

ProQuest Learning: Literature Example Lesson Plan

Topic: Patterns—Women Poets Speak for Themselves

Grade Levels: High School

Subjects: English Literature; Speaking & Writing; Women's Studies

Standards: *NCTE English Language Arts Standards 3,6,7,9,and 11*

Description: The student will examine selected works of twentieth-century women poets that speak to the stereotypes about women inherent in Western culture. Beginning with Amy Lowell's "Patterns," the student will consider how societal expectations may inhibit a woman's actions. Through personal interview exercises, the student will begin to identify attitudes about women within their culture. Using this background, the student will then consider the work of various women poets. Finally, the student will write a poem about his own experiences with stereotypes.

Objectives:

Literature

- ? Apply close reading skills to a selection of poems.
- ? Analyze several poetic devices used to create dynamic tension in poetry.
- ? Develop a context of understanding for reading poems about a selected topic.

Speaking & Writing

- ? Create questions for, conduct, and summarize and present results of an interview on an identified topic.
- ? Write a response essay to a poem studied in class.
- ? Write a poem modeled on a subject considered in class.

Women's Studies

- ? Identify stereotypes about women and their place in Western culture.
- ? Examine the work of women writers who consider the tension between gender-related social norms and inner (creative) needs.

Procedure:

Day One

- ? Introduce the concept of associative meaning in poetry. Use several poem fragments to demonstrate the extension of meaning through association.
- ? Create the following table on a blackboard and ask students to respond in whole class discussion with associations for the words, 'pattern' and 'passion.'

<i>Pattern</i>	<i>Passion</i>

- ? Read aloud Amy Lowell's poem, "Patterns." Share information with the students from the biography of Amy Lowell in ProQuest Learning: Literature, paying particular attention to the intellectual activities of members of her family and to the narrowness of her own upbringing.
- ? Ask the students to locate and re-read "Patterns" by Amy Lowell in ProQuest Learning: Literature. Return to the table (above), but this time ask the students, working in small groups, to fill it in only with words taken from the text of the poem.
- ? In a whole class discussion, have the students share and defend their results.

Day Two

- ? Introduce the poet's use of metaphor. Consider together the metaphor of clothing or water. Returning to the student groups, ask them to identify and support other patterns of metaphor.
- ? In a whole class discussion, ask students to consider the relationship between society's expectations for the narrator of the poem and her emotional needs. Ask the students to consider these guiding questions:
 - ? When does the poem take place? When was it written?
 - ? What conventions restrict the narrator to the patterns described in the poem?
 - ? How do her actions reinforce the patterns?
 - ? Is she the only character bound by patterns?
 - ? To whom must she look to break those patterns? Why?
 - ? How does the poet's voice relate to the narrator within the poem?
 - ? How does the time of the poem's setting relate to the time that it was written?
- ? Extending the discussion, consider these questions: Do you think female poets write differently than male poets? If so, what are the differences? Poll the students for results.

Assignment

- ? Students will write a short response essay (one page) on the poem, "Patterns" selecting on of the following topics. The student's work should be supported by quotations from the poem.
 1. The essay should consider whether the issues that drive the poem are gender specific or are more general human concerns, not specific to gender.
 2. Written in the voice of the Lord Hartwell from beyond the grave, the essay should respond to the narrator's grief.

Day Three

- ? Giving them only two minutes to complete the exercise, have students write down three words that occur to them in conjunction with the phrase 'ideal woman'; repeat the timed exercise, but with the word 'wife'; repeat with the word 'mother.'
- ? Working in small, mixed-gender groups, have the students share their results. Ask the students to consider how the expectations of society affected their choices. Students should use concept mapping tools to illustrate the relationships that inform their word choices.

Day Four

- ? Introduce the next assignment by explaining briefly how social scientists might define cultural norms by identifying commonly shared attitudes. Explain the use of the questionnaire as a tool for identifying those attitudes.
- ? Working collaboratively, have each group create a questionnaire consisting of three questions and designed to identify cultural norms associated with one of the following aspects of a person's life: growing up, playing, falling in love, working, being single, being married, having children, growing old. Have them duplicate those questions for each gender. A model follows.

Playing

- ? *What is a little girl's favorite toy?*
- ? *What kind of play activity do little girls most like to do?*
- ? *What kind of adult do little girls most like to pretend to be?*
- ? *What is a little boy's favorite toy?*
- ? *What kind of play activity do little boys most like to do?*
- ? *What kind of adult do little boys most like to pretend to be?*

Assignment

- ? Each student will administer the questionnaire to four people, a female peer, a male peer, an adult male, and an adult female, and collect results.

Day Five through Seven

- ? Returning to their small groups, have students correlate their findings from the questionnaire and report the results to the class, noting any differences tied to gender.
- ? Introduce the following poems to the students by having them locate and read through each one on ProQuest Learning: Literature.

- ? Louise Glück, “WIDOWS”
 - ? Maxine Kumin, “Life’s Work”
 - ? Edna St. Vincent Millay, [Sonnet] “XXXI”
 - ? Molly Peacock, “All Her Life That Bra Strap”
 - ? Marge Piercy, “Barbie Doll”
 - ? Stevie Smith, “How Cruel is the Story of Eve”
 - ? Robert Hayden, “Those Winter Sundays”
- ? In each of six computer work stations set up throughout the classroom, load one of the poems. Ask the students to create a dialogue about each poem, posing guiding questions and responding to the questions of their peers, recording the process in a text document. Encourage students to draw on the work they have already done in poetics and in identifying social conventions to inform their analyses. Ask them to consider what characteristics the Hayden’s poem holds in common with those of the women poets and what characteristics are different.

Assignment/Assessment

- ? Each student will write a poem about a personal experience he has had in which social conventions or traditional expectations were at odds with his inner needs. This poem need not focus on gender; age, size, ability or race might be the source of the conflict.

Abbreviated Lesson: The lesson plan may be divided into two units, days one through two and days three through seven. Each may be used separately.