



## Poetry Aloud/Poetry Out Loud

### Focus: Live vs. Taped Speakers

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#### Overview

Through comparing how tone shapes a reading of a poem and by comparing a live (in-class) performance of a poem with a taped performance of the same poem, students learn the power of tone on meaning and analyze the impact of one work in two different media.

#### Standards

- **9-10.SL.3.** Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, assessing the stance, premises, links among ideas, word choice, points of emphasis, and tone used.
- **9-10.SL.5.** Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.
- **9-10.SL.6.** Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

#### Objectives

- To evaluate crucial elements of a speech
- To compare speech in print versus performance
- To see how video or other media alters an audience's impression or reception of a poem

#### Materials

- Computer and Internet connection
- Access to the Poetry Out Loud site
- Slips of paper with tone-words written on them
- LED projector or computer lab with Vision



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## Activity 1

### Lecture

Explain to the students a crucial issue about poetry: that it is often (though not always) intended to be read aloud to an audience. It is therefore interactive by nature, and just as the content of a speech is perceived differently by an audience when they can see and hear the speaker, so also is a poem's emotional range communicated most effectively not just in the words on the page, but by the voice, gestures, stance, and intonation of a skilled speaker.

Before the lesson begins, visit the [Poetry Out Loud](#) website, specifically the "[Video](#)" link. Poetry Out Loud is a nationwide competition in which students recite poetry from memory – not "acting out" the poem as much as giving the poem a voice. The following poems have videotaped versions of exemplary student performances:

[Writ on the Steps of Puerto Rican Harlem](#)

by Gregory Corso

[Forgetfulness](#)

by Billy Collins

[Bilingual/Bilingüe](#)

by Rhina P. Espaillat

[Sonnet CXXX: My Mistress' Eyes Are Nothing Like the Sun](#)

by William Shakespeare

[Frederick Douglass](#)

by Robert E. Hayden

[I Am Waiting](#)

by Lawrence Ferlinghetti

[Pied Beauty](#)

by Gerard Manley Hopkins

[Danse Russe](#)

by William Carlos Williams



Distribute at least 2 copies of each poem to the students. The students should perform the following:

Read the poem silently through one time, writing down the mood, the tone, and the overall “feel” of the poem and its speaker.

Have students read silently a second time, writing down questions, strong reactions, and important things they noted in the poem, including figures of speech or striking imagery.

### Small Groups

Group students with the same poems and direct them to share their poems with each other. Instruct the student groups to determine the “right way” to read the poem out loud. Some questions to ask are these:

- Is this a “fast” poem or a “slow” poem?
- What kind of mood is the speaker in?
- Does this mood evolve or change over the course of the poem?
- Where does the speaker’s mood shift?
- Are there certain places where the speaker is louder? Softer? Why?
- What is the emotional climax of the poem? (Note: It probably happens close to the end of the poem!)

### Fun with Tone

Distribute “Words for Tone” cards to students. These cards should ideally run the gamut of emotions from ecstasy to depression, boredom to elation, and so on. A wonderful list of words for tone can be found at the Poetry Out Loud site: [Words for Tone](#). See page 5 of this document.



Instruct the student teams to rework their previous interpretations so that the poem is read with the emotion depicted on the card.<sup>1</sup>

### Reading

The groups will read each poem twice to themselves – the first time as they believe the author intended it; the second time as they were instructed on the tone card, slanted with the emotion of that tone in their voice, words, and gestures.

### Performance

Have students first perform their poems as the tone card dictates. Have audience listen to the poems and jot down what emotion they think is represented in the interpretation and what the essence of the poem is attempting to convey. In the second reading, students should perform as they believe the author indicated.

Students in the audience should jot down the differences between the two poems for later discussion, asking themselves the following questions:

- Which one was better?
- Why?
- Could the two readings be combined?
- Were there some moments you thought worked better the first way and others you thought worked better as the author intended?
- What different impressions or ideas did you get during the second reading that you did not have during the first one?

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<sup>1</sup> Sometimes the results for an exercise like this can be surprising, as when a student actor performing a similar exercise was given the challenge to read a particularly bloodthirsty passage from *Titus Andronicus* as if it was comedy. However, the student's reading – which was comic – gave the passage a deeply uncanny, unsettling impact it lacked when performed "straight."

**Whole-Group Discussion**

After each poem, spend time exploring how the required emotional twist affected the essence of the poem as a whole. Go through answers to the questions above, focusing students on why they felt one version worked better than another, what different impressions they received during the two different readings, and so forth.

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**Activity 2****Poetry in Performance**

Using the LED projector or hooking up students' computers with Vision, play some of the best student-read poems on the Poetry Out Loud site: [Video](#) and evaluate the student performers. Watch the performances with a look toward the following issues:

- Did the Poetry Out Loud student make different choices with tone, with pacing, or with intonation than you (or other students in the class) made with the same poem?
- Was the Poetry Out Loud student's choice better? Was yours (or your peer's)? Why?
- In what way did the Poetry Out Loud student's reading make you understand new issues or ideas about the poem than you did before? Which issues or ideas do you now see differently?
- Why did the student's physical gestures, body language, eye contact, and tone of voice convey the poem more forcefully or richly than simply reading the poem on the page did?
- Which performance was more powerful for you – the live performance in class, or the Poetry Out Loud performance? Why?

**Closure**

Students can write reflectively in journals or discuss in small groups how the video affected their view of the poem (if it did), sharing insights and suggestions.



Remind the students of the power of the visual, of the speaker to the piece, of the performance live versus videotaped. Remind students that this can be used with more genres than simply poetry.

#### Poetry Resources

- [Poetry Out Loud](#)
- [Academy of American Poets](#)
- [Poet Laureate, United States](#)
- [Modern American Poetry](#)
- [Poetry and the Library of Congress](#)
- [Poetry and the Library of Congress Webcasts](#)
- [WWII Poetry - USA](#)
- [WWII Poetry - Britain Archive](#)
- [National Archives - Britain - Educator's page](#)
- [Poetry Slam, Inc.](#)
- [Everypoet](#)
- [Walt Whitman Archive](#)
- [Columbia University Press](#)
- [Poetry in Translation - personal site](#)
- [Peasantry Poems of England](#)
- [Emily Dickinson Poem of the Week](#)
- [Emily Dickinson Homestead Homepage](#)