Form and Content in Modern Poetry and Drama

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"Art is an idea that has found the perfect form." – Paul Rand

Overview

"Form and Content in Modern Poetry and Drama" will focus on examining the roles that form and content play in poetry and drama. The unit will focus on the close reading methodology of plays and poems and students will discover and be able to articulate why form is so important. How the words are said proves to be more important than what is being said in both the fields of poetry and drama.

Students will first focus on exploring the definitions of form and content through a series of theatre activities. Next, students will learn the close reading methodology and participate in active close reading discussions of many modern poems. The students will create small performance projects as they complete each poem that allows them to dive deeper into the content of each piece. Finally, the students will be asked to create performance piece based on one of the poems that we have studied. Students will adapt the poem into a performance form of their choosing that they best feel is in keeping with the original idea of the content.

Essential Questions

What is content?
What is form?
Did the poet choose the best form to present the content?
Did the playwright choose the best form to present the content?
Why is how words are said more important than what is being said?

Rationale

As teachers, we must choose to best form to present our curriculum. We must figure out what we want the end result of our lesson to be and then artfully put together a lesson in the most effective way possible that will lead the students to reach those outcomes. Theatre professionals

have the challenge of coming up with the best possible concept to tell a certain story, convey a message or theme, and get their audience to come along on the journey with them. Creating a work of theatre and creating a poem are not dissimilar processes. Drama and poetry are both art forms and the creators of these works of art must carefully choose the best way to convey their message.

As part of the drama curriculum, students are required to create works of art based on events in history, other works of art, etc. Students will learn how to adapt an already existing work into their own form of performance – a skill that is important for any drama professional to be able to do. Students are also required to write their own plays, so this unit will get them brainstorming about all the different forms their original plays can take.

Most importantly, this unit goes beyond the explicit curriculum of drama and poetry and can be implied implicitly into the students' lives. In life, in work, and in art, how we say what we say is more important oftentimes than what we are saying. If students cannot choose the right form to express their words, thoughts, and actions, they will not be able to effectively communicate with others. Students need to be able to express their thoughts and actions in the best way possible. For instance, students will soon be looking for jobs and work. When thanking an employer for a job interview, what form will they use to thank them? Will they send an email? A letter? Say an informal, "thanks for the interview, buddy?" Will they choose to express their thoughts in the same form that they would write to a friend? They must learn to choose the proper form to express their thoughts and actions in order to be successful in life. Students often have trouble expressing themselves and their emotions and often choose a weak form to express their thoughts. This will help students to give more thought to the best way to express the ideas and feelings that they have. When they have an argument with a loved one and are frustrated, instead of yelling their feelings or in most cases at our school, getting psychical about it through a fight, perhaps they will think twice about the form they will choose to express themselves. Maybe write a letter, calmly talk to the person, write a poem, and so forth. Students will learn to ask themselves, "What do I want to accomplish and how is the best way to accomplish it."

Finally, the close reading methodology of poetry and interactive drama activities allow students to explore empathy. Students will step into someone else's shoes and explore how they are feeling. How a person appears to be and feel on the outside may not always line up with how they are actually feeling on the inside. Students at West Philly High need to practice empathetic behavior and this lesson will help them develop the ability to be more empathetic to others.

Objectives

Students will:
- define of form and content
- participate demonstrate proficiency in close reading methodology
- participate in active close reading discussions of many modern poems
- listen and respond to each other and communicate effectively in group discussions and close readings
- express their opinions in clearly structured journal entries and a constructed response question

- create small performance projects as they complete each poem that allows them to dive deeper into the content of each piece
- work as an ensemble to create a large performance piece based on the content of one of the poems that they studied

Content Standards

Arts and Humanities: Theatre

9.1.8.A:

Know and use the elements and principles of each art form to create works in the arts and humanities.

9.1.8.B:

Recognize, know, use and demonstrate a variety of appropriate arts elements and principles to produce, review and revise original works in the arts.

9.1.8.E: Communicate a unifying theme or point of view through the production of works in the arts.

9.1.8.F: Explain works of others within each art form through performance or exhibition.

9.1.8.G: Explain the function and benefits of rehearsal and practice sessions.

9.1.12.E: Delineate a unifying theme through the production of a work of art that reflects skills in media processes and techniques.

9.1.12.F: Analyze works of arts influenced by experiences or historical and cultural events through production, performance or exhibition.

