Teaching ideas

AS/A-level English Language and Literature 7706/7707
Poetic voices: Locations and Settings

Introduction

These teaching ideas can be used with students when exploring how poets use language to create a sense of location. They offer students the opportunity to explore the importance of location in poetry, thinking about how this helps to create an overall sense of poetic voice. Students will develop their understanding of language choices in their chosen poetry and consider the importance of imagery and how this is constructed, and how readers are able to 'share' the location and setting of the poem. Students will also have the opportunity to compare how location is constructed across a range of different poems.

The suggested activities are intended to span two lessons lasting one hour each.

Learning objectives

Students will:

- consider the importance of location in poetry
- explore how poets use language to create location so that readers 'share' this
- evaluate the significance of location choices and how these contribute to poetic voice.

Prior knowledge needed

Students should have some knowledge of the following:

- foregrounding
- semantic fields
- lexical intensity
- clause analysis; subject; verb processes; object
- deixis
- language levels.

Lesson preparation

Teachers will need the following resources:

- images from poems
- opening lines on A3 paper
- *AQA Poetic Voices Anthology*.

Activities

Lesson 1

- Display a poem from your chosen poet on the board/paper with the words in alphabetical order. Poems that might work particularly well with this activity include:

  - Robert Browning: *Porphyria's Lover*
  - John Donne: *The Sun Rising*
  - Carol Ann Duffy: *Stafford Afternoons*
  - Seamus Heaney: *Death of a Naturalist*

- Ask students to 'predict' the following, reminding of the need to use appropriate meta-language and evidence for their ideas:

  - Where do the events take place? How can you tell?
  - Is it a 'tangible' location (beach, field, city, etc) or an abstract location (mental/emotional state)?
  - What might be the story of this poem, and why do you think the poet chose to set the story in the location they did?

- Next, look at the poem in its original form and consider how 'close' the predictions were. Re-ask the same questions and compare responses before and after. Check overall understanding of the location, characters and events of the poem.

- Give each student a copy of the opening lines of the same poem, on A3 paper. Working independently, students should explore how the poet constructs location through foregrounding, lexical intensity and semantic fields, making annotations as they do so. Ask students to extract words that do this – what grammatical patterns begin to emerge? Eg, does the poet rely heavily on concrete nouns or material verb processes to do this? Share ideas as a class.

- Conduct a clausal analysis of certain lines from the poem. What objects/characters appear in subject/object position and why? How does this help to construct location? What verb processes are involved in helping to construct location?

- Take the remainder of the poem and extend this task. Does the location change, and if so, how is it marked through language choices? Students should use the Internet to create a 'comic book' style series of images that correspond to the different locations in the poem, labelling these images with words and phrases from the poem.

Preparation for next lesson

- Students can apply what they have learnt this lesson to other poems in the anthology. Does the poet use the same linguistic style in constructing location? What conclusions can be drawn about how your chosen poet constructs location, and the importance of location in their poetry?

AQA Education (AQA) is a registered charity (number 1073334) and a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (number 3644723). Our registered address is AQA, Devas Street, Manchester M15 6EX.

2 of 3

Lesson 2

- Refresh knowledge of spatial deixis by comparing sentences that use different spatial co-ordinates (*this*, *that*, *these*, *those*, *here*, *there*, *where*).

  - One way to do this is to simply ask a student to say these sentences in different parts of the classroom. For example, by saying *this/that/here/where is my chair* in a different location and reference point alters the meaning and our understanding of the deictic expression.
  - Through doing this, draw out the understanding of shared context and shared space, and how poets 'invite' their readers to share location with a speaker. Draw out the distinction between proximal and distal spatial deixis, and also how body language helps to 'solve' ambiguities in deictic expressions.

- Explore a poem that uses spatial deictic expressions to create a sense of shared location. Ask students to prepare a stylistic analysis, making sure that students interpret the effects of deixis in helping to construct location – how and why are the deictic expressions used? How is location encoded through deixis? What happens if the location shifts through deixis? Poems that work particularly well with this activity include:

  - Robert Browning: *Home Thoughts, From Abroad*
  - John Donne: *Twicknham Garden*
  - Carol Ann Duffy: *Never Go Back*
  - Seamus Heaney: *Night Drive*

- Working in groups, students can apply what they have learnt over these two lessons to comparing a poem they have looked at in class to a different poem from the *AQA Poetic Voices Anthology*.

  - Using a comparison table as a guide, ask students to look at and compare the following: foregrounding, semantic fields, lexical intensity, syntax, verb processes and spatial deixis.
  - What differences and similarities can they draw out? What conclusions can be drawn about the way that their chosen poet uses language to construct location?
  - This can be developed into an extended piece of writing and assessed in various ways.

Further work

- Students could investigate the use of pathetic fallacy in creating location, in a selection of poems. This should be tied in with the overall mood and atmosphere created – does the location help to determine this, and how are they related?
- Students could investigate poems from their chosen poet beyond the anthology text. Are there 'typical' locations and places that the poet tends to write about or set events in? How does this contribute to the overall poetic voice and sense of identity projected?
- In order to examine the function and importance of location, students could re-imagine the poem in a different location. How does the change affect the meaning, and why is the original version set in that location?

AQA Education (AQA) is a registered charity (number 1073334) and a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (number 3644723). Our registered address is AQA, Devas Street, Manchester M15 6EX.

3 of 3