

Suggest workshop activities:

My school district has been involved in a professional growth project over the past two years that has centered on differentiated instruction. The activities that follow were adapted from our departmental work during that time and reflect some of the ideology and strategies that were inspired by a number of sources.

An activity that can help students to learn, organize and reinforce ideas is that of a Mind Map. This activity works particularly well as a pre-reading strategy. The consultant can select a poem from the list of required readings or select a poem that he/she knows and that will provide participants with many opportunities to suggest related terms. I have used the Victor Hugo poem “*Le Mendiant*” with this activity and have had success. The first step is to have students (participants) read the title and first lines (stanzas) of a poem to ascertain an initial impact or theme of the poem. This may be done in small groups or as a class. This should be done quickly as an overview. The second step is to read the poem – if it is lengthy, you can read the first portion of it. Then you will begin the creation of the Mind Map. In the center of a large piece of poster board (or a white board) write a word that captures the general theme of the work. You may accompany the words with some type of imagery. Write any associated terms that come to mind and that are related to the center word on the available areas of the paper. A number of these new terms will create subthemes that will generate their own list of associated terms - have participants circle these groups. With Hugo’s poem, words such as “*pauvre, vieux, ciel* and *brave*” lead to such subsets. As the number of terms increases, use arrows to show a link between groups of words. An effective Mind map will wind up resembling a tree with its many branches or even a spider web with its linked threads. The benefits of the Mind Map are that they assist the learner in brainstorming and learning vocabulary, solving problems by seeing many terms / issues and their relationship to each other and summarizing ideas. This type of activity addresses the learning skills of those who are more spatially or visually oriented.

Le Mendiant – V. Hugo

Un **pauvre** homme passait dans le givre et le vent.
Je cognai sur ma vitre ; il s'arrêta devant
Ma porte, que j'ouvris d'une façon civile.
Les ânes revenaient du marché de la ville,
Portant les paysans accroupis sur leurs bâts.
C'était le **vieux** qui vit dans une niche au bas
De la montée, et rêve, attendant, solitaire,
Un rayon du **ciel** triste, un liard de la terre,
Tendant les mains pour l'homme et les joignant pour Dieu.
je lui criai : « Venez vous réchauffer un peu.
Comment vous nommez-vous ? » Il me dit : « Je me nomme
Le pauvre. » Je lui pris la main : « Entrez, **brave** homme. »
Et je lui fis donner une jatte de lait.
Le vieillard grelottait de froid ; il me parlait,

Et je lui répondais, pensif et sans l'entendre.
« Vos habits sont mouillés », dis-je, « il faut les étendre ,
Devant la cheminée. » Il s'approcha du feu.
Son manteau, tout mangé des vers, et jadis bleu,
Étalé largement sur la chaude fournaise,
Piqué de mille trous par la lueur de braise,
Couvrait l'âtre, et semblait un ciel noir étoilé.
Et, pendant qu'il séchait ce haillon désolé
D'où ruisselait la pluie et l'eau des fondrières,
Je songeais que cet homme était plein de prières,
Et je regardais, sourd à ce que nous disions,
Sa bure où je voyais des constellations.

A second activity that can be used with poetry is one called Literary Circles. This activity is done in small groups when one poem is to be studied by everyone in the class. Each group is issued a packet that will contain background information of the poet or era, along with essential vocabulary. There will be sheets in the packet that require the following information to be recorded:

- Title of poem / name of poet
- Journal entries – thoughts while reading the poem
- Parts of poem that I would like to share with group
- A question that I have about the poem
- Essential vocabulary

After a group discussion of the poem, each group will present to the class either a skit based on the poem or role plays representing the feelings expressed in the poem. At the end of the packet will be an assortment of questions such as:

- What if this poem had been told from the viewpoint of...?
- What would have happened if the poem were set in a different time / place...?
- Why do you think the poet...?
- What are the main ideas...?
- If you were to make a film based on the poem, who would play...?

This activity permits for a non-traditional method of analysis that addresses the learning needs of those who are more verbally/linguistic and interpersonally oriented.

