



TEACHING HUMAN DIGNITY

Women's Hidden Experiences:

POETRY ABOUT MOTHERHOOD,
ABORTION, AND LOSS

CENTRAL QUESTIONS:

- ◆ What makes poetry a unique literary genre?
- ◆ How does poetry allow us to step into the experience of another person?
- ◆ Why is poetry an important literary art form?
- ◆ How does poetry give us new insight into the experience of motherhood, abortion, and loss?

Copyright © 2019 McGrath Institute for Church Life, University of Notre Dame.

Developed in Collaboration with Ann W. Astell, Ph.D.

“I, Too” reprinted by permission of Harold Ober Associates. Copyright © 1994 by the Langston Hughes Estate.

“The Mother” reprinted by consent of Brooks Permissions.

“The Abortion” and “With Mercy for the Greedy” reprinted by permission of SLL/Sterling Lord Literistic, Inc. Copyright by Linda Gray Sexton.

“Parliament Hill Fields,” “The Winter Trees,” “Thalidomide” from THE COLLECTED POEMS OF SYLVIA PLATH, EDITED by TED HUGHES. Copyright © 1960, 1965, 1971, 1981 by the Estate of Sylvia Plath. Editorial material copyright © 1981 by Ted Hughes. Reprinted by permission of Harper Collins Publishers.

“Panic attacks and panic disorder” excerpt used with permission of Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research, all rights reserved.

“I felt a funeral in my brain” THE POEMS OF EMILY DICKINSON: VARIORUM EDITION, edited by Ralph W. Franklin, Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Copyright © 1998 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College. Copyright © 1951, 1955 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College. Copyright © renewed 1979, 1983 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College. Copyright © 1914, 1918, 1919, 1924, 1929, 1930, 1932, 1935, 1937, 1942 by Martha Dickinson Bianchi. Copyright © 1952, 1957, 1958, 1963, 1965 by Mary L. Hampson.

Unit-at-a-Glance

Setting/Subject:

Upper level English Class addressing poetry; including American Literature, Poetry, Women's Literature, or Twentieth Century Literature.

Curriculum Area:

Secondary English/Integrated Language Arts;

Time Requirement:

This unit contains 5 lessons; Lessons 1 and 5 are 90 minutes each; lessons 2-4 are 50 minutes each

Descriptors:

Critical Attributes of Poetry, Anne Sexton, Gwendolyn Brooks, Sylvia Plath, Confessional Poetry, Dramatic Poetry, Literary Analysis

Unit Objectives

Students will be able to:

- ◆ list and accurately describe the critical attributes of poetry as a literary form.
- ◆ determine the themes and central ideas of poems and analyze how they develop over the course of text.
- ◆ analyze and evaluate poetic conventions used to express experience, insights, and emotions in poetry including figurative language, word relationships, diction and syntax.
- ◆ practice critical thinking while observing, describing, and analyzing literary patterns.
- ◆ articulate the unique value of poetry as a genre for writers and readers.

Rationale

Participation in this unit will facilitate the students' ability to work with the critical attributes of poetry, to comprehend, analyze and evaluate individual poems, and to articulate the distinct and unique way poetry aids human beings in making sense of reality and relating to others.

Unit Summary

<i>Lesson Title</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Learning Objectives</i>
<p>Unit Pre-assessment</p>	<p>Before the lesson starts, the teacher will ask students to complete a survey and a pre-assessment. This information will be used to establish a safe classroom environment and modify instructional experiences for greater efficacy.</p>	<p>The students will be able to clearly and anonymously articulate their prior experiences and knowledge in relation to poetry and abortion, so that they can share it with their teacher and contribute to productive unit planning and more successful learning.</p>
<p>Lesson #1: The Critical Attributes of Poetry</p> <p><i>Two 50 minute class periods</i></p>	<p>The students will read and consider a selection of text-based resources (examples and non-examples of poetry). They will also develop the ability to distinguish the critical attributes illustrated in examples of poetry and use them to make generalizations about the critical attributes of poetry.</p>	<p>Students will be able to read and analyze an example of poetry and another text-based resource that represent a different genre.</p> <p>Students will be able to correctly differentiate between examples of poetry and non-examples of poetry (literature representing other genres).</p> <p>Students will be able to determine how poetry differs from literature in other genres. (This foundation will enable students to develop a unique appreciation for poetry during subsequent lessons.)</p> <p>Students will be able to accurately list the distinct characteristics of poetry as a literary form.</p> <p>Students will be able to practice critical thinking skills while observing, describing, and analyzing literary patterns.</p>

