
Unit 4 – Analyzing Poetry

Unit Overview:

Students synthesize their knowledge of individual poets, poetic forms, and elements of poetry in this unit through a series of writing assignments. They compare and contrast poems on the same theme, write narratives and analytical essays that ask them to analyze how and why authors created their poems, and practice skills of revision and editing. They work through a sequence of activities that will prepare them to write an effective research document.

Lesson 4 - 1: Day 1 – Research: Incorporating Literary Criticism

Objective(s), skills attained & motivation: Students will analyze elements of a poem to arrive at an understanding of theme. They will discuss the ways that literature reflects the range of human experience.

Materials list:

- If available, several examples of texts on and by Emily Dickinson. Thomas H. Johnson’s edition of *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, if possible.
- “Because I Could Not Stop for Death” (Smith 70, Pockell 96, Dickinson 35)
- Worksheets 1:8, 4:1 and 4:2
- High School Poetry Notes 4:1

Starter Activity: Ask students to talk about their impressions of “Because I Could Not Stop for Death” and how it fits with other Dickinson poems they have read. **(5 minutes)**

Directions:

1) Read “Because I Could Not Stop for Death” aloud. Split students into 5 groups and have them write a one-paragraph paraphrase of the poem. Assign each group one of the following areas from Worksheet 4:1 to examine in the poem: vocabulary and connotative language, figurative language, rhythm and rhyme, structure and form, and symbolism. Tell students that they will put together all of the pieces in order to uncover the theme of the poem. **(15 minutes)**

3) Refer back to High School Poetry 1:8 to review symbolism.

4) Have each group share its findings. Use High School Poetry Notes 4:1 to fill in gaps.

5) Have students do a Think, Pair, Share activity, using Worksheet 4:1. **(20 minutes)**

Wrap-Up Activity: Ask students to tie this poem to others that they have read by Emily Dickinson. They are likely to point out that the poet is fascinated with death. Students may notice that, like in Emily’s life, the speaker seems to have little control over what others expect of her. **(4 minutes)**

Unit 4 Daily Lesson Plans- Analyzing Poetry

Homework: Students should follow the procedure they used with Worksheet 4:1 to examine one poem by their individual poets for all of the elements that they can find and then do a free write on the possible theme. **(1 minute)**

Suggested Differentiated Teaching Strategies:

- Do the activity as a whole group rather than in small groups.
- Provide a structured worksheet that breaks down the parts of the poem for students.

Lesson 4 - 1: Day 2 – Research: Incorporating Literary Criticism

Objective(s), skills attained & motivation: Students will demonstrate effective research skills in locating and taking notes from primary source materials and literary criticism. They will locate, compare, and synthesize information from multiple sources and will critically evaluate written material.

Materials list:

- High School Poetry Notes 4:1, 4:2 and 4:3.
- Library Materials or assistance from the librarian

Starter Activity: Put this statement on the board: “Because I Could Not Stop for Death” is one of the greatest poems written in the English language.” Allen Tate. Ask students to come up with reasons to explain why a critic might think so. Discuss their reasons. **(5 minutes)**

Directions:

- 1) Show students examples of literary criticism on High School Poetry Notes 4:2. Point out that literary criticism is secondary source material because it is written about the primary sources. Explain that literary critics study, discuss, evaluate, and interpret literature, often drawing on their knowledge of philosophy, methods, and goals. Most literary critics are scholars at universities. Ask students if, knowing this, they might add anything to their opening comments about Mr. Tate’s views. Point out the format of cards. **(15 minutes)**
- 2) Have the librarian display various sources of literary criticism and offer hints on how to locate them. **(10 minutes)**
- 3) Remind students that the speaker in “Because I Could Not Stop for Death” felt that she did not want to pause in her usual activities for death. Use High School Poetry Notes 4:4 to describe typical elements in an obituary and to display Emily Dickinson’s obituary, written by her close friend and sister-in-law, Susan. Have students point out any qualities that fit what they have learned about the poet: the unique quality of her writing, her shyness, her fascination with nature, and her brilliant intellect, for example. **(10 minutes)**

Unit 4 Daily Lesson Plans- Analyzing Poetry

Wrap-Up Activity: Tell students that they will need to have fifteen literary criticism cards ready for five class days from now. Ask them to begin a draft of an obituary for their poet, one of their required portfolio items. **(4 minutes)**

Homework: Begin working on locating and taking notes on literary criticism. Bring poems, any note cards you have completed, and a completed obituary for your poet to class the next day. **(1 minute)**

Suggested Differentiated Teaching Strategies:

- Materials could be gathered on specific poets that less able students have chosen.
- Students could work in small groups to interpret the sample Emily Dickinson literary criticism.
- A college professor could visit class to explain the value of literary criticism.
- If their poets have died, students could search a site like <http://www.obitcentral.com/> to look at actual obituaries.

Lesson 4 - 1: Day 3 – Research: Incorporating Literary Criticism

Objective(s), skills attained & motivation: Students will practice synthesizing primary and secondary source material.

