Alone

Maya Angelou (1928-2014)

Lying, thinking
Last night
How to find my soul a home
Where water is not thirsty
And bread loaf is not stone
I came up with one thing
And I don't believe I'm wrong
That nobody,
But nobody
Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.

There are some millionaires
With money they can't use
Their wives run round like banshees
Their children sing the blues
They've got expensive doctors
To cure their hearts of stone.
But nobody
No, nobody
Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.

Now if you listen closely
I'll tell you what I know
Storm clouds are gathering
The wind is gonna blow
The race of man is suffering
And I can hear the moan,
'Cause nobody,
But nobody
Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.

classroom activities

The following activities and questions are designed to help your students use their noticing skills to move through the poem and develop their thinking skills so they understand its meaning with confidence, using what they've noticed as evidence for their interpretations. Read more about the framework upon which these activities are based.

1. **Warm-up:** Listen to Dr. Maya Angelou speak about kindness in the video "Be a Rainbow in Someone Else's Cloud."
2. **Before Reading the Poem:** Watch this video of Labi Siffre singing "My Song." What lyrics or phrases stick out to you? Why?
3. **Reading the Poem:** Silently read the poem "Alone" by Maya Angelou. What do you notice about the poem? Note any words or phrases that stand out to you or any questions you might have.
4. **Listening to the Poem:** Enlist two volunteers and listen as the poem is read aloud twice. Write down any additional words and phrases that stand out to you. Or you may opt to listen to a reading of the poem.
5. **Small Group Discussion:** Share what you noticed about the poem with a small group of students. What connections do you notice between the resources from the beginning of class and the poem? Why? What differences do you notice? What do you think of the line "How to find my soul a home"? Why?
6. **Whole Class Discussion:** How would you describe the speaker? Why? What do you think of the repetition "Nobody, but nobody / Can make it out here alone"? Do you agree or disagree with these lines? Why?
7. **Extension for Grades 7-8:** Write a creative response to the poem, in particular the sixth stanza of the poem that begins with the lines "Now if you listen closely / I'll tell you what I know …" Your response might be a letter to the poet or someone of your choice or a poem of your own.
8. **Extension for Grades 9-12:** (*Teachers, we suggest printing out copies of the poems "Still I Rise" and "On the Pulse of Morning" before class. You can also find audio of "Phenomenal Woman."*) Join with a partner or small group and read or listen to more of Angelou's work. For each reading, work with your partner or small group to take turns reading the poem aloud and sharing what you liked and noticed about each poem. As a class, discuss the themes that stood out most to you. Why did they stand out? What can we learn from Angelou's work?

Disclosure

by Camisha L. Jones

A poem about being hard of hearing

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I’m sorry, could you repeat that. I’m hard of hearing.
To the cashier
To the receptionist
To the insistent man asking directions on the street

I’m sorry, I’m hard of hearing. Could you repeat that?
At the business meeting
In the writing workshop
On the phone to make a doctor’s appointment

I’m-sorry-I’m-sorry-I’m-so-sorry-I’m-hard-for-the-hearing

Repeat.

           Repeat.

Hello, my name is Sorry
To full rooms of strangers
I’m hard to hear

I vomit apologies everywhere
They fly on bat wings
towards whatever sound beckons

I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I am so, so sorry
           and repeating
                       and not hearing

