

A Constructivist Approach to Analyzing Figurative Language in Poetry by Drawing and Mapping

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Overview

Students who evade analyzing poetry often hinder themselves from comprehension. Most times, they fear such an open-ended concept where there are no guaranteed approaches to bring about the “right” answer. There is no systematic equation to yield a definite solution. Moreover, no pattern can be attributed to poetry comprehension. That is, there is no one approach that can be successfully applied to all poems. Many suggestions about understanding poetry have been offered in effort to provide students and teachers with a wide array to choose from. This way, the learners can select which techniques best suit their learning styles and they can experiment with trial and error.

The Bedford Introduction to Literature offers some suggestions for approaching poetry; among them are: read the poem more than once, read the poem aloud, pay attention to the title, open your mind and be receptive, paraphrase the poem, examine the speaker, and examine each element in the poem (Meyer 606). Many teachers have incorporated these suggestions into poetry instruction. In addition, some teachers urge students to experience poetry from the writer’s perspective by urging them to become poets themselves. Some argue that teachers should not enforce scrutiny of poetry on their students, but rather, allow the students to enjoy it as a form of creative expression. To this I say, what then is the purpose of teaching poetry? How can the teaching of poetry be validated if it does not equip students with skills to perform as better learners and thinkers? Certainly, poetry should not be stripped of its beauty and entertainment value. Instead, these factors should be used to gain the interest of students and motivate them to want to learn. In short, the enjoyment of poetry can be used as a catalyst for learning.

This unit provides an alternative to the prevailing approach to teach poetry. Students engage in drawing and mapping as a means to comprehend figurative language. The marked difference is the focus. Instead of teaching poetry, this unit teaches skills by means of poetry. This way, students use familiar skills to construct new knowledge, which is paramount to the Constructivist view of learning—a strategy employed by this unit design. This outlook makes way for Problem Based, Inquiry Based, Discovery, and Visual Learning, as well as Metacognition, Drawing, and Mapping. There is a strategic purpose for each. They all contribute to increasing reading comprehension.

Author of *Literature & Language*, the 11th grade English anthology for Pittsburgh Public Schools, defines figurative language as “language that conveys beyond the literal, or ordinary, meaning of words” (Bernstein 940). According to Bernstein, “The most common figures of speech are simile, metaphor, personification, and hyperbole” (940). Since certain genres of literature, like fiction and nonfiction, are predominately used to teach students how to comprehend literal expression, poetry is an ideal venue to teach students how to recognize the implied meaning of aesthetic language. This is important because it encourages students to demonstrate higher-level thinking, as they are called to think beyond the obvious. Furthermore, figurative language poses a challenge to comprehension. In my experience, when students encounter the use of figurative language in poetry, most insist that, “it’s just too deep,” and some even give up. Ironically, students use this metaphor with great ease, which is evidence that they are capable of comprehending figurative language. To play on this metaphor, this unit does not intend to immerse students in the deep waters of poetry; rather, the goal is to show students they can construct meaning from wherever they stand—in the shallow or even remote from the water altogether.

Procedurally, the students will embark on a journey of poetry and identity. They will demonstrate that they have constructed their own meaning of each poem by producing a drawing of the major elements, a word web that represents their thought processes, and a souvenir for each. The culminating activity is to produce an identity map, which is a result of a longitudinal process. The identity map will chart their journey through the poems. Each poem is symbolic of a destination on their identity map. Reading each poem is comparable to visiting or revisiting a new place. Students will be exposed to various mind states (no pun intended), feelings, cultures, and perspectives. Students will obtain a souvenir, which will actually be a lesson learned from each poem. They can interpret and portray the souvenir as literal or figurative. They are free to present a physical object or capture how each poem makes them feel or think. They may even adapt the skill of drawing to express the souvenir’s meaning. Hopefully, they will learn something about themselves and the way they think and learn, in addition to the content of the poem.

Rationale

Inspiration

My first experience in teaching poetry occurred during my field practice as a student teacher in Hampton City Schools. I taught a miniature survey of American poets to a large group of 11th graders. Among the poets was Robert Frost, a celebrated poet known for his application of universal themes to occurrences in nature. The most challenging objective for this particular course

of study was for students to develop and exhibit analytical skills. Frost's poetry is ideal for teaching this skill, for much of his poetry is rich in metaphor, which requires students to think critically about the content. The classroom anthology was our source of poetry. In it was a compilation of Frost poetry predetermined as appropriate for grade 11 students. All was well when exploring "The Road Not Taken" and "Nothing Gold Can Stay" because I was familiar with such poems and has sharpened my knowledge of them over time. However, an unfamiliar poem presented a new challenge.

There were a few reasons why this poem was challenging for me. First to be considered is the circumstance. During student teaching, preparing my lesson plans was as stressful as it was complicated. There was no such thing as knowing what I was teaching in advance. I usually found out that I would be teaching one day prior to the lesson. This, too, was the case for the lesson dealing with the unfamiliar Frost poem. I had already selected my choice of poems to teach from the anthology, and to benefit myself, I only chose poems I already knew or found generous in difficulty. However, my cooperating teacher intervened and demanded I teach the poem "Neither out Far, Nor in Deep," in keeping with the practice of the curricular studies. I assertively complied. Certainly, it was time for me to expose myself to new poetry—especially if I was to consider Frost my favorite poet.

