

1-1-1998

# The use of humorous content material and student attitude toward poetry

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THE USE OF HUMOROUS CONTENT MATERIAL  
AND STUDENT ATTITUDE TOWARD POETRY

by

DAVID L. JAMES

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

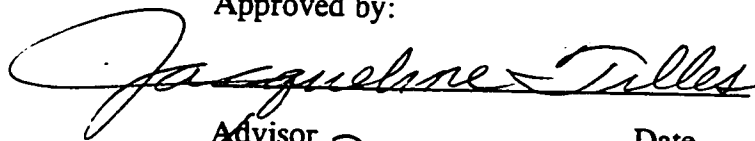
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

1998

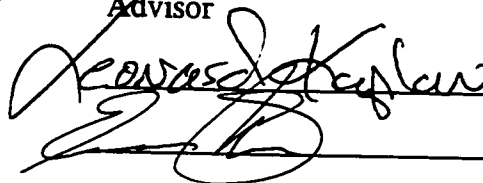
MAJOR: CURRICULUM AND  
INSTRUCTION

Approved by:

 3-5

Advisor

Date



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful for the advice and counsel of Dr. Jacqueline Tilles, my doctoral chair, and one of the kindest people on the face of the earth. I am grateful to Dr. Leonard Kaplan for showing me what a great teacher can do to and for students. And I am thankful to Dr. Ed Sharples for stepping in at the last moment, and giving me the one final push I needed.

But I must express my deepest thanks to my wonderful family--Collin, Nathan, Leah, and Debra, for putting up with my late nights, for pushing me to succeed, and for standing beside me whether I went forward or backward. All of my love goes out to you.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Statement of the Problem

#### Introduction

In this era of renewed public interest in student learning, teacher effectiveness, and educational accountability, many innovative proposals have been made. The overall concern, of course, is to enhance and enrich the learning environment so that students of all ages will learn more, develop better skills, think critically and creatively, and be able to enter or re-enter the workforce as productive, effective workers. The future of the American society, government, and economy depends upon the success or failure of this national movement.

The focus of most reform movements has been on restructuring and school improvement. Although there is much to be said about the variety of educational proposals such as streamlining reporting channels, school autonomy, team-teaching, enhancing classroom climate, and business-education partnerships, the real focus of an educational movement must center on teachers, their methods and expectations.

As proposals, ideas, and new strategies surface to suggest more effective teaching methods, the use of humor has entered into the limelight. For many years, students have routinely claimed they prefer teachers with a good sense of humor (Hart, 1934; Mintzes, 1979; Bryant, Comisky, Crane & Zillmann, 1980; Schmuck and Schmuck, 1989). Many educators encourage the use of humor in the classroom, claiming it is a powerful and effective motivator (Colwell, 1981; Cornett, 1986; Whitmer, 1986; Crooks, 1988; Walter, 1990; Hebert, 1991; Bergen, 1992; Weaver, 1993; Parrott, 1994).

Only in the past thirty years, however, have researchers begun to explore the effects of using humor in the classroom to stimulate interest and to enhance student learning and retention. The empirical data on the effectiveness of humor on learning, persuasiveness, retention, and attention is mixed and inconclusive. The most recent



research has focused on student evaluations of teacher humor, or the effectiveness of a teacher's use of various types of humor. Very little investigation has centered on incorporating humor in the actual content material (Klein, Bryant, & Zillmann, 1982; Ziv, 1988).

### Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this investigation is to measure, document, and evaluate the effects of using modern and contemporary humorous poetry in teaching an introductory poetry unit to sophomore high school students. Poetry is routinely one of the least favorite subjects, and one of the least read forms of literature, as evidenced by book sales nationwide. Bugeja (1992) surveyed eighty college students in journalism classes to find out why they did or did not like poetry. Only 11% indicated they enjoyed poetry after completing high school. Marshall (1993) recommends that poetry should be dropped from the high school curriculum so that students would not become alienated from poetry as an art form in their formative years.

The study involves a control group that was introduced to poetry using non-humorous modern and contemporary examples, and two experimental groups introduced to poetry using modern and contemporary humorous material. The control group and one experimental group were pretested, received a five-lesson introduction to poetry unit, and then completed a posttest measuring affective levels of change. The second experimental group received the treatment and posttest only.

### Background of Theory and Research

Even though humor has been a part of human existence for thousands of years, it has only been seriously considered or reflected upon since the 1900s when Freud (1905) categorized jokes into three major areas: 1) tendentious (hostile, sexual), 2) playful (illogical, nonsense) and 3) conceptual (witty, topical). Others have described these categories in this way: 1) superiority humor, 2) incongruity humor, and 3) relief humor (Hebert, 1991; Endlich, 1993; Gutwirth, 1993; Lowis and Nieuwoudt, 1993).

The literature in the area of humor and education falls into the following categories: 1) classroom environment and teacher effectiveness; 2) persuasion; and 3) student learning and retention.

Student evaluations of teacher effectiveness, appeal, and delivery is a large area of research. Not only do most students indicate they prefer a teacher with a sense of humor (Hart, 1934; Weaver and Cottrell, 1988; Schmuck and Schmuck, 1989), but some studies have shown a positive relationship between a teacher's use of humor and higher teacher effectiveness ratings from students (Bryant et al., 1980; Tamborini and Zillman, 1981; MacAdam, 1985). The type of humor (self-disparaging, sexual, other-disparaging, or incongruity) and the gender of the teacher play a role in the effectiveness. The general assumption is that the use of humor reduces anxiety and therefore creates a better learning environment (Gorham and Christophel, 1990).

The research on humor and persuasion is not large, and indicates, with mixed results, that the use of humor does not generally increase the persuasiveness of a short term message (Gruner, 1967; Markiewicz, 1974). One major study of humor use in introductory textbooks indicates that although it related to enjoyment in reading, humor was not associated with interest, persuasion, or as a motivator to read more in the future (Klein et al., 1982). In fact, the use of humor in a textbook was perceived as detrimental to the author's credibility.

The results of studies on the use of humor and its effect on student learning or cognitive retention are mixed. Some research has found a clear relationship between humor and an increase in divergent thinking capabilities and general knowledge acquisition (Ziv, 1976, 1983, 1988). Other research has indicated no difference in comprehension between humor groups and control groups (Kaplan and Pascoe, 1977). Many others have supported the use of humor in the classroom as an attention device, a stress releaser, and a teaching tool to enhance the learning environment (Gilliland and Mauritsen, 1971; Colwell, 1981; Cornett, 1986; Whitmer, 1986; Brillantes,

Jorgensen & Kelley, 1990; Walter, 1990; Hebert, 1991; Berwald, 1992; Bergen, 1993).

Overall, there is no conclusive evidence to predict how the use of humorous material in the teaching of poetry will affect this investigation, even though anecdotal and empirical data support the use of humor generally as a teaching strategy.

### Significance of the Study

Very few, if any, empirical studies have been conducted using humorous content material to teach poetry to high school students. If this study shows significant increases in affect for the experimental group, implications of the research may transform the methods of English education. No longer will the benefits of using content humor be assumed to be effective. No longer will the burden of using humor be placed on the shoulders of the teacher; the content material will be humorous and provided for the teacher. The teacher will become a facilitator and participant in the humor, not the creator of it. Regardless of the conclusions reached in the study, an important question about the use of content humor in the high school classroom will be answered in a carefully designed research experiment, adding to the scarce literature on educational humor.

### Assumptions

Whenever a study deals with human beings in any kind of treatment interaction, there is always the possibility that personality, internal bias, and other related characteristics may have an unforeseen affect on the results. Since this study uses regular classroom teachers for all involved groups, it is assumed that the teacher personality will not adversely affect one group over the other. The only difference between the control and experimental groups will be the treatment which involves using humorous material instead of non-humorous material. The assumption of the study is that the use of content humor in the poetry is the only definable, differential characteristic between the groups.

## Overview of the Study

This study explores the effects of using humorous material in teaching poetry. Using control and treatment groups, pre and posttesting, this investigation measures the affective changes in students by using humorous content material and contributes to the growing body of knowledge surrounding humor and learning.

For purposes of this study, the following definition of 'attitude' will be used:

An attitude is a mental and neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all objects and situations with which it is related (Allport, 1967, p. 8).

Most definitions of attitude conclude that an attitude is a learned predisposition (Shaw & Wright, 1967). Therefore, through experience, attitudes can be unlearned, relearned, and changed in either a positive or negative direction. One goal of this current study is to determine whether the use of humorous content material in a classroom situation positively alters student attitude towards the subject matter.

Most educators agree that when the classroom environment is engaging and motivating, the potential for learning is greater (Kaplan, 1986). In *Human Characteristics and School Learning*, Bloom states:

Where students enter a learning task with enthusiasm and evident interest, the learning should be easier, and, other things being equal, they should learn it more rapidly and to a higher level of attainment or achievement than will students with a lack of enthusiasm and evident interest (1976, p. 74).