Dear (again)
I regret to inform you

I       am

here
```

Assignments

1. Warm-up: Look closely at the comic “If You Want To Say Thank You, Don’t Say Sorry” by Yao Xiao. What do you notice in this comic? What words, phrases or repetitions stand out to you? Why?

2. Before Reading the Poem (think-pair-share): Join with a partner and discuss what it might mean to disclose something. Share your answers with the class.

3. Read the poem “Disclosure” silently. What do you notice about the poem? Annotate for any words or phrases that stand out to you or any questions you might have.

4. Listening to the Poem (enlist two volunteers to read the poem aloud): Listen as the poem is read aloud twice, and write down any additional words and phrases that stand out to you. Or, you might opt to listen to the audio of the poet reading the poem.

5. Small-group Discussion: Share what you noticed in the poem with a small group of students. Based on the details you just shared with your small group, how does the comic you viewed at the beginning of class relate to the poem? What might the significance of the poem's title be?

6. Whole-class Discussion: How does the poem change at the end? What do you make of the last lines: "I am / here"? Why might the poem end without punctuation? Read the "About This Poem " section. After reading this, what new insights do you have or what else can you say about this poem?

7. Extension: Read more poems by poets who identify as Deaf or hard of hearing. With a partner, choose a poet to read. Prepare to give a class presentation in which you'll share a poem by your selected poet and share a brief biography of this poet.

8. Extension: Research how your own community offers support to the local Deaf or hard of hearing community. What might your community do to enhance accessibility

Hope is the thing with feathers

Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)

Hope is the thing with feathers

That perches in the soul,

And sings the tune without the words,

And never stops at all,

And sweetest in the gale is heard;

And sore must be the storm

That could abash the little bird

That kept so many warm.

I've heard it in the chillest land,

And on the strangest sea;

Yet, never, in extremity,

It asked a crumb of me.

Classroom Activities

The following activities and questions are designed to help your students use their noticing skills to move through the poem and develop their thinking skills so they understand its meaning with confidence, using what they've noticed as evidence for their interpretations.

Warm-up: (*Teachers, before class starts, give students two different versions of the title with fill-in-the blank slips. One being "Hope is _____" and the second, _____ is the thing with feathers.*") Fill in the blank. Then, read your line *) to your class. What stands out to you about these lines?

1. **Before Reading the Poem:** Look closely at this image of birds flying. What do you see? What stands out to you? What emotions does this image evoke? Why?

2. **Reading the Poem:** Silently read the poem "Hope is the thing with feathers" (254) by Emily Dickinson. What do you notice about the poem? Note any words or phrases that stand out to you or any questions you might have.
3. **Listening to the Poem:** Enlist two volunteers and listen as the poem is read aloud twice. Write down any additional words and phrases that stand out to you. You might enjoy this video from the Adrian Brinkerhoff Poetry Foundation of the poem being performed.
4. **Small Group Discussion:** Share what you noticed about the poem with a small group of students. Based on the details you just shared with your small group and the resources from the beginning of class, how does the title inform your reading of the poem?
5. **Whole Class Discussion:** What is the extended metaphor in the poem? How does this metaphor deepen your understanding of the themes in the poem? (*Teachers, you can find more information on extended metaphors from NCTE.*)
6. **Extension for Grades 7-8:** Take out the lines that you wrote at the beginning of class. Swap lines with a partner and try writing an extended metaphor of your own that incorporates the language from your partner's line or an idea of your own. Share your writing with the class.
7. **Extension for Grades 9-12:** Read more about Emily Dickinson and find more poems by the poet. Work with your teacher and school to participate in an Emily Dickinson day. Bring at least one Dickinson poem that you enjoy and write at least one discussion question. Share your poem and question during classroom activities. Share what you like about this poem and what Dickinson's language can teach us.

*) **The line** is a fundamental unit in verse, carrying meaning both horizontally across the page and vertically from one line to the next.
The following definition of the term line is reprinted from A Poet's Glossary by Edward Hirsch.

