

WEBER READS



*Emily
Dickinson*

ELEMENTARY LESSON PLANS

Bees, Flowers, and Butterflies

Judy Chesley, Wasatch Range Writing Project

Burning Question:

How can I teach students to understand the format for Iambic poems, the format Emily Dickinson used for most of her poems?

Objective:

Students will be able to identify the format of Iambic poems and will use rhythm and rhyme in writing an original poem.

Context:

A sixth grade elementary classroom, easily adapted to all grade levels K-12

Materials:

- The Poems of Emily Dickinson, edited by R.W. Franklin
- Copies of poem #113 “The bee is not afraid of me”
- Thesaurus
- Writing notebook or paper and pencil
- Highlighters
- <http://www.poetryoutloud.org/poems-and-performance/video-recitation-series>

Time Span:

One or two class periods, plus additional time for publishing final written product

Procedures

1. Emily Dickinson’s poems about nature, bees, flowers, butterflies, etc., reveal Emily’s love of nature, and her fun sense of humor about things. Most of Emily Dickinson’s poems are written in Iambic meter. Ask students to write the following in their writing notebooks for a reference:
 - a. Iambic meter has a short syllable followed by a long syllable. Her poems often have stanzas of four lines
 - b. Lines one and three have eight syllables
 - c. Lines two and four have six syllables
 - d. The last word in lines two and four rhyme
2. Read Emily’s poem #113 “The bee is not afraid of me.” (See below.) Discuss the format, use highlighters to mark stressed syllables, and count out the number of syllables in each line.

# 113	The bee is not afraid of me, I know the butterfly, The pretty people in the woods Receive me cordially.	The brooks laugh louder when I come, The breezes madder play Wherefore, mine eyes, thy silver mists? Where, O summer’s day?
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3. Students will do this assignment outside, either on the school grounds or, if this is not possible, you may assign this as homework and they can do it in their backyard. Prepare a paper by placing a compass rose in the bottom left corner, and identify north, south, east, and west. Ask students to take this paper and their notebooks outside.

4. Ask them to identify which direction is north when they go outside. Then they should find a spot away from other students; a yard or two should be sufficient. They will have one minute to sit down and record any sounds or sights in nature they hear or see. They should start by facing north and write their list below north. After one minute, you will indicate they should change direction by quietly blowing a whistle, ringing a bell or chime, etc.
5. When all directions have been covered, they should choose a subject or subjects from their list. They should sit facing their subject to make precise observations if possible. Allow them two or three minutes to write down as much as they can about their subject or subjects.
6. Upon returning to the class, have them write an Iambic meter poem about their chosen subject. Encourage them to find other word choices for common or overused words by using the Thesaurus.

Extensions:

- We use composition books for publishing our poems. Students write poems on the left hand page of the journal in cursive. On the right hand page of the composition book, they draw a full page colored illustration, using crayons or colored pencils, but no markers, which goes along with the poem.
- Have students memorize their original poem and be prepared for a “Poetry Out Loud” presentation. Discuss with them how to make performance compelling, how to master the feeling, language and rhythm of their poem.

Rationale:

Students need to have the opportunity to observe, be aware of, and “feel” what they are writing about. Giving students the opportunity to share through performance enriches the writing experience.

Resources:

Dickinson, Emily, and R. W. Franklin. *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Reading Edition*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap, 2005. Print.

<http://www.poetryoutloud.org/poems-and-performance/video-recitation-series>

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Emily Dickinson – Gardener

Angela Choberka, Wasatch Range Writing Project

Burning Question:

By participating in the collection or cultivation of plants, can students be more engaged in their studies of the poet, Emily Dickinson?

Objectives:

- Introduce the students to the poet Emily Dickinson and her poetry.
- Engage them in an activity that will allow them to experience being a gardener.
- Give them a point of interest by looking for the scientific names of plants and caring for them.

Context:

Use the season to inspire your lesson. See sources for instructions on how to do the following activities. Many of these projects could be given as gifts relevant to the season: Christmas, Mother's Day, etc.

- In the fall, students can collect flowers or leaves to press.
- In the winter, bulbs can be forced in the classroom: paper whites (*Narcissus papyraceus*) can easily be done right out of the package; tulip, hyacinth, or amaryllis need to be prepared months in advance.
- In the spring, seeds can be planted indoors and/or transplanted outdoors for observation. Some flower-budding branches can be collected and then forced indoors or observed outdoors in bloom.

Materials:

This depends on the season and which activity is chosen. General materials are as listed:

- Picture Book: *Emily* by Michael Bedard (see resources)
- Plant materials (see context) or permission to go outdoors to collect specimens
- Pencil
- Paper
- Colored Pencils
- Field Guide for Plants/Trees or internet

Time Needed:

One to several 40 minute class periods

Procedures:

1. Read the picture book *Emily* to the students. Point out the various statements that mention nature or refer to the metaphors of death and spring.
2. Discuss the afterword, which explains that the story is inspired by Emily Dickinson. You could show a picture of her as found online and some real pictures of the plants or project you will be completing.



3. Choose one of the above activities.
4. Ask students to write or match a nature poem with a drawing or a pressed plant. Make sure to find the scientific names of the plants, as Dickinson was an avid botanist. A discussion regarding classification could also be held at the appropriate level for the students.