The questions presented in this study are these: Will using humorous material in an introduction to poetry unit create more positive attitudes in students toward the genre of poetry? Will using humorous material increase the likelihood that students will read poetry in the future? This study is worthwhile considering the major skills necessary for survival in the 21st century include a command of the English language and communication skills. The study of poetry increases a student's ability to comprehend language through the analysis of patterns, style, symbols, and multiple levels of meaning. Any research that sheds some light on how literature can be more

appropriately introduced to students so that they enjoy, learn, and hone the skills of effective communication is clearly significant.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

#### Introduction

Research on the use of humor in education is relatively new, spanning the past twenty-five years. For purposes of this study, the literature will be discussed in the following categories: 1) humor and persuasion, and 2) humor and student learning and retention, 3) humor and its effects on the classroom climate and teacher effectiveness.

#### Humor and Persuasion

One could make a case that all teaching involves persuasion to one degree or another. Teachers not only inform and disseminate information, they encourage students to think critically, creatively, and expose them to new ways of viewing the world. In order to motivate and inspire, teachers must be persuasive in the broadest and best sense of the word. They should be captivating; they should be believable and credible.

Can humor enhance persuasiveness? Gruner (1967) was working with the assumption that since humor heightens attention, it should also result in greater learning. Using four groups of 32 male upperclassmen, he randomly selected one-half as a control to listen to a serious speech on listening, and the other half to listen to a humorous speech (using relevant humor) covering the same topic. Each group rated the speaker on authority, interest, information retention, and character. The results indicated only one area of significance where the humorous speaker was rated higher: character. No differences were found in the other areas.

In a broad review of 11 studies on humor and persuasion, Markewicz (1974) concluded that most studies found no positive effect in using humor although many problems in samples, methods, and experimental procedures were cited. None of the studies was performed in educational settings over a long period of time.

Is a humorous text conducive to learning, enjoyment, persuasion? Klein et al.

(1982) conducted an experiment with 180 college students reading one chapter from 90 texts. Students were asked to complete a questionnaire afterwards to rate their learning amount, enjoyment, interest, persuasiveness, credibility, and inspiration to read more. Although humor usage in the text had a significant relationship to enjoyment, it did not affect any of the other categories and, in fact, had a negative correlation on the credibility of the author. However, questions regarding the type and relevance of humor usage in the texts can be raised.

The literature on persuasion and humor is inconclusive. Very few controlled studies have been documented in the educational arena. Questions are raised about the reliability of the persuasion studies completed in the past. Were experiments conducted in high social density settings or not? Prerost (1977) has shown how smaller sized rooms and larger group numbers can affect the humor appreciation of the group. It is evident that more definitive research is necessary in the field of humor and persuasion.

### Student Learning and Cognitive Retention

Without a doubt, the literature on the benefits of using humor in education is widespread and generally assumed to be valid. Given the assumptions that humor relieves tension, enhances attention, increases enjoyment, creates motivation, and reinforces good behavior, many educators encourage the use of it. Gilliland and Mauritsen (1971), Colwell (1981), Cornett (1986), Whitmer (1986), Johnson (1990), Walter (1990), Hebert (1991), Berwald (1992), and Parrott (1994), all support the use of humor in the classroom, claiming it creates a better learning environment and keeps students interested and motivated as well. Johnson (1990) suggests that using humor is appropriate in teaching sensitive topics like death, cancer, and suicide because of humor's ability to reduce stress, provide relief, and create distance. Without providing one ounce of experimental data to support their theses, the above mentioned authors publish these assertions about the classroom benefits of humor usage.

In a more professional study, Kaplan and Pascoe (1977) researched the effects of humorous lectures on comprehension and cognitive retention. Five hundred and eight undergraduates in sixteen sections of Introductory Psychology were randomly selected to hear one of four 20 minute video lectures—one serious, three humorous. The three humorous lectures were designed to use 1) related humor, 2) unrelated humor, and 3) mixed humor. Students were given an impression test and a comprehension test after the lecture, and the same test six weeks later.

Even though the cognitive test results showed no significant difference in scores, either after the lecture or after six weeks, the humorous lectures were perceived as better, more interesting, and entertaining. In the posttest six weeks later, the groups viewing the related humor lecture scored significantly better on the humor items than did the serious group.

Bahr (1978) examined the effect of using three different amounts of humor in a lecture on immediate learning and delayed retention. Using 125 college students, Bahr randomly divided them into five groups. Low (ten jokes), medium (twenty jokes), and high (thirty jokes) humor groups viewed a 25-minute videotape lecture on language development, as well as a serious control group and a verbal repetition control group. A quiz was administered following the lecture and one week later. All groups did equally well on both tests; there were no significant differences. The humor groups, however, rated the lecture as lighter and more interesting than the control groups, who found the lecture boring. As a vehicle for providing an interesting and enjoyable learning experience, content-related humor appeared to work well.

Approaching the topic from a different angle, Townsend and Mahoney (1981) and Lorenzi (1996) have explored the role humor plays in relieving test anxiety. Since humor is supposed to lower one's state of anxiety, it should have a positive effect on test performance. In the Townsend and Mahoney study, four college classes (106 total people) were given two self-reporting instruments to measure anxiety. Five humorous



test questions, non-content based, were inserted in a 35-item multiple choice test. No significant differences were found among the four class sections on achievement and anxiety level. The Lorenzi study consisted of 181 nursing students, one-half randomly selected to view a 3-6 minute humorous videotape prior to testing, and one-half selected not to view a video. Results of the study indicated no significant affect in the students' test scores between the two groups. However, when students are given a choice to take tests in a humor or non-humor room, 88% of the students choose the humor room. Overall, these results do not support the idea that humor has a positive affect on test performance, but may have a positive affect on attitude toward testing.

Perhaps the most convincing studies on humor in teaching and learning have been conducted by Avner Ziv. In 1976, Ziv conducted a creativity experiment involving 288 tenth graders. Randomly selected into two control and two experimental groups, each group was tested with the Torrance Creativity Test. The experimental group listened to funny records prior to taking a second Torrance Creativity Test three weeks later. The experimental groups' total scores were significantly higher than the control groups. The humor stimuli increased divergent thinking capabilities in adolescents.

In a similar study, Ziv (1983) used two experimental groups of 30 tenth graders and one control group of thirty. The experimental groups were exposed to humorous cartoons and funny movies prior to taking the Torrance Creativity Test. Significantly higher scores were found in the experimental groups. Again, the use of humor improved students' creative and divergent thinking abilities.

Ziv (1988) even addressed the question: Will humor used judiciously throughout a whole semester show an increase in student learning? In two Statistics courses with 82 students in the experimental group and 79 in the control, the same teacher was trained in using three to four humorous comments or examples for important concepts per class meeting in the experimental group. Based on a 50 item multiple choice final

exam, the experimental group scored higher at the .01 level than did the control group. Ziv replicated the experiment in a psychology course, with 65 students in the experimental group, and 67 in the control. The replication showed the same results as the initial study, documenting that humor usage can significantly increase learning by students.

### Classroom Environment and Teacher Effectiveness

Sudol (1981) cautioned educators on the use of humor in the classroom. He claimed it could 1) set an improper tone, 2) create a detrimental image of the teacher, and 3) encourage students to view class as a fun time, not as a learning situation.

Despite these cautionary notes, humor is commonplace in educational settings. Fabrizi and Polio (1987) studied humorous activity in third, seventh, and eleventh grade classrooms. Using observational data focusing on laughter and smiling, they found a decrease in humorous activity as students progressed into the higher grades:

Laughter:     3rd grade, 3/hour  
                      7th grade, 3/hour  
                      11th grade, 1.5/hour

Smiling:       3rd grade, 6.5/hour  
                      11th grade, 2.75/hour

Another study at the collegiate level, surveying seventy undergraduate classrooms, found humorous elements at a rate of 3.34 per fifty minute class (Bryant et al., 1980).

Darling and Civikly (1987) measured the effect of various humor types in a lecture on the classroom climate. It has been previously documented that a supportive classroom climate is more conducive to learning. After listening to ten minute audio tape lectures by male and female teachers, 180 college students completed a Communicative Climate Questionnaire. The lectures used non-tendentious humor, tendentious humor, and no humor. The results indicated that any teacher using any

kind of humor was perceived as more defensive than supportive. However, it was uncertain if the humor employed was content-related or not, and whether using visual or personal cues would alter student perception.

Stuart and Rosenfeld (1994) examined the relationship between the perceptions of 195 university students of college teachers' humor usage and classroom climate. Classes of teachers viewed as low in their overall use of humor were rated low in student supportiveness, involvement, and innovation.

Bryant and Zillman (1988), in a broad review of the literature on humor in education, answered the question, "Does humor improve the classroom environment?" There is much anecdotal evidence to support the premise that humor relaxes, eases, and creates a non-threatening climate for students. Research from Zillman and Bryant (1983) on television viewing supported the premise that humor in short, fast-paced segments facilitated viewing and enjoyment by children and adolescents. There were also positive effects in the retention of information presented in a humorous fashion. Even though the literature is somewhat mixed, the generalization supported by the authors is that the careful use of humor creates a more positive classroom climate.

Gorham and Christophel (1990) relate the use of classroom humor to immediacy and student learning. Using a questionnaire by students to rate verbal and non-verbal immediacy behaviors in five class meetings, the authors compared the use of humor and its effect in low, moderate, and high immediacy teachers. Total humor events positively correlated to student learning. High immediacy teachers used 63% more humor than low and moderate immediacy teachers. Personal anecdote, stories, and relevant content-related humor used with other verbal and non-verbal cues provided for the best learning environment.