I only had one day's preparation, so I rushed to read the poem for the first time. The first time, though, was not the last. I read the poem repeatedly, aloud, slowly, swiftly, meticulously, etc. I entertained various approaches to reading; nonetheless, I did not understand the poem at all! I began to wonder if Frost's poems were literal and not meant to be analyzed, because it would have salvaged me from trying to recognize the deeper meaning. "Maybe this poem is really about people on the beach watching the sea," I thought. But this thought was only intended to appease my ego. I felt that because I could not identify the deeper meaning of the poem, it must not exist. But while this satisfied me, I knew it would not suffice for instructional purposes. I still had to teach the poem on the following day. I soon became overwhelmed with the task of teaching a poem I could not even learn myself.

As it turned out, this challenge was a blessing because it required me to become the student again. Too often, teachers grow estranged from the student's needs because we have knowledge that exceeds the capacity of our pupils. We sit on a pedestal of knowledge do not know how to relate to the students. This challenge gave me the opportunity to identify myself with the students firsthand by experiencing the difficulty of meeting and overcoming a challenge. I also gained a greater appreciation for the teachers who go to great lengths to learn first (and learn new things, at that) so that they can become better teachers.

As a student, I sought out new approaches to analyzing poetry. First, I posed questions that directed me to the method of discovery. For instance, my first inquiry was, “Why did Frost choose this particular setting to convey his meaning?” In other words, I set out to ascertain the significance of the setting. How else can setting be best understood than by viewing it? In order to create the setting and make it come alive, I captured the mental images in my mind by drawing them. By making the poem’s features tangible, I figured I could better study its relevance. I grabbed a blank sheet of paper and sketched the atmosphere described in the poem as accurately as possible. I drew the images in the order they are presented. I started with the people, who are standing “along the sand,” all looking in the direction of the sea. Almost immediately, this detail struck me as peculiar. “What are they looking at?” I wondered. More mysterious is that they are all turned away from the land and looking at the sea “all day.” My drawing depicted the people motionless, as if they are hypnotized. Staring at the image aroused a more inquisitive wonder: “What are they looking *for*? What are they so taken by?” Literally, they are looking at the water. But, the sea is immaterial—like the title suggests. There doesn’t seem to be anything significant about the sea’s external appearance. However, the water reaches far and deep, similar to the poem’s hidden meaning. I knew that drawing the body of water would help me put the poem into perspective. It also helped make the water become its own character, its own trait in the setting.

As I sat back and stared at my drawing, thoughts and ideas sprung from mind at too free and fast a rate. So, I grabbed a separate sheet of blank paper and began to structure my thoughts in the form of a map. I began with the large concept of the sea as the center circle, and I identified its traits in the smaller surrounding circles. From this, I generated ideas, thoughts, and feelings associated with such traits by extending the map farther away from its center. Eventually, I arrived at abstract concept that penetrated the allure of the sea. No sooner had I recognized the poem as an extended metaphor suggesting to human nature and experience. Ultimately, drawing and mapping ushered me toward an understanding of challenging material. I had discovered a process of learning that proved more beneficial than the overall appreciation of the poem. I was so happy that I had found my way out of a maze. Nevertheless, the process of analyzing facilitated comprehension and enjoyment of the poem, which yielded contemplation of broader concepts (e.g. critical thinking).

I was anxious to teach this poem the following day because, in teaching the poem to myself, I was better equipped to walk my students through the process. I first assessed the student’s pre-knowledge by merely introducing the poem. As I anticipated, all of the students were initially baffled. I allowed discussion—a sharing of ideas, but the students soon grew impatient and frustrated by their inability to comprehend the poem. I knew the feeling all too well. Without offering my input or sharing my ideas, I guided the students to be

constructive. I advised them to draw the setting and map all the thoughts and ideas regarding each aspect of the setting, such as the people, the sea, and the land. Then, I observed their performance. It was interesting to see how diverse the process was among the students. The pictures and maps varied and offered various interpretations of the poem. In result, students attained their own understanding. They were surprised when I expressed an emphasis on the process itself, rather than the end result. I was just pleased they were able to manipulate the poem as well as their own thoughts. They were also relieved that there was no judgment of their interpretation, only an evaluation of how they reached their interpretation. However, the added bonus for them was that they were actually able to reach an understanding on their own. They were quite pleased with themselves. Some students even shouted, "I get it!" upon conceptualizing such a challenging piece of work. I, too, knew the joy and feeling of achievement upon reaching my own understanding the previous day.

Purpose

Students will benefit from this unit because it provides such enduring skills as critical thinking and problem solving that can be applied to other academic disciplines and real-life experiences. In short, the skills learned are both adaptable and transferable. This will enable students to manipulate the unfamiliar by applying familiar concepts. Interpreting poetry teaches students to apply these skills and demonstrate higher-level thinking. Too often students are taught what to think. This unit places an emphasis on two important traits of education: *why* to think and *how* to think. It follows the principle "give a man a fish and he'll eat for a day; teach a man to fish and he'll eat for a lifetime." This unit sets out to teach students to fish. It is not enough to merely endow students with information. The success of teaching relies upon equipping students with the skills needed to survive, such as being able to think independently. Doing so requires teachers to present relevant information that students realize the benefits of outside the classroom.

Furthermore, analyzing poetry teaches students to think abstractly. This is necessary because, in life, things are not always blatant, tangible, or observable. For instance, a person's thoughts, ideas, and emotions, and such forms of language manipulation as puns, innuendo, and connotation are either intangible or initially imperceptible. Analyzing poetry requires one to think beyond and to think deeply. For it, one must probe their minds, as well as others. In result, abstract thinkers develop theories and philosophies, make uninhibited decisions, create art forms, extract meaning, and construct new meaning.