Rationale:

By providing an experience that mimics an activity that Emily Dickinson also participated in, we can help our students further understand her love of nature. They may also be inspired to learn more about gardening or plant care. Children love caring for living things, so we can use this desire to help show them how writing can be inspired.

Resources:

Iannotti, Marie. "Forcing Paperwhites - How to Force Paper White Narcisis Indoors." *About.com*. Web. 23 Jul 2012. <<http://www.gardening.about.com/od/forcingandprechilling/a/Paperwhites.htm>>

Brown, Deborah L. and Harold F. Wilkins. "Forcing Bulbs for Indoor Beauty in Winter." *University of Minnesota Extension*. 2012. Web. 23 Jul 2012. <<http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/horticulture/dg1116.html>>

HGNW Staff. "Pressing Plants." *OregonLive*. Last updated 14 Jul 2010. Web. 23 Jul 2012. <http://blog.oregonlive.com/homesandgardens/2009/05/pressing_plants.html>

Iannotti, Marie. "Seed Starting – How to Successfully Start Plants from Seed." *About.com*. Web. 23 Jul 2012. <<http://www.gardening.about.com/od/gardenprimer/ss/SeedStarting.htm>>

Bedard, Michael and Barbara Cooney. *Emily*. New York: Doubleday, 2002. Print.

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Emily Dickinson
Through Primary and Secondary Sources

Annie Robertson, Wasatch Range Writing Project

Burning Question:

Can students use primary and secondary resources to verify information presented in a picture book or novel?

Objectives:

- Question the validity of information presented by an author.
- Use primary and secondary resources to examine the life of an important historical figure and verify information about them.

Context:

This lesson could be used when discussing the importance of using primary sources over secondary sources during the research process. The lesson is appropriate for 2nd-6th grade.

Materials:

- *Uncle Emily* by Jane Yolen
- Primary Sources Packet (Weber Reads Website)
- Optional: *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, edited by R. W. Franklin

Time Span:

45 minutes- 1 hour

Procedures:

1. Read *Uncle Emily* by Jane Yolen. Discuss the relationship Emily must have had with her nephew.
2. Point out that Emily has written a poem where the first line is “Tell the truth, but tell it slant”.
3. Discuss what this could mean to researchers and why primary source documents such as letters, photographs, and historical documents might be important.
4. Read the “What is true about this story” page at the end of the picture book. Jane Yolen states that Emily really did give the poem about the dead bee to her nephew as reported in a letter.
5. Ask students how they could find out if this was really an Emily Dickinson poem. If this poem was really one of Emily’s poems, it should be listed in the book *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* or found easily in a search. Emily Dickinson generally did not title her poems. Her poems are listed in an index by the first line in her poems.
6. Demonstrate to students how to search for Emily Dickinson’s poems using the first line. Example poems would be *I’m nobody! Who are you?*, *I dwell in Possibility*, and *The moon was but a chin of gold*. The first line of the bumble bee poem she gave to her nephew, according to the book *Uncle Emily*, appears to be *The Bumble Bee’s Religion*. In doing a search of Emily’s poems, this poem does not seem to exist. However, when looking at the poem, a title on the poem would make sense because Emily was giving it to her nephew as a finished product. So the first line of the poem would actually be *His little Hearse-like Figure*. Looking at the index of Emily Dickinson poems, you will find the poem under *His little Hearse-like Figure*. Jane

Yolen used this primary source to craft the story. Some of the facts are true, and some have been made up because we can't be sure.

Extensions:

- Use the primary resource packet as well as a bigger variety of Emily's poems and let students look through the information and discuss if *Uncle Emily* could have happened.
- Collect primary and secondary sources on an event in history, such as the Civil War, and discuss what we can learn from these sources and how things can change as the documents are interpreted.
- Play phone call where one student starts by giving a small message and the class tries to send that message around without being changed. Explain to the students that the closer the message is to the original source, the more accurate it is.

Rationale:

Students must learn not to trust the information provided to them on the internet or in other literature without having a source to verify the information. Searching for the primary source documents is not always easy and requires some alternate search methods.

Resources:

Dickinson, Emily, and R. W. Franklin. *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1999. Print.

Yolen, Jane, and Nancy Carpenter. *My Uncle Emily*. New York: Philomel Books, 2009. Print.

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I Dwell in Possibility

Pat Lowe, Wasatch Range Writing Project

Burning Question:

Why does Emily Dickinson's work seem relevant today? What are some of the Big Ideas that she explored in her poetry?

Objectives:

- Students will become familiar with poetry by Emily Dickinson that helps readers to understand her as a person.
- Students will analyze poems for themes she considered important.
- Students will write a self-reflective poem modeled on one of her poems.

Context:

This lesson could be used as an introduction to the study of poetry in general or a unit on Emily Dickinson in particular. It would be appropriate for upper elementary students and secondary students.

Materials:

- Books of poetry by Emily Dickinson
- Copies of selected poems: individual sheets, posters, or pages to be projected on a screen
- Large sheets of poster paper for display in the classroom
- Paper or individual student notebooks/journals

Time Span:

The material can be presented in multiple sessions of 45 minutes each, with periods of several days between for student reflection and writing.

