



An American Poetry Odyssey

Overview: This unit incorporates a wide array of skills and thinking levels in the process of researching, reading, analyzing and understanding American Poetry. Students will participate in small group discussions and group collaboration, whole class presentations, poetry and process writing. Students work with 3 or 4 students in their class to form an imaginary traveling team which will explore America learning about specified poets.

Each group will make SIX small group presentations along the journey to share newly learned information with classmates. Each presentation will require all group members to participate in the teaching of six poems of the selected poet. *(The number of poems can be smaller depending upon class size and the time allowed.)*

Standards:

RL.11-12.9 Demonstrate knowledge of eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and twentieth-century foundational works of American literature, including how two or more texts from the same period treat similar themes or topics.

RI.11-12.6 Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness, or beauty of text.

W.11-12.7. Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

SL.11-12.1a-b Initiate and participate in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively; come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas; work with peers to promote civil, democratic discussions and decision-making, set clear goals and deadlines, and establish individual roles as needed.

SL.11-12.2 Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.

SL.11-12.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.

Objectives:

American Road Trip Team Poem Presentations
(General Rubric—Each presentation theme day's rubric will be specific to the day's task.)

Traveling Team Members: _____

Date: _____ Period: _____ Poet: _____

Poem Selection: _____

	Poor	Fair	Average	Good	Superior
	1	2	3	4	5
Selection					
1. Significance and quality of material					
2. Appropriate for speaker, audience, presentation theme					
Introduction					
1. Appropriate information					
2. Conversational directness					
3. Attention-getting device					
Meaning					
1. Communicated author's intended meaning					
2. Accurate phrasing to convey meaning					
3. Appropriate emphasis					
4. Presentation follow-up "teaches" poem effectively					
Tone					
1. Communicated emotion the author intended					
2. Communicated the climax					
Voice					
1. Pleasant , clear quality					
2. Appropriate pitch level					
3. Appropriate inflection and rate					
4. Adequate volume					
6. Clear articulation and pronunciation					
Delivery					
1. Readers physically poised and at ease					
2. Unobtrusively handled scripts					
3. Bodily action coordinated with thought and emotion					
4. Adequate eye contact with audience					
Total					



1. The learner will be able to share and support opinions about authors, issues, styles, and trends in American literature.
2. The learner will be able to read and understand an informational, nonfiction story.
3. The learner will be able to read selections written by American authors, 1900 to the present.
4. The learner will be able to read secondary sources, written by literary critics, about American authors 1900 to the present.
5. The learner will be able to identify the style of American authors, 1900 to the present.
6. The learner will be able to expand upon the meaning of functional materials.
7. The learner will be able to determine the author's point of view in a fiction passage.
8. The learner will be able to apply literary devices to poetry.
9. The learner will be able to use figurative language with poetry.
10. The learner will be able to identify masterful use of language.
11. The learner will be able to identify supporting ideas in class discussions.
12. The learner will be able to identify supporting ideas in oral presentations.
13. The learner will be able to participate effectively in small group discussions.
14. The learner will be able to listen in small group discussions.
15. The learner will be able to listen for the main idea of an oral presentation.
16. The learner will be able to analyze print media for audience appropriateness.
17. The learner will be able to draw logical and supported conclusions from passages
18. The learner will be able to understand and follow written instructions/directions.
19. The learner will be able to identify the theme of a given reading passage.
20. The learner will be able to make inferences from reading materials.
21. The learner will be able to identify and understand figurative language in reading materials.
22. The learner will be able to identify the tone of a given passage.
23. The learner will be able to identify the literary device being used by the author.
24. The learner will be able to assess the effectiveness of literary devices used in poetry.
25. The learner will be able to read materials analytically.
26. The learner will be able to speak effectively in a small group discussion.
27. The learner will be able to demonstrate poise when giving oral presentations.
28. The learner will be able to plan an effective oral presentation.
29. The learner will be able to use logical content in an oral presentation.
30. The learner will be able to create an effective mood when giving an oral presentation.
31. The learner will be able to use tone to produce the desired effect in an oral presentation.
32. The learner will be able to present research results.
33. The learner will be able to use different types of technology to enhance learning experiences.
34. The learner will be able to use available technological tools as a means of expression
35. The learner will be able to write for various purpose, audiences, and formal and informal situations.



36. The learner will be able to write for various purpose, audiences, and formal and informal situations.
37. The learner will be able to write in a variety of genres.

Materials:

- American literature books or anthologies of American poets
- Access to research materials: computers, Internet, library, etc
- Copies of handouts referenced in the lesson (handouts provided)
- Access to PowerPoint and presentation equipment (depending on student presentation needs)
- Chart paper, markers, glue, old magazines, etc--optional

Procedure:

1. Each team (3-4 students) will first look through their American literature books and select one poet of interest to their group. This list of poets will become the foundation of the rest of the unit.