Skill Base Necessary for Students who will be receiving the Unit

This unit is directed at high school students in grades 10 and 11. This midpoint finds them sandwiched between grade 9, wherein they should have already received an adequate knowledge base of poetry and grade 12, wherein they can apply the acquired skills to higher-level academics. Adequate pre-knowledge should entail awareness of poetry forms, devices, and approaches to comprehension. Specifically, recognition of figurative language will provide a healthy foundation for receiving this unit. Students should be able to identify uses of figurative language in poetry, such as metaphor, simile, symbolism, personification, paradox, hyperbole, pun, and irony. They should also be familiar with mapping techniques as a means of brainstorming. However, if these concepts are not administered or received during their 9th grade experience, they can be reviewed or taught prior to teaching the unit. Teachers are encouraged to use discretion, for student's grade levels may not appropriately represent student's skill level. Furthermore, teachers should pre-assess students to accurately determine student preparedness.

In addition, this unit is appropriate for students about to enter grade 12 because they can experiment with their intellectual maturity by applying the skills learned to more advanced English classes and other disciplines, as well as experiences outside of school. For instance, grade 12 often finds students preparing for college. This may involve taking standardized tests, finalizing their English portfolios, researching and presenting a Senior project, writing essays for college admission, and receiving new information that will hopefully be retained for use in their post-graduate exploits. The skills learned in this unit can be useful to each of these efforts. For each, students will be expected to problem-solve, brainstorm, organize, visualize, analyze, and think critically and abstractly. Ultimately, this unit promotes the fundamental skill of thinking, which is arguably mankind's key trait in survival and success. By grade 12, teachers should be building on the already existing potential of student capability to become productive citizens. For these reasons, the median of high school grade levels is ideal for such indoctrination.

How the Unit will fit into the Existing Curriculum Prescribed by the P.B.O.E.

All grade levels in high school are expected to incorporate poetry into the curriculum. The PA Academic Standards for Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening and the accompanying textbooks, which cover a wide array of poetry and poetry forms, substantiate this. For example, students are expected to provide a writing exhibit that demonstrates their ability to write a literary genre. This entry provides that students can choose to write a poem, which suggests they must have adequate knowledge about the genre from both the reader and writer perspective. It specifically demands the students be knowledgeable of the techniques used in this genre. This unit will build their knowledge of a poetry technique that will strengthen their reading and writing skills. Additionally, the

Literature and Language textbook serves as the primary source for grades 10 and 11. Both anthologies are grade-specific compilations of varying genres, including poetry. The poems are presented individually and thematically throughout the texts, as they may be used to accompany certain pieces of fiction, nonfiction, and plays.

This unit seeks to organize poetry—some within the text and some outside—under a standard-based theme: analyzing and interpreting figurative language. Since the poetry is grouped together, no other genres will be addressed, and certainly some poems will be spared. This approach calls for a concentrated focus on a small survey of poetry employing figurative language. But while this unit limits student’s exposure to varying poems exhibiting diverse techniques, such as sound and structure, it provides students with a nondiscriminatory approach to learning. Therefore, what they learn in this unit can expose them to a broader territory of knowledge.

Objectives

Each year, students are expected to develop an English portfolio that exhibits adherence to the PA English Standards. Likewise, the classroom assignments must coincide with these standards, as they are learning objectives set for the district to ensure teacher accountability and reliably assess student performance. Standards 1.1D, 1.1E, 1.2A, and 1.3C of the PA Academic Standards for Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening are incorporated into the unit’s objectives.

Additional objectives for this unit are based upon Bloom’s Taxonomy, which considers the cognitive, psychomotor, and affective domains. The cognitive domain identifies knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation as the type of skills to be demonstrated (Lamb). Under the cognitive domain, students will be able to demonstrate knowledge by reading and examining a small survey of poetry employing figurative language, defining figurative language, metaphor, simile, personification, hyperbole, irony and other unknown terms, describing the traits of figurative language, identifying the use of figurative language in poetry, as well as the particular problem that inhibits comprehension of the poem, and indicating the significance of figurative language in terms of content. Other objectives in this area concern making connections between ideas presented in the poem and personal ideas, listing ideas in map form by creating a word web, showing the class their artistic depictions of elements in poetry, and telling the class what they gained from each poem.

Students will demonstrate comprehension by distinguishing between literal and symbolic levels, associating words and ideas with their connotations, making predictions about the poem’s overall meaning, interpreting the meaning of

each poem, describing the major elements referred to in the poem, extending concepts used in the poem, comparing their ideas with those presented in the poem, and discussing ideas about the poem with the class.

Students will demonstrate application by applying previous knowledge to new concepts, solving problems encountered upon reading poetry, classifying ideas in order of significance, experimenting with images that may lend to reading comprehension, illustrating word webs and the physical representation of each poem, collecting souvenirs for each poem read, demonstrating an understanding of the literal meaning of poems, making personal and independent discoveries, articulate the lessons learned, constructing new meaning from existing knowledge, and completing the required reading of poems and their accompanying assignments by the due date.

Students will demonstrate analysis by analyzing various poems for literal content, arranging ideas in sequential order, demonstrating how imagery and figurative language relate to meaning, inferring the meaning suggested by figurative language, correlating meaning with language technique, and subdividing elements presented in poetry. Students will demonstrate synthesis by combining visual learning skills with reading comprehension skills, modifying their analysis to bring about an accurate and well-supported assertion of the poems, planning an approach to thinking, creating a basis for knowledge, formulating a set of procedures to abide, integrating existing skills with newly adapted skills, and substituting words with images. Students will demonstrate evaluation by assessing their thought processes, comparing their ideas with others, deciding the most beneficial approach to attaining knowledge, measure their intellectual and creative growth, convincing the audience of their conclusions, and defending their ideas by referencing the poems.