An activity that I have used for a number of poems is to have students create a non-verbal representation of an idea or image from the poem. One that brings about some of the most dramatic responses is the poem by Baudelaire entitled “Harmonie du Soir”. The next to final line of the poem has been the source of some of the most intense and original artwork that I have seen. The image of the “sun drowning in its congealed blood” can be quite striking. I require each student to describe the feelings that he/she felt when he/she

created this image. Having created the image and then describing it, students will then perhaps understand the emotions of the poet.

Harmonie du Soir – C. Baudelaire

Voici venir les temps où vibrant sur sa tige
Chaque fleur s'évapore ainsi qu'un encensoir;
Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir;
Valse mélancolique et langoureux vertige!

Chaque fleur s'évapore ainsi qu'un encensoir;
Le violon frémit comme un cœur qu'on afflige;
Valse mélancolique et langoureux vertige!
Le ciel est triste et beau comme un grand reposoir.

Le violon frémit comme un cœur qu'on afflige,
Un cœur tendre, qui hait le néant vaste et noir!
Le ciel est triste et beau comme un grand reposoir;
Le soleil s'est noyé dans son sang qui se fige.

Un cœur tendre, qui hait le néant vaste et noir,
Du passé lumineux recueille tout vestige!
Le soleil s'est noyé dans son sang qui se fige...
Ton souvenir en moi luit comme un ostensor!

Reflection: These activities permit different entry points into the realm of poetry analysis. The non-traditional methods that are described allow for students needs to be met when it comes to the manner in which they learn. There still needs to be a thorough application of the more traditional means of analysis to ensure preparation for the AP exam. After each of these activities, participants should reflect on how these activities permitted students to analyze the poem in question. Which activities lead to better knowledge of vocabulary? (Mind Map) Which activities encouraged students to constantly ask questions about the meaning of the poem? (Literary Circle) Which encouraged students to visualize the feelings and ideas of the poem? (creating images)

Follow-up: One suggestion for teachers to follow up on these articles, especially the three that deal with the essentials of poetic analysis, would be to provide a data base of sources to facilitate student research. Because terms such as “literary and historical context” are used in these articles, students will need some guidance as to where they can compile this information. A list of appropriate web links on a teacher website would be

helpful as well as having the school library put several resources aside for the use of the AP Literature class.

A second suggestion would be to create podcasts based on the information in this Special Focus report. A podcast is a original recording that may include images and web links that can be accessed by students online at their own convenience. A major advantage to podcasts is that they may be played as many times as the student needs to understand the material as well as the ability to access the web links that are embedded in the podcast. I have created podcasts to introduce specific works, authors and movements.

(<http://podcasts.haverfordsd.org/weblog/edweiss/>) The information in the podcast can subsequently lead to class discussion and assessment. Students can assist in the creation your podcasts and then can create their own to demonstrate their comprehension.

Condensing: As I mentioned in the “Setting the Stage” section, using the many highlighted terms of the articles will allow for a more expeditious presentation of the material. These highlighted items can then be discussed briefly to allow the participants to comprehend the gist of the article and then spend extended time with that article at their leisure. Because the consultant usually has so many topics to cover during any workshop, this strategy may permit for a quicker presentation.

Expanding: There are many ways to go into more depth on these topics. In the initial article featuring the “*tableau diachronique*”, the consultant could take the time to discuss each of the “*courant littéraire*”. Discussing these literary eras and their movements will provide students with valuable background information that will help them understand the poetry of that era. Groups of students could be assigned the various movements to present to the rest of the class. Typical ideas and vocabulary from each period could be highlighted.

In the “*guide schématique*” section of the packet, the consultant could select a poem known by the participants and actually fill out sections of the guide together to demonstrate how literary analysis works.

In the article on du Bellay by Patterson, the section “*Les étapes pour analyser un poème*” offers the possibility for expansion. Along with the suggested means of analysis, the consultant could add several differentiated activities such as creating an image based on the poem or writing a letter to the poet.

Submitted by Ed Weiss

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