NOTE: The next step in the lesson requires that the teacher assign research and provide students with computer lab or library access to complete research on their authors. Students should also be given a handout that outlines the task and specifies the research format required. Usually, this will be MLA, and this could be an opportunity for the teacher to present the process of documenting research and creating bibliographies and/or annotated bibliographies and source citation pages. Depending upon when this unit is implemented, the teacher may need to plan on at least three to four class sessions for this task to be completed. This unit assumes that students have already learned how to do research, evaluate sources, document sources, and create the necessary documents usually required in research projects since poetry tends to be taught a bit later in the typical school year. Team members will be required to compile six poems they want to teach in addition to compiling research on the "5 P's" on the group's chosen poet:

- The poems written by the poet
- The background of the poet: significant life events, education, family information, and the personality of the poet
- The places of the poet--how did his/her settings or environments, both time and place, and influence of the poet
- The passions of the poet's lives—subjects, hobbies, jobs held, or was poetry the only passion?
- The people of the poet's lives--was a poet inspired by someone else's work? Who did the poet interact with? Many poets share their work with a community of other writers or significant people in their lives.



2. Once the teacher assigns students into small group, students are instructed to choose their personas and how their group will travel through the United States to study about their poets. For example, each group could decide to travel as train hobos like Steinbeck or in a unique car, truck, or van suited to the group's tastes and what they feel their author might embrace. The transportation mode needs to have a uniquely American flavor to it, and it must reflect the group's personalities somehow. Students will need to find a picture in a book, magazine, or on the internet of their group's vehicle, or they may illustrate one themselves.

Consider providing students with some suggestions or ideas from a list something like the one below including some pictures from books, magazines, or the internet. (Some of the examples below will not be known to students, so the teacher should have examples to help them grasp the concept of a vehicle with personality.)

- A 1959 pink Cadillac convertible with fins
 - An ice cream truck that plays "My Favorite Things" when it turns a corner
 - A black hearse, most recently used as a Godfather's Pizza delivery vehicle
 - A steel gray truck formerly used as a Brinks security vehicle
 - Two-tone Chevy Bel-Air with fuzzy dice hanging from the rear-view mirror
 - A Bookmobile from the Library
 - The Oscar Mayer Weinermobile
 - A double-decker bus last used for giving tours
 - A yellow checkered cab
 - The Batmobile
 - The Partridge Family bus
 - 1996 Chevy S-10 pick-up splashed with mud
 - A Hummer
 - An orange Plymouth Duster
 - A 1955 white Thunderbird with candy apple red interior
 - A 1980 full-size station wagon with faux wood panels
 - A set of Harleys with sidecars
 - A cab from an 18-wheeler
 - A reconditioned US Postal Service local delivery truck with steering wheel on the right side of the vehicle
 - An Amphicar (half car/half boat)
3. Next, each group will need to make a flag or pennant to take along on their road trip. Each group should include the following items on their flag: a) the poet's name b) and at least six symbols revealing important elements in the poet's life, and a favorite quote of the author. Since this pennant will be seen in public, students will need to take time to make it look professional: clip art, very neat printing, color, photos, and the poet's name in large, clear letters. These pennants will reside on the classroom wall.
 4. After students select their poets and have their body of information, each group will need to look at a calendar with the teacher to determine the dates they would like to



present their assigned presentation work with the class. At this time, the teacher should create a presentation chart that displays the dates each group will be making their various presentations. This should be displayed so that all students know the due dates.

On the days specified by each group and the teacher and recorded on the calendar, each group will "teach" a poem to the class. Each of the group presentations that take place in this unit will require a different type of effort on the group's part. (Explanations of each type of presentation follow this lesson)

Presentation Days Schedule

- Presentation One: Multi-media presentation
 - Presentation Two: Frozen tableau
 - Presentation Three: Artistic interpretation
 - Presentation Four: Drama
 - Presentation Five: Ceremony
 - Presentation Six: Readers Theatre
5. Next, each group will create a map of the places they want to visit on their American Toad Trip. Starting from their current location, students will use maps and online resources to create a journey plan. They should calculate the distance they will have to travel to get to the hometown or primary city of residence for their poet. If their poet moved or traveled a great deal, they may have several places to map out, or the group can focus on the most significant places where the author spent a good amount of time. The group will actually create a physical map on butcher paper or a large poster board. This map should be accurate, colorful and reflect their journey in detail. On the map, students will be required to include a drawing or photo of the team's vehicle an actual photo of the group as they would dress for their trip. This can be done in class by the teacher, or the students can do this on their own.
 6. At this point, it may be helpful for the teacher to instruct students to check the internet and try to find out information about the primary city of residence. Does the town have a special library or museum in featuring the poet's work? If so, this could be a nice way for the teacher to stop and do a lesson on how to write an appropriate formal business letter. Students can draft letters or emails, to send requests to receive some materials be sent to them to share with the class. Some students can even use any family members they know in various locations that might be willing to take a trip to a library or establishment that might be interesting for the class to see.
 7. Before the groups begin their road trips across America learning about their poet, they need to be ready to present their pennant, their map, and a group-written poem about their team and their unusual vehicle. Warming up their sharp-as-an-eagle poetic eyesight, they should write their poem in ballad form and include alliteration, personification, a rhyming couplet, and a metaphor in their poem. Students will need to



