



Poetry Lesson Plan: Using Images & Indirection

Grades: 9-12 > College Level

Objective — The student will:

- closely analyze a true event or moment associated with their life; they will then present the scene, and personal emotions and/or actions generated by that incident in a free verse poem.
- learn the difference between words defined as "concrete" and "specific" in contrast to words defined as "abstract" or "vague."
- utilize "concrete" words and imagery in constructing the poem.
- understand the meaning of "cliché" and then avoid such uses in the poem

Hint: Suggest to students that the event or moment they choose to write about should already be providing a strong detailed visual image or "picture" in their mind. Now have them provide that picture to a reader through words that simply, yet concretely depict the scene and associated emotions.

Using Images & Indirection

Write a poem which satisfies all of the following criteria:

1. The poem must be no more than fourteen lines.
2. The poem should be like a scene from a play.
3. This scene should present realistically, with great concrete detail, a true incident from your life-- either the first time or the last time you did something or found yourself in a dramatic situation which permanently changed you. (The best type of subject matter would be an "initiation" experience, for example the death of a relative, your first kiss, playing hardball for the first time, etc.)
4. The poem should be in the first person singular, like Hamlet's "To be or not to be" speech: i.e., it should read as if you were re-experiencing the incident, aware that your remembering were being overheard. Even though it is premeditated and carefully edited, it should appear spontaneous.
5. For this reason, it should be in free verse, not end-rhymed.
6. The poem must consist of a few images which create an emotionally suggestive atmosphere, that imply emotion in the narrator (the persona), but...
7. The poem must not use abstract words that name feelings. For example, do not use words such as "happy," "sad," "angry," etc. Do *not* describe emotions in terms of your body (e.g., "my heart is racing," "my palms are sweating," "my stomach is growling," etc.)

EXAMPLE 1

Thursday, Nov. 28 -- 1:07 a.m.

One light is on above the kitchen sink.
Tomorrow's dinner plates are clean,
stacked next to a bowl of white,
unpeeled potatoes.
Pumpkin pies settle on the stove.
Chairs sit politely around the table.
Each individual tick of the clock
falls off the wall,
out of tune with the hum
that comes from beneath
the refrigerator.
Everyone else is asleep.
I cut a piece of pie.
Then another.

-- Greg German

EXAMPLE 2

After Midnight

The dark streets are deserted,
With only a drugstore glowing
Softly, like a sleeping body;

With one white, naked bulb
In the back, that shines
On suicides and abortions.

Who lives in these dark houses?
I am suddenly aware
I might live here myself.

The garage man returns
And puts the change in my hand,
Counting the singles carefully.

-- Louis Simpson

Some questions to consider:

1. Do you recognize words that are "concrete" in nature being used in this poem? What are they?
2. Is it easy for you to visualize the scene from the words provided in the poem?
3. If you were secretly watching this event and decided to paint a picture of it, what would you include in your image?
4. What emotion do you think the person in the poem is experiencing? What emotions do you personally experience from reading the poem?

Some questions to consider:

1. From what socio-economic status is the narrator? How do you know?
2. Where is the poem set? In the city, country, a small town? In what kind of neighborhood? How do you know?
3. Are there really "suicides and abortions" in this "drugstore?"
4. Why did the narrator stop here?
5. What time of day is it?
6. What is the narrator feeling at various points in the poem?
7. Why does the narrator say "garage man" instead of "the man" or "the boy," or "the mechanic" or something else? How important is the motif of money in the poem?