A unit of meaning, a measure of attention. The line is a way of framing poetry. All verse is measured by lines. On its own, the poetic line immediately announces its difference from everyday speech and prose. It creates its own visual and verbal impact; it declares its self-sufficiency. Paul Claudel called the fundamental line "an idea isolated by blank space." I would call it "words isolated by blank space," because the words can go beyond the idea, they can plunge deeper than thought. Adam Zagajewski says, "Tragedy and joy collide in every line."

"Poetry is the sound of language organized in lines," James Longenbach asserts in The Art of the Poetic Line (2008). "More than meter, more than rhyme, more than images or alliteration or figurative language, line is what distinguishes our experience of poetry as poetry, rather than some other kind of writing." There are one-line poems called monostiches, which are timed to deliver a single poignancy.

An autonomous line in a poem makes sense on its own, even if it is a fragment or an incomplete sentence. It is end-stopped and completes a thought. A line carries the meaning over from one line to the next. Whether end-stopped or enjambed, however, the line in a poem moves horizontally, but the rhythm and sense also drive it vertically, and the meaning continues to accrue as the poem develops and unfolds.

In “Summa Lyrica: A Primer of the Commonplaces in Speculative Poetry” (1992), Allen Grossman proposes a theory of the three modular versions of the line in English:

1. Less than ten syllables more or less.

2. Ten syllables more or less.

3. More than ten syllables more or less.

The ten-syllable, or blank verse, line provides a kind of norm in English poetry. William Wordsworth (1770–1850) and Robert Frost (1874–1963) both perceived that the blank verse line could be used to give the sensation of actual speech—a person engaging others. “The topic of the line of ten is conflict,” Grossman says, which is why it has been so useful in drama, where other speakers are always nearby. It has a feeling of mutuality. In the line of less than ten syllables, then, there is a sense that something has been taken away or subtracted, attenuated or missing. There is a greater silence that surrounds it, a feeling of going under speech, which is why it has worked well for poems about loss. It has also proven to be useful for the stripped-down presentation of objects, what the Imagists called “direct treatment of the thing.” We feel the clutter has been cleared away to create a clean space. Poems with drastically reduced lines aspire to be lyrics of absolute concentration, rhythmic economy. The line of more than ten syllables consequently gives a feeling of going above or beyond the parameters of oral utterance, or over them, beyond speech itself. The long lines widen the space for reverie. “The speaker in the poem bleeds outward as in trance or sleep toward other states of himself,” Grossman says. This line, which has a dreamlike associativity, also radiates an oracular feeling, which is why it has so often been the line used in prophetic texts and visionary poetry.

Love at First Sight

by Wislawa Szymborska (1923 – 2012)

They're both convinced
that a sudden passion joined them.
Such certainty is beautiful,
but uncertainty is more beautiful still.

Since they'd never met before, they're sure
that there'd been nothing between them.
But what's the word from the streets, staircases, hallways—
perhaps they've passed by each other a million times?

I want to ask them
if they don't remember—
a moment face to face
in some revolving door?
perhaps a "sorry" muttered in a crowd?
a curt "wrong number" caught in the receiver?—
but I know the answer.
No, they don't remember.

They'd be amazed to hear
that Chance has been toying with them
now for years.

Not quite ready yet
to become their Destiny,
it pushed them close, drove them apart,
it barred their path,
stifling a laugh,
and then leaped aside.

There were signs and signals,
even if they couldn't read them yet.
Perhaps three years ago
or just last Tuesday
a certain leaf fluttered
from one shoulder to another?
Something was dropped and then picked up.
Who knows, maybe the ball that vanished
into childhood's thicket?

There were doorknobs and doorbells
where one touch had covered another
beforehand.
Suitcases checked and standing side by side.
One night, perhaps, the same dream,
grown hazy by morning.

Every beginning
is only a sequel, after all,
and the book of events
is always open halfway through.

1. Whip-around: Go quickly around the room asking your students for one one-word association they have with the word love. If a student does not have an idea, it is fine for them to say "pass," but remind them you will come back to them when the rest of the class has finished.

2. Play the audio of "The Book of Love" by Magnetic Fields. Ask your students to write down words and phrases they hear that jump out at them. Play the audio a second time. This time, ask your students to write down how this song makes them feel. What in the song makes them feel this way?

3. Ask your students to get into pairs to share their answers to question #2.

