

Poetry Out Loud in the classroom: An Alternate Method

While Poetry Out Loud (POL) has significant long-term benefits¹, it's challenging to fit a 3-week unit into an already packed curriculum. The key is to reduce required time (in half) by distributing the project intermittently over a 3-month period, culminating with Classroom Competitions in December and the Building Competition in January. (This schedule also gives students more time to understand and memorize their poems, and, therefore, be better prepared.)

Here's one timeline as developed by Joyce Donais at Kamiakin H.S. Poetry is the second unit of the year. She starts the unit with POL, then dovetails further POL activities as time allows.

(See Notes and Tips on back)

1. Late Sept-early Oct. (3-4 periods)

a. Introduce POL.

There are a number of options.²

b. Next day, find 2-3 possible poems

Demonstrate navigation of POL website (on document camera, in room or lab).

Have students visit computer lab to find and print 2-3 potential poems.³

c. Next day, have students read poems to each other in small groups to see which poem speaks to them the most, or to which they can give the most life.

Complete a preliminary analysis, such as a TPS-FASTT.⁴

d. Within a few days, have students complete a Tone Map in class.⁵

2. October-mid November. (2-3 periods, cumulative)

Intermittent mini-lessons/practice, for 10 minutes each, 1-2 times a week, as available.

a. Have students read poems aloud, including title/author, emphasizing pacing and tone.

This is to first capture the sense of the poem, like in a Reader's Theatre.

b. Mini-lessons to practice matching sound to sense. This can include:

tone, pacing, phrasing, pauses, enjambed/end-stopped lines, dynamics, presentation, memorization techniques

c. Pre Quiz. Set a date for students to write poem from memory. (1/2 period)

3. Mid-November/early December. (2-3 periods, cumulative)

a. Practice delivering from memory, with pacing, intonation, etc. 1-2 times a week.

Have partners follow with copy of the poem to check accuracy.

b. Show Evaluation sheet. Work on physical presence. (1 period)

c. Practice 3-4 times for 10 min each.

4. December. Classroom Competition. Second week. (1 period)

After Class Competition:

5. Teachers meet with Classroom Winners to discuss selection of second poem and preparation for Building Competition.

6. Winter break. Classroom Winners work on second poem on their own.

7. January. Building Competition. Usually second week back from Winter Break.

8. February. Regional Finals.

9. March. Washington State Finals.

10. April. National Finals in Washington D. C.

Notes and Tips:

1. In addition to meeting Core Curriculum Standards (see Teacher’s Guide), teachers notice how Poetry Out Loud skills continually cross-apply and serve as a touch-stones in developing more nuanced understandings in other genres, for example:
 - a. Delivery and audience awareness in persuasive and expository speeches.
 - b. Improved understanding of complex sentences and structure in creative nonfiction. (ex. Annie Dillard, Diane Ackerman)
 - c. Character analysis, pacing and tone in scenes for both fiction and drama. (ex. Ray Bradbury, Harper Lee, Shakespeare)
2. Options for introducing POL:
 - a. Show a few clips from Robert Pinsky’s *An Invitation to Poetry* (from Favorite Poem Project.) Suggested tracks: “The Sloth,”(15); “I’m nobody who are you”(13); “We Real Cool,”(8).
Discuss how/why each poem appealed to that particular reader. This helps each student find a poem that appeals to him or her.
 - b. Ask students about their favorite poem, and why they like it so much.
 - c. Show videos of recitations from POL website (State or National)
 - d. Speak of past experiences and competitions related to POL (if you have some).
 - e. Recite one of your favorite poems!
 - f. Identify purposes and benefits to student.
3. To avoid having eight “After Apple-Picking” poems or nine Blake poems, have students start the search with the first letter of their last name, not at the beginning of the alphabet. The website has an extensive list of terrific poems for students to consider. You’ll undoubtedly discover new poets and new poems yourself.
4. TPS-FASTT: You may be familiar with this. Students complete a chart focusing on these aspects of the poem. (Charts can be found online.)
 - Title—anticipate meaning; questions raised
 - Paraphrase—What’s it about? Literal action. 1-3 sentences.
 - Speaker/situation—speaking to? when/where?

Figurative Devices—notice, name and identify, with examples.
 - Attitude—tones of the speaker.
 - Shifts—shifts in tone, subject, speaker, situation, or word choice.
 - Title—reconsider title for new implications.
 - Theme(s)—poet’s attitude toward key subjects, expressed in a complete sentence.
5. Tone Map is crucial. Find this on the POL website under Teacher Resources (Teacher Resources > Lesson Plans > The Tone Map). They have a fairly extensive tone list.
6. When ready, have Classroom Winners practice recitation of both poems a couple times in front of class before Building Competition.
7. Continue to coach Building Winner during lunch or after school, as time is available, to prepare for Regional Competition.