Ziv (1979) surveyed 46 junior high teachers to find out which ones had a good sense of humor, and which ones were the most positive teachers. He then gave a social climate questionnaire to all students in those 46 classes. On both accounts, he

found a clear connection--the teachers who were rated with the best sense of humor were also viewed as the most positive; by student evaluation, the five top teachers using humor created a much more positive learning environment than the lowest five teachers at the .01 alpha level.

There is general support to conclude that humor enhances the classroom learning environment. However, the use of aggressive, hostile, and demeaning humor will have a negative effect (Stocking and Zillman, 1976; Bryant and Zillman, 1988; Gorham and Christophel, 1990).

The majority of research on teacher preferences by students indicates that students prefer the use of relevant, non-hostile humor in the classroom. Schmuck and Schmuck (1989) replicated a survey originally performed on 212 rural grade school students in 1963. The same top five teacher qualities were important to 200 Detroit schoolchildren in 1989: 1) shows respect, 2) makes subject interesting, 3) uses humor, 4) shows empathy, and 5) does not play favorites. More recently in a study by Crump (1996), 70 undergraduate students ranked 12 different teacher immediacy behaviors for importance. The top five ranked behaviors were 1) humor, 2) vocal variation, 3) dynamic delivery, 4) use of personal examples, and 5) friendliness.

In addition to creating a positive classroom environment, is humor use by teachers related to motivation, enjoyment, and student learning? Murray (1983) studied the differences between low, middle, and high rated teachers in large social science classes. Observations of 54 college teachers in three separate classes by six to eight trained observers indicated that the high rated teachers differed from the low and middle rated teachers in the following ways:

- 1) they spoke expressively
- 2) they appeared enthusiastic
- 3) they moved around the classroom
- 4) they exuded a strong interest in the subject

5) they had a sense of humor.

Mintzes' (1979) study posed the question: What teacher behaviors are most conducive to high student evaluations in smaller classes? He surveyed six sections of an Introduction to Psychology class with 18 students per class. The highest correlations were found with Clarity items (explains, speaks expressively and concretely) and Rapport (shows interest, uses praise, personal). Gesturing, sense of humor, and point of view were not found to be as significant for the smaller classes as they were for large class sections in Murray's study.

Bryant et al. (1980) studied seventy undergraduate classes at the University of Massachusetts. Based on student evaluations of the teachers and tape recordings, they found, on average, professors used 3.34 humorous elements in a typical fifty minute class. Humor related positively for male teachers (who used 3.73 humorous comments per class), but was unrelated for female teachers (who used 2.43 humorous comments per class). Humor used by male professors was associated with enhanced appeal; however, this was not true for female teachers. The authors speculated that the use of humor by female professors was perhaps incongruous with students' perceptions of women as teachers. Overall, humor by male teachers significantly enhanced student evaluations in the categories of appeal, delivery, and effectiveness, but not competence.

Tamborini and Zillman (1981) studied the issue of how humor type affected student perception. Fifty male and fifty female college students from an introductory course in telecommunications were randomly selected to listen to one audio taped lecture by a male or female professor using either 1) sexual humor, 2) self-disparaging humor, 3) other-disparaging humor, or 4) no humor.

The use of humor had no detrimental effect on the students' perceptions of the intelligence of the teacher. Self-disparaging humor appealed more to the same sex; sexual humor appealed more to the opposite sex. Depending upon the class make-up,

using either sexual or self-disparaging humor may enhance student evaluations. MacAdams' (1985) review of literature supports Tamborini and Zillman's research and its application for instructional librarians. Ellermeier's study (1991) of adult learners' perceptions found that a professor's use of humor established him or her as a good communicator and socially competent adult.

Ziv et al. (1986) also provided experimental support for the use of humor to enhance teacher effectiveness. Using four random groups of 136 tenth graders, Ziv et al. had students view a video lecture employing either 1) self-disparaging humor, 2) other-disparaging humor, 3) mixed humor, or 4) no humor. Significantly higher ratings in appeal and originality were given to teachers using mixed humor; the no humor teacher was rated lowest on originality.

Weaver and Cottrell (1988) surveyed college students after having them list the top 17 items that motivated students in class. The six top-ranked items were 1) interesting subject, 2) instructor enthusiasm, 3) exciting approaches used, 4) relevance of the class to life, 5) sense of humor, and 6) interaction between teacher and student. According to these authors, a classroom that incorporates humor is viewed as more motivating and stimulating to students.

Broadly speaking, humor in the classroom is a positive element, assuming it is aptly timed, and it is the appropriate humor type (Powell and Andresen, 1985). Some sex differences exist in humor use and student perception, with male teachers benefitting the most.

Not only do students prefer humor, but many teachers view humor as an integral teaching strategy. In one survey, 170 high school teachers listed the major reasons for using humor, which included putting students at ease, getting students' attention, keeping the class less formal, and making learning fun (Neuliep, 1991). In another survey, 35 of the 50 best teachers in the United States listed the most important teacher characteristics as follows: 1) love of children, 2) subject matter

knowledge, 3) excellent communication skills, 4) flexibility, and 5) sense of humor (Shanoski & Hranitz, 1991).

It is fairly evident, even given the impossibility in measuring one's sense of humor (Thorson and Powell, 1991, 1993), that the carefully calculated use of humor can enhance classroom climate and teacher effectiveness.

### Chapter Summary

In reviewing the literature on humor in education, one is struck by the mixed and varied research. The literature on humor and persuasion is inconclusive. Although humor aids in the student perceptions of teacher character (Gruner, 1967), and in the student perception of textbook enjoyment (Klein et al., 1982), it provides little enhancement in any persuasive qualities (Markewicz, 1974). The research indicates that student learning and divergent thinking capabilities can be enhanced with the use of humor (Ziv, 1976, 1983, 1988) in controlled settings, even though humor does not necessarily reduce test anxiety (Townsend and Mahoney, 1981). The carefully calculated use of relevant humor has been shown to enhance the classroom climate, teacher effectiveness, and student achievement.

Finally, the use of humor is routinely mentioned as a preferred teacher trait by students and teachers alike (Hart, 1934; Mintzes, 1979; Murray, 1983; Weaver and Cottrell, 1988; Schmuck and Schmuck, 1989; Gorham and Christophel, 1990; Neuliep, 1991; Crump, 1996). And even though one research study by Darling and Civikly (1987) documented a negative effect of humor on classroom climate, many others have shown positive and helpful effects (Ziv et al., 1979; Zillman and Bryant, 1983; Gorham and Christophel, 1990).

This study focuses on the use of content humor in a five-lesson introduction to poetry unit to discover in a quasi-experimental educational design whether content humor enhances students' attitude towards poetry as an art form, and whether or not this humorous introduction is likely to impact their reading habits in the future.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Research Design

#### Introduction

This chapter describes the research design for the study. A description of the design, variables, population, the treatment and control groups, the curriculum, the survey instrument, and the lesson plans is provided. Research questions and hypotheses are also stated.

#### Research Design

The design for this investigation was an exploratory, quasi-experimental research experiment (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 1990). Two groups of tenth grade students, one treatment and the control, randomly selected as such, were pre and posttested in order to determine attitudinal differences between the groups following treatment, and to monitor affective changes within both groups. A second treatment group of tenth graders was given the posttest only to overcome concerns that the pretest had interactive effects. Treatment and control groups were randomly chosen from intact tenth grade classes in Luke M. Powers Catholic High School in Flint, Michigan.

#### Selection of Poems

After 20 years as a poet in the Michigan Council for the Arts' Poets in the Schools program, the researcher collected a total of 40 humorous and 40 non-humorous contemporary and modern poems from a wide variety of professional sources. Poems were selected largely from past experience as a reader and a teacher. Humorous selections came from the following general categories: absurd, surreal, and narrative. Hostile, demeaning, overly sexual or racist poems were not included in either group. Most importantly, poems were chosen in both categories for their interest and accessibility to teenagers. The poems were then collated into four groups of 20 poems each, two humorous packets with surveys, and two non-humorous packets



with surveys. The authors' names were removed to eliminate any possible bias in selection based upon name recognition. The goal was to have American Literature classes from Linden High School rate the top ten in each group in order to end up with the top-rated poems to use in the curriculum experiment.

Ms. Bedford-Smith, an English teacher at Linden High School in Genesee county, agreed to have her three American Literature classes read and rate the top ten poems in each packet. To accommodate the four packets, one class read two packets, and two other classes read one packet each. On February 12, 1996, a total of 75 students (50 sophomores, 25 juniors) read and rated their favorite poems in each group. The researcher collected the packets on February 14, 1996, and tallied the results. The top-rated 20 poems were used in the control and treatment groups at Powers High School (Appendix A and Appendix B). Two poems were added by the researcher to each group, totalling 22 poems, to adequately accomplish the rhyme scheme portion of the lesson plans.

### Curriculum Experiment

On February 20, 1996, the three 10th grade American Literature classes at Powers High School were randomly selected for treatment and control status. The two teachers were Ms. Pat Otten (with one regular American Literature class) and Ms. Corinne Talbot (with two regular American Literature classes). Ms. Talbot's two classes were randomly selected: her first hour class was selected as the control group with non-humor, using pretest and posttest, and her third hour class was selected as the treatment one group with humor, using pretest and posttest. Since Ms. Otten had only one class, she was assigned the treatment two group with humor, using the posttest only.