4. Project the poem "Love at First Sight" by Wislawa Szymborska so all your students can see it. Ask them to read the poem silently, writing down all the words and phrases they think are important. Ask one student to read the poem out loud to the class, while the listening students continue listing the words and phrases that jump out at them. Ask another student to read the poem to the class, repeating the same process.

5. Ask your students to gather in groups of four to share what they have noticed.

6. Whole-class discussion: What does the speaker in Szymborska's poem say are the "signs and symbols" of love? How do these relate to the characteristics of the song "The Book of Love"? Make sure your students back up their interpretations with evidence from the poem and the song.

Lunch Break

Francisco Aragón

Two hours between classes.
The short Metro ride home.
Coffee table, plates, glasses,

the TV flickering afternoon
news, sometimes a car bomb…
And in the kitchen the singular tune

of his voice, his jokes, recounting this
or that—plot of a novel, book
he's put down, I bought for his

monthly fix (how he'd love
reading in the park what I took
half an hour to choose). Above

all, the sofa: digestion a nap,
my head nestled in his lap.

Classroom Activities

The following activities and questions are designed to help your students use their noticing skills to move through the poem and develop their thinking about its meaning with confidence, using what they've noticed as evidence for their interpretations. Read more about the framework upon which these activities are based.

Warm-up: (free-write) Write about when you feel most at peace. Where are you when you feel this way? Who might be with you, or are you alone? Or, write about how you might schedule your day if you could choose the activities. If you feel comfortable, share your writing with a classmate.

Before Reading the Poem: (Teachers, before class, ask students to send in a photo that they feel best represents their day or something personally meaningful. Let students know that you will share these photos. Use the images to create a virtual or real gallery walk.) Look closely at the images in the gallery walk. Which images stand out to you? Why? Look again. What images might you want to know more about? Why?

Reading the Poem: Read the poem "Lunch Break" by Francisco Aragón silently. What do you notice about the poem? Annotate for any words or phrases that stand out to you or any questions you might have.

Listening to the Poem (enlist two volunteers to read the poem aloud): Listen as the poem is read aloud twice, and write down any additional words and phrases that stand out to you.

Small-group Discussion: Share what you noticed in the poem with a small group of students. Based on the details you just shared with your small group and your activities from the beginning of class, what might be the significance of the title, “Lunch Break?” How does this poem compare to how you might choose to spend your time?

Whole-class Discussion: What might be the relationship between the speaker in the poem and “he” at home? Find the definition of a sonnet. Do you feel that this poem is a sonnet? Why or why not?

Extension for Grades 7-8: Over the course of a week, document your life by taking photos or creating images. At the end of the week, choose three photos/images that speak to you. Incorporate these images into a poem.

Extension for Grades 9-12: The poet Frank O’Hara famously wrote poems during his lunch break. Choose a time of day where you can write for approximately 15-20 minutes. Each day, over the course of a week, write one poem. Each day, try to lean into writing about what you are feeling, experiencing or seeing. At the end of the week, share your experiences with your classmates and share one of your poems.

Poetry Glossary

This week’s poetic term is **enjambment**, or the continuation of a phrase or sentence from one line to another without an end-stop

Once a marine biologist told me octopuses have three hearts

Denice Frohman

I wonder what I'd do
with eight arms, two eyes
& too many ways to give
myself away

see, I only have one heart
& I know loving a woman can make you crawl
out from under yourself, or forget
the kingdom that is your body

& what would you say, octopus?
that you live knowing nobody
can touch you more
than you do already

that you can't punch anything underwater
so you might as well drape yourself
around it, bring it right up to your mouth
let each suction cup kiss what it finds

that having this many hands
means to hold everything
at once & nothing
to hold you back

that when you split
you turn your blood
blue & pour
out more ocean

that you know heartbreak so well
you remove all your bones
so nothing can kill you.

The following activities and questions are designed to help your students use their noticing skills to move through the poem and develop their thinking skills so they understand its meaning with confidence, using what they've noticed as evidence for their interpretations.

1. **Warm-up:** Watch this video about octopuses and their three hearts. After watching the video, what is one thing that you have learned? What questions, if any, do you still have?

