

How This Machine Works

by Rachel Mindell

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Objectives: Students will practice figurative language using two poems by Ada Limón as models.

Education Level: Junior High, High School

Genre: Poetry

Format: Lesson Plan

Time Frame: 50-60 minutes

Materials: Paper, pencils, print out or overhead projection of literary model

Literary Model: [“The Quiet Machine” and “Downhearted”](#) by Ada Limón.

Introduction (5 minutes):

Introduce the topic for today’s lesson: the power and potential figurative language offers. Introduce the poet [Ada Limón](#) and display or pass out a copy of her two poems.

Activity (10 minutes):

Introduce metaphors, similes, and personification. You can use the second page of [this worksheet](#) to help.

Have students participate in reading the two poems aloud. You could also pair students and have them take turns reading.

You may wish to show them [this video](#), from 15:45 to about 20:10. In it, Ada Limón discusses her relationship with figurative language and reads “Downhearted.”

Idea Building (5 minutes):

Ask students to write a metaphor, simile, and use personification about: 1. Silence 2. The heart. In total, students should create six sentences, three for silence and three for the heart.

This could also be a group activity or completed in pairs.

Ask students to share and write their examples on the board.

Lesson Prep (5 minutes):

Tell students they will be creating a poem that uses figurative language. They can model their poem after a poem by Ada Limón, focusing on either silence or the heart. They could also explore both in a single poem. If these themes sparked another idea, they should feel free to write about it, as long as they use figurative language.

Share the following details:

Instructions

- Focus your poem either on quiet or on the heart. If you choose the heart, start with “the hard part.”
- Try to use as many metaphors and similes as you can.
- Repeat one word several times, like “wails and wails and wails.”

Other ideas

- Personify quiet or the heart. Make them into a character doing things, like watching TV.
- Include a list, or give the poem the quality of a list.
- Ask questions.
- Zoom way in, like this passage: “loops and elongates in the chest, in the diaphragm, in the alveoli.”

Writing (10-20 minutes):

Encourage students to write actively and write past the first time they think they might be “done.”

Sharing (10-15 minutes):

Have students share what they’ve written (voluntarily) with one another and/or the class.

Extensions:

- Share other work by Ada Limón like this video: [vocalisms #37: Ada Limón](#)
- Create a small unit around the work of Ada Limón, in combination with this lesson on [Writing a New National Anthem](#)
- Incorporate other poetry about [silence](#) or the [heart](#).
- Build in science instruction related to how humans make sound/silence and the human heart (or the sound/silence and heart of other creatures)

- Create a group poem with a line or two from all students
- Have students work with a partner or in small groups to create their poem