To the Young Who Want To Live: Creating a Positive Message

Note: This would be a great follow-up to the Looking Upstream lesson plan examining the causes behind gun violence.

PURPOSE
To create and present an anti-violence message for young people in the form of a poem, song, or theatrical piece.

GRADE LEVELS
Upper Middle and High School

CONTENT AREAS
English/Language Arts
Theatre
Music

TIME
45-70 minutes or
One class period

STUDENT OBJECTIVES
- Students will identify poetic devices in a poem.
- Students will interpret a piece of poetry.
- Students will utilize poetic devices to create an effective message.

PSAE/ACT SKILLS
Reading Skills: Main Ideas and Author’s Approach
Writing Skills: Expressing Judgments; Using Language

STANDARDS AND BENCHMARKS
Fine Arts State Goal 26B
English Language Arts State Goals 1A, 1B, 1C, 2A, 3B, 3C, 4B

LEARNING STYLES
Musical/Rhythmic
Bodily/Kinesthetic
Verbal/Linguistic
Interpersonal
Intrapersonal

MATERIALS
"To The Young Who Want to Die" by Gwendolyn Brooks Student Handout
"To The Young Who Want to Die" by Gwendolyn Brooks Teacher Guide
"To The Young Who Want to Die" by Gwendolyn Brooks Sentence Strips

VOCABULARY
Assonance
Personification
Repetition
Alliteration
Symbolism
Metaphor

ASSESSMENT
Positive message poem or song

ACTIVITIES
Anticipatory Set
Ask students to write for a moment, listing as many issues facing teens or kids their age as they are able. Prompt them by asking questions such as: “What issues do you have to deal with at school—from friends, from classmates, from teachers?” “What issues might some students face outside of school?” “What issues might girls face that boys do not or vice versa?”

Allow, but do not require, some students to share their responses. Tell students to set their lists aside to return to at the end of class. They will be using their lists to pick a topic for their Positive Message poem or song.

Lesson:
Define (or review) the following terms and ask students to copy them into their notebooks: assonance, personification, repetition, alliteration, symbolism, metaphor. Students' textbooks should have all of these terms, but you may also wish to use the definitions provided on the teacher's guide copy of the poem handout.

- Pass out sentence strip lines of the Gwendolyn Brooks poem to small groups of students and have them read through the line a few times. Tell students they will be reading their line for the class and to decide how to deliver the line. They should consider the following:
  - What gestures should accompany the reading?
  - What facial expressions would be appropriate?
  - Which words should be emphasized?
  - Where should the volume grow louder or softer?
  - When and how should pauses take place?
- Have students stand in a circle in order of the lines and read them one after another. Be sure to instruct students to listen for the meaning of the poem as a whole and not to talk while other students are reading their lines. The first time through will probably have a lot of stumbling and students might be a little shy so leave time to go through the entire poem multiple times. Briefly debrief after each try using the following focus points:
  - For the first reading, ask students to pay particular attention to the lines immediately before and after their own line and consider how they might change the delivery of the line.
  - For the second reading, ask students to pay attention to particular sounds they notice in the poem.
  - For the third reading, ask students to pick out strong or powerful images in the poem.
  - For the fourth reading, ask students to identify the overall message and meaning of the poem. What is the author trying to communicate? You may also wish to talk about mood or tone if you feel students are ready.
- Have students return to their seats and pass out a copy of the poem as a whole. Use the discussion and their poetic terms notes, they should work to identify the use of these terms in the poem. See the teacher guide of the poem for examples. You may wish to complete this activity in small groups, independently, or as a class, depending on the group of students. The Gradual Release model described in the resource section below also works well.
- Point out to students that Brooks uses the poetic devices in the poem to help make her message powerful and positive to readers and listeners.