For the treatment one and control groups, pretests were administered on March 1, 1996. The treatment two group had no pretest. The curriculum was administered in all three classes between March 4-8, and March 11-13. Due to a number of

shortened days at Powers High School, several extra days were needed to complete all of the curriculum materials. The teachers continued to follow the lesson plans in the appropriate sequence. Posttests were administered on March 18, 1996.

Pre and posttests were collected by the researchers on March 19 and assembled as follows:

Treatment One (humor group)

Pretests: 26 (22 valid)

Posttests: 26 (22 valid)

Treatment Two (humor group)

Posttests: 26 (25 valid)

Control (non-humor group)

Pretests: 21 (19 valid)

Posttests: 21 (19 valid)

Pre and posttests with incomplete responses were eliminated from the pretest and posttest total comparison analysis. Incomplete surveys were included in individual item analysis, except in those specific categories where they were missing data.

### Variables

The dependent variables for this study were as follows:

- 1) attitude toward poetry
- 2) likelihood to read poetry in the future.

The independent variable was the content humor in the poetry used in the treatment groups.

### Population

The treatment and control groups were selected randomly from three tenth grade American Literature classes at Luke M. Powers Catholic High School, a private

high school. The school enrolls students from nearly all sectors of Genesee county and was selected for this broad student representation. Forty percent of the student body come from the city of Flint, and 60% live within a 30 mile radius. Twenty percent of the population are students of color. Powers Catholic High School enrolls 907 total students, with 228 in tenth grade. The school offers basic, regular, and advanced American Literature classes. Students are enrolled in the appropriate level course based upon testing, grades, and teacher recommendations. The three American Literature classes used in this experiment were designated as "regular."

### Sample

Intact classes, rather than individual students, were targeted for treatment and control groups. The treatment and control groups were randomly selected among the three regular tenth grade American Literature classes at Luke M. Powers Catholic High School whose teachers volunteered to be involved. The criteria placed on student participation in the study were the ability of the students to speak and understand the English language and an 80% attendance rate during the one-week curriculum exposure. The groups consisted of 21, 26, and 26 students, which approaches the preferred research standard of 30 subjects per sample group (Ary et al., 1990).

### Data Collection

The control and two treatment groups were randomly selected. On Friday, March 1, 1996, a pretest was administered to the treatment one and control group. To limit teacher bias in the experiment, the treatment one and control groups were taught by the same teacher, Ms. Talbot. Both groups were pre and posttested. The treatment two group, with no pretest, was taught by a second teacher, Ms. Otten.

The introduction to poetry curriculum, created by the author but taught by the regular high school English teachers, was conducted over the course of two weeks. The two treatment classes read only humorous poetry, and the control group read only non-humorous poetry. The lesson objectives, lectures, and assignments for all three

classes were identical.

The English teachers were volunteers who expressed interest in learning more about new methods for teaching poetry. It is evident that teacher bias, either for or against poetry, could influence the experiment. This problem was discussed at the training session, and teachers were encouraged to treat this unit like any other literature unit. Students also were unaware that they were participating in a curriculum experiment. In fact, the researcher was never present for any class during the experiment. These above steps were taken to minimize influence related to the Hawthorne Effect.

On Monday, March 18, 1996, following the administration of the poetry unit, the posttest was given to all three groups. Only pre and posttest results from students attending at least eighty percent of the class sessions were included in the final data analysis.

### Test Instrument

The Poetry Opinionnaire is a survey instrument used to measure a person's attitude toward poetry and is designed after the Revised Math Attitude Scale (Aiken & Dreger, 1961). The Revised Math Attitude Scale (RMAS) is a 20-item scale using the Likert scaling procedure. The authors report a test-retest reliability coefficient of .94.

The Poetry Opinionnaire Instrument (Appendix C) consists of nine items using the Likert scaling procedure, and one item for ranking forms of literature. Six of the items are exact replications from the RMAS, only substituting the word 'poetry' for the word 'mathematics.' The remaining four items were created by the researcher. The test instrument was not validated by pretesting, nor statistically measured for reliability.

Of the nine statements on the Poetry Opinionnaire, five of the statements are positive regarding poetry, and four are negative. Given the imitative design of the instrument, it appears to be a satisfactory device for measuring students' attitudes

toward poetry, particularly their level of appreciation for the art form in general.

### Treatment Curriculum

The treatment curriculum was developed as a brief introduction to poetry unit for tenth graders by the researcher. The facilitator of the curriculum was the regular classroom teacher who had participated in a two-hour training session with the author. The training consisted of an overview of the entire experiment, and a review of the lesson plans and poems used in both curricula.

The five basic lessons (Appendix D) are listed below with general topic areas noted.

- |                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| 1. What is Poetry?       | Definition, examples, purpose                             |
| 2. The Figure of a Poem  | Figurative language, concrete, abstract, simile, metaphor |
| 3. The Sound of Poetry   | Alliteration, slant rhyme, rhyme scheme                   |
| 4. The Meaning of Poetry | Explication, symbol, allusion                             |
| 5. Creating Poetry       | Creative process, writing exercises                       |

### Research Questions and Hypotheses

The purpose of this study is to test the effectiveness of using content humor in an introduction to poetry unit on students' attitudes towards poetry and on students' likelihood to read poetry in the future.

Research question one: Is there a difference in attitude toward poetry between tenth grade students exposed to an introductory poetry unit using humorous material and those using non-humorous material? The null hypothesis to test this is as follows:

*Hypothesis One: There will be no statistically significant difference in student attitude toward poetry between students introduced to poetry through humorous material and students introduced to poetry using non-humorous material.*

Research question two: Is there a difference in students' likelihood to read poetry in the future between students introduced to poetry using humorous material and students

introduced to poetry using non-humorous material? The null hypothesis is as follows:

*Hypothesis Two: There will be no statistically significant difference in likelihood to read poetry in the future between students introduced to poetry using humorous material and students introduced to poetry using non-humorous material.*

#### Data Analysis

The data analysis was completed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, 1993). A chi square analysis was completed to determine if significant sex differences existed between classes. Mean comparisons of pre and posttest results were utilized to highlight differences between groups. Summary score averages by gender and group were reviewed to examine the possibility that gender played a role in the results. The t-Test for paired samples by statement and group and an analysis of variance for all groups conclusively highlighted the statistical differences between the groups. All decisions on the significance of statistical procedures were based on an alpha level of .05.

#### Limitations of the Study

Since this investigation is limited in scope, its applicability in other types of learning environments, or with various academic subjects, is uncertain. Some subjects such as English lend themselves to content humor more than other areas. Further experimentation will be necessary to discover the transferrability of this data. The brevity of this experiment could limit the validity of results. A longer, more extensive curriculum experiment is recommended for the future. Most statisticians have clearly stated that external validity limitations with the pretest serving as an interactive device may affect results. However, the second treatment group with no pretest should overcome any concerns that the pretest had interactive effects. It is also possible that teacher bias, for or against poetry, could influence the experimental results. The self-designed survey instrument, the Poetry Opinionnaire, was utilized due to the scarcity of valid attitudinal surveys in the field of poetry. The instrument

was not tested for reliability or validity, and, therefore, should be considered a limitation. The general assumptions related to internal validity concerns of nonrandomly selected groups should be duly noted.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Data Analysis

Chapter IV presents the results of the data analysis that was completed to test the hypotheses developed for this study. The first part is a descriptive analysis of the sample; the second part details the use of inferential statistics to address research questions and hypotheses.

#### Descriptive Analysis

Three intact classes at Powers Catholic High School participated in this introduction to poetry curriculum experiment. The experiment was designed to introduce students to poetry using either humorous or non-humorous content material, and measure the attitudinal changes, if any, of the groups.

The students were all tenth graders, enrolled in regular American Literature classes based upon test scores, teacher recommendations, and counselor discretion. A total of 73 students were included in the final data analysis. The control class, using non-humorous content material, consisted of 21 students. The treatment one class, using humorous content material, consisted of 26 students, and the treatment two class, also using humor, consisted of 26 students.

Table 1 on the following page shows the crosstabulation of the individual classes with the variable of sex of the student.

Table 1  
Chi-Square Analysis of Class  
By Sex of the Student

	<u>male</u>	<u>female</u>	<u>row total</u>
Control Group	12	9	21
	57.1%	42.9%	28.8



	<u>male</u>	<u>female</u>	<u>row total</u>
Treatment One	16	10	26
	61.5%	38.5%	35.6
Treatment Two	16	10	26
	61.5%	38.5%	35.6
Column Total	44	29	73
	60.3%	39.7%	100.0
Chi-square value: .12 (NS)			

The results showed that males outnumbered females in each class. The control class consisted of 12 males and nine females. The treatment one class had 16 males and ten females. The treatment two class also had 16 males and ten females.

A chi-square analysis was completed to determine if there was a significant difference in sex of the students relative to class. The chi-square value of .12 was not statistically significant with two degrees of freedom. Students in the three classes did not differ significantly based upon their sex.

