

Odes to Ordinary Things

by Judy Rose Sensibar

Educational Level: Middle School and High School

Genre: Poetry and Spoken Word

Time Frame: 40 minutes

Objective: Students will learn how personification and strong verbs elevate a poem. They will take in two poems which use personification and active verbs. These examples will show students how to use personification and verbs in their own odes to “ordinary things.”

Prior Knowledge and Skills: None

Materials: Copies of the poem, “The Patience of Ordinary Things” and/or a way to project the poem for everyone to see; a way to project the YouTube video of Sara Kaye reciting her poem, “Hands.” Paper and pencils.

Literary Model: “The Patience of Ordinary Things” by Pat Schneider, “Hands” by Sarah Kaye: https://youtu.be/kqCMHcdYR_E?si=9p22i46YowFzGsMQ

Sequence of activities:

1. Ask students about their favorite things. Then ask about what objects they use every day but often overlook.
2. Help them define **personification**: giving human qualities to inanimate objects.
3. Read Pat Schneider’s poem:

The Patience of Ordinary Things

It is a kind of love, is it not?
How the cup holds the tea,
How the chair stands sturdy and foursquare,
How the floor receives the bottoms of shoes
Or toes. How soles of feet know
Where they’re supposed to be.
I’ve been thinking about the patience
Of ordinary things, how clothes
Wait respectfully in closets
And soap dries quietly in the dish,
And towels drink the wet
From the skin of the back.
And the lovely repetition of stairs.
And what is more generous than a window?

By Pat Schneider 1934–2020

4. Have students point out examples of personification:

Answers include: How the cup “lovingly” holds the tea; the floor “receives” the bottoms of shoes or toes; how the soles of feet “know” where to be; “the patience” of ordinary things; clothes “wait respectfully”; soap dries “quietly”; towels “drink”; “generosity” of a window.

5. Before playing the second example, Sarah Kaye’s “Hands,” ask students, as they listen, to write down at least five examples of what hands can do, and which verbs Kaye chooses.

Listen to Sarah Kaye perform “Hands”:

https://youtu.be/kqCMHcdYR_E?si=9p22i46YowFzGsMQ

Answers include: “hold” other hands; “tickle” piano keys; “dribble” a basketball; “grip” a pencil; “mold” poetry; “interlock” like a zipper; “pound.”

6. Ask students to look at their original list of ordinary things. Encourage them to choose one or more objects to write their odes about, first listing what this object does (verbs) and what human qualities they can assign it (personification).
7. Eventually, the lists will grow into lines and poems will emerge!