Strategies

This unit employs Jerome Bruner's Constructivist philosophy, which holds that "we construct our own understanding of the world we live in" (Constructivism). While one source indicates that Constructivists consider learning to be "a search for meaning" (Constructivism), another source adds that, "Constructivists view learning as the result of mental construction" (What is Constructivism?). Such building, which is also referred to as "knowledge construction," is considered the cornerstone of this theory, and it "emphasizes the central role learners play in developing their own understanding" (Eggen & Kauchak 281). In this sense, "students learn by fitting new information together with what they already know" (What is Constructivism?). Such learning is provided as an alternative to having students "memorize the 'right' answers and regurgitate someone else's meaning" (Constructivism). This method is founded on the basis that people learn best

when they are active participants in the learning process (What is Constructivism?). This approach entails various teaching strategies, which requires the teacher to “think of learning as a process, consider *how* the student learns, nurture learner curiosity, encourage and accept learner inquiry, autonomy, and initiative, and provide learners the opportunity to construct new knowledge and understanding from authentic experiences” (What is Constructivism?).

The following strategies correspond well with the Constructivist theory. First is the Metacognitive approach, which fosters learner involvement in the thinking process. According to Eggen and Kauchak, metacognition is “being aware of the way you store information and making a conscious effort to look for relationships” (269). In other words, metacognition is “thinking about thinking” (qtd. in Livingston). This strategy allows students to exercise and evaluate their most important tool—their brains. Learners gain more confidence once they can first demonstrate self-awareness. Being aware of their thinking process allows them to establish a sense of control, which will result in learner autonomy. This strategy is particularly useful in teaching poetry because readers observe and interpret the material subjectively and “metacognition can play a role in perception” (Eggen 269). Readers may have difficulty grasping a poet’s ideas if they cannot first grasp their own thoughts. For instance, “being aware of the possibility of misperceiving something and consciously reserving judgment until [learners] have additional information demonstrates awareness of and control over [their] perception” (269). In order for students to be able to comprehend new information, they should be able to interact with and manipulate their own thoughts.

Second is Problem Based Learning, which strongly aligns with the Constructivist effort to have students “construct his/her own conceptualizations and solutions to problems” (What is Constructivism?). This strategy “assists students to solve problems by the process of continually encountering the type of ill-structured problems confronted by adults and practicing professionals” (Problem Based Learning). According to Bransford & Stein, “a problem occurs when a problem solver has a goal but lacks an obvious way of achieving the goal” (qtd. in Eggen & Kauchak 310). In this unit, the problem can be identified as having difficulty interpreting the ideas presented in poetry. Essentially, reading comprehension is the anticipated goal and any barriers can be perceived as a problem.

This strategy encourages students to become problem solvers. This is important because, “Students with such ingrained skill are well prepared for occupations which rarely have a supervisor who has time, inclination, or knowledge to tell the worker what to do” (Problem Based Learning). It also serves as a form of metacognition, which contributes to learner autonomy. Employing this strategy requires adjustment of the typical classroom design, such

as modification of teacher and student roles. For example, while “students solve the problems, teachers are coaches and facilitators,” and “there is no one formula for student approaches to the problem; students are only given guidelines for how to approach problems” (Problem Based Learning). Because this unit seeks to promote certain specific skills, the classroom design is more structured, but nonetheless, open-ended. This leaves the student bearing more responsibility in the learning process.

After identifying the problem, students will engage in Inquiry Based Learning. This strategy is closely related to Problem Based Learning; in fact, they go hand in hand. According to Eggen and Kauchak, “inquiry is a strategy in which facts and observations are used to answer questions and solve problems” (533). This strategy also emphasizes metacognition, in that, it focuses on “how we come to know,” as opposed to “what we know” (Inquiry-based learning). The lasting benefits involve “emphasis on the development of inquiry skills and the nurturing of inquiring attitudes or habits of mind that will enable [students] to continue the quest for knowledge throughout life” (Inquiry-based learning). Again, thinking is highlighted as the most important trait of learning.

Inquiry typically includes the following steps: “identifying a question or problem, forming an hypothesis to answer the question or solve the problem, gathering data to test the hypothesis, drawing conclusions from the data, and generalizing on the basis of the conclusions” (Eggen & Kauchak 553). These steps accurately correspond with the unit plan. For instance, first students establish the specific barriers to poetry comprehension. Next, they identify questions and respond to open-ended questions that will lead them toward discovery. It is important to note that, “The process of inquiring begins with gathering information and data through applying the human senses—seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, and smelling” (Inquiry-based Learning). This process necessitates that students become actively engaged in learning. This unit is ideal for exercising this trait because drawing poetry requires imagery, which is the application of the human senses to descriptions in poetry. Then, they explore the questions by means of constructing knowledge (drawing and mapping). The learner reaching his/her goal can be characterized as the discovery.

This stage is also its own strategy, which is termed Discovery Learning. Eggen and Kauchak define Discovery Learning as “a strategy that provides students with information to construct understanding” (550). This unit makes particular use of Guided Discovery, which “occurs when the teacher identifies a content goal, arranges information so that patterns can be found, and guides students to the goal” (550). This approach is effective because it provides the type of structure that both teachers and students are familiar with--without being overbearing or restrictive. Furthermore, Guided Discovery has its benefits over unsupervised discovery and direct instruction. Alexander, Murphy, and

Marshall present a recent study, in which “researchers found that teachers spent less time lecturing and explaining and more time asking questions during guided discovery...In addition, they found that students were more involved and had more opportunities to practice higher-order thinking—both important elements of learner-centered instruction” (qtd. in Eggen & Kauchak 550).

