



*His labor is a chant,
His idleness a tune;
Oh, for a bee's experience
Of clovers and of noon!*

WEBER READS

*Emily
Dickinson*

JUNIOR HIGH LESSON PLANS

Abstract Ideas Explored

Writing with Extended Metaphor

Linda Simpson, Wasatch Range Writing Project

Burning Question:

Emily Dickinson effectively used extended metaphor to develop abstract ideas. By using her poetry as a model, can students explore and discover important lessons about abstract concepts?

Objectives:

- Students will read and identify Dickinson’s use of metaphor in “Hope is the thing with feathers.”
- Students will discuss how “Hope” and “the thing with feathers” are similar and speculate on why Dickinson used this comparison.
- Students will look closely at the structure of her three-stanza poem in order to write their own, using their own abstract idea to develop.

Context:

This assignment would work with 9th-12th graders as part of a poetry unit including Emily Dickinson or as a Creative Writing assignment.

Materials:

- A copy of Dickinson’s poem for each student or projected for the entire class to read
- Whiteboard or screen for brainstorming abstract words
- Paper or notebooks for students’ own work

Time Span:

This lesson usually takes one class period of approximately 45 minutes.

Procedures:

1. Read Emily Dickinson’s Poem #314 “Hope is the thing with feathers” aloud by having students take turns reading a stanza or a line or having a student read the entire poem.
2. Direct the students to read the poem a second time.
3. Define the words *gale*, *sore*, *abash*, *chillest* and *extremity* by having students look them up.
4. Discuss how “Hope” and “the thing with feathers” are similar. Ask students why they think Dickinson used this comparison. What does the poem reveal about hope?
5. Brainstorm abstract words and write on the board. Examples: *fear*, *joy*, *excitement*, *friendship*, *love*, *anger*, *patriotism*, *laughter*, *hatred*, *frustration*, *pride*. Students can come up with others.
6. Ask students to select one abstract word and determine an object or living thing to compare it to. Example: Fear is the thing with teeth (perhaps comparing fear to a bear).
7. Ask students to list qualities of their object or living thing to use in their poem.
8. Assign students to write their own three-stanza poem using Dickinson’s #314 as a model.
 - a. Stanza 1: Begin with their abstract word in quotation marks on the first line.
 - b. Stanza 2: Begin with “And.”

- c. Stanza 3: Begin with “I’ve heard,” or “I’ve seen.”
9. Share completed poems aloud.
10. Discuss how comparisons provided insights into their selected abstract idea.

Rationale:

This lesson allows students to create their own fresh extended metaphor by closely reading and utilizing Dickinson’s form as a model. Imitation often frees students to express themselves in surprising new ways.

Extensions:

- Students may find other poems of Dickinson’s with extended metaphor to analyze and imitate.
- Suggested poems:
 - #383 “I like to see it lap the Miles”
 - #387 “The Moon is distant from the Sea”
 - #598 “The Brain – is wider than the Sky”
 - #735 “The Moon was but a Chin of Gold”
- Students may want to try to discover extended metaphor as utilized by other poets.

Resources:

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

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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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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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Learning Theme and Mood from Emily Dickinson's Poetry

Manuel Saine, Wasatch Range Writing Project

Burning Questions:

What is poetry? How do we recognize or create poetry? How do we recognize or create mood?
What is a theme?

Objectives:

- Students will understand what poetry is by reading poems by Emily Dickinson.
- Students will recognize mood and theme in poetry by mimicking or responding to it.

Context:

English middle school class. This can be done as an introduction to literary genres.