#### Pretest Equivalencies

The control and treatment one classes were pretested using the Poetry Opinionnaire. The treatment two class received no pretest. This procedure was employed to monitor interactive effects possible due to pretesting. The control and treatment one classes were compared on their pretest measures to determine pretest equivalencies prior to starting treatment. This comparison was made using a t-test for two independent samples with the pretest summary scores used as the dependent variable. The results of this analysis are shown in Table 2.

Table 2  
t-Test for Two Independent Samples:  
Pretest Total Scores on the Poetry Opinionnaire  
by Class Membership

<u>Variable</u>	<u>No. of Cases</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>SE</u>
Pretest Total Score				
Control Group	19	27.84	9.5	2.18
Treatment One	22	28.27	8.3	1.77
Mean Difference = -.43				
t-test for Equality of Means				
Variances	t-value	df	2-tail sig.	SE of Difference
Equal	-.15	39	.878 (NS)	2.78

The results of the t-test indicated that the students in both the control and treatment one classes had no significant attitudinal differences toward poetry prior to the experiment, according to the Poetry Opinionnaire survey. A t-value of -.15 with 39 degrees of freedom was not statistically significant at the .05 alpha level. The mean pretest total score for the control class was 27.84, versus the mean pretest total score for the treatment one class of 28.27, a difference of .43.

#### Pretest Data

The pretest to measure student attitude toward poetry was administered to the control and treatment one classes only. The following Table 3 is a summary of that data, item by item, from the Poetry Opinionnaire.

Table 3  
Pretest Summary Data By Statement  
on the Poetry Opinionnaire  
(Control and Treatment One Groups)

ITEM 1 Pretest: I feel at ease reading poetry, and I like it very much.		
	frequency	valid percent
strongly disagree	4	8.5
disagree	17	36.2
undecided	18	38.2
agree	6	12.8
strongly agree	2	4.3
ITEM 2 Pretest: I am always under a terrible strain when I read poetry.		
strongly agree	4	8.5
agree	13	27.7
undecided	10	21.3
disagree	17	36.2
strongly disagree	3	6.4
ITEM 3 Pretest: When I hear the word 'poetry,' I have a feeling of dislike.		
strongly agree	4	8.5
agree	10	21.3
undecided	16	34.0
disagree	13	27.7
strongly disagree	4	8.5

**ITEM 4 Pretest: Poetry is fascinating and fun.**

	frequency	valid percent
strongly disagree	6	12.8
disagree	15	31.9
undecided	18	38.3
agree	6	12.8
strongly agree	2	4.3

**ITEM 5 Pretest: Poetry is a subject in school which I have always enjoyed studying.**

strongly disagree	11	23.4
disagree	16	34.0
undecided	9	19.1
agree	9	19.1
strongly agree	2	4.3

**ITEM 6 Pretest: Reading poetry makes me feel uncomfortable, restless, irritable, and impatient.**

strongly agree	7	14.9
agree	10	21.3
undecided	12	25.5
disagree	15	31.9
strongly disagree	3	6.4

ITEM 7 Pretest: If I had my way, I'd study more poetry in English class.

	frequency	valid percent
strongly disagree	7	15.2
disagree	19	41.3
undecided	11	23.9
agree	7	15.2
strongly agree	2	4.3

ITEM 8 Pretest: Poetry should be banned from all high school English classes.

strongly agree	7	14.9
agree	7	14.9
undecided	8	17.0
disagree	17	36.2
strongly disagree	8	17.0

ITEM 9 Pretest: In the future, I will probably continue to read poetry on my own.

strongly disagree	9	19.1
disagree	14	29.8
undecided	15	31.9
agree	9	19.1
strongly agree	0	0

ITEM 10 Pretest: Poetry ranked as a form of literature.

Rank #1	8	19.0
Rank #2	12	28.6
Rank #3	9	21.4
Rank #4	13	31.0

### Posttest Data

After exposing each class to the introduction to poetry curriculum, two humorous treatments and one non-humorous, the Poetry Opinionnaire was administered to all three classes for posttest results. The intent was to measure whether or not any attitudinal changes toward poetry had taken place as a direct result of the curriculum design. The following Table 4 is a summary of responses for all three classes on the posttest.

Table 4  
Posttest Summary Data by Statement  
on the Poetry Opinionnaire  
(Control, Treatment One, Treatment Two)

Item 1 Posttest: I feel at ease reading poetry, and I like it very much.		
	frequency	valid percent
strongly disagree	3	4.1
disagree	11	15.1
undecided	25	34.2
agree	29	39.7
strongly agree	5	6.8
Item 2 Posttest: I am always under a terrible strain when I read poetry.		
strongly agree	2	2.7
agree	8	11.0
undecided	13	17.8
disagree	38	52.1
strongly disagree	12	16.4

Item 3 Posttest: When I hear the word 'poetry,' I have a feeling of dislike.

	frequency	valid percent
strongly agree	3	4.1
agree	16	21.9
undecided	19	26.0
disagree	28	38.4
strongly disagree	7	9.6

Item 4 Posttest: Poetry is fascinating and fun.

strongly disagree	7	9.6
disagree	7	9.6
undecided	35	47.9
agree	19	26.0
strongly agree	5	6.8

Item 5 Posttest: Poetry is a subject in school which I have always enjoyed studying.

strongly disagree	9	12.3
disagree	22	30.1
undecided	24	32.9
agree	13	17.8
strongly agree	5	6.8

Item 6 Posttest: Reading poetry makes me feel uncomfortable, restless, irritable, and impatient.

	frequency	valid percent
strongly agree	4	5.5
agree	8	11.0
undecided	15	20.5
disagree	34	46.6
strongly disagree	12	16.4

Item 7 Posttest: If I had my way, I'd study more poetry in English class.

strongly disagree	8	11.0
disagree	19	26.0
undecided	23	31.5
agree	15	20.5
strongly agree	8	11.0

Item 8 Posttest: Poetry should be banned from all high school English classes.

strongly agree	6	8.2
agree	3	4.1
undecided	8	11.0
disagree	26	35.6
strongly disagree	30	41.1



Item 9 Posttest: In the future, I will probably continue to read poetry on my own.

	frequency	valid percent
strongly disagree	8	11.0
disagree	13	17.8
undecided	29	39.7
agree	18	24.7
strongly agree	5	6.8

Item 10 Posttest: Poetry ranked as a form of literature.

Ranked #1	20	27.4
Ranked #2	18	25.4
Ranked #3	17	23.9
Ranked #4	16	22.3

Table 5 details a percentage comparison of pretest to posttest responses on the Poetry Opinionnaire. These data are included to show a descriptive change in attitude toward poetry.

Table 5  
Percentage Comparison by Statement  
of Total Pretest Responses (47) to Control Posttest Responses (23)  
and Treatment One Posttest Responses (26)  
in the Strongly Agree/Agree Categories

	pretest	control posttest	treatment posttest
1. I feel at ease reading poetry, and I like it very much.	17.1%	39.1%	57.6%

	pretest	control posttest	treatment posttest
2. I am always under a terrible strain when I read poetry.	36.2%	17.3%	3.8%
3. When I hear the word 'poetry,' I have a feeling of dislike.	29.8%	21.7%	7.6%
4. Poetry is fascinating and fun.	17.1%	21.7%	42.3%
5. Poetry is a subject in school which I have always enjoyed studying.	23.4%	26.0%	23.0%
6. Reading poetry makes me feel uncomfortable, restless, irritable, and impatient.	36.2%	21.7%	3.8%
7. If I had my way, I'd study more poetry in English.	19.5%	34.7%	38.4%
8. Poetry should be banned from all high school English classes.	29.8%	13.0%	7.6%

	pretest	control posttest	treatment posttest
9. In the future, I will probably continue to read poetry on my own.	19.1%	30.4%	38.4%
10. Poetry ranked as the most favorite form of literature.	19.0%	26.0%	30.7%

### Mean Comparisons

The following Tables 6 and 7 show the mean response data for the control and treatment one groups separately. In the point scheme used for this experiment (a 1-5 scale), the higher the mean, the more favorable attitude *towards* poetry is expressed.

Table 6  
Mean Comparisons by Statement  
of Pretest vs. Posttest Responses  
for the Control Class  
(non-humorous curriculum)

	pretest	posttest
1. I feel at ease reading poetry, and I like it very much.	2.66	2.95
2. I am always under a terrible strain when I read poetry.	2.95	3.42

	pretest	posttest
3. When I hear the word 'poetry,' I have a feeling of dislike.	3.00	3.09
4. Poetry is fascinating and fun.	2.66	2.71
5. Poetry is a subject in school which I have always enjoyed studying.	2.33	2.57
6. Reading poetry makes me feel uncomfortable, restless, irritable, and impatient.	2.71	3.23
7. If I had my way, I'd study more poetry in English.	2.50	2.90
8. Poetry should be banned from all high school English classes.	3.19	3.61

	pretest	posttest
9. In the future, I will probably continue to read poetry on my own.	2.38	2.71
10. Poetry ranked as the most favorite form of literature.	2.75	2.55

In nine of the ten statements, the mean scores for the posttest increased, indicating an enhancement in student attitude toward poetry after exposure to the non-humorous treatment.

