

American Rhythms

Subject: English, Language Arts

Grade level: 9-12

Rationale or Purpose: In order to gain a better appreciation and understanding of Native American poetry translated by Mary Austin in *The American Rhythm*; students will unite their use of language with music and movement to create their own poetry that incorporates the use of rhythm

Materials: Computer with internet access
Drums (anything that will sound like a drum when beat)
Bells or any other percussion instrument
Native American poetry (usually found in English textbook)
Butcher paper
Markers

Lesson Duration: Several class blocks

Objectives: English III

- 14A-E The student listens attentively for a variety of purposes
- 15A-F The student speaks clearly for a variety of purposes
- 16-A-D The student evaluates and critiques oral presentations
- 1A-c The student writes in a variety of forms
- 4A-G The student uses writing as a tool for learning
- 9A-B The student reads widely to increase his knowledge of American culture

Activity:

- Step 1: Move desks out of the way and have students sit in a large circle on the floor. If possible have them go outside and sit under a shady tree instead. They should take their textbooks with them and turn to the Native American poetry. Bring your percussion instruments as well.
- Step 2: Students should read the poems aloud and discuss their meaning. Use figurative language terms in your discussion. Have they created any metaphors? What image does this personification create? What are the tones of the poems?
- Step 3: Divide students into smaller groups and hand out percussion instruments. Have each group take a different poem and add sound, rhythm and movement to the poem as the group reads the poem aloud to the class. Let the groups separate and practice several times

adding the sound and movement before sharing their reading with the class. Tell students they must stand while presenting. They may read all together or separate and share the lines. When done, discuss with students how adding sound and movement enhanced the poetry?

- Step 4: Hand out modern rap lyrics by *Eminem* about his daughter. Have students read the lyrics aloud without music, sound or movement. Then have them add both sound and movement when they read the lyrics. Again, ask how sound and movement enhances the words of the poems.
- Step 5: Have the students access *Teaching the American Twenties* collection on the internet, go to “*Defining American Culture – Romanticizing Cowboys and Indians*” and find *The American Rhythm* by Mary Austin. Read the content and discuss her idea about copying Indian behavior to put her in the optimal state of mind to write poetry. Is this a good idea? Look at the two poems by Austin that have been included. Read them aloud and discuss their meaning, again focus on tone, figurative language and how it has been used to create meaning in the poem.
- Step 6: Divide class into two separate groups and assign each group one of the Austin poems. Each group will add music and movement to Austin’s poems. Again allow them to practice before sharing with other class members.
- Step 7: Have students go to “*Big Debates and Personal Experiences – The Rise of Women*”. Turn to *Motherhood in Bondage* by Margaret Sanger. Read the content and then some of the excerpts of letters given. Discuss how these women felt about their situation and motherhood. How are these letters different from Austin’s “*Song for the Newborn*”? What various tones exist in these letters and what do they express?
- Step 8: Divide class into small groups of 4-5 students. Give each group a large piece of butcher paper and some markers. Each group will create a poem in the Native American style, using the feelings emotions and some of the words from excerpts of letters in *Motherhood in Bondage*. Each group should use figurative language in their poem. Its tone should be clear. They are to write their poem in very large letters on the butcher paper to share later with the class.
- Step 9: Now have them add movement and sound to their poems. They should practice their chorale reading and movement and sound before presenting their poem to the whole class. Remind them that their movement and sound should reflect the tone they are creating.

Step 10: Each group will present its poem to the class. As closure, the class will discuss how these poems reflect the values, ideas and feelings of the women in the letters.

Modification: Group activities assist students with special needs. Be sure that learning disabled students are placed appropriately. After completion of the group poem, the gifted students can then write his own poem that shares feelings about an important modern issue in current society. Using sound and music they can then present their poems to the class.

Student Product: Oral presentations of poems. Butcher paper poem with presentation

Closure: See Step 10.

Assessment or evaluation: Discussion: do they understand the use of figurative language, rhythm and movement? Have they been able to use these to develop tone in their own poems? How well do they understand the ideas in the letters and were students able to successfully contrast these ideas with the poem by Austin?

Butcher paper poems should clearly reflect the ideas in the excerpt letters. Do they use appropriate figurative language? How well developed is their use of language, sophisticated vocabulary, depth of ideas?

Participation: did all members of the group actively participate in all areas?

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