Poetry Out Loud In the Classroom Transcript

0:00
[Male voice] Poetry is the sandbox of language. With poetry, we can bulldoze words into playful piles of half sentences with our toy trucks. We can squash them into buckets, add a splash of alliteration, and mold them into tiny castle kingdoms protected by metaphorical moats. Or we can carefully sculpt them into elaborate works of art that resemble sandy sea turtles or the giant head of E.T.

When students play with poetry, they interact with metaphor, theme, cadence and tone in a messy, real, and human way. We do students a disservice if the only words we introduce them to are confined in the tight and controlled paragraphs of academic prose. Poetry Out Loud provides a platform for students to play in the sand. This video introduces 14 poetry-exploring activities--many of which have been modified from the Lesson Plans section of the Poetry Out Loud website.

The activities prepare students for the Poetry Out Loud classroom contest and sit them down squarely in the sandbox of language.

1:10
Poetry Speed Dating introduces students to dozens of poems in a class period. Hundreds of poems are arranged around the classroom on walls, desks, and table tops.

Students select a poem to visit. They record the poem's title and author and then spend time with the poem--noticing whatever strikes them--perhaps the poem's contours, vocabulary, cadence, mood, or theme. When a timer sounds, they jot down a plus or minus sign to indicate their reaction to the poem and a quick description of its subject matter. The timer can be set for anywhere from 30 seconds to 3 minutes-- alternating time spent with each poem.

1:50
The Poetry Out Loud Scavenger Hunt invites students to explore poems directly on the Poetry Out Loud website. Students are led through the various menu options in the Find Poems drop-down menu. The Speed Dating Form can be used again to keep track of poem titles, authors, descriptions, and student ratings.

2:10

A Socratic discussion about poetry interpretation is a natural follow-up activity to the reading of Naomi Shihab Nye's "Valentine for Ernest Mann" and Billy Collins' "Introduction to Poetry."

The Socratic discussion might explore a single line from each poem. What does it mean to walk inside a poem's room and feel for the light switch? What does it mean to suggest that poems hide?

2:40
Another poem exploration activity challenges students to engage with several poems, and respond to three questions for each poem: What do you think? What do you feel? What do you wonder?

2:53
The Mean, Matter, Message activity requires students to break a poem into meaningful chunks. Then they consider what each chunk means. Next, they explore why the poem matters by thinking about the social or personal concern that might have prompted the writing of the poem. Finally, students discuss the main message or theme of the poem.

3:15
Creating Poem Chunk slides allows students to add another level of poem exploration by adding an illustration and a tone to each of a poem's meaningful chunks.

3:25
The Tone Map activity located in the Lesson Plan menu on the Poetry Out Loud website, uses Kay Ryan's "Jenny Kissed Me" and an extensive list of tone words to introduce students to the concept of tone before allowing them to explore the tone of a poem of their own selection.

3:45
A choral reading of this line 6 times with an emphasis on a different word each time shows students just how much emphasis matters in creating both tone and meaning.

[Female voice with emphasis placed on a different word each time. Emphasized words are in bold]
I really thought I knew her
I **really** thought I knew her

I really **thought** I knew her
I really thought **I** knew her
I really thought I **knew** her
I really thought I knew **her**

4:10
Exploring the Scoring Rubric and the detailed Evaluation Criteria and Tips documents provided in the "Judging a Contest" section in the "Teachers and Organizers" dropdown menu provides students with insight into delivery.

4:25
Developing a Presentation Tips Slide show--either alone or in groups--challenges them to really delve into the rubric and tips documents. Delivering the slide deck orally gives students a chance to practice the tips they highlight.

4:40
Students can feel their poems physically by walking their words. They will notice that walking a distance between lines feels different from walking a distance between meaningful chunks, helping them with interpretation, recitation, and memorization.

4:57
[Delena speaks E.E. Cummings' poem "Buffalo Bill's" as she walks]

Buffalo Bill's
Defunct
who use to
ride a watersmooth-silver
stallion
And break onetwothreefourfive pigeonsjustlikethat
Jesus
He was a handsome man
And what I want to know is
How do you like your blueeyed boy
Mister Death

5:25
[male voice] Acting the part allows students to physically embody their poems, too. They may choose to dress as a poem's character, act out a plotline, or create a

freeze frame tableau of a poem's theme or subject matter. Such full-bodied engagement with a poem encourages both interpretation and memorization.

5:45
[Delana's voice]
Be music night by Kenneth Patchen
Be music, night,
That her sleep may go
Where angels have their pale tall choirs
Be a hand, sea,
That her dreams may watch
Thy guidesman touching the green flesh of the world
Be a voice, sky,
That her beauties may be counted
And the stars will tilt their quiet faces
Into the mirror of her loveliness
Be a road, earth,
That her walking may take thee
Where the towns of heaven lift their breathing spires
O be a world and a throne, God,
That her living may find its weather
And the souls of ancient bells in a child's book
Shall lead her into Thy wondrous house

6:30
[male voice] The Poetry Out Loud website also has some great ideas for daily practice aimed at memorizing poems.

Rewriting a poem by hand is helpful when students challenge themselves to write more and more lines from memory with each rewrite.

Practicing in front of a mirror or friend encourages conscious delivery decisions.

Carrying a poem around allows a student to practice while waiting in the lunch line or after finishing classwork early.

Reading a poem before going to sleep and again when a student wakes up solidifies it in the mind.

7:05

Finally, involvement in Poetry Out Loud can serve as a jumping off point for various poetry projects including everything from the creation of games and reports to the delivery of talk shows, mock funerals, or commercials that explore individual poems or poets, and encourage engagement with full books of poetry, and the writing of original works.

Poetry is the sandbox of language. Bringing Poetry Out Loud into the classroom provides students with loads of sand toys devised to help them dig in and enjoy.