



Comparison Odes with Pablo Neruda

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Grade Level: 1-6

Time Frame: 1 hour

Objective: Students will use observations of everyday objects to create writing that is rich in metaphor and simile; students will use their knowledge of metaphor and simile to write odes—"poems that praise something"—as a class and on their own.

Prior Knowledge and Skills: None required, although this lesson works best when students have already spent some time honing their awareness of sensory detail.

Required Materials: Printouts of Pablo Neruda's poem "[Ode To My Socks](#)."

Sequence of Activities

Introduction: 20 minutes

Introduce poetic comparisons to the class. Ask students what the sky outside looks like, what the grass looks like, etc. Encourage students to try out all kinds of comparisons, and especially encourage "strange" comparisons (Kenneth Koch: "If the grass seemed to them like an Easter egg they should say so").¹

Suggest that students compare something in the house to something out of the house, something big to something small, something imaginary to something real, something human to something not human, something warm to something cold, etc.²

Then, as a class, read "[Ode to my Socks](#)" (or an excerpt, depending on grade level). Read the poem once aloud, and then have students work on it with a pencil.

Ask students to: Circle two lines or phrases that "make a picture" in their minds.

Circle all the comparisons they can find. Ask them to pick their three favorites. Why are these so interesting?

Writing Activity: 30 minutes

Explain to the class that an ode is a poem that praises something. What might we usually praise? Why is Neruda's poem in praise of socks so startling?

¹ Koch, Kenneth. *Wishes, Lies, and Dreams*. New York: HarperCollins, 1970, 9.

² *Ibid.*, 9-10.

Tell students that they will be working on a collaborative ode to something in the classroom. In order to do so, they will have to observe the object very scientifically, in a great deal of detail. What might they compare the object to? On the board, brainstorm comparisons. Encourage students to incorporate smell, sound, taste, and touch as well as sight in their comparisons.

Each student will write one line of the collaborative poem. Tell students that their lines must contain a comparison of the object to something else. Suggest that the comparisons might constitute either a description of the object or a memory about the object.

When the collaborative poem has been read aloud, tell students that they can write their own odes. What do they want to praise? They can praise anything from a math book to their mother's hair. Tell students that the only "rule" is that each line must include a comparison.

Closing Activity: 10 minutes

Share student writing with the class.

Student Writing Samples

Ode to a Towel

Towel, feeling like the hairs on a baby eating up and sensing a weird taste. It smells like fish. It looks like a fuzzy piece of paper. Finally, it sounds like deep breathing.

- J.D. W., grade 3

I love you nametag

When I got my first nametag

it looked like garbage

It smelled like paper

It sounded like air

It tasted like nothing

It felt like the road.

It had all these things, and

all the things had it.

- Emily M., grade 2