Lesson Plans

DAY 1
WARMING UP- Thinking about words

Objective: Students will be able to identify the influence of words in their daily lives, in history, and in theatre.

1. *Do Now*
   In their journals, students will respond to the following prompt:
   "I don't think writers are sacred, but words are. They deserve respect. If you get the right ones in the right order, you can nudge the world a little."
   -Tom Stoppard

What does Stoppard mean by this? When is a time in your life when your world has been nudged by words?

2. *Pair and Share*
3. *Share With Class & Discuss Prompt in a Circle*
4. *Guided Practice: Carousel Activity*
   When is a time in history when words have been responsible for nudging/changing the world?
   Break the class into small groups and give each group a piece of chart paper. Give the students about ten minutes to make a list of all the times in history that they can think of when words have impacted the world. After ten minutes, post the chart paper on the classroom walls and allow the groups to rotate and look at each other's responses. Groups can place a check next to an example that they included on their own list.
5. *Independent Practice *This can be done individually or as part of guided practice*
   Instruct students to choose one event that stood out to them either from a personal or historical example. Write a brief scene (either using dialogue or silent) that actors can perform showing how words made an impact in that moment. Students can choose one scene from each group to perform for the class.
6. *Exit Ticket*
   Which example from class today was the most dramatic and why?
7. *Homework*
   Have students reflect on the importance of words in drama in a short paragraph.

DAY 2
EXPLORATION: Form and Content
Objective: Students will be able to clearly identify and define form and content.

1. *Do Now*
   In their journals, students will respond to the following prompt:
   "Art is an idea that has found the perfect form."
   – Paul Rand
   What does Paul Rand mean by this? What do you think is the definition of form? Of content?

2. *Pair and Share*
3. *Share With Class & Discuss Prompt in a Circle*
4. *Direct Instruction*
   Play the video clip of Paul Rand in which he discusses content and form. Ask students to review their original definitions and ask if they would change anything based on the video. Then, have students look up the definition of form and content. Have the definitions available in a slide to display and make sure students know the proper definition of each. Introduce them to the next activity in which they will be exploring content and form in a variety of dramatic real life situations.

   Use a breaking up with someone as an example. Ask the class, what are different ways you can break up with someone? List them on the board (examples: in person bluntly,

over the phone, in a letter, a text message, via a friend, etc) Ask: Which way is the best way to achieve the purpose?

5. *Guided Practice*
Have two students come up and act out different improvised examples of breaking up with someone. Discuss as a class which improvised skit achieved the purpose best. Place a variety of scenarios on slips of paper that represent content. Have students come up in pairs and choose a random scenario. The students will act out the scenario without any direction for the first time. Ask students to perform the scene again a second time, but this time change the way the content is delivered, just as they already did with the break up scenario. After each round of skits, ask the class to discuss which was the best way to achieve the purpose in each scenario.

> *Some examples of scenarios (content):* Breaking up with someone, firing someone from work, telling a student they are not graduating from high school, parents telling kids they are getting a divorce, trying to get someone's phone number for a date, etc
> *Some examples of different ways to present the content (form):* In person, letter, email, speech, documentary, a message delivered by a friend, a song, a poem, etc.

In addition to the first part, teachers can also break the class into small groups or pairs. Each group can be given the same content, but a different form. Each group has a few minutes to come up with a skit. The groups all perform the same scenario, but deliver the message in a different way. After watching all the skits, the class can discuss which form fir the scenario best.

Always ask after multiple skits are performed about each scenario: Which skit was an example of the best way to achieve the purpose?

6. *Independent Practice*
PART I: Write on the board: "I love you." Explain to students that this is the content and that they are going to be shown that sentiment in a variety of forms. After viewing all of the different forms, students will be asked to identify which form the feel expresses the content best.

> -"I Can't Sleep Baby" by R.Kelly
> - "All I Want Is You" by Miguel
> - Clip from *Say Anything*
> - Clip from *10 Things I Hate About You*
> - "One Hundred Love Sonnets: XVII" by Pablo Neruda

PART II: Write on the board "The goal is: Equal Rights." Using the 1960s civil rights movement as an example of a time in history where people fought for freedom, show four different examples of how blacks tried to achieve equal rights. Show videos clips and/or present text of:

> - "I Have a Dream" speech by Martin Luther King, Jr.
> - Video footage of freedom rides
> - Video footage of sit-ins

- "People Get Ready" by Curtis Mayfield & The Impressions

After viewing the four different forms, have students respond to the following prompt in their journals: Which form was most the most effective way to achieve the purpose of equal rights?