Procedures:

1. Present background information about Emily Dickinson (ED) and her life found in the Introduction to *Poetry for Young People: Emily Dickinson*.
2. Read "I Dwell in Possibility" (#466).
3. In small groups, have students discuss why ED chose the metaphor of a house for her idea. Brainstorm what she might "gather" of Paradise.
4. Share ideas with the class as a whole by having each group write on chart paper posted around the room.
5. In their poetry journals, have students write their own predictions about the Big Ideas or themes they might find in poems by ED.
6. Allow student to read a variety of poems by ED. They should read 25 to 40 poems in order to have a feel for the breadth of subject matter in her writing. Some students may benefit from listening to recordings, reading them aloud with a partner, or reading them aloud using a whisper phone or with a finger in their ear.
7. Students should use their poetry journal to record the first line of the poems they read and list the Big Idea each contained. They could mark poems they especially like. Have each student make a list of themes that occur often.

8. Create a class list of the most common/frequent themes on poster paper.
9. Let students select a theme to explore in a small group. Have the different groups generate a list of poems that relate to their theme.
10. Groups should orally present their ideas, and post their list.
11. Allow students time to reflect and brainstorm ideas about themselves and review ED poems for a format that would fit what they want to express.
12. Have each student select an ED poem to use as a model and then create his or her own poem.
13. Publish companion poems (the model and the student poem) on the same page or on side-by-side pages.
14. Have students write in their journals a reflection about why they selected a particular poem and the ways in which theirs is similar or different from the ED poem.
15. Review the predictions made at the beginning of the study of ED.
16. Have students write a response to one of the following prompts:
 - a. ED saw possibilities in ...
 - b. Poetry by ED is relevant today because...
17. As a class, orally share responses.

Extensions:

- Explore poems that express ED's opinions about the following ideas:
 - a. self (#260 "I'm Nobody! Who Are You?" and #409 "The soul selects her own society")
 - b. success (#1570 "How happy in the little stone" and #112 "Success is counted sweetest")
 - c. death (#982 "If I can stop one heart from breaking")
- Read about ED and the visit to her home by T.W. Higginson as recorded in letters to his wife. (Johnson, pp. 207-211) Why might he have said she "drained my nerve power...I am glad not to live near her"? Write about someone you know who has this effect on others.

Rationale:

Emily Dickinson wrote about a wide variety of subjects. She is the author of much more than "little" poems. By being exposed to many examples of her poetry, students will be encouraged to explore diverse ideas about life and the world in which they live.

Resources:

- Dickinson, Emily, and Frances S. Bolin. *Poetry for Young People: Emily Dickinson*. New York: Sterling Publishing Company, Inc., 1994. Print.
- Dickinson, Emily, and R. W. Franklin. *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Reading Edition*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999. Print.
- Johnson, Thomas H. *Emily Dickinson: Selected Letters*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986. Print.
- Dickinson, Emily, Edric S. Mesmer, and Virginia E. Wolff. *I'm Nobody! Who Are You? Poems by Emily Dickinson*. Scholastic, Inc., 2002. Print.

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My Moon

Judy Chesley, Wasatch Range Writing Project

Burning Question:

How can I teach students to write several stanzas using Iambic form (the format Emily Dickinson used for most of her poems) and descriptive words to show feeling?

Objective:

Students will use the poetry format for Iambic poems by writing a four (minimum) stanza poem about the moon on the day they were born.

Context:

A sixth grade elementary classroom, easily adapted for grade levels 3-12

Materials:

- *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, edited by R. W. Franklin
- http://www.moonconnection.com/moon_phases_calendar.phtml
- <http://www.poetryoutloud.org/poems-and-performance/video-recitation-series>
- Copies of poem #735 “The Moon was but a Chin of Gold”
- Thesaurus
- Writing notebook or paper and pencil
- Highlighters

Time Span:

One or two class periods plus additional time for publishing final written product

Procedures

1. Emily Dickinson wrote poems about the moon and stars. Most of Emily Dickenson’s poems are written in Iambic meter.
2. Ask students to write the following information in their writing notebooks for a reference about the format of Dickinson’s poems:
 - a. Iambic meter has a short syllable followed by a long syllable.
 - b. Stanzas have four lines.
 - c. Lines one and three have eight syllables
 - d. Lines two and four have six syllables.
 - e. The last word in lines two and four rhyme.
3. Give students one minute to write down everything they know about the moon in their writing notebook.
4. Tell students they will be writing a four-stanza poem about the moon on the day/night they were born. Have each student share their list with their neighbor.
5. Read Emily’s poem #735 “The Moon was but a Chin of Gold.”
6. Have students highlight the descriptive words in the poem.
7. Give students the web site to look up the moon on their birth date.
8. As they write the poem about their moon, tell them to focus on sounds, smells, weather, etc., of the month in which they were born.

Extensions:

- We use composition books for publishing our poems. Students write poems on the left hand page of the journal in cursive. On the right hand page of the composition book, they draw a full page colored illustration, using crayons or colored pencils, but no markers, which goes along with the poem.
- Have students memorize their original poem and be prepared for a “Poetry Out Loud” presentation. Discuss with them how to make performance compelling and how to master the feeling, language and rhythm of their poem.

Rationale:

Students need to have the opportunity to observe, be aware of, and “feel” what they are writing about. Giving students the opportunity to share through performance enriches the writing experience.