Debrief/Assessment:
- Ask students to return to the list of issues facing youth that they made at the beginning of class and choose one that they would like to create a positive message about.
- They should title their poem modeled after Brooks: "To the ________ who want _________." After the title, allow students to write freely, using Brooks as a model if they choose, or deviating from the original poem's format entirely. Some example titles: "To The Girls Who Want Respect" or "To The Schoolboys Who Want To Get High"
- Remind students that Brooks used poetic devices to create her message and that their poems or songs should include the same. Have them refer to the copy of the rubric attached to the bottom of the poem handout to see how they will be assessed.
- Allow students to share their poems.
Variation or possible extension activity: In a theatre class, you may wish to de-emphasize the literary terms and focus instead on the physical and verbal presentation of the poetry. In a music class, you can ask students to sing their initial lines during the opening exercise and instead of writing poems, require students to write songs set to a melody.

RESOURCES:

What Is Gradual Release?
The Gradual Release of Learning Responsibility is an instruction model in which the responsibility for task completion shifts gradually from the teacher to the student, through guided practice of comprehension lessons.

A general format for gradual release:
1. teacher modeling or demonstrating for whole class
2. whole class work with student input
3. small group work with teacher moving around room to help, correct and reinstruct when necessary
4. independent work without assistance

Some teachers choose to explain this process to students using this simple and memorable tool:


Rubric: Positive Message Poem or Song

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Title is modeled after Gwendolyn Brooks and addresses a specific audience</td>
<td>Positive message is communicated strongly and clearly</td>
<td>Poem or Song uses at least two poetic devices correctly to add emphasis to message</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Title is modeled after Gwendolyn Brooks but it is not entirely clear who the intended audience is</td>
<td>Attempt to communicate positive message is partially successful, but lacks clarity</td>
<td>Poem or song uses only one device, or uses two but may be awkward, forced, or contain minor usage errors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>No title or title not related to assignment or Gwendolyn Brooks model</td>
<td>No clear message, or message is negative, contradictory, or confusing</td>
<td>Does not use a poetic device to support the meaning of the poem or song</td>
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Total Points Possible: 15

Suggestions for Extension Activities:

1. Coordinate with an art class and have students create paintings or collages of images that support the meaning of the poems.
2. In a technology class, ask students to turn the poems into visual essays using PowerPoint or similar software.
3. Have students visit other classrooms or younger students to share their positive message poems.
To The Young Who Want To Die
By: Gwendolyn Brooks

Sit down. Inhale. Exhale.
The gun will wait. The lake will wait.
The tall gall in the small seductive vial
will wait will wait:
will wait a week: will wait through April.
You do not have to die this certain day.
Death will abide, will pamper your postponement.
I assure you death will wait. Death has
a lot of time. Death can
attend to you tomorrow. Or next week. Death is
just down the street; is most obliging neighbor;
can meet you any moment.

You need not die today.
Stay here--through pout or pain or peskyness.
Stay here. See what the news is going to be tomorrow.

Graves grow no green that you can use.
Remember, green's your color. You are Spring.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~
Now, it's your turn to create a positive message in the form of a song or poem!
Directions:
➢ Return to the list of issues facing youth that you made at the beginning of class and choose one
that you would like to create a positive message about.
➢ Title your poem modeled after Brooks: "To the______ who want ______". It should be clear
who your intended audience is from the title.
➢ Write your poem or song. Make sure your positive message is clear.
➢ Remember that Brooks used the poetic devices you identified in the poem above to help make
her message powerful. For full credit, you must include two of these poetic devices in your own
work. Refer to the rubric below for how you will be graded on this assignment.

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Total Points Possible: 15

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3. The tall gall in the small seductive vial

4. will wait will wait:

5. will wait a week: will wait through April.

6. You do not have to die this certain day.

7. Death will abide, will pamper your postponement.

8. I assure you death will wait. Death has

9. a lot of time. Death can
10. attend to you tomorrow. Or next week. Death is

11. just down the street; is most obliging neighbor;

12. can meet you any moment.

13. You need not die today.

14. Stay here--through pout or pain or peskiness.

15. Stay here. See what the news is going to be tomorrow.

16. Graves grow no green that you can use.

17. Remember, green's your color. You are Spring.
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