Materials list:

- High School Poetry Notes 4:3
- Worksheets 2:17 and 2:20
- Library materials and computer lab, if possible

Starter Activity: Have students share their obituaries in pairs as you circulate to check them and give feedback on these details: specific information about the poet, his/her accomplishments, interesting details, clear wording. **(5 minutes)**

Directions:

1) Explain that you will be showing students an example of a research paper excerpt that includes material on “Because I Could Not Stop for Death.” Share the sample from High School Poetry Notes 4:3, pointing out the structure and the way that primary and secondary sources are incorporated. Make sure that they notice the introductory, body, and concluding parts that are described. Tell them that the section on “Because I Could Not Stop for Death” also shows how to examine specific parts of the poet’s craft to analyze a favorite poem, something they will be doing with their presentation. Call their attention to Worksheet 2:17 with requirements and 2:20 with various steps and deadlines. **(20 minutes)**

2) Give students time to find literary criticism related to specific poems their poets have written. Enlist the help of the librarian, if possible. **(15 minutes)**

Unit 4 Daily Lesson Plans- Analyzing Poetry

Wrap-Up Activity: Call students together to find out how many were successful in locating material about specific poems. Give suggestions as to how students could find material on poems of interest: they could do a Google search or find general books related to the poetry from the country or period of the poet, then look in the index at the back of the book. **(4 minutes)**

Homework: Continue taking notes to meet the deadline four days from now. Revise any portfolio items already begun or complete other ones. **(1 minute)**

Suggested Differentiated Teaching Strategies:

- Have materials ready for students on specific poems.
- Prepare overhead transparencies of specific reference books.
- Take students to a computer lab with a data projector to demonstrate how to do an online search.

Lesson 4 - 2: Day 1 – Research: Portfolio Items

Objective(s), skills attained & motivation: Students will respond to intellectual aspects of literary criticism and poetry. They will write letters to demonstrate their ability to use a variety of forms to develop ideas, share information, influence, persuade, create, and entertain.

Materials list:

- High School Poetry Notes 4:2

Starter Activity: Display the sample of a response to literary criticism found in High School Poetry Notes 4:2. Remind students that they need to complete two of these for their portfolios. **(5 minutes)**

Directions:

- 1) Give students time to practice writing a response to a piece of literary criticism on which they have already taken notes. **(20 minutes)**
- 2) Display the sample letter portfolio items in High School Poetry Notes 4:4. Ask students to point out traits that tie to Emily's poetry, life, and style. They will note her use of exclamation points, capital letters, and humor. They may also notice evidence of her education. Tell students that their letters should use specific, authentic detail and show evidence of research. Point out that all of the dates and address mentioned in the letters are accurate. Brainstorm the kinds of topics that Emily Dickinson might write to some of their poets. Students may mention that she will ask them about their use of punctuation and capitalization, their views on death, whether or not they are introverted or extroverted, and their views on God and science. Give students time to

Unit 4 Daily Lesson Plans- Analyzing Poetry

- 3) draft letters from a poet they have read during this course to their own poets or vice versa. (15 minutes)

Wrap-Up Activity: Ask students to share some of what they wrote. (4 minutes)

Homework: Revise the responses to literary criticism they wrote in class to be clearer and demonstrate critical thinking and synthesis of ideas. Continue working on locating and taking notes on literary criticism so that they can meet their deadline of fifteen cards in two class days. Bring copies of your favorite poems by your author to class. (1 minute)

Suggested Differentiated Teaching Strategies:

- Students could write their letters in a computer lab.
- The teacher could provide a template that would include letter format and potential topics to include or questions to answer.
- Students could decorate their letters or compose them on stationery or items related to their poets (scraps of paper for Emily Dickinson, for example).

Lesson 4 - 2: Day 2 – Research: Portfolio Items

Objective(s), skills attained & motivation: Students will critically analyze and evaluate poems for the inherent ability of the work to communicate on a personal level. They will compare and contrast poems that deal with the same theme.

Materials list:

- High School Poetry Notes 4:2
- “I’m Nobody” (Dickinson 9)
- [An Invitation to Poetry](http://www.favoritepoem.org/thevideos/mcwhorter.html) and tracks 13, 14, and 15 from the accompanying DVD, “I’m Nobody! Who Are you?,” “Out, Out,” and “The Sloth,” edited by Robert Pinsky and Maggie Dietz (also available at <http://www.favoritepoem.org/thevideos/mcwhorter.html>)
- DVD player or data projector to display the material from the website.

Starter Activity: Check revised literary criticism responses. Remind students about Poet Laureate Pinsky’s Favorite Poem Project for which he videotaped a variety of people talking about poems that loved to read again and again. One of his ground rules was that the filmmakers would focus on the relationship between the reader and the poem rather than the material of the poem itself. Tell students that you will show them films of three people in Pinsky’s project. Students should try to determine what the three poems have in common. (3 minutes)