2. **Before Reading the Poem:** What would you do with three hearts? How might the human experience be different with more than one heart? Join with a partner or small group and share your ideas.

3. **Reading the Poem:** Silently read the poem "once a marine biologist told me octopuses have three hearts" by Denice Frohman. What do you notice about the poem? Note any words or phrases that stand out to you or any questions you might have.

4. **Listening to the Poem:** Enlist two volunteers and listen as the poem is read aloud twice. Write down any additional words and phrases that stand out to you. Or you may watch this video of the poet reading the poem.

5. **Small Group Discussion**: Share what you noticed about the poem with a small group of students. How might this poem relate to the video from the beginning of class? What do you think of the title? How might the poem be different with another title? Share any title ideas you have.

6. **Whole Class Discussion:** Read this definition of anthropomorphism. How does it relate to the poem? What does the poem say about love and/or heartache?

7. **Extension for Grades 7-8:** The speaker addresses the octopus. Write a poem from the point of view of the octopus. What might the octopus want to say?

8. **Extension for Grades 9-12:** Look again at the definition of anthropomorphism. Read more poems that explore the concept, cited at the bottom of this page. What can we learn from animals and poetry? If you feel inspired, write your own poem that explores the relationship between animals and humans.

Find more poems about animals, especially suitable for students in elementary school, by poets like Elizabeth Bishop, William Blake, Lewis Carroll, and others.

On Joy and Sorrow

Kahlil Gibran

Then a woman said, Speak to us of Joy and Sorrow.

And he answered:

Your joy is your sorrow unmasked.

And the selfsame well from which your laughter rises was oftentimes filled with your tears.

And how else can it be?

The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain.

Is not the cup that holds your wine the very cup that was burned in the potter's oven?

And is not the lute that soothes your spirit, the very wood that was hollowed with knives?

When you are joyous, look deep into your heart and you shall find it is only that which has given you sorrow that is giving you joy.

When you are sorrowful look again in your heart, and you shall see that in truth you are weeping for that which has been your delight.

Some of you say, "Joy is greater than sorrow," and others say, "Nay, sorrow is the greater."

But I say unto you, they are inseparable.

Together they come, and when one sits alone with you at your board, remember that the other is asleep upon your bed.

Verily you are suspended like scales between your sorrow and your joy.

Only when you are empty are you at standstill and balanced.

When the treasure-keeper lifts you to weigh his gold and his silver, needs must your joy or your sorrow rise or fall.

Classroom Activities

The following activities and questions are designed to help your students use their noticing skills to move through the poem and develop their thinking skills so they understand its meaning with confidence, using what they've noticed as evidence for their interpretations.

1. **Warm-up:** Join with a partner. Together, write a definition of the words *joy* and *sorrow*. Join with another pair and share your definitions. Then, rewrite your definitions so that you have one definition for each word. Share with the class. What do you notice about the words? How are they different? How might they be connected?

2. **Before Reading the Poem:** Listen to "Here Comes The Sun" by The Beatles. What lyrics in the song stand out to you? Why? What does the song say about joy?
3. **Reading the Poem:** Silently read the poem "On Joy and Sorrow" by Kahlil Gibran. What do you notice about the poem? Note any words or phrases that stand out to you, or any questions you might have.
4. **Listening to the Poem:** Enlist two volunteers and listen as the poem is read aloud twice, and write down any additional words and phrases that stand out to you. Or, you may opt to listen to a recording of the poem.
5. **Small Group Discussion:** Share what you noticed about the poem with a small group of students. What does the poem say about joy and sorrow? How does this compare to the definitions you shared at the beginning of class as well as to the song?
6. **Whole Class Discussion:** Is it possible for joy to exist without sorrow or for sorrow to exist without joy? Why or why not? What does the poem say about the juxtaposition of these two ideas? What do you think of the line, "The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain"?
7. **Extension for Grades 7-8:** How might you explore the juxtaposition of joy and sorrow even more? Create a piece of art, a song, a collage, a photograph that explores these ideas in the poem. Share your piece with the class.