The last two steps include cross-referencing their conclusions with the poems and reflecting on the process via discussion and dialogue. Being able to support one’s findings with evidence from the text is a significant trait in learner maturity. Discussion is also viewed as an effective learning strategy that can aid in learner maturity, as well. Such dialogue is especially beneficial in an English classroom, wherein discussions are needed for students to practice an alternative form of expression, which may, in turn, help them organize their thoughts and ideas for written presentation. Discussions also help by encouraging students to entertain the various interpretations that poetry calls for. Moreover, Brookfield and Preskill attest that discussion “affirms students as co-creators of knowledge, and it helps students recognize and investigate their assumptions” (22-23). Both encourage learner autonomy and critical thinking.

The most extensive and intensive of the steps is the discovery, which is reached by drawing and mapping. These strategies were selected because of their effectiveness, authenticity, expedience, and level of enjoyment. There is a reason why such visual concepts are being incorporated into this unit. A large percentage of what humans interpret is visual. Many things in our society appease the human need to visualize. A few examples include video games, music videos, billboards, and even such artwork as paintings and sculptures. All are forms of visual stimuli. Furthermore, visualizing concepts lends to a more refined sense of memory in learning new information. Both drawing and mapping fall into the category of visual aids, which have always been highly considered by teachers as a strategy to motivate student learning.

Humans tend to be visual learners; most of what people learn is through the sense of sight. This translates over to the classroom. Many students need to see what their brain is processing. For this reason, biology labs are equipped with microscopes and magnifying glasses. Also, lab participants are expected to follow models and diagrams to draw and sometimes dissect their specimen. This makes sense because the process of life can best be understood by observing it. More examples include Mathematics classes, in which maps, graphs, tables, and charts are used to condense lengthy sentences and phrases to figures, images, and symbols that explain what paragraphs otherwise would. Geography classes refer to maps and globes to make sense of the physical world. Music classes rely on song sheets portraying notes and bars that translate into sound. Most classes are equipped with chalkboards so that teachers can demonstrate and students can visualize the concepts being taught. More recently, technology has aided in visual

communication as a tool for classroom instruction. For all areas of Communication, Power Point, slideshow projectors, Smart Boards, poster boards, collages, dioramas, videos, dramatic interpretations, overhead projectors, and many others have enhanced the presentation of information. These tools are essential in attracting and maintaining student attention.

In recognizing the significance of visual aides in classroom instruction, many schools require students to participate in its application. Outside of their likely association with teacher use, students are now encouraged to enhance their presentation and performance skills with visual aides. Students are expected to accompany their writing assignments and presentations with visual aides varying from artwork and illustration to charts and graphs. Now, in adopting the skill to express, students are not only required to explain, but are also obligated to demonstrate.

The benefits of visual learning range from helping students to “clarify thinking, reinforce understanding, integrate new knowledge, identify misconceptions, and think creatively” (Visual Learning). These skills are made possible because “visual diagrams reveal patterns, interrelationships, and interdependencies” (Visual Learning). Furthermore, this technique fosters Gardner’s spatial dimension of intelligence, which is “the ability to perceive the visual world accurately and, and to re-create, transform, or modify aspects of the world on the basis of perception” (Eggen & Kauchak 105). This relates back to metacognition and the Constructivist view, which stresses an inclusion of the student’s way of viewing things. In addition to the definition, Eggen and Kauchak offer an instructional application for this particular dimension of intelligence in the form of a question: “What can I do [as a teacher] to help students visualize, draw, or conceptualize the idea spatially?” (107). This unit sets out to answer to provide an answer to this question.

Such demonstration is captured in this unit by drawing and mapping. Poetry can both be seen as a map and a picture, as opposed to words on a sheet of paper. Drawing is something many students are familiar with, as they experiment with it as early as infancy. Some students may be apprehensive about drawing if they feel incompetent in this area. However, they can rest assured that this unit is not about artistic ability, rather the ability to portray images that will be best understood by the artist. The drawings will serve as a metaphor for poetry; they will represent individual interpretation and will be created and viewed in context of the artist’s and viewer’s perception.

Students will use drawing as a tool to understand figurative language and imagery. This approach is ideal for such elements of poetry because many poems create an image in the minds of readers. Meyer insists that, “Poets take in the world and give us impressions of what they experience through images” (649). In

this case, if some poet's are inspired by what they see and set out to re-create such images in word form for the reader, reader's can transform the poet's words back to their origin: an actual image. This can be achieved by drawing the poem. For those poets who employ imagery in their writings, Meyer continues to draw a thread between reading and drawing: "An image is language that addresses the senses. The most common images in poetry are visual; they provide verbal pictures of the poet's encounters—real or imagined—with the world" (649). Consequently, by drawing poetry, students can tap into their thinking process and demonstrate metacognitive skills, which aids in their ability to construct knowledge. They can also make their thoughts, ideas, and feelings more tangible by depicting them.

Mapping techniques can also bring students toward discovery. Mapping is neither new to classrooms nor mankind. Maps are intended to provide direction. It is no wonder that such a universal and customary concept has been integrated into our method of learning. Directions have been given since the beginning of time, whether by compasses or verbal and physical demonstrations. Man's first direction was that of banishment from the Garden of Eden, in which God directed Adam and Eve outward. Furthermore, Man's reliance upon directions to guide the course of travel developed into cartography, which is the art and science of making maps. Although several definitions are available, the most general and basic of them refers to a map as "a graphic representation or scale model of spatial concepts" used as "a means for conveying geographic information" (Abner).

