



Poetry Lesson Plans: Persona Poem

Grades: 11,12 > College Level

Objective — The student will:

- write a poem from the perspective of the first-person ("I") persona. Through the words of the poem, demonstrate a higher level of thinking by providing "insight" to the personality of the poem's speaker--the "I" who is featured in the poem.
- utilize the use of "irony."

Hint: Students need to understand the meaning of "irony" and "persona." Students need to understand what is meant by "the speaker" as pertaining to poetry. Suggest that the first person protagonist of the poem can be one's self. Or, a situation where the student places them self into the mind and body of another experiencing a dramatic event. (See example 1 provided on page 2)

Persona Poem

Write a poem which satisfies all of the following criteria:

1. The poem is in the first person singular.
2. The poem's title provides information which the reader needs in order to know who is speaking and to understand the situation which the speaker is talking about.
3. The poem should not be end-rhymed, but...
4. The language of the poem should sound like conversation (it should be in the dialect of the speaker), but it should be rich enough to qualify as poetry (i. e., actually a little richer than ordinary conversation.)
5. Most of the poem should be a reminiscence about past events.
6. Through the way in which the protagonist (the speaker of the poem) tells the story, he or she must inadvertently reveal something about him/herself. In other words, the poem should exhibit some dramatic irony.
7. The speaker should be convincing, sound authentic.
8. The poem's dramatic irony--the speaker's blind spot--should have significance beyond being merely a personal quirk or shortcoming.

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EXAMPLE 1

Knowit Hoheimer

I was the first fruits of the battle of Missionary Ridge.
When I felt the bullet enter my heart
I wished I had stayed at home and gone to jail
For stealing the hogs of Curl Trenary,
Instead of running away and joining the army.
Rather a thousand times the country jail
Than to lie under this marble figure with wings,
And this granite pedestal
Bearing the words, "Pro Patria."
What do they mean, anyway?

-- *Edgar Lee Masters*

EXAMPLE 2

The River Merchant's Wife: A Letter

(after Rihaku)

While my hair was still cut straight across my forehead
I played about the front gate, pulling flowers.
You came by on bamboo stilts, playing horse,
You walked about my seat, playing with blue plums,
And we went on living in the village of Chokan:
Two small people, without dislike or suspicion.

At fourteen I married My Lord you.
I never laughed, being bashful.
Lowering my head, I looked at the wall.
Called to, a thousand times, I never looked back.

At fifteen, I stopped scowling,
I desired my dust to be mingled with yours
Forever and forever and forever.
Why should I climb the lookout.

At sixteen you departed.
You went into far Ku-to-yen, by the river of swirling eddies,
And you have been gone five months.
The monkeys make sorrowful noise overhead.

You dragged your feet when you went out.
By the gate now, the moss is grown, the different mosses,
Too deep to clear them away!
The leaves fall early this autumn, in wind.
The paired butterflies are already yellow with August
Over the grass in the West garden;
They hurt me. I grow older.
If you are coming down through the narrows of the river Kiang,
Please let me know beforehand,
And I will come out to meet you
As far as Cho-fu-Sa.

--*Ezra Pound*

EXAMPLE 3

House In The Middle Of A Field

I know of no one who has lived
here. And it has been here forever,
a pivot we cramp machinery around
behind a full-throttled tractor.
The house could have been a corner post
so tight set it made no difference
how taut or in what direction a wire
stretched. The foundation has settled.
Wind has chiseled the excitement
out of the wood, and the sun has left it
grey. Its shingles are receding.
There are no curtains. The front door
is gone, so it must be open. Inside
I mingle with the musty scents eroding
from the crisp millers and mummified mice
hidden behind the layered, pastel paper
wilting from the walls. Children
drift through bedroom doors playing
with antique toys. Screened
by a common farmer face, a man sits
on his kitchen chair. He stares
beyond a woman in a cotton dress
into clouds that might not
be rain. I have done my duty.
And mine are the last boots
to arouse the dusty lull spread
across this cold wood floor.
On the windward side of the house
dad announces there is no better time
than now. I stand back. He lights
a match. Flames lean from windows,
tattered flags at full mast.

--*Greg German*