7. *Exit Ticket*
Circle up as a class and discuss which forms and expressed the content best from the independent practice activities. Have a discussion as a class and guide it toward the fact that people may not come to agreement about which form was the best way to present the content.

8. *Homework*
Ask students to reflect on the Paul Rand quote presented at the beginning of class. "Art is an idea that has found the perfect form." Have students write a paragraph about what they now think Paul Rand means and to give an example of some kind of art (theatrical, musical, visual) that they feel has been presented to the world in a perfect manner. Students also should write down an example of a song that has been remixed.

DAY 3
EXPLORATION PART II: Form and Content
Objective: Students will be able to state which form of written work they feel fits the content best.

*Note: Since this lesson is designed for a drama class at WPHS, this part of the lesson is purposely using a direct instruction/independent practice model to get the students ready to focus on the close reading methodology they will participate in while reading the poems. Most of the drama lessons at WPHS consist of on your feet activities where the students are moving around and acting out. This day, the students will be mainly listening, reading, and writing to change the pace of the class for the reading of poems that will happen in the next few days.

1. *Do Now*
In their journals, students will respond to the following prompt:
What is form? What is content? Name a song that has been remixed. Do you like the original or the remixed better? Why?
2. *Pair and Share*
3. *Share with Class & Discuss Prompt in a Circle*
4. *Direct Instruction*
Brief overview of some songs that have been remixed throughout history. Present the objective for the day and what is expected of students during the lesson.
5. *Guided/Independent Practice*
PART I: Song Remixes
Teacher will hand out lyrics to a song. The class with read the lyrics as a group and identify the message, theme, and author's purpose of the song. The class will then listen to two different versions of the same song. They will then be asked to identify which form fit the content best. Teachers can take a step further and play the music videos after

the students have listened to the songs. The students can then decide if the form of the music videos best fits the content of the songs. They can also take a stand on whether they prefer the lyrics alone, the audio, or the music video to best convey the content of the song.

Example 1:
Lyrics to "Boys of Summer" by Don Henley
Listen to Henley's version
Listen to Ataris' version

Example 2:
Lyrics to "(Everything I Do) I Do It For You" by Bryan Adams
Listen to Bryan Adam's version
Listen to New Found Glory's version

PART II: Poems and Songs
Repeat the same method from the first part of the lesson with the following poems and songs:

Example 1:
"Chain Gang" by Sam Cook
"Chain Gang" by Tracie Morris

Example 2:
"Still I Rise" by Maya Angelou
"I'll Rise" by Ben Harper

Example 3:
"Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night" by Dylan Thomas
Stravinsky's instrumental version

Example 4:
Les Miserables
Show video clip about the story behind *Les Miserables*. Show different examples on the SmartBoard of how it has been a book, a stage musical, a movie without singing, and a movie with singing. Discuss as a class which form they think would tell the story of the French Revolution best: a book, a movie, or a musical?

6. *Exit Ticket*
Which piece of work was your favorite today? Why?

7. *Homework*
What is a close reading? Ask students to research close reading methodology at home and state how they think it will be similar to scoring a script.

DAYS 4 – 9
METHODOLOGY: Close Reading & Mini Performances

Students will spend the week participating in close readings of a selection of modern poems. The teacher will pre-assign lines or words to each student or pairs of students in the class. Those students will be responsible for analyzing those lines out loud in front of the class. After each poem is read and discussed, the teacher will ask the class: Does the form best fit the content of the poem? The students will debate and discuss this question and oftentimes be asked to physically take a stand and move themselves to show if they agree or disagree that the form best fits the content or not.

Students will be asked to create mini performance projects with each poem that they close read. These mini performance projects will be done as homework each night and the teacher can choose to allow the students to share the next day before beginning the close reading of another poem. One way sharing can be done is to break the class up into groups and have the students trade works with one another so that all student work gets seen. Each group can then elect one project to be presented to the entire class.

Small performance projects can include:
1. Create a monologue as one of the character's in the poem
2. Create a silent scene of the poem using music in the background
3. Draw the set of the poem
4. Create costumes for characters in the poems
5. Write a scene that happens right before the poem takes place
6. Write a scene that happens right after the poem takes place

Content for this week (can be arranged in the order that best fits each individual class):

"Woman at Window 1&2" by William Carlos Williams
1. Have students read each poem silently by themselves.
2. Ask: Which form of the poem do you prefer, 1 or 2?
3. Ask students to move to the left if they choose version 1 and the right if they choose version 2. Ask students to state why they like their chosen version better.
4. Circle up and do a close reading of both poems.
5. When finished reading and discussing, have some students take on the body poses of each poem and act it out silently. Ask students to vote on which version of the poem they like better when performed.
6. Homework: Change the form. Choose one poem and write the poem as a monologue by either the woman or the child.