Unit Summary cont.

<i>Lesson Title</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Learning Objectives</i>
<p>Lesson #2: “the mother” by Gwendolyn Brooks</p> <p><i>50 minute class period</i></p>	<p>In this three part lesson, the students will listen to and read the dramatic poem, “the mother” by Gwendolyn Brooks, identify the key metaphors and word patterns that will facilitate analysis of the poem, and understand the power poetry has to express complex experiences and emotions in ways that invite the reader’s development of compassion and understanding.</p>	<p>Students will be able to be conscious of their reaction to the poem and express their thoughts and feelings in relation to the work using precise and honest words and phrases.</p> <p>Students will identify the form, structure, word choice, figurative language, and style Gwendolyn Brooks employs in "the mother" and describe how these features impact the meaning of the poem.</p> <p>Students will identify and analyze the various emotions, thoughts, and experiences of a person affected by abortion as expressed in the poem, "the mother."</p> <p>Students will explain the ways dramatic poetry may affect a reader-- it can expand reader’s understanding of other people and allow them to develop compassion for them through consideration of their experience.</p>

Unit Summary cont.

<i>Lesson Title</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Learning Objectives</i>
<p>Lessons #3: “The Abortion” by Anne Sexton</p> <p>Lesson #4: “Parliament Hill Fields” by Sylvia Plath</p> <p><i>Two 50 minute class periods</i></p>	<p>After reading examples of Confessional Poetry written by Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath, the students will understand how writing poetry can promote an author’s inner healing.</p>	<p>Students will be able to express their thoughts and feelings in relation to the work using precise, honest words and phrases.</p> <p>Students will identify examples of the critical attributes and analyze how they are employed in the poem.</p> <p>Students will explain the ways that confessional poetry evokes an emotional response in the reader and offers preliminary analysis of what the author maybe trying to say about humanity and the experience of abortion.</p> <p>Students will express their thoughts and feelings in relation to the work using precise, honest words and phrases.</p> <p>Students will identify major examples of the critical attributes (i.e., word choice, metaphor, figurative language, voice, etc.) and analyze how they are employed in the poem.</p> <p>Students will explain the ways that confessional poetry evokes an emotional response in the reader and offer preliminary analysis of what the author is arguing about the human experience, motherhood, loss, and how they affect women.</p> <p>Students will articulate the ways that confessional poetry impacts the reader and the author.</p> <p>Students will compare and contrast the various ways poets speak of similar experiences in varied and unique ways.</p>

Unit Summary cont.

<i>Lesson Title</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Learning Objectives</i>
<p>Lesson #5: The Unique Contributions of Poetry</p> <p><i>Two 50 minute class periods</i></p>	<p>The students will revisit the text-based resources used in Lesson #1 and practice their critical thinking skills as they consider the contributions of poetry in expressing and understanding the human experience.</p>	<p>Students will be able to distinguish how the exploration and communication of a topic in a poem differs from its exploration using other forms of literature (science writing, reference writing, etc.).</p> <p>Students will accurately identify the critical attributes of poetry in a specific poem.</p> <p>Students will identify differences between the ways poetry and non-fiction writing enable the exploration of a topic.</p> <p>Students will make numerous correct generalizations about the unique contributions of poetry.</p>