

Title: Body Part Rhapsody—Teaching Metaphor to Young Writers

By: Matisse Rosen

Grade level: Kindergarten-3rd grade

Time frame: 30 minutes

Objective: To make key aspects of poetry—including metaphors and similes, image, engagement with the five senses—come alive for early writers. To coax quiet or frustrated poets out of their shells and to get them excited about generating language through improvisation and play. To emphasize the expressive and poetic qualities that can emerge through the spontaneous spoken language of students.

Prior knowledge and skills: This lesson plan is intended for students with very little prior comfort with poetry, or written communication in general. Students don't even have to know how to write down their own poems heading into this workshop—I found great group poems emerged when I simply transcribed the expressive and spontaneous language that emerged from students' mouths as they were rhapsodizing on the fly.

Required materials: Bodies, voices, two large pieces of paper for transcribing brainstorming and writing class poems, individual pencils and paper for each student.

Literary Model: This lesson plan borrows its comparison teaching framework from exercises outlined in *Beyond Words: Writing Poems with Children*, a text by Elizabeth McKim and Judith Steinbergh.

Note: I used this lesson plan in a 3rd grade virtual residency amidst the ongoing pandemic in Fall 2021. The students were together in class, but I zoomed in to meet with them. After realizing that most students were reading and writing behind grade level as a result of the almost year and a half they had missed of in-person school, I began adapting lesson plans to suit the needs of early readers and writers. Most students were at kinder-1st grade levels.

Sequence of activities:

Framing Comparisons (5 min):

Script: Imagine I got stuck in a storm on my way to school. And I really wanted to show you what being in that storm was like. The storm was really loud, but that in itself doesn't show you that much. Saying the storm was loud doesn't help you to see or feel it.

But what if I say the storm sounded like an empty stomach. Then, what do you see? What do you hear? Through the image of a stomach gurgling, maybe you get a sense for how thunder was rumbling in the sky.

Comparisons help us to use our senses. Comparing a storm to a stomach helps people to experience the storm, as if they were right there with me. In poems, try to make

comparisons that surprise the reader, that make them feel close to the experience you are trying to share with them.

Warm-up Rhapsody (15 min):

Script: Now we are going to try something together to practice using comparisons. We're going to make comparisons by looking at and feeling different parts of our bodies. Ok, here's what we're going to do:

- Hold your hands up in front of your face, and really look at them. Wiggle your fingers, stare at your palms, see what it feels like to open and close them

Directions for Instructor: After forty-five seconds of looking at and playing with your hands, begin spouting off comparisons while-making dramatic gestures. For example, you might say something like:

- *Oh my! My fingers are ten squiggly snakes*
- *My hands are moon caves*
- *My fingers are sewing needles*
- *My hands are craters reaching for the sun.*

Then, ask students what they see when looking at their hands and encourage them to shout out answers begin shouting out answers. Improvise, moving between transcribing the lines they are generating and adding your own lines to fill any protracted silences.

This part of the exercise should be really lively and generative! After you've finished your brainstorming session, read back what they've written, making sure to emphasize the parts you think have energy, strength, etc..

Creating a Class Body Poem-Drawing (10 min):

Directions for Instructor: On a large piece of paper, draw a simple empty outline of a human figure. Explain to the class that now you are going to use the same strategy, only this time you are going to fill in lines on this stick figure's body to create a collective poem-drawing.

Repeat exercise above by moving through different zones of the body on the drawing.

Once the exercise is complete, read the poem back to the class and say **YOU WROTE THIS!** If desired, this lesson plan can pair well with an additional art project, in which each student copies down the group poem-drawing, only with their own artistic flair and style.