Materials:

- Copy of poems in step six of the procedures for each student
- Rubrics in Appendix A for each group
- Cameras or whatever material is required for group projects (students supply these)

Time Span:

Five class periods (45 minute class periods)

Procedures:

1. Ask students what they know about poetry. Write answers on the board as they speak. Ask if they know any poets or poems and write them down. A KWL chart would be appropriate.
2. Explain to students that poetry is everywhere. Poetry uses symbolic language, such as metaphors and similes. Give examples of metaphors in advertisement (Joseph, 2012):
 - a. "Your daily ray of sunshine" (Tropicana)
 - b. "It's what comfort tastes like" (Werther's candy)
 - c. "Real honest food" (Cornish Foods)
 - d. Write down any other examples that students may come up with.
3. Play two or three songs and give students copies of the lyrics, or display them on the board. Ask students what kind of mood these poems reflect. Does the mood match the lyrics? (http://www.experienceproject.com/music_search.php is a great tool to search songs by mood. Students could explore this website and see if they agree with the choices that the website suggests.)
4. After the first discussion, students will need to do a brief research on Emily Dickinson's biography and be able to describe some elements of her life.
5. Write what students learned about Emily Dickinson on the board, separating the answers into sections. Based on that list, ask students what they think Emily Dickinson's poems are going to be about and what kind of mood her poems are going to have.
6. List on the board the major themes in Emily Dickinson's poetry. Read each of the following poems and ask students to select their corresponding theme category. (Melani, 2009)
 - e. Nature: "A Narrow Fellow in the Grass," "I'll Tell You How the Sun Rose"

- f. Love: “If you were coming in the fall,” “That I Did Always Love”
 - g. Death: “I heard a fly buzz when I died”
 - h. God and Religion: “He Fumbles at your Spirit”
7. Based on their new knowledge of Emily Dickinson, students will work in a multigenre project in groups. Students will choose four of the following activities and place them on a folder. The cover will include a photograph or illustration relevant to Emily Dickinson and/or her poetry. Each folder should have the project’s rubric (Appendix A) in the inside of the front cover. Each team member’s name should be on the folder.
 8. Students will have three complete class periods to work on this assignment. If more time is needed, the project may be finished at home.
 - a. Write a poem in response to one of the Emily Dickinson poems that we read in class. The poem has to be of similar length, mimic the poem’s style (number of lines, rhyme structure, if any, etc.), and use similar language. **NOTE: This assignment is mandatory for everybody!**
 - b. Do a poetry/song mash up using one of Emily Dickinson’s poems. You can choose the melody of any popular song or any song that you like, but the song should reflect the mood of Emily Dickinson’s poem, and the lyrics need to flow well in the song and not sound too forced.
 - c. Turn one of Emily Dickinson’s poems into a brief story. Again, the mood of the story needs to reflect the mood of the poem. You can accomplish this by using people’s moods, setting, lighting, wardrobe, indoor vs. outdoor locations, etc.
 - d. As an extension of the last assignment, you may film a two-minute movie using your story. **Only teams who write the story (assignment C) may work on this assignment!**
 - e. Take five photographs and caption them using Emily Dickinson’s poems. The photographs and the poems need to reinforce each other’s theme (in other words, they have to have something to do with each other!).
 - f. This assignment is similar to the previous one, but instead of taking photographs, you will be using ten pictures that you find on the internet and caption them using Emily Dickinson’s poems. As in the previous assignment, the photographs and the poems need to reinforce each other’s theme.

Extensions:

- Have students do a slideshow presentation on an aspect of Emily Dickinson’s life that was not discussed in class.
- Have students do a brief report on one of the many documentaries on Emily Dickinson available at the school or local library (*Garrison Keillor and Emily Dickinson: Face to Face*, *The World of Emily Dickinson*, *The Poet in Her Bedroom*, *Loaded Gun: Love, and Death, and Emily*, etc.) or on UEN.org.

Rationale:

By discussing what poetry is and relating it to commercials students are familiar with and music they enjoy, they will realize that poetry is not something foreign or to be afraid of. Also, doing multiple genre-style assignments using what they have learned allows students to engage in higher-order thinking and makes their learning more relevant.



References:

Joseph, C. *Examples of Metaphors in Advertising*. Demand Media, 2012. Web. 26 Jul 2012. <<http://smallbusiness.chron.com/examples-metaphors-advertising-10422.html>>.

