How This Machine Works
by Rachel Mindell

Contributor: Rachel Mindell

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


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