

Poetry as Pedagogy

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By Dr. Kyle Rapinchuk
Head of School, Sager Classical Academy
kyle.rapinchuk@sageracademy.com

Owner, The Classical Thistle
www.theclassicalthistle.com
kyle@theclassicalthistle.com



Goal: To convince you that poetry is one of our most powerful pedagogical tools; to show you how to implement poetry as a pedagogy, both for teaching and assessment.

Facts, Skills, Ideas (Adler)

➤ Facts: Content Delivery

- Albert Cheng has shown how poetry helps science retention, but it makes the biggest impact in attentiveness. ~Cheng, “You Should Teach Poetry: Science Demonstrates It,” The Classical Thistle, Aug 10, 2022

➤ Skills: Writing Skills

- **Poetry makes us better writers—e.g., word choice, imagery, brevity**

1. **Word choice** (dead words list vs choosing better words): Asking students to write another stanza in the rhyme scheme of the poem puts constraints on them to choose the right words, not just any words. Example: Write a four-line epilogue to “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard,” following the rhyme scheme of the poem.

- *Life like a vapor, the misting morning dew
May vanish quickly without a trace
To realize potential—the fortunate few
The many, all memory, erased.*

2. **Imagery (+WC):** Begin with Hopkins’ words, “Glory be to God for...” and choose your own theme, then complete the six lines following the same rhyme scheme. Begin with Wordsworth’s words, “I wandered lone as ...” and choose your own simile, then complete the six lines following the same rhyme scheme.

- *I wandered lonely as the sun
Whose bright light slowly fades
After its heavenly course has run
The arc God formed and made
I, too, fade into darkness because of sin
Yet like the Sun I’ll rise again*

3. **Brevity (+WC + Imagery):** Take the following paragraph from *Jane Eyre* and turn it into a six-line poem.

- “Most true it is that ‘beauty is in the eye of the gazer.’ My master’s colourless, olive face, square, massive brow, broad and jetty eyebrows, deep eyes, strong features, firm, grim mouth—all energy, decision, will—were not beautiful, according to rule; but they were more than beautiful to me: they were full of an interest, an influence that quite mastered me—that took my feelings from my own power and fettered them in his. I had not intended to love him; the reader knows I had wrought hard to extirpate from my soul the germs of love there detected; and now, at the first renewed view of him, they spontaneously revived, green and strong! He made me love him without looking at me” (203).
- *Beauty lies not in the features of another
But in the eyes of one who gazes
To see beyond one’s features is a power
That masters and amazes
I fought that seeds of love would never flower,
Yet without a glance, all my heart’s castle walls he razes.*

➤ *Ideas: Big Ideas*

○ **Poetry forces students to communicate the depth of their understanding**

1. **Poetry:** Rewrite the last two lines of Shakespeare’s Sonnet 18.

- Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer’s lease hath all too short a date;
Sometimes too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimm’d;
And every fair from fair sometimes declines,
By chance or nature’s changing course untrimm’d;
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow’st;
Nor shall death brag thou wander’st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow’st:
~~So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.~~
- *Thy beauty like summer through all seasons persists
Though many years pass, thy beauty, time, resists.*

2. **Fiction:** Summary of message or scene in LWW in poetic style of “Light Shining Out of Darkness”

- God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform;
He plants his footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.
- *She bears the shears and shears the mane,
She scoffs as Aslan dies.
But she knows not the old refrain
That one once dead will rise.*

○ **Poetry (especially the villanelle) can help us reinforce key lines**

1. Pick two short, meaningful quotes from the book (summarize/adjust as necessary to make them roughly equal in length and rhyme, without changing meaning) and try to use those as your two main lines in a villanelle.

- Brothers Karamazov: “Thy ways, oh Lord, have been revealed” and “By the experience of active love.”
 - A1: Thy ways revealed, oh Lord above;
 - A2: By experience of active love.

- *A1: Thy ways revealed, oh Lord above*
B: Your glory displayed in lives that shine
A2: By experience of active love.

A: The Spirit breathes and darkness moves
B: That heaven and earth may soon align
A1: To show Thy ways revealed, oh Lord above

A: Yet suffering clothes our days like hand in glove
B: Death comes to steal joy and life of yours and mine
A2: And no experience of active love.

A: What dreadful, evil webs the devil wove
B: Knotting our fleeting lives in tangled vines
A1: How are Thy ways revealed, oh Lord above?

A: Ah, forget not Him we call the Son of Jove
B: Whose body is bread and blood is wine
A2: Poured out by experience of active love.

A: Yes, though suffer we must, trials faced thus us behoove
B: Each one with eyes to see God’s grand design
A1: Yes, Thy ways revealed, oh Lord above
A2: By experience of Jesus’ active love.

