

## **A Book By Its Cover: Poetry, Image, and Dust Jacket Design**

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**Grade Level:** University

**Time Frame:** 90 minutes

**Objective:** Students will use imagery in a poetry collection to create a hypothetical dust jacket design.

**Prior Knowledge and Skills:** None required.

**Required Materials:** Physical copies of poetry collections, preferably cloth editions without dust jackets; examples of existing cover designs for poetry collections; small cutout strips of paper.

### **Sequence of Activities**

**Introduction:** 10 minutes

Begin by asking students:

- What makes poetry distinct from prose? How might these distinctions become apparent in a cover design for a poetry collection?
- What design elements might you expect to see in a cover for a poetry collection?

Show students examples of actual cover designs for poetry collections.

Ask students:

- What do these covers communicate about the contents of each collection?
- How does each cover target a particular audience? How do the audiences for these collections differ?

**Writing Activity<sup>1</sup>:** 30 minutes

Give students a selection of poetry collections (around 10 more books than there are students; the books should preferably be cloth editions without dust jackets). Ask each student to choose a single collection.

Explain the poetic definition of *imagery* as *sensory information* (that is, an image in a poem can be visual, but it can also be aural, olfactory, etc.) Give students time (around 5 minutes) to page through their chosen books and write down three examples of poetic imagery.

Share images as a class. Which images are most surprising or thought-provoking?

Next, discuss *abstraction* in poetry: the presence of intangible ideas like love, hope, anger, history, etc. Tell students poets frequently discuss the abstract in terms of concrete imagery (like those we've already discussed). Why might this be?

Distribute a cutout slip of paper to each student. Ask students to look through their chosen collections again and write one abstraction that they find on their slips of paper.

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<sup>1</sup> This writing activity is derived from the exercise "Translations: Idea to Image" by Carol Muske in *The Practice of Poetry*, eds. Robin Behn and Chase Twichell. New York: HarperCollins, 1992.

Collect the strips. Tell students that you will read out each word in turn. As you read each word, students should write down the first thing that they “see” in their mind’s eye. (This image may make immediate sense in the context of the abstraction, or it may not; unique or surprising combinations are encouraged.)

Read out the words on the strips of paper, allowing a few seconds between each word for students to write down the images they “see.” (Keep this activity moving at a brisk pace: pause for no more than 10 seconds between each word, so students don’t have time to think their way to expected images.)

Discuss the results. What images occurred to students? Which are most surprising? Which connections seem as though they might merit further exploration?

**Drafting:** 40 minutes

Give students time to begin working on cover designs for their chosen collections. These designs may incorporate some ideas from the previous discussion, or they may not: the design is up to the student and her interactions with the poetry in the collection.

**Closing:** 10 minutes

Share drafts with the class.