8. **Extension for Grades 9-12:** Read more about Kahlil Gibran. Choose another poem by Gibran to read and explore. Write a short paragraph comparing and contrasting the poems. What connected themes, if any, did you see? What differences did you notice? Share with your class in a discussion.

Emily Elizabeth Dickinson
10 december 1830 – 15 mei 1886

Our share of night to bear—

Our share of morning—

Our blank in bliss to fill,

Our blank in scorning—

Here a star, and there a star,

Some lose their way!

Here a mist – and there a mist –

Afterwards—Day!

This is a strange and lonely poem. The first stanza begins conventionally enough: yes, we each must bear the dark as well as enjoy the light. Then the use of the word "blank" becomes interesting. Perhaps the poet is indicating our lives are blanks to fill in, or that there are a series of blanks. I think it is the latter and that there is at least one blank we can fill in with bliss (and this line makes use of both the alliteration of "blank" and "bliss" and of the assonance of "bliss" and "fill"). Another will be filled in with "scorning". "Scorning" is an interesting opposition to "bliss" and I don't think Dickinson chose it simply because it rhymed with "morning" – although that may be how she first thought of the word for that slot. No, just as bliss is a particular kind of joy and happiness, so scorn is a very particular form of misery. Being scorned is worse than being forgotten. But scorning can also mean unhappiness or doubting.

The second stanza with its plethora of faint stars scattered across the sky reminds us that it is often difficult to navigate through life. Today we like to speak of "rising stars" and hitching our wagon to a star, and even the constancy of the northern star, Polaris. But face it, most people would be hard pressed to find their way north, south, east, or west simply by looking at the night sky. The stars are so unreliable that even mists can obscure them. Yet, if we can endure through the night, Day will surely come. The star of Day, of course, is the sun. Its light is clear, bright, and steady; its course through the heavens completely reliable.

While the poem ends on this positive note, one is left with the haunting image of souls lost in the mists of night, gazing up at dim stars. I think that is because of the hypnotic vagueness of the lines "Here a star, and there a star," and "Here a mist – and there a mist – "; and also because of the strength of the word "scorning." It's a nighttime poem and I picture the poet hanging in there until dawn.

Source: The Prowling Bee | Susan Kornfeld

Based on the above comments, questions and assignments can be created for students.

That's My Heart Right There

Willie Perdomo

We used to say,
That's my heart right there.

As if to say,
Don't mess with her right there.

As if, don't even play,
That's a part of me right there.

In other words, okay okay,
That's the start of me right there.

As if, come that day,
That's the end of me right there.

As if, push come to shove,
I would fend for her right there.

As if, come what may,
I would lie for her right there.

As if, come love to pay,
I would die for that right there.

Classroom activities

1. Warm-up: Create a gallery walk with images of different hearts. Join with a partner or small group to view an image. What do you notice? What stands out to you in the image? Why? Look again. What else do you see? What do these images together make you think about? Why?

2. Before Reading the Poem: Listen to the song, "Heart to Heart" by Mac DeMarco.
What words or phrases stand out to you in the song? Why?
What emotions does the song evoke? How?

3. Reading the Poem: Silently read the poem "That's My Heart Right There" by Willie Perdomo. What do you notice about the poem? Note any words or phrases that stand out to you or any questions you might have.

4. Listening to the Poem: Watch this filmed reading by Perdomo, produced by the Adrian Brinkerhoff Foundation, twice. Write down any additional words and phrases that stand out to you.

5. Small Group Discussion: Share what you noticed about the poem with a small group of students. How might this be similar to or different from the resources from the beginning of class? Having watched the video twice, what do you like or notice about the video? How does it compare to the printed poem that you read? Why? How does seeing a poet read in context, in a city, impact your reading of the poem and its meaning?

6. Whole Class Discussion: What imagery do you see in the poem? How does it impact the poem? (Teachers, divide your class into two sides. Ask one side of the room to read aloud the first lines of each stanza. Ask the second side of the room to read aloud the italicized second lines of each stanza.) After reading the poem again and in this new way, what else do you notice and what questions do you have? What might the title and second line “That’s my heart right there” mean? Why?

Untitled [Do you still remember: falling stars]

Rainer Maria Rilke (1875 – 1926)

Do you still remember: falling stars,

how they leapt slantwise through the sky

like horses over suddenly held-out hurdles