"This Is Just To Say" by William Carlos Williams and Flossie's Response
1. Close Reading of both pieces
2. Read the poems dramatically one after the other
3. Ask the students: Do the forms of the poems best fit the content?
4. Homework: Create a scene between Flossie and William Carlos Williams that gets across the same message as the poems.

"Between Walls" by William Carlos Williams

1. Listen to PoemTalk about the poem
2. Discuss what was said and the students' response to the poem
3. Write a scene that could have happened before the poem took place. Think about who could have been in this space before the poem was written and create that character and a scene or a monologue as or about that character.

"A Song of Myself 8" by Walt Whitman
1. Close Reading of Stanza 8
2. Start homework in class: Write a scene to act out. Can do a silent scene or a scene with dialogue taking place within what Walt Whitman is describing in Stanza 8. All scenes will be performed in class the next day.

"A Supermarket in California" by Allen Ginsberg
1. Watch video of Penn students doing a close reading of the poem
2. Discuss the poem and the video as a class
3. Improvise the poem silently line by line
4. Homework: Write a scene or poem about the supermarket where you live.

"Incident" by Countee Cullen and "If We Must Die" by Claude McCay
1. Close reading of each poem as a class.
2. In groups, choose the message of one of the poems. Keep the idea of the content and change the form into some sort of performance piece. Groups can write a monologue, a scene, do a dance piece, write a silent scene, a song, another poem, or a speech. The groups can choose any form to present the content, but they cannot change the original message of the poem.
3. Homework: Each group should be prepared to present their pieces to the class the following day.

"Let Us Describe" by Gertrude Stein
1. Close reading of the poem as a class.
2. Begin homework in class: Write a scene that is inspired by this poem or design three sets for this piece.

Days 10 – 13
PERFORMANCE: Choose one poem and change the form into a performance piece
Objective: Students will be able work as an ensemble to create a performance piece based on a poem that they have studied.

Students will use one of the poems that they have studied as the basis to create a performance piece. The poems will dictate the setting, the plot, the characters, and the overall content of the piece, but the students can choose any kind of theatrical form that they want to present the content to the class.

Explain to students: Choose one of the poems that we have studied and create an adaptation of it. Keep the idea of the content, but change the form into some kind of performance piece. You could create a scene in which you act out the poem, a dance

piece, a musical piece, another poem that is meant to be performed out loud, write a dramatic speech addressing the issues in the poem, etc.

Example #1
Shakespeare's *Macbeth*
There are many different versions of the play called adaptations. This means that the overall content is the same, but the form is different. Show examples of:
1. The classic version
2. Sleep No More: http://sleepnomorenyc.com/ , http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RR0MPk69Iao
3. Scotland, PA: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hiF-ftELdv0

Example #2
"If I Told Him" by Gertrude Stein
1. The Poem
2. Adaptation into dance piece: http://media.sas.upenn.edu/watch/132556

Students will be given two class periods, Days 10 and 11, to work on their performance pieces and all groups will have to present to class on Days 12 and 13. After the presentations, the students will write reflectively on their experience as well identify which theatrical pieces they best felt conveyed the original content of the poems and state if they felt any of the theatrical pieces better conveyed the content than the original poems. Students will also be given a Constructed Response Question (CRQ) as a culmination to the this unit in which they do a written close reading of a randomly chosen poem (differentiated based on ability) and state how they would choose to adapt that poem into a theatrical form.

Resources

Day 2:

1. "I Can't Sleep Baby" by R. Kelly
   Lyrics: http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/rkelly/icantsleepbaby.html
   Music Video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DmDyBUSAIt8

2. "All I Want Is You" by Miguel (can edit for profanity)
   Lyrics: http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/miguel/alliwantisyou.html
   Music Video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n7PVhQPaFNY

3. Video Clip from *Say Anything*
   http://www.moviefanatic.com/videos/say-anything-boombox-scene/

4. Video Clip from *10 Things I Hate About You*
   http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6XGUhzfutc

5. One Hundred Love Sonnets: XVII" by Pablo Neruda
   Text: http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/179257