More recently, the map has emerged as mankind's formal source of direction. Direction is required for travel. Reading poetry provides one with a sense of travel, for it directs the mind to or away from an experience or alternative reality. Maps have helped make places and experiences more attainable. Likewise, Meyer asserts that "Images [in poetry] give us the physical world to experience in our imaginations" (649). With maps, travel is simplified. With physical travel, the world is more tangible. For example, boundaries are broken, themes become universal, and cultures experience mitosis. Certainly, readers of poetry experience the same advantages. Readers are able to explore, understand, and possibly relate to another viewpoint or state of mind and archetypes are created. Furthermore, all maps have an origin, with paths that lead toward various directions. This is similar to poetry because it all begins with an idea, which turns into a thought process that spreads and lends to various ways of reading it. If a poem is metaphorical, that is, if it embodies figurative language, its point of origin is literal. If a poem is literal, all that is presented has an origin (a background, context, motivation, etc.). The poem may express the heart or mind, but mapping can help students gather the thoughts and feelings and lead them to the source of the poet's words. Ultimately, mapping is an approach to analyzing poetry that can bring about comprehension.

The appropriate way to incorporate mapping is to refer to its common use in the academic setting. Among the various types of maps used, the semantic map is most appropriate for this unit. The technical definition offers that, “Semantic mapping is a visual strategy for vocabulary expansion and extension of knowledge by displaying, in categories, words related to other words” (Semantic Mapping). Mac McClellan confirms its effectiveness: “As a measure for improving comprehension, the Semantic Mapping Strategy builds upon student’s prior knowledge to create relationships between components of a given concept,” which is the supreme goal of Constructivism. One way of demonstrating this map is by word webbing, which describes, in detail, the concept of mapping ideas. According to McDougal and Litell’s Literature anthology, “a word web is a diagram showing a central idea and related ideas” (Bernstein 953). The purpose of such a web is “to explore ideas further, generate new ideas, or discover connections among ideas” (953). This form of mapping is termed “web” because of its physical appearance. Spiders spin webs from a single thread and expand by spreading out, with each thread relying on and connecting to the other. Word webs are constructed with this design in mind. Creating one involves the following procedures provided by the Literature and Language anthology: “write a central idea in the middle of a page and draw a circle around it. Outside the circle, write related ideas. Circle each one and draw a line connecting it to the central idea. Do the same for each related idea” (953).

Together, drawing and mapping serve as a way for students to be actively involved in their learning experience. Such hands-on involvement acquaints the learners with their learning styles, to where manipulation of their thought processes is inevitable. Engaging in the steps provided by Problem, Inquiry, and Discovery Based Learning pave the way for critical-thinking, analytical, and problem-solving skills. These skills are made attainable by means of inheriting the Constructivist approach to learning, which yields independent learners and thinkers. This unit encourages students to use poetry as a vehicle for penetrating their minds and comprehending the unfamiliar. Furthermore, students are able to enjoy the learning process and appreciate the value of appropriating flexible and enduring skills.

Classroom Activities

This unit will comprise of ten 45-minute class periods. The unit should begin on a Thursday, with Thursday and Friday being the introductory days, the following full week being the survey of poems, and the last three days encompassing the culminating activity. The following is a list of recommended poems that may be referred to in this unit. While some of the poems are provided in either the 10th or 11th grade Literature & Language textbook, others are outside of the designated class materials and may be available in any library or on the Internet. You will

find that the poems are diverse in time-periods, gender, race, culture, and subject matter, but are all favorites of the literary canon. I have limited my choice of poems to a few from this list that I feel are suitable for the designated time and the intended lesson.

“Neither Out Far nor in Deep”	
“The Road Not Taken”	Robert Frost
“ ‘Hope’ is the thing with feathers”	
“Presentiment”	Emily Dickinson
“Do not go gentle into that good night”	Dylan Thomas
“Harlem”	Langston Hughes
“Love Poem”	Joyce Carol Oates
“A Noiseless Patient Spider”	Walt Whitman
“Tomorrow (from <i>Macbeth</i>)”	William Shakespeare
“Mirror”	Sylvia Plath
“A Poison Tree”	William Blake
“Chess”	Rosario Castellanos

Day One

On the first day of instruction, students will need to be introduced to poetry and figurative language. A proper anticipatory set should precede this type of introductory lesson because it prepares and motivates the students. Initially, the instructor should assess the student’s relationships to poetry by engaging in discussion about their attitudes. Some invoking questions are: “How is poetry different from prose?” (which replaces the typical “What is poetry?” by probing for deeper reflection), and “What other forms of expression is poetry similar to?” Asking students what they think and how they feel is a way of validating their views, and this helps build trust between the learners and the instructor. Students may be more receptive to learning when the teacher expresses an interest in them. These questions also stimulate the student’s minds and manners of expression that are necessary for use in this unit. During this procedure, allow students to voice their opinions and use their responses to construct new questions that probe deeper into their view of poetry. However, this discussion should be brief (5-7 minutes) and focused.

Following discussion, the teacher should set out to gauge student confidence in comprehending poetry. The idea is to present students with a challenging poem that will perplex most of the class. An ideal poem for this aim is *Neither out Far nor in Deep* by Robert Frost because it employs both figurative language and imagery, can be viewed as challenging, and has proven effectual for drawing and mapping. Begin by distributing a copy of the poem to each student, and then allowing one or two students to read it aloud to the class while the rest read along. Pose the question: “What is this poem about?” and allow students a

few minutes to read back over it independently and contemplate its meaning. Do not be surprised if some students are able to provide a strong analysis of the poem's meaning. In this event, do not confirm or deny any student responses. The students will most likely expect teacher feedback and may become frustrated without any, but this tactic prepares students to become free and independent thinkers. For students whose estimations are accurate, their views will be confirmed upon studying the poem using the approach designated for this unit. Besides, this unit is about the process as opposed to the result. Students will need to understand and manage how they have reached their conclusions.