Table 7  
Mean Comparisons by Statement  
of Pretest vs. Posttest Responses  
for the Treatment One Class  
(humorous curriculum)

	pretest	posttest
1. I feel at ease reading poetry, and I like it very much.	2.69	3.61
2. I am always under a terrible strain when I read poetry.	3.11	3.96

	pretest	posttest
3. When I hear the word 'poetry,' I have a feeling of dislike.	3.11	3.53
4. Poetry is fascinating and fun.	2.61	3.30
5. Poetry is a subject in school which I have always enjoyed studying.	2.57	2.88
6. Reading poetry makes me feel uncomfortable, restless, irritable, and impatient.	3.11	3.73
7. If I had my way, I'd study more poetry in English.	2.53	3.19
8. Poetry should be banned from all high school English classes.	3.30	4.07

	pretest	posttest
9. In the future, I will probably continue to read poetry on my own.	2.61	3.30
10. Poetry ranked as the most favorite form of literature.	2.00	2.90

In all ten statements, the mean scores for the posttest increased, indicating an enhancement in student attitude towards poetry after the humorous treatment.

#### Posttest Means

Table 8 below shows a comparison of raw mean scores by class membership by statement.

Table 8  
Raw Mean Posttest Scores  
by Statement and Class Membership

<u>statement</u>	<u>control</u> (non-humor)	<u>treatment one</u> (humor)	<u>treatment two</u> (humor)
1.	2.95	3.61	3.26
2.	3.42	3.96	3.61
3.	3.09	3.53	3.15
4.	2.71	3.30	3.23
5.	2.57	2.88	2.80
6.	3.23	3.73	3.69
7.	2.90	3.19	2.73
8.	3.61	4.07	4.15

<u>statement</u>	<u>control</u> (non-humor)	<u>treatment one</u> (humor)	<u>treatment two</u> (humor)
9.	2.71	3.30	2.88
10.	2.55	2.90	2.36
<b>Total</b>	<b>30.63</b>	<b>34.45</b>	<b>32.32</b>

Both humor group classes, treatment one and treatment two, consistently outsourced the non-humor control group. Treatment one class means were higher than the control class means in all 11 categories. Treatment two class means were higher than the control class means in nine of the 11 categories. The treatment two humor group, with no pretest, outsourced the control group with pretest. This situation supports the premise that there were no interactive effects as a result of the pretest instrument.

#### Gender Differences

To examine the possibility that gender played a role in the results, the pretest summary scores for the control and treatment one groups were separated. The data indicate that females in general have a slightly better attitude toward poetry (the higher the score, the better the attitude toward poetry).

Table 9  
Pretest Summary Score Averages  
by Gender and Group

	Female		Male	
	<u>Number</u>	<u>Average</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Average</u>
Control	8	29.25	11	26.8
Treatment One	8	31.00	14	26.7
Total	16	30.10	25	26.76

The posttest summary scores separated by gender in Table 10 show that the



average female score is also higher than the average male score.

Table 10  
Posttest Summary Score Averages  
by Gender and Group

	Female		Male	
	<u>Number</u>	<u>Average</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Average</u>
Control	8	34.2	11	28.00
Treatment One	8	34.3	14	34.50
Total	16	34.3	25	31.64

Gender was not perceived as a decisive factor in the results. The average gain in score totals from pretest to posttest was 4.2 points for females, and 4.88 for males. No definitive research could be found to indicate a difference in humor appreciation based upon gender.

#### Inferential Statistics

The t-test for paired samples was used to evaluate the difference between pretest and posttest means for each item on the Poetry Opinionnaire. Table 11 shows the results for the control group which used non-humorous content material in its curriculum design.

Table 11  
t-Test for Paired Samples  
by Statement for the  
Control Group (non-humor)

statement	pretest mean	posttest mean	paired differences	SD	df	t-value
1.	2.66	2.95	-.285	.956	20	-1.37 (NS)
2.	2.95	3.42	-.476	.928	20	-2.35*

statement	pretest mean	posttest mean	paired differences	SD	df	t-value
3.	3.00	3.09	-.095	.700	20	-.62 (NS)
4.	2.66	2.71	-.047	.669	20	-.33 (NS)
5.	2.33	2.57	-.238	.889	20	-1.23 (NS)
6.	2.71	3.23	-.523	.814	20	-2.95*
7.	2.50	2.90	-.400	.883	19	-2.03 (NS)
8.	3.19	3.61	-.428	1.07	20	-1.83 (NS)
9.	2.38	2.71	-.333	.856	20	-1.78 (NS)
10.	2.75	2.55	.200	1.79	19	.50 (NS)
Totals	27.84	30.63	-2.78	5.25	18	-2.31*

\* =  $p < .05$

Table 12 shows the results of the t-test for paired samples for the treatment one group which used only humorous content material in its curriculum design.

Table 12  
t-Test for Paired Samples  
by Statement for the  
Treatment One Group (humor)

statement	pretest mean	posttest mean	paired differences	SD	df	t-value
1.	2.69	3.61	-.923	1.01	25	-4.63**
2.	3.11	3.96	-.846	.967	25	-4.46**
3.	3.11	3.53	-.423	.945	25	-2.28*
4.	2.61	3.30	-.692	.928	25	-3.80**
5.	2.57	2.88	-.307	1.12	25	-1.40 (NS)
6.	3.11	3.73	-.615	1.23	25	-2.54*
7.	2.53	3.19	-.653	1.05	25	-3.16*

statement	pretest mean	posttest mean	paired differences	SD	df	t-value
8.	3.30	4.07	-.769	1.36	25	-2.87*
9.	2.61	3.30	-.692	1.22	25	-2.88*
10.	2.00	2.90	-.909	1.19	21	-3.58*
Totals	28.27	34.45	-6.18	6.68	21	-4.34**

\* =  $p < .05$   
 \*\* =  $p < .001$

### Analysis of Variance

The statistical method of ANOVA (analysis of variance) was administered to the posttest data for all three groups for all individual statements on the Poetry Opinionnaire, as well as on the summary scores to determine if any one group differed significantly from another. Table 13 contains the results of this analysis.

Table 13  
 Analysis of Variance By Statement  
 for all Groups  
 (Control, Treatment One, Treatment Two)

Statement 1: I feel at east reading poetry, and I like it very much.					
<u>Source</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>Sig.</u>
Between Group	2	5.14	2.57	2.99	.05*
Within Group	70	60.22	.86		
Total	72	65.36			

\* =  $p < .05$

(The Multiple Range Test indicates a significance at the .05 level between Treatment One and the Control class.)

<u>Mean</u>	<u>Class</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>T1</u>	<u>T2</u>
2.95	Control			
3.26	Treatment 2			
3.61	Treatment 1	*		

Statement 2: I am always under a terrible strain when I read poetry.

<u>Source</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>Sig.</u>
Between	2	3.49	1.74	1.90	.15(NS)
Within	70	64.25	.91		
Total	72	67.75			

Statement 3: When I hear the word 'poetry,' I have a feeling of dislike.

<u>Source</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>Sig.</u>
Between	2	2.86	1.43	1.32	.27(NS)
Within	70	75.65	1.08		
Total	72	78.52			

Statement 4: Poetry is fascinating and fun.

<u>Source</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>Sig.</u>
Between	2	4.68	2.34	2.39	.09*
Within	70	68.43	.97		
Total	72	73.12			

\* =  $p < .05$

(The Multiple Range Test indicates a significance at the .05 level between Treatment One and the Control class.)

<u>Mean</u>	<u>Class</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>T1</u>	<u>T2</u>
2.71	Control			
3.23	Treatment 2			
3.30	Treatment 1	*		

Statement 5: Poetry is a subject in school which I have always enjoyed studying.

<u>Source</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>Sig.</u>
Between	2	1.20	.60	.49	.61(NS)
Within	70	85.83	1.22		
Total	72	87.04			

Statement 6: Reading poetry makes me feel uncomfortable, restless, irritable, and impatient.

<u>Source</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>Sig.</u>
Between	2	3.37	1.68	1.50	.22(NS)
Within	70	78.46	1.12		
Total	72	81.83			

Statement 7: If I had my way, I'd study more poetry in English class.

<u>Source</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>Sig.</u>
Between	2	2.81	1.40	1.03	.35(NS)
Within	70	94.96	1.35		
Total	72	97.78			

Statement 8: Poetry should be banned from all high school English classes.

<u>Source</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>Sig.</u>
Between	2	3.76	1.88	1.31	.27(NS)
Within	70	100.18	1.43		
Total	72	103.94			

Statement 9: In the future, I will probably continue to read poetry on my own.

<u>Source</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>Sig.</u>
Between	2	4.50	2.25	2.01	.14(NS)
Within	70	78.47	1.12		
Total	72	82.98			

Statement 10: Poetry ranked as a form of literature.

<u>Source</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>Sig.</u>
Between	2	2.44	1.22	.95	.38(NS)
Within	68	86.71	1.27		
Total	70	89.15			

Posttest Summary Scores

<u>Source</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>Sig.</u>
Between	2	151.04	75.52	1.31	.27(NS)
Within	63	3611.31	57.32		
Total	65	3762.36			

### Research Questions and Hypotheses

The purpose of this study was to test the effectiveness of using content humor in an introduction to poetry unit on students' attitudes toward poetry and on students' likelihood to read poetry in the future. Two research questions were posed. All decisions on the significance of the null hypotheses were made using an alpha level of .05.