Resources:

Dickinson, Emily, and R. W. Franklin. *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Reading Edition*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap, 2005. Print.

http://www.moonconnection.com/moon_phases_calendar.phtml.

<http://www.poetryoutloud.org/poems-and-performance/video-recitation-series>

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Nature's Surprises

Judy Chesley, Wasatch Range Writing Project

Burning Question:

How can I help students be more aware of the nature around them and improve their use of vocabulary in description and voice?

Objective:

Students will be able to write a freeform poem with improved vocabulary choice in both description and voice.

Context:

A sixth grade elementary classroom, easily adapted for other grade levels K-12

Materials:

- *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, edited by R. W. Franklin
- *Emily* by Bedard, Cooney, and Braswell
- Thesaurus
- Writing notebook or paper and pencil
- White board or projector

Time Span:

60 minutes for lesson plus additional time for publishing final written product

Procedures:

1. Ask students to listen carefully as you read the picture book *Emily* aloud.
2. Take one minute and make a list of things the students learned about Emily Dickinson.
3. Ask students to take a few minutes to share their lists.
4. Ask if anyone had nature, love of nature, or something similar on his or her list. Have a short discussion with the class about Emily's love of nature.
5. Take a minute for students to write in their notebooks a list of things they love or notice in nature.
6. Have each student share one item from his or her list. Tell them they may add to their list if they hear something they really liked that is not on their list.
7. Ask students to circle the one item on their list. Explain they will write a freeform poem about this item. Freeform poetry is just what the name implies. The poet is free to use whatever format he/she wants. Rhyme is optional.
8. Ask students to take one minute to make a list of words or short phrases to describe the item in nature they have chosen. Direct them to think of the five senses...sight, sound, touch, taste, smell.
9. Read aloud Emily Dickinson's poem #359 "A Bird, came down the Walk."
10. Use a projector to display poem #359 or give each student a copy. Ask them to read the poem and share some vocabulary they notice related to description and voice.
11. Give them 15 to 20 minutes to begin the first draft of their poem.
12. Ask them to read what they have written and circle four or five words that could be exchanged with a more descriptive word.

13. Direct students to a thesaurus to find more descriptive words and make needed changes.
14. Invite volunteers to share what they have so far.
15. Give students time to self-edit and prepare to write their final write and publish.

Extensions:

- We use composition books for publishing our poems. Students write poems on the left hand page of the journal in cursive. On the right hand page of the composition book, they draw a full page colored illustration, using crayons or colored pencils, but no markers, which goes along with the poem.
- Have students memorize their original poem and be prepared for a “Poetry Out Loud” presentation. Discuss with them how to make performance compelling and how to master the feeling, language and rhythm of their poem.

Rationale:

Teaching poetry allows students to learn different formats for expressing their thoughts and feelings. Poetry also builds writing confidence as different formats are taught: free form, haiku, cinquain, acrostic, limerick, sonnet, etc. Poetry is a vocabulary rich form of communication.

Resources:

Bedard, Michael, Barbara Cooney, and Lynn Braswell. *Emily*. New York: Delacorte Press, 1992. Print.

Dickinson, Emily, and R. W. Franklin. *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Reading Edition*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap, 2005. Print.

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Spending Time in Nature Each Day

to Inspire Writers

Angela Choberka, Wasatch Range Writing Project

Inspired by the book *Last Child in the Woods*, I have been teaching children to spend more time in the natural world and this is one of their favorite activities. Please see the *Coyote's Guide to Connecting with Nature* if you are looking for more wonderful and fun ways to spend time with your students or children outdoors.

Sit Spots (from the *Coyote's Guide*)

Find a place where the students can safely spend ten minutes outside for the entire school year (a day each week would work, but the more often at varying seasons or during differing weather, the better). Your school grounds will work even if it is in a city and apparently surrounded by concrete. The natural world is present. Participate with the students.

The students must be told to sit quietly and directed to observe nature. Ask them to use all of the senses: watch, listen, touch, smell, (maybe not taste). You may direct their observations if you feel the need, but don't do it every time. You can direct them to draw something, listen for particular sounds, or write something. It is important that there is silence, so they may need to be moved or need to join you in your sit spot if they have trouble.

When they are alerted to the end of the time, call them back to the group with a special drum or whistle. Have students share a story of what they observed during their sit spot time. You need to share a good story, too.

You may be reluctant to participate in the activity because of your group of students or particular situation, but in my experience, students love this activity. They seldom have any quiet time in nature.

This activity can inspire students to write in various genres. Some poems by Emily Dickinson that are clearly based on her observations of nature can be found in the book *Poetry for Young People: Emily Dickinson*, edited by Frances Schoonmaker Bolin (1994). Poems on pages 26, 27, 32, 33, and 34 are perfect examples that have illustrations accompanying them.

Sources:

Louv, Richard. *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder*. Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill. 2008.

Young, Jon, Ellen Haas, Evan McGown and Kiliiii Yu. *Coyote's Guide to Connecting with Nature for Kids of All Ages and their Mentors*. Perfect Paperback. 2010.

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Tell all the Truth but tell it slant

Pat Lowe, Wasatch Range Writing Project

Burning Question:

Can a study of the life and times of a poet help students discuss and decide on difficult questions, such as “is it sometimes O.K. to lie?”