- **Poetry can help us make connections among different texts (Adler’s syntopical reading)**

1. The Sower’s Song (Parable of the Sower, Song of the Sower poem, Sower’s Song by AP, write your own Sower’s Song)

- *Knees on the ground, digging in toil*
Breaking apart clay to reveal a tomb

An empty casket in the earth providing room
For a seed to be buried in soil.

The seed that has died, given dew
In hope that the seed will sprout
A plant with new life will break out
And the fruit of the plant emerges new

But long ago on a hill called The Skull
A seed buried in earth without hope of breaking through
No anticipation of life born anew
Such great expectation had now come to null.

Sown on Friday in a borrowed, garden tomb
Bursts forth on Sunday as He did also from the womb.

The Parable of the Sower

Matthew 13:1-9

13 That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. **2** And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. **3** And he told them many things in parables, saying: "A sower went out to sow. **4** And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. **5** Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, **6** but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. **7** Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. **8** Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. **9** He who has ears, let him hear."

The Song of the Sower

by [William Cullen Bryant](#) (*I include the first 3 out of 10 verses*)

I. The maples redden in the sun;
In autumn gold the beeches stand;
Rest, faithful plough, thy work is done
Upon the teeming land.
Bordered with trees whose gay leaves fly
On every breath that sweeps the sky,
The fresh dark acres furrowed lie,
And ask the sower's hand.
Loose the tired steer and let him go
To pasture where the gentians blow,
And we, who till the grateful ground,
Fling we the golden shower around.

II. Fling wide the generous grain; we fling
O'er the dark mould the green of spring.
For thick the emerald blades shall grow,
When first the March winds melt the snow,
And to the sleeping flowers, below,
The early bluebirds sing.
Fling wide the grain; we give the fields
The ears that nod in summer's gale,
The shining stems that summer gilds,
The harvest that o'erflows the vale,
And swells, an amber sea, between
The full-leaved woods, its shores of green.
Hark! from the murmuring clods I hear
Glad voices of the coming year;
The song of him who binds the grain,
The shout of those that load the wain,
And from the distant grange there comes
The clatter of the thresher's flail,

And steadily the millstone hums
Down in the willowy vale.

III. Fling wide the golden shower; we trust
The strength of armies to the dust.
This peaceful lea may haply yield
Its harvest for the tented field.
Ha! feel ye not your fingers thrill,
As o'er them, in the yellow grains,
Glide the warm drops of blood that fill,
For mortal strife, the warrior's veins;
Such as, on Solferino's day,
Slaked the brown sand and flowed away —
Flowed till the herds, on Mincio's brink,
Snuffed the red stream and feared to drink; —
Blood that in deeper pools shall lie,
On the sad earth, as time grows gray,
When men by deadlier arts shall die,
And deeper darkness blot the sky
Above the thundering fray;
And realms, that hear the battle-cry,
Shall sicken with dismay;
And chieftains to the war shall lead
Whole nations, with the tempest's speed,
To perish in a day; —
Till man, by love and mercy taught,
Shall rue the wreck his fury wrought,
And lay the sword away!
Oh strew, with pausing, shuddering hand,
The seed upon the helpless land,
As if, at every step, ye cast
The pelting hail and riving blast. [...]

The Sower's Song

Performed by Andrew Peterson

Written by Andrew Peterson and Ben Shive

Oh God, I am furrowed like the field
Torn open like the dirt
And I know that to be healed
That I must be broken first
I am aching for the yield
That You will harvest from this hurt

Abide in me
Let these branches bear You fruit
Abide in me, Lord
As I abide in You

So I kneel
At the bright edge of the garden
At the golden edge of dawn
At the glowing edge of spring
When the winter's edge is gone
And I can see the color green
I can hear the sower's song

Abide in me
Let these branches bear You fruit
Abide in me, Lord
Let Your word take root
Remove in me
The branch that bears no fruit
And move in me, Lord
As I abide in You

As the rain and the snow fall
Down from the sky
And they don't return but they water the earth
and bring they forth life
Giving seed to the sower, bread for the hunger
So shall the word of the Lord be with a sound
like thunder
And it will not return, it will not return void

We shall be led in peace
And go out with joy
And the hills before us
Will raise their voices
And the trees of the field will clap their hands as
the land rejoices
And instead of the thorn now
The cypress towers
And instead of the briar the myrtle blooms with
a thousand flowers
And it will make a name
Make a name for our God
A sign everlasting that will never be cut off
As the earth brings forth sprouts from the seed
What is sown in the garden grows into a mighty
tree
So the Lord plants justice, justice and praise
To rise before the nations till the end of days

As the rain and the snow fall
Down from the sky
And they don't return but they water the earth
and they bring forth life
Giving seed to the sower, and bread for the
hunger
So shall the word of the Lord be with a sound
like thunder
And it will not return, it will not return void
It will not return, it will not return void
It will not return, it will not return void
We shall be led in peace
And go out with joy

And the sower leads us
And the sower leads us
And the sower leads us