

Making Predictions with Poetry Word Clouds

Grade Level: 9-12

Introduction

Word clouds visually represent the language of a text. The larger that a word appears in a word cloud infographic, the more frequently it is used in the piece. This correlation helps provide a snapshot of a poem's meaning, often indicating the overall mood and themes that are present. However, while these snapshots are usually accurate, they can sometimes be misleading, opening conversations about our expectations of language and the role of elements beyond simple word choice in the expression of meaning.

This lesson plan integrates EBSCO's Poetry & Short Story Reference Source database. It asks students to consider the role of word choice in an author's process and asks them to expand their understanding of certain words to create their own work.

Standards

STANDARDS: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1, 2, 4; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.4-5; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.1-3, 5 | NCTE 3, 5, 6, 8, 11, 12

- R.2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
- R.4: Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
- NCTE 3: Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
- NCTE 6: Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.
- NCTE 8: Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.

Essential Questions

1. How do authors use language to influence the perception of their work?
2. How can the same words be manipulated to create different meanings?

Objectives

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

1. Make predictions for a text by observing frequently used language.
2. Develop original poetry based on keywords.
3. Revise and expand writing.

Materials

- Computer/laptop
- Access to Poetry & Short Story Reference Source
- Poetry Clouds Worksheet (see end of lesson)

Procedure

1. Begin by showing students how to locate poetry word clouds on Poetry & Short Story Reference Source. In the search bar, type “JN infographics: Poetry Word Clouds”
2. Have students choose a word cloud that interests them. This should be a poem that they have not read before. If they have trouble choosing, some recommended clouds are:
 - “The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock” by T. S. Eliot
 - “The Heart of the Tree” by Henry Cuyler Bunner
 - “The Fish” by Elizabeth Bishop
 - “The Empty Dance Shoes” by Cornelius Eady
 - “so you want to be a writer?” by Charles Bukowski
 - “Sailing to Byzantium” by W. B. Yeats
 - “Problems with Hurricanes” by Victor Hernández Cruz
 - “Phenomenal Woman” by Maya Angelou
 - “Ode on a Grecian Urn” by John Keats
 - “Let America be America Again” by Langston Hughes

3. Students should examine their word clouds without reading the original poem and fill out Part 1 of the worksheet at the end of this lesson. The worksheet asks that they make predictions about the mood and themes of the poem based on the word cloud before having read the actual text. They are also asked to compose a few lines of how they imagine the poem is written.
4. Have students type up the lines that they wrote and expand them into a short poem.
 - The new poem should be at least 10 lines long.
 - The original lines containing the word inspiration should be present somewhere in the poem, but do not necessarily have to be at the beginning. These lines may be slightly altered to better fit the new poem, as long as the central words are not changed. These lines should be indicated.
5. Students should complete Part 2 of the worksheet. This section asks them to compare their extrapolation to the original poem both thematically and stylistically.
6. Host a class discussion about the accuracy of the students' speculation. Did any students find that their predictions did not match the original poem? Why did this happen or not happen?
7. Exit Ticket: Students will fill out a brief exit ticket in which they explain if their predictions were accurate and what words were most important in their decision.

Assessment

Formative Assessment

Conduct smaller evaluations that track progress towards final unit goal. Students may share their own poems and workshop them in class as part of a formative assessment towards creative writing goals. This can be done anonymously with nicknames if desired. Students should turn in their poems and worksheet along with exit ticket for assessment.

Name: _____ Date: _____ Class period: _____

Poetry Word Clouds

PART 1

On Poetry & Short Story Reference Source, search “JN infographics: Poetry Word Clouds” and select a word cloud that interests you. Try to avoid poems you are already familiar with. Do not look up the full text of the poem.

Title of poem: _____

Author: _____

What do you think the tone or mood of this poem is? Why?



Most Prominent Words in Cloud

What do you think the poem is about? What are the major themes? Why?

Using some prominent words from the cloud, compose a few lines of your own version of the poem based on your predictions:

PART 2

After composing your own version of the poem, find the full text of the original poem on Poetry & Short Story Reference Source.

How accurate were the predictions you made in part 1? What was the same, and what was different?

How does your poem compare to the original text stylistically?