Objectives:

- Students will learn about Emily Dickinson (ED) and her love for her family.
- Students will think about ways in which ED was different from other adults around her.
- Students will explore life in the time of ED and compare it to their own experience.

Context:

This lesson could be used as an introduction to poetry, to life in the 1800s, or to begin/end a character development unit on honesty. It could be adapted for students K-8.

Materials:

- Paper or student journals
- Crayons or colored pencils
- Copy of the poem #1129 “Tell all the Truth but tell it slant”

Time Span:

The lesson could be covered in one or more periods of 30-45 minutes, depending on the grade level.

Procedures:

1. Read Jane Yolen’s book, *My Uncle Emily*, including the page, “What is True,” at the back.
2. Discuss the details that show Emily’s relationship with her family.
3. Have students make a list of facts and inferences about the Dickinson families. Next to that list, students should write things about their own family. With younger students, this could be done as a whole class with the teacher being the scribe.
4. Discuss ways in which ED seems different from other grown-ups in the story: she wears only white dresses; writes poetry; lowers a basket of gingerbread down to children from her room; “notices everything;” and asks, “Isn’t there more to this story?”
5. Talk about the advice, “Tell her—but carefully,” which Ned gave to his younger brother, Gib.
6. Read poem #1129 “Tell all the Truth but tell it slant.” Clarify vocabulary as needed: *slant*; *Circuit*, *inform*; *eased*; *dazzle*; and *gradually*.
7. Present ideas that scholars have had about the poem.
 - a. Real truth, especially in a sense of religion, is “too bright” to understand at one time.
 - b. Circuit, pronounced by emphasizing the second syllable, suggests roundabout, curved, or even bending the truth.
 - c. Telling everything, all at once, might not be the best idea, but be careful not to lie.
 - d. The poem may even suggest that people need a different perspective about things.
8. Reread the end of the story. What was the result of Gib’s decision?
9. Have students discuss or write a response to the question, “Did ED think it was O.K. to lie?”

10. Using the illustrations, have students list ways in which life and school were different in the 1800s from today.
11. Let students choose one idea from their lists and illustrate a sentence/paragraph that compares or contrasts life in the 1800s with their life.
12. If this is an introduction to poetry, pay attention to the way the words and sentences are placed on the pages. It is called free verse because they are arranged like poetry. The author could have written her story in narrative form, with sentences in paragraphs. By making a different choice of how to present her text, she reinforces the idea of a poet's work and style.

Extensions:

- Have students read other poems by ED, or stories from the same time period such as Laura Ingalls Wilder and Louisa May Alcott. In what ways are the lives of girls similar or different?
- Students might write a letter to ED asking questions about her life and poetry.
- Ask students to write about a time they had a situation like Gib faced—either at school or home. The form could be a poem, story, essay or a letter of apology.

Rationale:

Poets and poetry are often viewed with distrust as being too weird or difficult to understand. Emily Dickinson's unusual lifestyle contributes to that view of her. *My Uncle Emily* helps the reader understand her as a member of a close knit family. It also illustrates her deep feelings about poetry and the importance of all parts of life—even bees and little boys.

Resources:

Borus, Audrey. *A Student's Guide to Emily Dickinson*. Berkley Heights, N.J.: Enslow Publishers, Inc., 2005. Print.

Yolen, Jane. *My Uncle Emily*. The Penguin Group, 2009. Print.

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What did you say, Emily?

Dee Anne Squire, Wasatch Range Writing Project

Burning Question:

Can a poet living almost 200 years ago speak to students today and inspire them to speak as well?

Objectives:

- Students will find similarities between communication today and communication during Emily's time.
- Students will identify specific objects in Emily's poetry using descriptive details as clues.
- Students will recognize the importance of silent time and space to write.
- Students will construct their own poem, using descriptive details about an object in nature, and using silent time to make observations.

Materials:

Letter page for each student (Handout #1), one poem for each group of students (all poems are on Handout #2), journals, paper, and pencil

Time Span:

Four 50-minute class periods

Context:

Fifth through tenth grades

Procedures:

Day 1

1. Begin class by giving students five minutes to list in their journal as many forms of communication as possible. Push them to think not only of the forms they use on a daily basis, but what was also available to their grandparents and great-grandparents.
2. With help from all students, generate a list of these forms of communication on the board. After the list is complete, make a special list of communications available at the time of Emily Dickenson.
3. A short biography of Emily Dickinson might be appropriate here. Chapter one of *A Student's Guide to Emily Dickinson*, available in your library, is an excellent source.
4. Letters should be one form of communication on that list. Pass out and read with students the handout containing some of Emily's shorter letters. Direct students to look not at the words she uses, but the meaning of the message she is sending. Discuss the meaning of each letter. (The information at the bottom of each clue may add to the understanding of the content.) After studying this page, ask students if the letters bear any similarity to communication we use currently. Point out their short length, with usually only one purpose. Do they ever send messages such as these to friends? Hopefully, students will see the similarity her letters bear to text messages.

5. Ask students to rewrite these letters as if they were text messages. The content should be the same, with the wording modernized to fit the genre of text. If necessary, work through an example as a class. Leave the remaining letters for the students. They can be done in groups or individually.
6. Share texts at the end of class. Look at the different ways students translated the same text. Does this exercise make it easier to understand the meaning behind the words of Emily Dickenson?