Without settling on any interpretations, have the students identify the problem by asking, "What is the true challenge of this poem?" or "What is the barrier preventing us from fully comprehending the poem's meaning?" Then, ask the students *how* they might go about determining meaning ("What strategies could you use to find out what the poem means?"). Again, this places the emphasis on the process and may lead into another brief discussion. Brainstorm with the class some poetry comprehension strategies by listing them on the board. Students may refer to past experiences with poetry or consider new ideas. Some of these ideas can and should be applied to this activity. One necessary strategy that students should be prompted to highlight is determining whether the poem is literal or figurative (though students may state it using different terms). You might sarcastically pose the question: "Is this poem really about people standing on the beach and staring in the sea?" Once the class decides on the poem's manner of representation, the students should be geared to focus on converting the figurative language to its literal meaning. Ask the students how this should be done. The individual teacher can decide when he or she should introduce drawing as a possible strategy—that is, if no one mentions it. Introduce the idea with enthusiasm and an attitude of experimentation that will hopefully prove contagious and carry over to the students.

After distributing construction paper and drawing utensils, ask students how they would initiate the drawing ("What from the poem will they draw and in what order will they draw these elements?"). These answers should be discussed and agreed upon with the class to provide a safety net for the first time. Once students are sure of their directions to draw the most important aspects of the poem's setting (the land, the people, and the sea), set the students loose to illustrate this image. Stress that while accuracy is essential, artistic ability is not. Allow 10-12 minutes for this procedure. Such short time is necessary for students to understand that this is intended to be a sketch, a step in a set of procedures, and a form of creative expression that does not require critical thinking about the content. Students should not spend this time on trying to understand the poem's meaning; rather, their main goal is to capture the images. Monitor this process by walking around the classroom and ensuring that students are aware of the directions and guidelines and are using their time appropriately.

Once students have finished their drawings, twenty minutes should be left in the class. Have the students look at their individual pictures and ask them to think about what elements in the drawing are suggestive. For instance, the people they have drawn may be literal figures in their true representation, but the land and sea can both be viewed as impenetrable. Students will brainstorm as a class and the instructor should convert their ideas into word webs on the chalkboard. There should be one word web for the land and the sea comprised of mostly adjectives. The guiding questions for these word webs can be: “What does the land/sea represent? What does the land/sea make you think of? How is the land/sea depicted in the poem? What feelings and thoughts are evoked by looking at the ocean?” Members of the classroom should challenge the student’s ideas if they seem illogical. Some model ideas that may spawn from the “sea” word web are deep, mysterious, constantly in motion, unattainable, intangible, flowing, immense, captivating, intriguing, predictable, unfamiliar, blue, wet, travel, etc. Some ideas for the land are variable, immediate, familiar, dry, life, home, tangible, stable, diverse, people, etc. Some ideas that contradict each other may be paradoxes.

At this point, students should reflect on both the drawing and the word webs. They should be alerted to notice that the land and sea are set up as opposition; this should be evident in the drawing because they are set on opposing sides from the people and divided by a shoreline. This is further evident in the differences between the word webs. Finally, students will be left to gather the literal meaning of the poem. They will be encouraged to explore their ideas as presented in the illustrations and word webs. Their goal will be to answer the definitive that launched this means of discovery: “What is this poem about?” Additional questions that can prompt deep thinking are as follows: “If the sea represents these things (indicate the coinciding word web), why are the people staring at it so? If the land represents these things (indicate the word web), then why are the people turning away from the land? What are the people looking for? What are the people turning away from? Have students try to make a connection between the traits of each element and the people’s behavior toward them.

While there may not be enough time to thoroughly analyze the poem, students are now familiar with the process they will use to discover meaning in other poems. For closure, the students should read the poem again and collaborate all the information they established during the process. I suggest five minutes of discussion, in which students can share their assertions about the poem’s meaning. Students should place their drawings in their personal class folders in the classroom. They are to be saved and referred to in the future. Assessment for this lesson will regard participation, as discussion and involvement are in great demand. Follow-up will be a homework assignment. Students will receive a worksheet on figurative language, which shows a table

listing techniques down the left column, their definitions down the middle column, and empty spaces down the right column. The empty spaces are to be filled with examples from the poem that demonstrate the listed techniques. Students will only fill the boxes with examples that are applicable to the Frost poem. They must be told this information in advance. This assignment allows them to interact with a familiar poem and build new knowledge from the class lesson and become familiar with the poetry techniques that will be explored in this unit.

Day Two

The following day, the class will go over the homework assignment together. They should have identified the uses of metaphor, simile, irony, and symbolism in the poem, thereby leaving two figures of speech boxed empty (personification and hyperbole). This should allow for additional contemplation of Frost's poem. Afterward, the teacher should distribute their drawings and give the students time to discover their own interpretation of the poem's overall meaning. Once they have reached their own discovery, they are to put this explanation into words by writing the moral of the poem on the flip side of their drawings.

Days Three-Seven

This day begins the week of intensive analysis of a small survey of poetry. They will now approach the designated poems independently. Students will be assigned five poems from the reading list (one poem daily) and are to follow the process of reading, identifying the problem, posing questions, drawing, mapping, analyzing, and reflecting. These steps mimic the approach used in analyzing *Neither Out Far nor In Deep*. Students will have one class period to complete this process and will be evaluated based on their ability to move through the required steps. For each poem, students will staple a copy of the poem, a worksheet identifying the problem and create their own questions regarding the problem, one drawing on construction paper with the lesson learned or value perceived on the back side, as many word webs as needed on blank writing paper, and any other relevant notes they may accumulate regarding the process. For example, some valid notes might include vocabulary discovery, wherein they define unknown terms that bring them toward understanding of the poem's meaning. This is required for at least four of the six poems and will be included in the assessment. If students need more time, they may take their work home and work on it, but they must bring it back to class, as all packets must be kept in their folders to be turned in and evaluated at the close of the unit.

