

Voice, Speaker, and Audience

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Grade Level: Middle-High School

Time Frame: 45 - 60 minutes

Objective: Students will draw inspiration from Marcus Amakur's "Give Yourself Some Flowers" to write poems that speak to a specific audience, using second person (you) voice. Students will think about the effect changing point of view and voice has on their writing.

Prior Knowledge and Skills: Grade level reading and comprehension

Required Materials: Paper, pencil, and "Give Yourself Some Flowers" by Marcus Amakur

Sequence of Activities:

1. Welcome and Introduction (10-15 minutes)

The teaching artist can use this time to introduce themselves, what inspires them to write poetry, and perhaps even share some writing of their own. Students can also introduce themselves. In addition to sharing their names, students can answer/share their response to the following (or another fun question the teaching artist invents):

Imagine yourself as an animal, object, or color.

What do you have in common with that animal, object, or color?

Following introductions, facilitate a relaxed, informal, low stakes discussion on the following question, reminding students there is no such thing as a "right/wrong" answer. We're sharing our opinions, in so far as we are comfortable to do so. These questions set students up to think about voice, speaker, and audience in a poem:

If a poem is a conversation, who do you imagine could be at the other end?

Who do we write poems for?

2. Literary Model and Discussion (10 minutes)

The teaching artist can share the following before inviting a student to read the below poem aloud:

Today's lesson is all about voice, speaker, and audience. The audience is who you imagine reading your poems. There are so many people for whom you might choose to write. Maybe your audience is all of humanity. Maybe your audience is more specific, like a letter to a family member or even to yourself. You can play with your voice by changing the point of view. For example, maybe you use the word "I" in a poem, or you might instead use the word "you" as if you were talking directly to your reader. In some cases, you might even use the word "we", as if a group of people are speaking through the poem. These are just a few ways to change your voice.

In a moment, we'll read a poem that uses the word "you" and "yourself", as if the poet were speaking directly to the reader. This gives the poem a very personal feeling, as if you and the poet had a close relationship. It might also feel as if the poet wrote a letter specifically for you.

I love this poem because it's a reminder to rest, take care of your body, and take care of your mental health. When I read this poem, it feels kind, full of empathy, and warm advice. In my opinion, this special feeling is created by the voice and the way the poet speaks to me directly using the pronoun "you" throughout the poem.

Read the following poem aloud: ["Give Yourself Some Flowers"](#) by Marcus Amakur

Questions for Discussion:

How do you feel about this poem? What was your reaction?

How would the poem change if the poet used "I/me" instead of "you"?
For example, "In the beginning God gave my body a checklist."

3. Individual Writing (10-15 minutes)

In a quiet, focused atmosphere, perhaps with each student finding their own special place to write (a corner, the school garden, or simply at their desk with some folders up for privacy), invite students to dive into their own writing. Below is the full prompt:

Write a poem to someone and use the pronoun "you." Imagine this poem is like a personal letter. Use the phrase "Keep in mind" throughout the poem. It might look something like this:

Keep in mind

Write at least six lines and break them up however you like. Try reading your poem out loud to help you decide where to break your lines. But remember, there's no special rule for line breaking, which means there is no wrong way. You are free, free, free to experiment.

4. Sharing (15-20 minutes)

Never force sharing, that's my personal philosophy. Writing and art can be intensely personal and if the atmosphere is right, students will decide if it's timely to share. So this section is simply to create an inviting space for those who do feel ready to share. You can invite students to read their own poems, have a friend read it for them, or even have the teacher read it for them.

Alternatively, students could share their answer to the following question:

What are two important things you would want the reader of your poetry, or art, to know?

5. Illustration and Extension Activities

If the teaching artist wished to extend the lesson over multiple days, they could use the below prompts:

1. Write a poem using "we" as the voice. "We" could be any group of people or entities. "We" could be an entire family, a group of friends, or even a flock of birds speaking. Who will be speaking in your poem? You might need to use other pronouns throughout the poem in addition to "we." Other pronouns you might need to use include: "us" and "our."
2. Pick a few lines or a stanza from "Give Yourself Some Flowers" to illustrate.

Samples of Student Writing From this Lesson Plan:

Chyenne

You Are Who You Are

Keep in mind everybody's
different but you got
to choose how your
differences
keep in mind you
may feel like you'll
never be good enough
for some reason
keep in mind
you'll always
be good enough
for yourself
keep in mind
there are no instructions
on how you live
your life but
just keep in mind
you are who you are
and no one can
change that except
you

Christopher

You Can Be Anything

You can be anything.
You can be a cloud
floating in the sky.
You can be a star
shining so bright.
You can be a hero
Soaring in the sky.

It doesn't matter
as long as you're happy.
Whatever you pick
you can always change.
You can be anything.

You will make mistakes,
we all do.
But you are going to fix those mistakes.
Your family believes

in you.
You can be anything.

You only have
one life.
But we have
multiple chances.
Use them wisely,
and have fun.
You can be anything.