Day 2

1. Journal write: *If you could be any animal, bug, or object in nature, what would you be and why? Be specific about describing desirable characteristics.* Allow students time to write. Take time to let students share their writing.
2. Remind students of yesterday's lesson where they converted letters to text messages. Remind them that looking for the basic meaning of the letter helped them understand what she was saying, even if they didn't understand all of the words. Today students will be working with her poetry, trying to make similar discoveries to understand the subject of her poems. They are going to take it a step further and look at the language she uses to describe that subject and how her descriptions give clues to the true nature of the object. Remind them of their own journal writing and the descriptive details they shared.
3. If your students need an introduction to reading poetry, refer to Chapter 2 of *A Student's Guide to Emily Dickinson*.
4. Arrange students in groups of four. Hand each group one of Emily's poems. The poetry pages are found in Handout #2. Students will work together to discover the subject of the poem. Each poem describes an object from nature. Once the group discovers the subject, they should make a list of words and phrases that helped them reach this conclusion.
Poem Answers: 1332 –Snake, 173 – Caterpillar, 1332 – Flower, 605 –Spider, 1710 – Cloud, 1575 – Bat, 359 - Bird
5. Each group will share its poem with the class, allowing others to guess at the subject. After a few guesses, the group will share its answer and the clues that support that answer.
6. Prepare the students for tomorrow's activity. They will be writing their own poem about objects in nature. They will each have 20 minutes of quiet time outside to gather descriptive details about the object for their poem. Share with students your rules and expectations for this activity.

Day 3

1. Share with students the following philosophy Emily shared with her brother in a letter.
2. She cultivated silence in order to have something to say. "... *but if you talk with no one, you are amassing thought which will be bright and golden for those you left at home – we meet our friends, and a constant interchange wastes tho't and feeling, and we are then obliged to repair and renew – there isn't the brimful feeling which one gets away*"
3. Have students write in the journals about silence, using this prompt: *Do we think better thoughts if there is silence?* Give time to share and discuss their writing.
4. Remind students of the rules for their silent time. Each should find a spot where he or she can be alone. It needs to be within your sight. There will be absolutely no talking. Students need paper and pencil to record the things they are observing. They may pick any object in nature to write about. They should be looking for descriptive details to put in their poem. They may begin the poem writing at any time.

5. Upon completion of the 20 minute time period, gather students and come in. Talk about the experience and allow students to share insights about their silent experience. Remind them of the poem assignment and set a due date.

Day 4:

1. Journal Write: What do you really like about your poem? What parts are you still working on? What doesn't seem quite right?
2. This activity can be the day following the "silent" experience or it can be a few days later to give students time to write their poetry.
3. Allow students time to share their poetry. Each student should keep the identity of the object secret. After each poem is read, students are given a chance to guess the identity of the object. Once the identity is discovered, talk about the descriptive details that lead to the discovery. Allow everyone the opportunity to share.

Extensions:

- With just a little alteration, this could be split into three individual lessons so that any one can be taught without the others.
- A similar lesson could be created focusing on the poetry dealing with feelings rather than objects.
- If the silent time is well received, it may be something you want to include occasionally in your lessons.

Rationale:

The purpose of this lesson is to help students become comfortable with the poetry of Emily Dickinson. First, students will work with her letters to introduce them to her writing. Second, students will read her poetry as riddles. This fun setting will take pressure off students. They must only discover one thing about the poem rather than understand all of its intricacies. Part of understanding Emily's poetry is understanding her beliefs. The silent time allows students to experience Emily's world, something that is very different from our media crazed world today. Finally, it allows students to try their hand at writing poetry again in a fun, non-threatening way.

Resources:

Borus, Audrey. *A Student's Guide to Emily Dickinson*. Berkeley Heights, NJ: Enslow Publishers, 2005. Print.

Dickinson, Emily, and R. W. Franklin. *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1999. Print.

Johnson, Thomas H. *Emily Dickinson: Selected Letters*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1971. Print.

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Who is Emily Dickinson?

Annie Robertson, Wasatch Range Writing Project

Burning Question:

Who is Emily Dickinson and why should we care about her? What will help our students understand her and care about her?

Objectives:

Use primary and secondary resources to explore the life of Emily Dickinson.

Context:

This lesson could be used as an introductory lesson to Emily Dickinson for use from K-6th grades with adaptations.

Materials:

- *Poetry for Young People: Emily Dickinson*, edited by Frances Schoonmaker Bolin
- Primary Source Packet (from Weber Reads Website)
- Family Tree (from Emily Dickinson Museum Website)
- Document list and explanation page (attached)
- Chart paper or white board
- Paper, pencils, and markers

Time Span:

30 minutes to 1 hour

Procedures:

1. Divide students into small groups of three or four.
2. Give each group a copy of the Primary Resource packet. Do not tell them who this person is or any details about her. Use some poetry out of *Poetry for Young People: Emily Dickinson*. A list of recommended poems can be found in the resource packet.
3. Have students examine the documents and write down the characteristics they think this person has. Ask them to answer the following questions:
 - a. When did this person live?
 - b. Where did this person live?
 - c. What did this person do for a living?
 - d. What activities did this person like to do?
 - e. What type of friends did this person have?
 - f. Was this person single or married?
 - g. What type of personality did this person have?
 - h. Why is this person important in history?
 - i. What else does the evidence suggest about this person?
4. Make a class list of character traits and attributes to create a character sketch of this character.
5. Introduce Emily Dickinson to the class. Explain the primary resources provided in the resource packet using the background information and document explanation attached.