be given a handout or brief lesson with resources explaining and revealing the ballad format. (This is an optional requirement.)

8. Each group will be required to teach the class about the poet and his/her background. Each group can teach the various aspects of the poet's life incorporating various pieces of information into their six presentations of poems by introducing the poems with facts that may have played a role in the writing of the poems. Students will need to determine how they will teach the poems and the information about the poet before they engage in their presentations. They should decide what information needs to be given first to help the class understand the poet and the poetry. Each group member must contribute in the presentations of the poet's life found in the research phase of the project.
9. At the end of the project, the teacher may want to require that the students write a 500-700 word process paper in which students discuss their journey and what they learned. The specific content from the research can be presented in any visual format to be presented as the group teaches the class. The details and facts learned must be documented in their presentations in some way with the sources being cited correctly.
10. Before each group presents, they need to be sure they have read, studied, and analyzed the poem to be taught for that presentation. They need to write the poem on the board, or put it in a PowerPoint, or provide handouts of the poem if it is not in the class textbook. Every group member will have a responsibility in this analysis so that each of the following elements in the selected poem is addressed. In literature circles, everyone has a job for each discussion. Each small group, in a way, is a poetry circle group. For each day, they should divide the responsibilities this way:
 - **Form-finder** - This job involves identifying the style or pattern of the poem. Is there a particular rhyme scheme? Is the piece, for example, a sonnet like Shakespeare's? How does the meter affect the mood of the poem? Does the poet employ alliteration? This team member will explain the use of white space or stanza divisions in the poem. What poetic devices are used in this poem? Is it a common ballad form? Use quatrains? Free-form?
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 - **Theme-Finder** - This position requires the circle member to identify important general ideas or, even better, to explain how some specific ideas progress through the piece to arrive at a universal idea. For example, in "To an Athlete Dying Young," could this be written about an ancient Greek or about one of the professional or college football players that have died on the sports field in the last twelve months? This team member will offer a paraphrase of the poem to the class.
 - **Background-finder** - This historian's job is to put the poem in context related to time (when it was written, when it takes place and how it relates to today). He or she would



also check out obscure references in the poem and might also include a brief biography of the poet or historical background to put the poem's theme into context. For example, Walt Whitman's "Captain, O' Captain" was written after the death of President Abraham Lincoln. A group presenting this poem should include information on Whitman's tribute to a fallen president. This team member should also look up definitions of unusual vocabulary or common words used in an unusual way.

- **Image-finder** - This group member will identify images, metaphors, similes and symbols. Are there animals? What kind? In Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," there is a horse. What do we associate with horses? (Perhaps, taking a journey?) In Auden's "Shield of Achilles", what do we think of when we think of a great warrior's shield? What would we expect to find on it? Are there references to weather in the poem? What ideas do we associate with cold, snow, ice? What about spring? Do we think of rebirth?

NOTE: *Rotate the team jobs for each presentation. The teacher may require a page of notes from each team member for each presentation to ensure individual accountability.*

11. Before the first day's presentations, each group will be required to create their own version of a "critic's review" sheet so that their peers can offer feedback on the effectiveness of the poetry presentation. The "critic's review" form should shadow the team's traveling persona. For example, a team of traveling hobos might have their feedback forms have an outline in the shape of a Campbell's Pork and Bean can label. [The team could draw a facsimile label or photocopy the real thing]. A group traveling in a 1959 pink Cadillac might have their evaluation forms have the shape of a 1959 license plate. These evaluation forms should be able to contain as much writing as one could place on a 3" x 5" index card. Students can give the teacher their master form and the teacher can have the needed number of copies of the form made before the group presents.