Melani, L. *Emily Dickinson*. Brooklyn College, 2009. Web. 26 Jul 2012. <<http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/cs6/dickinson.html>>.

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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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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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The Vanishing World Outside Emily's Window

Maria Inglefield, Wasatch Range Writing Project

Burning Question:

Focusing on the use of Bees and Stars in select Emily Dickinson poems, can we enhance environmental awareness in our students? Can students relate to Emily Dickinson's zeal for the natural world and its amplitude?

Objectives:

- Introduce students to the poetry of Emily Dickinson in audio and print formats.
- Use the Audrey Borus text supplied, particularly chapters two and five, to assist students with general introduction and finer points to understand how Dickinson "saw" the natural world.
- Use Dickinson's poems, supplied texts, and non-fiction articles from the internet/magazines to keep engagement high.
- Have students create their own poems or responses that relate in some fashion to insects or the night sky, and have them share their poems with the class.

Context:

This lesson would be most suitable for students in middle school to high school. It would be helpful to teach this unit in the Spring (and this seems to be the typical instructional time for poetry), when classes could perhaps access the school grounds or a park nearby, where plants would be budding/blooming and insects might be cruising.

Materials:

- Students will need: access to computers; paper; pens or pencils; flashlights, camping lanterns or the like; solar print paper; and colored pencils.
- You will need access to a projector, document camera.
- You will need copies of the following poems:
 - #262 "Ah, Moon-and Star!"
 - #1698 "Lightly stepped on a yellow star"
 - #253 "I've nothing Else- to bring, You know"
 - #983 "Bee! I'm expecting You!"
 - #217 "The Bumble of a Bee"
 - #1788 "Fame is a bee"
 - #1779 "To make a prairie it takes clover and one bee"

These poems can be found in various places, but these numbers are from the R. W. Franklin collection. You can also look on Poemhunter.com, Poets.org, *Poetry everywhere* through pbs.org (www.pbs.org/wgbh/poetryeverywhere), and many other websites. Many sites also contain audio versions of the poems.

Time Span:

Variable



Procedures:

1. Introduce students to the life of Emily Dickinson using the Meltzer text supplied. Read the book through yourself – it is a fast read and very informative. Create a lecture from this book, or assign the short six through eight page chapters to students to read in small groups and share out. Pepper the lecture with images from the web or with pictures from the Longworth text supplied.
2. Consider reviewing chapter two of the Borus text supplied. Within the chapter, you will find helpful tips on how to read and explicate Dickinson’s work, as well as primers on meter, rhyme, theme, etc. This will be very useful to students as they dissect the poems. Chapter five is also particularly illuminating and relevant to this lesson.
3. Using the poems that refer to bees first, you will need poems numbered 253, 983, 217, and 1788. See above list for names. Have the students read these aloud in small groups and let them react to the pieces in a general way first. Then attempt to pick out rhyme, metaphor, etc., from chapter two of Borus. Be ready with your own examples, of course, in case of a reticent crowd.
4. Ask students if they have heard of problems with bee populations in the US and abroad.
 - a. Show this older short ABC clip on your projector for an attention grabber: <http://abcnews.go.com/GMA/video/honeybees-dying-causing-drop-honey-production-11089407> .
 - b. Then bring up the following website article on the projector and review it as a class: <http://www.epa.gov/opp00001/about/intheworks/honeybee.htm>. The links at the bottom of this article are all compelling as well.
 - c. Depending upon how much time you have, there is a longer (50-minute) video you could show at <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/episodes/silence-of-the-bees/full-episode/251/>, or perhaps this could be assigned as homework with a short response required.
5. If possible, bring the class outside to watch bees or insects in action, using small notebooks or paper to take notes or write thoughts about what they see. If you can’t go outside, show <http://newswatch.nationalgeographic.com/2011/08/01/bees-help-make-raspberries-in-kenya-2/> . Ask students to research which plants are bee friendly to plant in their geographic area. Have them draw small pictures of those plants and finish them with colored pencils.
6. Now, on to poems that refer to stars. You will need poems numbered 262, 1698, and 253. See above list for names. Again, have students read these aloud in small groups, react to the poems generally, then pick out the salient points or elements using explication. They will need help with this, certainly. Even though the poems are short, they can be daunting to students uncomfortable with poetry.
7. Ask students if they have heard that the night sky is also disappearing. If you can bring them to a computer lab, do. If not, show the following website on your own projector: www.darksky.org. The site is information rich and has links to many articles that students should find compelling. Allow for general classroom conversation about the loss of starry nights and what we can do to prevent more light pollution.
8. See the recent article by Katharine Pioli called “The Brightness Blight,” found in *The Catalyst*. Search under Pioli and the name of the article or go to *The Catalyst* directly at http://www.catalystmagazine.net/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=1978:the-brightness-blight.