Research Question One: Is there a difference in attitude toward poetry between tenth grade students exposed to an introductory poetry unit using humorous material and those using non-humorous material?

This question was answered by testing the first null hypothesis:

Hypothesis One: There will be no statistically significant difference in student attitude toward poetry between students introduced to poetry through humorous material and students introduced to poetry through non-humorous material.

The statistical findings on the control group using non-humorous material show a significant enhancement of student attitude toward poetry at the .05 level on two of the ten statements in the Poetry Opinionnaire.

The statistical findings on the treatment one group using humorous material show a significant enhancement of student attitude toward poetry at the .05 level on nine of the ten statements in the Poetry Opinionnaire.

The fact that both the control and treatment one total scores indicate a significant enhancement in attitude toward poetry at the .05 level provides the basis to retain the null hypothesis. There was no statistically significant difference at the .05 level in student attitude toward poetry between students exposed through non-humorous material and those exposed through humorous material.

It is important to note, however, the intensity and direction of the changes. Both control and treatment one groups significantly enhanced students' attitudes toward poetry in general. In the analysis of variance, Table 13, the data indicated that on two statements on the Poetry Opinionnaire the treatment one class with humor significantly outperformed the control class with non-humor. Treatment one students scored significantly higher than the control class students on the posttest at the .05 alpha level on Statement 1: "I feel at ease reading poetry, and I like it very much," and Statement 4: "Poetry is fascinating and fun." More impressively, the treatment one group using humor indicated a significant difference from the pretest totals to the posttest totals at the .001 alpha level.

Research Question Two: Is there a difference in students' likelihood to read poetry in the future between students introduced to poetry using humorous material

and students introduced to poetry using non-humorous material?

This question was answered by testing the second null hypothesis:

Hypothesis Two: There will be no statistically significant difference in likelihood to read poetry in the future between students introduced to poetry using humorous material and students introduced to poetry using non-humorous material.

As indicated in Table 11 previously, statement nine ("In the future, I will probably continue to read poetry on my own"), there was no significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores for the control group.

In Table 12, however, the treatment one group shows a significant difference between pretest and posttest scores at the .05 alpha level for statement nine, "In the future, I will probably continue to read poetry on my own."

As a result of these findings, the null hypothesis of no difference in students' likelihood to read poetry after exposure to humorous material and students' likelihood to read poetry after exposure to non-humorous material is rejected. The curriculum design for the treatment one group using humorous content material appears to have positively enhanced students' attitudes toward poetry with regard to their self-reported intention to read poetry in the future. Since the time elapsed between the pre and posttest was three weeks, this significant change in 'intention' must be assumed. Only a longitudinal study of future reading habits would verify the end result. That study is beyond the scope of this current experiment.

### Chapter Summary

The quasi-experimental design of this study used intact, regular American Literature classes chosen randomly to be control, treatment one, and treatment two. A crosstabulation of sex of respondents indicated that there was no significant difference in the male/female ratio among the three classes.

The control and treatment one classes were given a pretest to measure any differences in attitude toward poetry prior to the curriculum treatment. The results of



a t-test for two independent samples, using the summary scores on the Poetry Opinionnaire, indicated no statistical difference. The mean of the control class was 27.84 compared to the mean of the treatment one class of 28.27. The treatment two class received no pretest in an attempt to monitor any interactive effects of the pretest instrument.

Mean comparisons of the pretest to the posttest for the control and treatment one classes showed a general enhancement in student attitude toward poetry. The control group using the non-humorous introduction to poetry curriculum indicated an increase in mean scores in nine of the ten items; the treatment one group using the content humor curriculum increased in mean scores in all ten items on the survey.

Comparing the posttest means for all three classes clearly indicated that the humorous curriculum outscored the non-humorous control group. The treatment one group means were higher than the control group means in all ten categories, and the treatment two group means were higher in nine of the ten categories.

To test Hypothesis One, a t-test for paired samples was administered, pretest total scores vs. posttest total scores, on the control group and the treatment one group. Since both classes showed a statistically significant enhancement in attitude toward poetry at the .05 level, the null hypothesis that there will be no difference in student attitude toward poetry between students introduced to poetry through humorous material and students introduced to poetry through non-humorous material was retained.

To test Hypothesis Two that there will be no significant difference in likelihood to read poetry in the future between students introduced to poetry using humorous material and students introduced using non-humorous material, the t-test for paired samples was administered. On the survey item, "In the future, I will probably continue to read poetry on my own," the control group produced no statistical difference between pretest and posttest scores. The treatment one group scores,

however, were statistically different at the .05 level. As a result, the null hypothesis was rejected. The curriculum using humorous content material positively enhanced students' attitudes toward poetry with regard to their intention to read poetry in the future.

Whether this somewhat brief experience in poetry will have a dynamic and lasting influence upon students' future reading habits is beyond the scope of this study. However, it is assumed that through positive experiences, attitudes toward poetry can be enhanced and exert a directive force upon a person's future response to the subject.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Summary and Conclusion

#### Introduction

This chapter summarizes the purpose of this study and includes conclusions and future recommendations for educational research.

#### Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of using modern and contemporary humorous poetry in an introductory poetry unit for tenth graders. The research questions used to determine this purpose were as follows:

1. Is there a difference in attitude toward poetry between tenth grade students exposed to an introductory poetry unit using humorous content material and those introduced to poetry using non-humorous content material?
2. Is there a difference in students' likelihood to read poetry in the future between students introduced to poetry using humorous material and students introduced to poetry using non-humorous material?

#### Background

Even though humor has been a part of human existence since the development of human consciousness, it has only been seriously considered since the 1900s when Freud (1905) categorized jokes into three major areas: 1) tendentious (hostile, sexual), 2) playful (illogical, nonsense), and 3) conceptual (witty, topical). Others have described these categories in this way: 1) superiority humor, 2) incongruity humor, and 3) relief humor (Hebert, 1991; Endlich, 1993; Gutwirth, 1993; Lowis and Nieuwoudt, 1993).

The literature in the area of humor and education falls into the following general categories: 1) classroom environment and teacher effectiveness, 2) persuasion, and 3) student learning and retention.

Student evaluations of teacher effectiveness, appeal, and delivery is a large area of research. Not only do most students indicate they prefer a teacher with a sense of humor (Hart, 1934; Weaver and Cottrell, 1988; Schmuck and Schmuck, 1989), but some studies have shown a positive relationship between a teacher's use of humor and higher teacher effectiveness ratings from students (Bryant et al., 1980; Tamborini and Zillman, 1981; MacAdam, 1985). The type of humor and the gender of the teacher play roles in the degree of effectiveness. The assumption is that the use of humor reduces anxiety and therefore creates a better learning environment (Gorham and Christophel, 1990).

The research on humor and persuasion is not large, and indicates, with mixed results, that the use of humor does not generally increase the persuasiveness of a short term message (Gruner, 1967; Markiewicz, 1974). One major study of humor use in introductory textbooks indicates that although humor related to enjoyment in reading, it was not associated with interest, persuasion, or as a motivator to read more in the future (Klein et al., 1992). In fact, the use of humor in a textbook was perceived as detrimental to the author's credibility.

The results of studies on the use of humor and its affect on student learning or cognitive retention are mixed. Some research has found a clear relationship between humor and an increase in divergent thinking skills and general knowledge acquisition (Ziv, 1976, 1983, 1988). Other research has indicated no difference in comprehension between humor groups and control groups (Kaplan and Pascoe, 1977). Many others have supported the use of humor in the classroom as an attention device, a stress releaser, and a teaching tool used to enhance the learning environment (Gilliland and Mauritsen, 1971; Colwell, 1981; Cornet, 1986; Whitmer, 1986; Brillantes, Jorgensen & Kelley, 1990; Walter, 1990; Hebert, 1991; Berwald, 1992; Bergen, 1993).

## Theoretical Framework

The use of classroom humor has long been assumed to be beneficial. Broad reviews on the literature and research of humor usage indicate that humor is a positive classroom element, a preferred teacher trait, can create enjoyment and enhance attention, and can stimulate divergent thinking capabilities (Ziv, 1976; Zillman and Bryant, 1983; Powell and Andresen, 1985; Bryant and Zillman, 1988; Slade, 1996).

Few researchers have explored how the use of humorous content material in a poetry unit would affect students' attitude toward the art form. Several studies on poetry preferences of students support the use of humorous material (Nelms, 1967; Ingham, 1980). In survey research, students from fourth grade to tenth grade indicated that humor was an important element in poems chosen as favorites. This current study is based on the concept that students who are enthusiastic and interested in a subject will be more likely to learn easily and effectively (Bloom, 1976).

Since it is apparent that most students' attitude toward poetry in high school is not favorable (Bugeja, 1992; Marshall, 1993), the creation of a new method of introduction may exert a direct, positive influence on this learned predisposition toward poetry.

## Review of Methodology

### Research Design

The design for this investigation was an exploratory, quasi-experimental research experiment. Two groups of tenth grade students, one experimental and the other control, were pre and posttested to determine attitudinal differences between the groups following treatment, and to monitor affective changes within both groups. A second experimental group of tenth graders was given the posttest only to overcome concerns that the pretest had interactive effects.