DUE DATE NOTE: *The teacher needs to set a due date for this form once the presentation dates are created. It would be best to have each group submit this form at least two to three days before their first presentation to ensure there is enough time to make any corrections and then have the necessary copies made.*

The teacher may also want to give students a handout that lists the type of information the class should include in their "critic's review." This could be quality of the information, the organization of the data, the use of eye contact, voice, and tone, and they could also evaluate the quality of visuals and the level of understanding they have of the poet and the poems after each presentation on a number scale or something of that nature. This should be determined by the teacher before the unit is begun.

12. Each day, after all the presentations are completed, the teacher will pass out the sets of evaluation forms. Students will write a critic's review of each of the presentations, and



then the class will vote on the best presentation of the day noting the effectiveness of the poem presentation and instruction.

Part One: Multimedia Presentation

Each group will present their poem with as much mood setting for a background as possible. Remember all the senses, and use them to set the tone of the poem. Music, scents, sound effects, backgrounds (painted cardboard, etc.), balloons, food, tactile images (poems written on sandpaper or fabric and handed out), and lighting effects - all these can make their presentations effective. The group will present their first poem and then "teach" the poem to the class. Each day's theme-finder in a group is responsible for coordinating the entire presentation.

Part Two: Frozen Tableau

Each group will make a talking statue formation that is the "soul" of their poem and recite it to the class. Students should pose themselves in a statuary group that tells us something about the poem. Recite the poem, using all the people in the group to say parts of the poem. Pause, and then do a frozen tableau - what is each character thinking or saying at that instant? Each "statue" should briefly unfreeze and explain what his/her role is in the poem. Students need to have a decorated title placard in front of their tableau, giving the title, author, and group members. This can be fun, and students sometimes like to dress in white sheets or some uniform colors and paint their faces gray or white. Anything is possible. They can also use background music playing very lightly while they present.

Part Three: Artistic Interpretation

Students will recreate their poems in any art form they wish. The poem should be read by a group member or it can be recorded and played to the class as a group as the art is presented. Students can present their individual pieces of art as the whole group does a choral reading of the poem, or the poem could be spoken in chunks by group members as the art is revealed. The art should reveal the poem or the themes of the poem in a clear way. Students may use any media, but no two art forms in the group may be alike. Dioramas, posters, sculpture, water color, collages, etc. are all welcome. Each member must complete a piece of art for this project. Each team member is responsible for artistically representing the poem and showing it to the class.

Part Four: Drama

Each group will act out a poem, using props and costumes as necessary. The goal here is to make the poem come alive. Students may use sound effects, costumes, dramatic entrances and exits, and lots of color to give your poem some flair!



Part Five: Ceremony

Students will select a poem by their author that would be exceptionally appropriate at a ceremony of some kind (wedding, funeral, graduation, bat/bar mitzvah, kick-off dinner for new business, inauguration, etc.). Each group will then determine one ceremony that is appropriate to that poem, and then, the group will stage the part of the ceremony where the poem would be used. For example, they could each play a role in a wedding and the students could say their vows and speak the poem at the moment of the vows they feel it would work into that event. The students could use it in a mock funeral or whatever situation is appropriate as this poem choice will most likely focus heavily on tone and theme. The speaking of the poem in the context of the situation should enhance the understanding of the tone and theme.

Part Six: Readers Theatre

Each group will choose a poem by their author that works well with multiple voices. A reader's theatre presentation does not have to utilize any real acting. The voices of the readers convey the message of the poem. Often, a readers theatre group will dress in the same color or style of clothes (example: white t-shirts and blue jeans) to appear as a UNIT when presenting. The group members cannot move once the reader's theatre presentation begins, except to raise their heads (if they decide to start out with bowed heads). They can speak as single voices, duets, trios, or whole groups. Students will need to decide how they can best work together using their voice to present the poem in the most effective way. They will want to rehearse this quite a bit before the presentation. Timing is critical.

A Note about Resources:

As you adapt this lesson to meet your needs and capabilities, develop a resource list and handout list for students. You will also want to develop an assignment list with specific items and elements required for each part of the project to give each student. You will also want to have a calendar for the assignment due dates. Each teacher will also want to develop a grading rubric for the various items in the unit. This is all very individual depending upon time, student ability levels and resources, the class size and the how the teacher.

Evaluation:

Included with this lesson is a general rubric to evaluate the small group presentations. You may adapt it slightly to meet particular presentations.

Conclusion:

Each group will submit a folder with copies of their annotated poems and 2 multiple choice questions (with 4 answer choices) for each poem which will appear on the final exam. To encourage accountability, each student will complete a group evaluation sheet. Students also should keep all notes from each presentation. The teacher will sign each of these on presentation days, and then the students turn them in with their project evaluation sheet at the end of the unit.

The concepts and various elements in this unit were adapted from a lesson from NCTE List Serv. Several English teachers contributed ideas to a similar original unit in April 2001 and October 2001.