6. "I Have a Dream" by Martin Luther King, Jr.
   Text: http://www.archives.gov/press/exhibits/dream-speech.pdf
   Video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=smEqnnklfYs

7. Freedom Rides Video: http://video.pbs.org/video/1568425025/

8. Sit-Ins Video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VDHBzB-eO1g

9. "People Get Ready" by Curtis Mayfield & The Impressions
   Lyrics: http://www.stlyrics.com/lyrics/akeelah&thebee/peoplegetready.htm
   Audio: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l04yM7-BWbg

Day 3:

1. "Boys of Summer" by Don Henley
   Lyrics: http://www.lyricsfreak.com/d/don+henley/the+boys+of+summer_20042039.html
   Audio/Music Video: http://vimeo.com/38296751

2. "Boys of Summer" by Ataris
   Audio: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hI93w0OV6D8

3. "(Everything I Do) I Do It For You" by Bryan Adams
   Lyrics:
   http://www.lyrics007.com/Bryan%20Adams%20Lyrics/(Everything%20I%20Do)%20I%20Do%20It%20For%20You%20Lyrics.html
   Audio/Music Video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZGoWtY_h4xo

4. "Chain Gang" by Sam Cooke
   http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L2XHYKWLGTg&feature=youtu.be

5. "Chain Gang" by Tracie Morris
   http://media.sas.upenn.edu/pennsound/authors/Morris/Morris-Tracie_Chain-Gang_NYC_2006.mp3

6. "Still I Rise" by Maya Angelou
   Text: http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/15623

7. "I'll Rise" by Ben Harper
   Audio: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Mef36R2iJk

8. "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night" by Dylan Thomas
   Text/Audio: http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/15377

9. Stravinsky's instrumental version of "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night"
   http://iceorg.org/blog/post/in-memoriam-by-stravinsky

Days 4 – 9

1. William Carlos Williams' "Young Woman at a Window"
   Version 1: http://www.writing.upenn.edu/~afilreis/88v/window1.html
   Version 2: http://www.writing.upenn.edu/~afilreis/88v/window2.html

2. Williams Carlos Williams' "This Is Just To Say"
   http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/15535

3. Flossie Williams' Reply to "This Is Just To Say"
   http://www.writing.upenn.edu/~afilreis/88v/flossie.html

4. "Between Walls" by William Carlos Williams
   Text: http://www.writing.upenn.edu/~afilreis/88v/wcw-between-walls.html
   PoemTalk: https://jacket2.org/?q=poemtalk/broken-pieces-poemtalk-1

5. "A Song of Myself 8" by Walt Whitman
   http://www.daypoems.net/poems/1900.html

6. "A Supermarket in California" by Allen Ginsberg
   http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/g_l/ginsberg/onlinepoems.htm
   Video of discussion of "A Supermarket in California"
   http://media.sas.upenn.edu/watch/132549

7. "Incident" by Countee Cullen
   http://allpoetry.com/poem/8497385-Incident-by-Countee_Cullen

8. "If We Must Die" by Claude McCay
   http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/15250

9. "Let Us Describe" by Gertrude Stein
   http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/243164

Days 10 -13

4. *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare (as a reference, just need short excerpts)

5. *Sleep No More*
        Website: http://sleepnomorenyc.com/
        Preview: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RR0MPk69Iao

6. *Scotland, PA*
   Preview: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hiF-ftELdv0

7. "If I Told Him" by Gertrude Stein
   Audio: http://media.sas.upenn.edu/pennsound/authors/Stein/1935/Stein-Gertrude_If-I-Told-Him.mp3

8. Adaptation into dance piece
   http://media.sas.upenn.edu/watch/132556

Teacher Resources

Filreis, Al. "PennSound." University of Pennsylvania, June 13 2013.
        <http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/>

        This is a fantastic website that is full of interesting audio bits and discussions about
        various modern poems. If any teacher would like to do this unit and switch up the poems,
        this is a great place to find excellent work.

Kelly Writer's House." University of Pennsylvania, June 13 2013.
        <http://www.writing.upenn.edu/~wh/>

        This is the website for the Kelly Writer's House on Penn campus. There are tons of
        events and open mic nights that students in the west area should be aware made of if they
        take an interest in poetry.

"PoemTalk: Jacket 2." Kelly Writer's House, June 13 2013.
    < https://jacket2.org/content/poem-talk>

        Great resource for live discussions and close readings of poems. Wonderful way to model
        close readings for students.