Extensions:

- Give groups only a few of the primary documents and see if they come up with the same personality and talk about how different documents tell us different things about the people they belong to.
- Use as an introduction to a poet research project. A character sketch could become part of a multigenre research project.
- Have students do silhouettes for each other.

Rationale:

Poetry can be difficult to understand. Introducing the poet in a meaningful way will interest students and help them make connections to the poet so they will better understand the poetry.

Resources:

- Beers, Frederick W., "Map of Amherst, 1873," in Digital Amherst, Item #32, Web. 31 Jul 2012. <<http://www.digitalamherst.org/items/show/32>>
- Cooley, Carolyn L. *The Music of Emily Dickinson's Poems and Letters: A Study of Imagery and Form*. Jefferson, N.C: McFarland, 2003. Print.
- Dickinson, Emily, Frances Schoonmaker Bolin, and Chi Chung. *Emily Dickinson*. New York: Sterling Pub. Co, 1994. Print.
- Dickinson, Emily, and R. W. Franklin. *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1999. Print.
- Emily Dickinson Museum. "Family Tree: The Dickinson's on Main Street." 2009. Web. 31 Jul 2012. <<http://www.emilydickinsonmuseum.org/node/193>>
- Habegger, Alfred. *My Wars Are Laid Away in Books: The Life of Emily Dickinson*. New York: Random House, 2001. Print.
- Longworth, Polly. *The World of Emily Dickinson*. New York: Norton, 1990. Print.
- Mt. Holyoke College. "The Rules of Mount Holyoke Female Seminary." Web. 31 Jul 2012. <<http://www.mtholyoke.edu/~lgkhouda/rules.html>>
- Academy of American Poets. *Poets.org*. Web. 31 Jul 2012. <<http://www.poets.org>>
- Weber State University. *Weber Reads Emily Dickinson*. 2012. Web. 31 Jul 2012. <http://www.community.weber.edu/WeberReads/weber_reads_emily_dickinson.html>

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Handout #1 *Emily's Letters*

373

To Edward (Ned) Dickinson

Mid-May 1872?

Neddie never would believe that Emily was at his circus, unless she left a fee---

Manuscript: HCL (L.52) Pencil. Envelope addressed: Neddie. Unpublished. The impression of a coin still shows in the note. Ned may have had his circus soon after visiting the circus had been in Amherst, 14 May.

777

To Maria Whitney

14 November 1882

Sweet friend,

Our Mother ceased---

while we bear her dear form through the wilderness, I am sure you are with us.

Emily.

Manuscript: Princeton University Library. Pencil.

Publication: L (1894) 340; LL 344; L (1931) 329.

This was written on the day Mrs. Dickinson died.

829

To Edward (Ned) Dickinson

19 June 1883

Stay with us one more Birthday, Ned-

“Yesterday, Today, and Forever,” then we will let you go.

Aunt Emily

Manuscript: HCL (B120). Pencil.

Publication: FF 255.

Ned’s birthday was 19 June. during the summer of 1883 Ned suffered from acute rheumatic fever. The quotation is from Hebrews 13.8: “Jesus Christ the same yesterday and today, and forever.”

101

To John L. Graves

about February 1853

I wonder if Cousin John has a lesson to learn this evening.

Emilie---

Manuscript: HCL (G9). Pencil. addressed: cousin John. Unpublished.

ED here suggests that John might call this evening, if he is free to do so.

646

To Mrs. Jonathan L. Jenkins

about 1880

Hope they are with each other---Never saw a little Boy going
Home to Thanksgiving, so happy as Austin, when he passed the
Door—

Emily.

Manuscript :Sister Mary James, Pencil.

Publication: FN 112

Austin had gone to visit Mr. Jenkins, who was his close friend.

Handout #2 - Poetry Riddles

173

A fuzzy fellow, without feet,
Yet doth exceeding run!
Of velvet, is his Countenance,
And his Complexion, dun!

Sometime, he dwelleth in the grass!
Sometime, upon a bough,
From which he doth descend in plush
Upon the Passer-by!

All this in summer.
But when winds alarm the Forest Folk,
He taketh Damask Residence—
And struts in sewing silk!

1332

Pink—small—and punctual—
Aromatic—low—
Covert—in April—
Candid—in May—
Dear to the Moss—
Known to the Knoll—
Next to the Robin
In every human Soul—
Bold little Beauty
Bedecked with thee
Nature forswears
Antiquity—

986

A narrow Fellow in the Grass
Occasionally rides—
You may have met Him—did you not
His notice sudden is—

The Grass divides as with a Comb—
A spotted shaft is seen—
And then it closes at your feet
And opens further on—

But never met this Fellow
Attended, or alone
Without a tighter breathing
And Zero at the Bone—

605

The _____ holds a Silver Ball
In unperceived Hands—
And dancing softly to Himself
His Yarn of Pearl—unwinds—

He plies from Nought to Nought—
In unsubstantial Trade—
Supplants our Tapestries with His—
In half the period—

An Hour to rear supreme
His Continents of Light—
Then dangle from the Housewife's Broom—
His Boundaries—forgot—

1710

A curious _____ surprised the Sky,
'Twas like a sheet with Horns;
The sheet was Blue—
The Antlers Gray—
It almost touched the lawns.