of our wishes—did we have so many?—

for stars, innumerable, leapt everywhere;

almost every gaze upward became

wedded to the swift hazard of their play,

and our heart felt like a single thing

beneath that vast disintegration of their brilliance—

and was whole, as if it would survive them!

Classroom Activities

The following activities and questions are designed to help your students use their noticing skills to move through the poem and develop their thinking about its meaning with confidence, using what they've noticed as evidence for their interpretations.

Warm-up (individual writing): How might you feel if you saw shooting stars in the night sky?

Before Reading the Poem (pair share): Look at the animated gif from TED-Ed with a partner. Share what you notice in the animation. What are the colors and shapes you see? What is the motion? What might the figures represent? What do you think they see? How might they feel about it? What is your evidence for these interpretations?

Reading the Poem (individual reading): Read the poem by Rainer Maria Rilke silently, and then write down the words and phrases that jump out at you.

Listening to the Poem (enlist two volunteers to read the poem aloud): Listen as the poem is read aloud and write down any additional words and phrases that jump out at you.

Small-group Discussion (two pairs join together to form a small group): Share the words and phrases that jumped out at you with the rest of your small group. What feelings do the words and phrases you noticed evoke in you?

Whole-class Discussion: What do you think Rilke meant by the lines "and our heart felt like a single thing / beneath that vast disintegration of their brilliance— / and was whole, as if it would survive them!"?

Valentine for Ernest Mann

Naomi Shihab Nye

You can't order a poem like you order a taco.
Walk up to the counter, say, "I'll take two"
and expect it to be handed back to you
on a shiny plate.

Still, I like your spirit.
Anyone who says, "Here's my address,
write me a poem," deserves something in reply.
So I'll tell a secret instead:
poems hide. In the bottoms of our shoes,
they are sleeping. They are the shadows
drifting across our ceilings the moment
before we wake up. What we have to do
is live in a way that lets us find them.

Once I knew a man who gave his wife
two skunks for a valentine.
He couldn't understand why she was crying.
"I thought they had such beautiful eyes."
And he was serious. He was a serious man
who lived in a serious way. Nothing was ugly
just because the world said so. He really
liked those skunks. So, he re-invented them
as valentines and they became beautiful.
At least, to him. And the poems that had been hiding
in the eyes of skunks for centuries
crawled out and curled up at his feet.

Maybe if we re-invent whatever our lives give us
we find poems. Check your garage, the off sock
in your drawer, the person you almost like, but not quite.
And let me know.

1. Project the image of the skunk so all your students can see it. Have them look at the image for several minutes, then ask them to write a detailed description of anything they think is beautiful about this animal. The description should make us feel that what they have seen is beautiful.

2. Divide your students into pairs. Ask your students to read their descriptions to their partners. The listening partner should tell the reader whether or not she felt the beauty of this part of the skunk and offer suggestions to help the writer describe its beauty. Make sure both students have a chance to be both readers and responders.

3. Project the poem "Valentine for Ernest Mann" so all your students can see it. Ask them to read the poem silently twice. The first time, they should simply read it through. The second time, they should write down the words and phrases that jump out at them.

4. Ask one of your students to read the poem aloud to the class. Have your students write down anything new that they notice, now that they have heard the poem.

5. Show your students the video of Naomi Shihab Nye reading her poem. Ask them to add items to their list of what they notice about the poem after watching Naomi Shihab Nye's reading. What words and phrases does she emphasize, if any?

6. What does Shihab Nye mean when she says, "Maybe if we re-invent whatever our lives give us / we find poems…?"

7. Ask your students to look for an item that they don't think is particularly beautiful. Have them bring it to class and look at it for a long while. Ask them to "reinvent" the object with either a detailed description or a poem.

Wonder and Joy

Robinson Jeffers

The things that one grows tired of—O, be sure
They are only foolish artificial things!
Can a bird ever tire of having wings?
And I, so long as life and sense endure,
(Or brief be they!) shall nevermore inure
My heart to the recurrence of the springs,
Of gray dawns, the gracious evenings,
The infinite wheeling stars. A wonder pure
Must ever well within me to behold
Venus decline; or great Orion, whose belt
Is studded with three nails of burning gold,
Ascend the winter heaven. Who never felt