Days Eight-Ten

These days constitute the culminating activity, in which students will gather all poetry packets and draw an identity map depicting their journey through all poems, including the poem used in the introductory lesson. The map should reflect a journey of six poems in total, but will be more telling of the creator's individuality. All maps will be similar in terms of order, but they will vary in detail. The starting point of this map will be *Neither Out Far nor In Deep* by Robert Frost. Therefore, the first destination on the map should show the poem's title and author, as well as the souvenir illustration or description, which represents the moral for each poem, and the actual wording of this moral. Each destination (poem) should exhibit the same, leaving six stopping points total. The students will have one class period, as well as time spent at home, to draw this map. The guidelines for the culminating activity include the following: each student should turn in their poetry folders including the completed packet of work for all six poems. Each packet is to be stapled individually by poem, with the cover page a copy of the actual poem. In addition, the students are to provide a neat, colorful, illustrated map with an appropriate title explicating a summary of their journey (specific to their experience), and the six destinations (poems) and the souvenir derived from each, along with the moral statement. To conclude the unit, each student is required to briefly present their most valuable lesson learned to the class by identifying the poem and author, present the souvenir collected, and read the moral statement.

Assessment

Students will be graded using the Pittsburgh Public School grading scale, which ranges from A—90-100%, B—89-80%, C—79-70%, D—69-60%, E—59-50%. They will earn points for the unit activities, the culminating activity, and the presentation. These points will be converted to a percentage and then a letter grade. Therefore, they will receive eight grades in total. For the poetry packet, students will receive 5 points for having all the required pages in their poetry packets, 5 points for following the guidelines, 5 points for thorough content and 5 points their moral statements, resulting in 20 points. For the culminating activity, student's maps will be worth 40 points: 5 points for each destination in accordance with the guidelines, 5 points for title appropriateness and creativity, and 5 points for illustration creativity (color and neatness, not artistic ability). For the presentation, students will be scored on a scale from 0-10 in terms of content.

Closure

Teachers may want to assess student mastery of this unit by administering a test that follows the same format as the unit activities. Any one of the poems from the reading list that were not used during instruction can be used for this test. I suggest a more through analysis of the poem's meaning that may be in the form of a paraphrase or short essay response.

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 Available <<http://www.Semantic%20Mapping.htm>>
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“What is Constructivism?” Constructivism. Online. Electronic Text Center. Internet. 5 Mar. 2003. Available

<[http://www.constructivism.htm%20\(Page%201\).htm](http://www.constructivism.htm%20(Page%201).htm)>

Web Page that summarizes the major traits of Constructivism and provides key words and phrases associated with this teaching style.

Annotated Reading List for Students

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1992. 11th grade English textbook employed by Pittsburgh Public Schools providing a survey of fiction, poetry, nonfiction, as well as a reader, writer, and language handbook; includes “ ‘Hope’ is the Thing with Feathers,” and “Harlem.”

Boone, Robert S. Literature and Language. Evanston, Illinois: McDougal, Littell & Co.,

1994. 10th grade English textbook employed by Pittsburgh Public Schools providing a study of literature, writing, language, and related skills; includes “The Road Not Taken,” “Love Poem,” and “A Poison Tree.”

Meyer, Michael. The Bedford Introduction to Literature: Fourth Ed. Boston: Bedford Books, 1996. Intended for college-level students and to be used in classrooms, this anthology is a compilation of 57 stories, 436 poems, and 22 plays—all classics of Western literature and representing a wide range of periods, nationalities, and voices; contains “Neither Out Far nor In Deep,” “Tomorrow,” “Presentiment,” “Chess,” “Mirror,” “A Noiseless Patient Spider,” “Acquainted With the Night,” and “Do not go gentle into that good night.”

Annotated List of Materials for Classroom Use

Chalkboard: needed as visual aid for teacher demonstration of brainstorming lists and word web examples.

Chalk: visible chalk (white preferred) to demonstrate the above.

Writing and drawing utensils: To perform the unit, the teacher will need to provide a class size of art supplies to be shared among the students, such as pens, colored pencils, crayons, markers, erasers, rulers, construction paper, and scratch paper.

Student Poetry Folders: A class size of folders specifically designated for this unit, in which students will place their work throughout the process.

Classroom Textbooks: The 10th and 11th grade textbooks are needed for poetry reading and should be made available to all students throughout the unit.

Handouts of poems: For those poems that are not offered in the classroom textbooks, the teacher will need to utilize alternative sources and photocopy such poems for the class; provide enough for each student to keep.

Figurative Language Table: Classroom size of homework sheets displaying a table of figures of speech, their definitions, and examples from poems (to be completed by the students).

Dictionaries/Thesaurus's: To be used as a resource for defining unknown terms.

Rubrics: Grading sheets are needed for each student for each of the assignments.

Appendix A
Content Standards Addressed

PA Academic Standards for
Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening

1.1 Learning to Read Independently

- D. Identify, describe, evaluate, and synthesize the essential ideas in text. Assess those reading strategies that were most effective in learning from a variety of [poems].
- E. Establish a reading vocabulary by identifying and correctly using new word acquired through the study of their relationships to other words. Use a dictionary or a related reference.

1.2 Reading Critically in all Content Areas

- A. Use teacher and student established criteria for making decisions and drawing conclusions.

1.3 Reading, Analyzing, and Interpreting Literature

- B. Analyze the effectiveness in terms of quality, of the author's use of literary devices.
 - Figurative language (e.g. personification, simile, metaphor, hyperbole, irony, etc.)

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