

Emily Dickinson: Writing Nature Poems



Grade Level: 9 to 12



Developed by Suzanne Strauss, Northampton High School & Susan Ebitz, Jackson Street School, Northampton, and used in Grade 4 and High School

Community Partners: Emily Dickinson Museum & Northampton Education Foundation

Overview/Rationale for Lesson:

High school students and elementary school students meet in a garden to read an Emily Dickinson poem about nature and write their own poems inspired by her model and informed by direct sensory observations.

Learning Objectives:

- Students will read and discuss nature imagery in a poem by Emily Dickinson.
- Students will write a poem based on direct observation and inspired by the format, imagery and graphic conventions of Dickinson’s poem.
- Students will make oral presentations of their poems to the group.

Lesson Plan Procedure

Preparatory Activity:

Time: 10 minutes (plus travel time to outdoor setting)

Note: Students meet in an outdoor setting (this lesson took place at the Rose Garden at Child’s Park in Northampton).

Step 1. Introduce the nature poetry session. 5 minutes.

- Gather students in a circle, explain that they will be reading and writing nature poems outdoors in the garden and set guidelines and expectations.

Distribute and read aloud a poem on the theme of nature written by Emily Dickinson: “This is my letter to the World” (see “Resources” for link). 5 minutes

Main Activity:

Time: 40 minutes

Step 2. Read aloud, “Nature is what We see” (see “Resources” for link), and give directions for poetry writing activity. 10 minutes.

- Hand out poem, writing directions (see “Resources” for link), clipboard, lined paper and pencil to each small group.
- Read aloud poem several times, inviting students and/or other adults to read aloud individual stanzas.
- Review directions and expectations for writing a poem inspired by Dickinson’s poem.

Step 3. Students work in small groups, spreading out around the outdoor area, first completing the handout and then composing a poem on lined paper. 30 minutes. (see “Resources” for link)

Conclusion/Follow-Up to Activity:

Time: 15-20 minutes

Step 4. Students gather in a circle and do a poetry reading. 10-15 minutes.

Step 5. Whole group does a choral reading of “Nature is what We see.” 5 minutes.

Additional Notes on Lesson Plan:

This lesson is the culmination of “Emily Dickinson: Person, Poetry and Place,” a sequence of collaborative lessons for high school students and 4th graders. See *Emily Dickinson: Close Reading* (link from Resources) for background.

Materials Checklist:

- Handout: Two Emily Dickinson poems (see “Resources” for link)
- Handout: Directions for writing nature poem (see “Resources” for link)
- Sample Student Poems (see “Resources” for link)
- Clipboard, lined paper, pencil (1 per group)

Extension:

Students re-write final draft of poem on paper with pressed flowers.



Downloads

- Handout: Two Emily Dickinson poems (<http://massbook.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/Fig-1-ED-poems.pdf>)
- Handout: Directions for writing nature poem (<http://massbook.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/Fig-2-Directions-for-writing.pdf>)
- Sample Student Poems (<http://massbook.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/Fig-2-Directions-for-writing.pdf>)
- Clipboard, lined paper, pencil (1 per group)

Useful Links

[Emily Dickinson Electronic Archives](#)

[Emily Dickinson Museum](#)

Museum Website Features:

- [Thinking About Place – Lesson Idea](#)
- [Emily Dickinson and Gardening](#)
- [Tips for Reading Emily Dickinson](#)
- [Major Characteristics of Dickinson’s Poetry](#)

ROW-CTRiver Lesson: *Emily Dickinson: Close Reading* (http://massbook.org/wordpress/?page_id=206)

[Northampton Education Foundation](#)

The Poems of Emily Dickinson, Variorum Edition, ed. R. W. Franklin (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998).

[Amazon Link](#)

[Google Books Link](#)

Useful Links and Downloads are available at http://row.ctriver.org/?page_id=202.

CURRICULUM STANDARDS

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS (Connections to the Common Core State Standards, <http://www.corestandards.org>):

Reading: Literature » Grade 4 & Grade 9-10

Text Types and Purposes

- MA.3.A. Write stories, poems, and scripts that use similes and/or metaphors.

Key Ideas and Details

- RL.4.1. Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.
- RL.9-10.1. Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

Craft and Structure

- RL.4.4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including those that allude to significant characters found in mythology (e.g., Herculean).
- RL.9-10.4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone).

Writing » Grade 4 & Grade 9-10

Research to Build and Present Knowledge

- W.4.9. Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Range of Writing

- W.4.10. & [W.9-10.10](#) Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Language » Grade 4 & Grade 9-10

- L.4.5. Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.
 - Explain the meaning of simple similes and metaphors (e.g., *as pretty as a picture*) in context.
- L.9-10.3. Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

STANDARDS, cont.

- L.9-10.5. Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.
 - Interpret figures of speech (e.g., euphemism, oxymoron) in context and analyze their role in the text.
 - Analyze nuances in the meaning of words with similar denotations.

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