This wondering joy may yet be good or great:
But envy him not: he is not fortunate.

Classroom activities

1. Project the image of Orion (https://apod.nasa.gov/apod/ap030207.html) as large as you possibly can for students to experience. Ask them to gaze at it for a few minutes. Then ask them to write down what they see and how it makes them feel. What is it about the image that makes them feel this way?

2. Ask your students to turn and talk with a partner about what they wrote down.

3. Project the poem "Wonder and Joy" by Robinson Jeffers so all your students can see it. Ask them to read it silently to themselves twice. The first time they should just read it through. The second time, ask them to write down the things about the poem that seem special.

4. Ask one student to read the poem aloud to the class. The listening students should write down new things they notice that seem special in the poem. Ask another student to read the poem aloud, with the listeners once again writing down what they notice.

5. Whole-class discussion: What kinds of things does Jeffers think “one grows tired of”? What do your students grow tired of in their lives? What does Jeffers think makes a person fortunate? Do your students agree?

6. If you and your students are interested in rhyme and form, you might want to plot out the rhyme scheme in this poem and discuss the sonnet form. Let the students write their own sonnet on a theme that they find tiresome. This can be interpreted both literally and figuratively.

Your laughter turns the world to paradise

Jalal al-Din Rumi (1207-1273)
translated from the Farsi by Haleh Liza Gafori

Your laughter turns the world to paradise.
It tears through me like fire.
It teaches me.

Reborn in emptiness,
I emerge laughing,
here to learn from Love
new depths of laughter.

I've been short on courage,
but I have a heart of sunlight,
straight from the king's hand.
I stir up laughter even in those who fear joy.

Crack open my shell. Steal the pearl.
I'll still be laughing.
It's the rookies who laugh only when they win.

Last night, the spirit of dawn came to my room
and gave me a lesson in laughter.
Our blazing roars lit the morning sky.

When I brood like a rain cloud,
laughter flashes through me.
It's the habit of lightning to laugh through a storm.

Look at the furnace. Look at the stones.
See the glowing red veins?
Gold—laughing in fire, daring you,

"Prove you're no fake!
Laugh even when you lose."

We're fodder for death so learn to laugh
from the angel of death.
He laughs at the jeweled belts and crowns of kings—
all that splendor's just on loan.

Treetop blossoms erupt in laughter.
Petals rain down.

Laugh like the bud of a flower,
hugging the ground.
Its hidden smile opens to a laugh that lasts a lifetime.

Classroom Activities

The following activities and questions are designed to help your students use their noticing skills to move through the poem and develop their thinking skills so they understand its meaning with confidence, using what they've noticed as evidence for their interpretations. Read more about the framework upon which these activities are based.

1. **Warm-up:** Look closely at the print "Note to Our Higher Selves" by Stephanie Santana. What stands out to you in the image? Why? Look again. What else do you notice? What feelings does the piece evoke? Why?

2. **Before Reading the Poem:** Listen to the song "The Laughing Gnome" by David Bowie. What words or phrases stand out in the song? Why?

3. **Reading the Poem:** Silently read the poem "Your laughter turns the world to paradise" by Jalal al-Din Rumi, translated by Haleh Liza Gafori. What do you notice about the poem? Note any words or phrases that stand out to you or any questions you might have.

4. **Listening to the Poem:** Enlist two volunteers and listen as the poem is read aloud twice. Listen as the poem is read aloud twice and write down any additional words and phrases that stand out to you.

5. **Small Group Discussion:** Share what you noticed about the poem with a small group of students. Based on the details you just shared with your small group and the resources from the beginning of class, what do you think of the title "Your laughter turns the world to paradise"? What might the relationship be between the speaker and the person in the poem being addressed?

6. **Whole Class Discussion:** What do you think of the repetition and symbolism in the poem? Why? What do you think of the line "It's the habit of lightning to laugh through a storm"? What role does laughter or joy play in your own life?

7. **Extension for Grades 7-8:** Use this sentence frame or one of your own to write a poem: "Your laughter turns the world to …" or "Your [insert your own idea] turns the world to …" Share your poem with the class.

8. **Extension for Grades 9-12:** Learn more about Rumi by watching the animated TedEd video "How to Love" or "A Meditation on Rumi and the Power of Poetry." Continue reading Rumi's poetry. What can we learn about life from his poetry? Write a short piece that explores this question. Share your writing with the class.