- a. Also, there is a great book you can find on Amazon, edited by Paul Bogard, called *Let There Be Night*. It contains essays and stories about the human and animal need for darkness. Students can read the Pioli article and respond in classroom discussion or in writing.
 - b. Talk about sleep patterns in adolescents and how this over-lit world is robbing us of sleep we need. Ask how many students stare at a white light computer or television screen until late into the night, only to find themselves struggling to retire when they try to get to sleep.
9. After review of the star poems and night sky information, try the following extensions.
- a. Take students back outside and take small samples of flowers, weeds, stones, acorns, pinecones, or whatever bits of flora they can find. Using solar paper, also found on Amazon, have students make solar prints of their objects. They will end up with a light blue silhouette on a dark blue paper, if done correctly. Have students then take the object into the classroom and look carefully at it in the regular classroom light. If possible, darken the room and let students look at the objects using just a dim flashlight. The idea is to see how deeply you can see the object at different light levels and to describe what you see at each level.
 - b. Consider having students bring the object home and write about it for homework. What do they see as the light gets dimmer outside. Do their eyes adjust to the darkness? And how dark does it really get?
 - c. Look up and see what stars we see in our lightening skies. How do these compare to the stars in truly dark places?
 - d. Have students look at images from the following website: <http://apod.nasa.gov/apod/ap120801.html> and react to those images.
 - e. Students could also interview an older family member about the night sky of their youth and report back to the class.
10. In wrapping up, ask students to write a letter to Emily Dickinson (as she was a prolific letter writer in her day). They can write about the bees or the stars or the changes in the world since Emily's time. Perhaps the teacher could mail the compilation of letters to the Emily Dickinson Museum in Amherst! Who knows what could happen next?

Extensions:

- Write with your students! When you ask them to share their writing, share your own. This creates an enormous buy-in with students when they realize you will take a writing risk with them. They will see you as a teacher/reader/writer/person in a new and wonderful way. Take a chance on yourself.

Putting my money where my mouth is, this is an original poem I wrote after reading Dickinson's work and doing this research. It may not win awards, but feel free to use it as a prompt or sample for students if you like.

Bees needle cosmos,
Brooding mare and boar - fur their sticky chaps
on stamen now impure.
Yet- less Lessoning- More boring-
is mayhaps, much More-
What we extrude
during Light- endures darkest Night-
and our pencils are the Sharper for.

Rationale:

This lesson melds Language Arts with Earth Science and utilizes poetry and nonfiction. It can be taught to various grade levels and opens the door to inquiry and further study. Hopefully, students will see poetry as a useful vehicle to respond to the natural world, as commentary or protest or exultation.

Resources:

Bogard, Paul. *Let There Be Night*. Reno, NV: University of Nevada Press, 2008. Print.

Borus, Audrey. *A Student's Guide to Emily Dickinson*. New Jersey: Enslow Publishers, Inc., 2005. Print.

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

Longworth, Polly. *The World of Emily Dickinson*. New York/London: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1990. Print.

Meltzer, Milton. *Emily Dickinson A Biography*. Minneapolis, MN: Lerner Publishing Group, 2006. 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.

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.

3. 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.

4. 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.
5. 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 Dickinson?

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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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
Sweet friend,

14 November 1882

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—