

Personifying Nature

By: Judy Rose Sensibar

Education level: Upper Elementary to Middle School

Genre: Poetry

Time frame: One hour

Objective: To help us connect with nature by imbuing it with human qualities; to learn how to enhance our poems with this kind of specific figurative language

Prior knowledge and skills: Know what a daffodil is! (Be sure to explain and show examples of this flower, as it does not grow in Tucson). Define vocabulary words from the poem students may not know: margin, bay, sprightly, jocund, pensive, solitude.

Required materials: Pencils, paper; books and/or magazines with photographs and drawings of flora and fauna; ability and equipment to stream YouTube videos

Literary model: *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud* by William Wordsworth

Sequence of activities:

1. Bring in a bouquet of daffodils. Pass around and let students smell them. Explain how they bloom in big fields in the spring the way our poppies can, or the way prickly pear spreads out and grows in our desert. (5 minutes)

2. Introduce personification: giving human emotions and qualities to something that isn't human. Start with the title of the poem, *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud* and ask how a cloud could be lonely. Then list lines of the poem on the board where the daffodils are described as if they are human, and have students pick out the words that are used to personify the flowers and underline them together: (5 minutes)

Fluttering and dancing in the breeze
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee

3. Play these two versions of the poem. Play the one full of photography and imagery first. Have students write down their favorite images. (5 minutes)

I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud by William Wordsworth
<https://youtu.be/tBjKga2FySY?si=vjhamGk3LB7grODt>

Then play: https://youtu.be/XfM2RB9OzBo?si=FFvg_jS_oV6VUx-J

Give context to the second video by saying how this young man, J'Kobe Wallace, was North Dakota's 2015 Poetry Out Loud champion. Describe how Poetry Out Loud is a contest that encourages the nation's youth to learn about great poetry, and how this program helps students master public speaking skills, build self-confidence and learn about literature.

After he reads, ask students how the same poem can feel so different. Talk about how a person's delivery and recitation can influence how the poem is understood. (5 minutes)

Teachers may want to have a copy of the poem for students. The text is pasted below:

I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud

by William Wordsworth

(1770-1850)

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced; but they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
A poet could not but be gay,
In such a jocund company:
I gazed—and gazed—but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

4. Now that students have heard this very old fashioned, famous poem, tell the class it's their turn to pick an aspect of nature to personify. Pass out books and magazines and invite them to browse through them, and to linger over images that appeal to them. (10 minutes)

5. Invite student to start by finishing the prompt, "I am a _____."

Encourage students to remember the five senses to evoke more figurative language. How would the animal, plant, or weather phenomenon look, feel and sound? What would it taste and smell like? Also, prompt students to use action words so there is motion and movement in the poem. (25 minutes)

Once students have worked on their own, if they need inspiration, close by offering these examples by 7th and 8th grade Safford students: (5 minutes)

Spider

I am a spider,
misunderstood and feared,
I am beautiful, divine.
Spinning webs,
works of art.
Despised,
people hate
what they can't
understand.
An outcast artist,
an eight-legged angel.
- Adela

Pink Lotus

I open my eyes and analyze my surroundings
I am in water, I am about 12 to 18 inches deep
So, I grow and grow until I am above the surface
I take a few deep breaths of fresh air
I enjoy the quiet atmosphere
While my brothers and sisters awaken
They start reaching to the sky
I close my eyes to enjoy the environment I grew up in
- Kimberlise

Smallest One

I am a hummingbird
Beautiful and iridescent
Free and wild
Colorful, humming, and fast
A beautiful bird with fast, humming wings
I am a Treeswift.
- *Nyla*

An Otter's Night

As day turns to night
My friends and playfulness
Start to go away.
I start to get tired as
I paddle on home,
With my hungriness
Growing bigger and bigger.
Once I get home
I cook myself some dinner
And have a feast.
As I anchor myself
So I can float on the water
I start to close my eyes for a
Good night's sleep
- *Trey*

BONUS

Other angles to help students generate a poem:

- Encourage students to wonder, if they were a plant or an animal, what would they be?
- Why is that animal or plant appealing to them?

- What qualities does it have that reflects their personality?
- Ask students to write from that plant or animal's point of view.