So low it leaned—then statelier drew—
And trailed like robes away,
A Queen adown a satin aisle
Had not the majesty.



1575

The ____ is dun, with wrinkled Wings—
Like fallow Article—
And not a song pervade his Lips—
Or none perceptible.

His small Umbrella quaintly halved
Describing in the Air
An Arc alike inscrutable
Elate Philosopher.

359

A ____ came down the Walk—
He did not know I saw—
He bit an Angleworm in halves
And ate the fellow, raw,

And then he drank a Dew
From a convenient Grass—
And then hopped sidewise to the Wall
To let a Beetle pass—

He glanced with rapid eyes
That hurried all around—
They looked like frightened Beads, I thought—
He stirred his Velvet Head

Like one in danger, Cautious,
I offered him a Crumb
And he unrolled his feathers
And rowed him softer home—



List of Primary Source Documents and Explanations

1. **Emily Dickinson Daguerreotype:** A daguerreotype was the first successful way a photograph was taken. The photograph was processed on a silver or silver plated copper plate. This is the only known photograph of Emily Dickinson. It was taken in 1847 when she was sixteen, and it is said that Emily did not like the photograph (Longworth 40).
2. **Emily Dickinson Bedroom:** Emily lived at her parents' home, also known as the Homestead. Emily did most of her writing in her bedroom. Hanging on the wall are the photographs of two of her favorite authors: Elizabeth Barrett Browning and George Eliot. From the window in her bedroom, Emily would lower gingerbread in a basket to children (Habegger 547). The recipe is available on the Emily Dickinson Museum Website.
3. **Emily Dickinson Silhouette 1865:** A silhouette is an outline of an object where the inside is usually black. Silhouettes are named after Etienne de Silhouette of France, who enjoyed making portraits cut out of paper. These became popular after the Seven Years War in 1759. This silhouette was cut when Emily was fourteen years old (Habegger 366b).
4. **Emily Dickinson's White Dress:** Emily was known for wearing her white dresses. The dresses were made with a pocket on the right side, where Emily could keep her writing notebook, pencil, and scraps of writing that she did throughout the day. It is unknown why Emily wore only white dresses. Some speculate it was because white was easy to clean (Emily Dickinson Museum White Dress).
5. **Elizabeth Barrett Browning and George Eliot:** The two photographs hanging in Emily's room were of Emily's favorite authors. Emily was an avid reader and grew up in a home where books were loved. Besides these authors, Emily read newspapers, periodicals, and the King James Version of the Bible (Emily Dickinson Museum).
6. **Emily Dickinson's Piano:** Music was another important part of Emily's life. Most of Emily's poetry has the same rhythm as the hymns of the day. Emily learned how to play the piano in her childhood. She got her piano when she was fourteen years old (Cooley 11).
7. **Mount Holyoke (Pronounced Mount "Hole-Yoke"):** Emily attended this female seminary from 1847-1848. Emily only spent one year there, although she spent most of her time as a second year student. There were only three academic levels in the school. The rules of the seminary were very strict and black marks were given for breaking the rules. Female higher education was still in its infancy and the teachers did not have advanced training in the areas they taught. Women were not yet being prepared for the professions of the world. Emily experienced homesickness while away at school and did not return for a second year. This was not unusual, as most women did not return for a second year (Habegger 191-212).
8. **Mount Holyoke Seminary Rules:** This list of seminary rules was self-reported at the end of the day. Black marks would be given if any of these rules were broken (Longworth 38 & Mt. Holyoke).
9. **Amherst Map:** The Dickinson family properties were located on Main Street. The church that her family went to was across the street.
10. **Emily Dickinson Family Tree:** Found on the Emily Dickinson Museum website, this family tree has photographs of the members of Emily's family. Additional information on each family member can be found on the Museum website.
11. **Emily Dickinson Poetry**
 - a. **I'm nobody! Who are you?:** Emily felt like a nobody though she was surrounded

by somebodies. Emily's grandfather helped found Amherst College. Emily's father was a congressman for the state of Massachusetts. Her father was also a prominent lawyer in town. Emily's brother was also an attorney in town. The Dickinson family mingled with the "somebodies" in Amherst. Emily was very shy and later became a recluse (Bolin 12).

b. A narrow fellow in the grass: Emily spent a lot of time outside in her garden. She wrote many poems about the things she observed in nature. This poem is about a snake. This is one of Emily's riddle poems (Bolin 29).

c. The Bumble Bee's Religion (#1547): This is a poem written for Emily's nephew Gib. Bumblebees were something special between the two. Gib gave the poem to his teacher in 1881. Emily wrote many poems about bees (Franklin 573).

d. Awake ye muses nine, sing me a strain divine, (# 1): Emily enjoyed writing valentines. This poem is the earliest of Emily's. It was published as anonymous, most likely without her permission, in a literary magazine that her brother's friend Henry Shipley edited. Emily wrote many valentines in her letters to friends, many of them sarcastic or playful (Franklin 15).