

Writing Anger and Other Intense Emotions: Part 2

By: Saraiya Kanning

Grade Level: 6-12

Time Frame: 60 minutes (although for students who engage deeply in the discussion aspects or in their individual writing, this lesson could easily take a couple of hour-long sessions)

Objective: Students will explore anger and express the dynamics of this emotion using metaphorical language.

Prior Knowledge and Skills: Grade level reading and comprehension, some practice writing metaphors and using sensory language, it is highly suggested that students have gone through [Writing Anger and Other Intense Emotions: Part 1](#).

Required Materials: white board and markers, paper and pencil

Literary Model: [Ode to Anger by Marilyn Chin](#)

Sequence of Activities:

Introduction (10 min):

Engage students in an open-ended conversation on anger using the below questions. Remind them these questions don't have "right" answers. All ideas/explorations are valid and each of us will have a different perspective on anger.

Discuss the questions as a large group and write their ideas to each of the three questions as a list across three columns, have students discuss in small groups, OR invite them to quietly journal their thoughts and share their papers with you anonymously (no names written down) to be read aloud:

1. What makes you angry?
2. Should anger be stopped? Why? How?
3. If your anger took the form of an animal, what would it be?

Read and Discuss Literary Model (10 min):

Read the below poem twice. Students can volunteer or be asked to read aloud. For the second reading, ask students to highlight or underline moments where anger appears as a part of an animal.

Ode to Anger

Marilyn Chin

Soak in a hot bath;
arrange my futuristic hair,
then, the futon & the cushioned tatami.
Cut orchids, cut fruit.

Set the table for plenty,
(but there is only one of me).
And here you come—
a cricket's dance in the woods—
in a fog-colored zoot suit.
Your eyes are red & bleary.
I am practicing *good purity*.
I do not get angry.

But here comes my father with the tiger's claw.
He paces and frets; I get no rest.
The caged animal must be released.

Here comes my mother with the serpent's touch.
I know the *dim mak*: the touch of death,
I know the softness of the temples,
the groin, the heart.

Here come my sisters with the lizard's tongue
to expel the secret in a moment's hiss.
But they are slow on their haunches.
I shall strike first.

The weir-basket was a snare;
the fish within were dying.
You promised me fresh fish.
You promised unconditional love and providence.

Here comes my brother with the ox's heart
to explain the world in a plum's pit.
He is not your kind.
You don't understand his plight;
nor does he your fomenting silence.

Tiger's claw, serpent's touch, lizard's tongue, ox's heart.
The caged animal is released.
I believe in the touch of life.
I shall keep my secret always.
Although you have lost your way,
you have never forsaken me.
you have been whole.
you have been good.

Discuss the Poem (10 min):

Take a moment to grow engagement with the poem using the below question and inviting students to share aloud:

What parts of this poem interest or confuse you?

Are there any images or moments that you feel are especially vivid or powerful?

Where do you see anger appearing in this poem?

Remind students they don't need to "understand" the poem or come away with some easily packaged meaning. They can relate to a phrase or a line, a single image, anything that catches their attention, gives them a fleeting feeling, or otherwise piques their curiosity or confusion. And...it is okay to feel confused. The poem does have an abstracted and fragmented quality, as many poems do.

Collaborative Writing Prompts (10-15 min):

This activity will prepare students for the individual writing prompt.

As a class, make a very long list of emotions. Practice being specific. For example, there are many types of anger. There is rage or mild annoyance or fury. If you say, "I am full of rage" that says so much more than just "I am full of anger."

Below are some emotions to get you started. Can you make them more specific? Can you add more emotions to this list? After making the initial list, turn each of those emotions into a metaphor by comparing it to an animal, force or element of nature, landscape, or object. For example, "I am the rage of a thousand rhinos charging a lion."

Sad

Happy

Angry

Tired

Afraid

Tip: If students are unfamiliar with metaphorical writing, you might take some time before this lesson in the days prior [to do this lesson](#). Although written for K-5, this linked lesson plan can be modified slightly for older ages.

Individual Writing Prompt (10-15 min):

Below are two prompts for individual writing. You can present both as options or have students do both prompts and extend the lesson over two or more days. The prompts do have the potential to build off each other and since anger is such a complicated topic, having two chances to write opens the door for deeper, more thoughtful writing.

Prompt 1:

Write your own ode to an emotion. Choose an emotion that people usually try to hide or control—like fear, envy, shame, or confusion. Or pick an emotion from the big class poem.

Guidelines:

1. Use strong imagery and sensory language to show how this emotion feels in the body or mind.
2. Use a metaphor! Like Marilyn Chin, you could compare that emotion to an animal, or a series of animals. Chin compared the anger of her family members to a tiger, an ox's heart, a lizard, and a serpent. Maybe the emotion you write about looks like a different animal when it shows up in the different people in your life. How does it show up in you?
3. End with a moment of insight or transformation—what does this emotion teach you? What has this emotion given you? In the end, was it a strength or a weakness? Did it have a power, a purpose?

Prompt 2:

Pick an emotion from the big class list. Write a letter to that emotion. Begin it as you would a letter: "Dear _____". Now write directly to that emotion. Tell it about yourself, tell it what you think about it, ask it questions. Describe it using metaphors or sensory language (how does that emotion taste or smell or sound?) Write at least four lines and end with one question that you are asking that emotion. If you want, the entire letter can be questions.

Optional Sharing or Art (10 min or continue in a follow-up session):

Save 10 minutes at the end of class for volunteers to share their poems. Writing about anger or any intense emotion means being vulnerable, so it's also okay if students aren't comfortable sharing. Another option is to draw or create a representation of this emotion using the metaphors that appear in their poem or in Chin's poem.

Note:

It is 100% OKAY if the poems that come out of this lesson are short or simple. It's okay if students struggle with metaphorical language. This lesson can feel like a challenge and a bit of a push for many students. Let this lesson be a tiny step on the journey towards the larger goal of growing their skills of expression.