Treatment and control groups were randomly chosen from intact tenth grade classes in Luke M. Powers Catholic High School in Flint, Michigan. The twenty poems used in the curriculum design, both humorous and non-humorous, were selected by three tenth grade English classes from Linden High School, Linden, Michigan, from a packet of 40 humorous and 40 non-humorous poems collected by the researcher. Students ranked the poems for interest and enjoyment, and the 20 highest rated poems, humorous and non-humorous, were used in the study.

### Treatment

The treatment curriculum was developed as a brief introduction to poetry unit for tenth graders by the researcher. The facilitator of the curriculum was the regular classroom teacher who had participated in a two-hour training session with the author. The training consisted of an overview of the entire experiment, and a review of the lesson plans and poems used in both curricula.

The five basic lessons are listed below with general topic areas noted.

- |                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| 1. What is Poetry?   | Definition, examples, purpose                                |
| 2. Figure of a Poem  | Figurative language, concrete,<br>abstract, simile, metaphor |
| 3. Sound of Poetry   | Alliteration, slant, rhyme scheme                            |
| 4. Meaning of Poetry | Explication, symbol, allusion                                |
| 5. Creating Poetry   | Creative process, writing exercises                          |

### Result of Data Analysis

#### Demographics

Three intact tenth grade regular American Literature classes from Luke M. Powers Catholic High School were selected for this study. A total of 73 students participated with an eighty-percent attendance rate. The control group consisted of 21 students, the treatment one group had 26, and the treatment two group had 26. A chi-square analysis by sex of student indicated no significant differences in the

male/female ratio between classes.

### Pretest Equivalencies

Students at Luke M. Powers High School enroll in basic, regular, and advanced American Literature courses. All students in this study placed into regular American Literature based upon test scores, grades, teacher recommendations, and counselor discretion. Prior to treatment, a pretest Poetry Opinionnaire was administered to the control and treatment one groups. A t-test for two independent samples with the pretest total scores used as the dependent variable indicated no significant differences in students' attitudes toward poetry based upon class membership. The mean attitudinal score for the control group was 27.84; the treatment one group mean was 28.27.

### Discussion

Two primary research questions were presented in this study. Each question had associated hypotheses that were addressed through the Poetry Opinionnaire summary scores (pre and posttest) and by individual item analysis. An analysis of variance and t-tests for dependent and independent samples were statistical methods employed to test all hypotheses. Each of the following null hypotheses were tested at an alpha level of .05.

Hypothesis One: There will be no statistically significant difference in student attitude toward poetry between students introduced to poetry through humorous material and students introduced to poetry using non-humorous material.

This hypothesis was examined by using a t-test for paired samples. The control group t-test on the pretest summary scores and the posttest summary scores indicated a statistically significant change at the .05 level. The treatment one t-test on the pretest summary scores and posttest summary scores also indicated a significant change at the .05 level. The null hypothesis was retained. There was no difference in

change in attitude towards poetry between the two classes after treatment. Both groups, however, significantly enhanced their attitudes towards poetry.

Hypothesis Two: There will be no statistically significant difference in students' likelihood to read poetry in the future between students introduced to poetry using humorous material and students introduced to poetry using non-humorous material.

This hypothesis was tested using a t-test for paired samples. The control group t-test on the pretest/posttest scores for item nine, "*In the future, I will probably continue to read poetry on my own,*" showed no significant differences. The treatment one t-test for paired samples on item nine indicated a significant difference at the .05 level. Based on this finding, the null hypothesis was rejected. The curriculum design for the treatment one group using humorous content material positively affected students' likelihood to read poetry in the future.

### Conclusions

The following conclusions can be derived from the findings of this study.

#### Student Attitude Toward Poetry

The curriculum design for this experiment proved to be effective in enhancing students' attitudes in general toward poetry. Both groups, the control using non-humorous material and the treatment one using humorous material, indicated statistically significant differences at the .05 level in pretest/posttest comparisons.

On the surface, the treatment one group appeared to be more successful, outscoring the control group with increased posttest means on all ten items of the Poetry Opinionnaire. The t-test for paired samples found treatment one posttest scores significantly higher than the pretest scores on nine of ten survey items. An analysis of the pretest/posttest control group means found statistical significance on only two of the ten items of the Poetry Opinionnaire. The treatment two group using humorous material outscored the control group in posttest mean comparisons on eight of the ten



survey items, as well as on the posttest summary score class mean.

An analysis of variance performed on the posttest scores for all three classes indicated a significant difference between the treatment one humor group and the control non-humor group on two survey items. The treatment one group scored significantly higher than the control group at the .05 level on their responses to these items:

1. I feel at ease reading poetry, and I like it very much.

4. Poetry is fascinating and fun.

The treatment one poetry curriculum using humorous content material demonstrated a greater "enjoyment factor" in students. It is assumed that this type of positive, enjoyable experience with poetry may have a direct influence on altering student attitude toward the art form in the future (Shaw and Wright, 1967; Kaplan, 1986).

#### Likelihood to Read Poetry in the Future

The results for the treatment one group using humorous material clearly show an enhancement in student attitude toward poetry, and a greater likelihood that students will continue to read poetry. A t-test for paired samples indicated a significant increase in mean scores with regard to students' likelihood of reading poetry in the future. The humorous poetry unit positively affected students' perceptions of poetry to the degree that they would be more likely to read poetry in the future. The control group using non-humorous material showed no significant change from pretest to posttest scores on this survey item.

#### Overall Enhancement of Attitude

Both control and treatment one groups significantly enhanced student attitude toward poetry. One plausible explanation for the control group's enhancement might be found in the selection process for the non-humorous poetry used in the experiment. The non-humorous poems were selected for priority interest and enjoyment by like students, sophomores and juniors, from another city in Genesee county.

On one level, it was concluded that the curriculum using humorous content material was very successful. Treatment one posttest means outscored the control group posttest means in all ten survey categories and summary score; the treatment two posttest means outscored the control group posttest means in eight of the ten survey categories and summary score. By improving student attitude toward poetry, the learning environment is greatly enhanced and students are much more likely to sustain interest in the subject.

Humor is an important tool for teachers. The best teachers report that a sense of humor is an essential teacher characteristic; student survey after survey list humor as a preferred teacher trait. This experimental study supports the judicious use of humorous content material: the humorous treatment curriculum outperformed the non-humorous curriculum, although it is true that both curricula enhanced student attitude toward poetry.

Teacher education programs should instruct future teachers on humor techniques and humor research. There is a growing body of knowledge in the field of humor type, usage, meaning, and its relevance in educational settings. Teacher education programs should encourage appropriate humor use, highlight the advantages of using relevant content humor in the classroom, and cultivate each student's personal sense of humor.

Although it is debatable whether 'humor' can be taught, anymore than creativity can be taught, teacher education programs should inform students about humor theory, humor research, and humorous teaching techniques. A presentation for teachers, "Humor in the Classroom: It's No Laughing Matter" (Appendix E), was developed by the researcher, incorporating the results from this study. As a teaching tool, humor has proven to enhance student attention, learning, retention, and attitude. Appropriate humor use can be considered as important to a teacher as communication skills or subject matter knowledge.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

This study was designed to examine the attitudinal effects of using humorous content material in an introduction to poetry unit for tenth graders. Suggestions for further research are as follows:

- Replication studies using this curriculum should be continued to verify and substantiate the results. Replication studies in rural and urban communities would indicate the possible viability and versatility of the curriculum.
- Replication studies using this curriculum with non-traditional populations in high school adult education or alternative education programs would explore the feasibility of its adoption.
- Replication studies using a similar curriculum with non-traditional students in continuing education or college and university programs would indicate further viability of the curriculum.
- Replication studies using this curriculum with all populations should be conducted that measure cognitive gains as well as affective gains.
- Replication studies using humorous content material should be conducted in other disciplines--social sciences, humanities, science--with similar student populations to judge the transferrability of the results.
- Conduct a longer, more intensive curriculum experiment over the course of a semester utilizing humorous content material to verify the validity of this study's results.
- Conduct longitudinal survey studies of students' poetry reading habits in the future to provide significant information about the permanent affect of the humorous curriculum on attitude.

## **APPENDICES**

**APPENDIX A**  
**Humorous Treatment Poetry**  
**(teacher's copy)**

## TRYING TO LIVE UP TO YOU

all because you said  
 i was dwarfish  
 i started eating bananas  
 stuffing myself with pies  
     cakes     donuts  
 devouring five pound  
 porterhouse steaks  
 drinking milk  
 from the largest glass  
 in the house

with rope i tied my legs  
 to iron stakes embedded in the ground  
 and ran until my stomach jerked up  
 between my ears  
 i wore tophats  
 elevator shoes  
 large bulky sweaters  
 i hung around pygmies whenever possible  
 i only drank beer in tall boys

i learned to walk on my big toes  
 without any noticeable exertion  
 i explained away bruises  
 on my head by saying  
 i hit it on the doorway  
 i got a job in one of those  
 clothing stores for tall men

and after it took me  
 six years to look you  
 face to face on level ground  
 you packed your suitcase  
 and left me  
*short*  
 of everything

David James

## Factory Love

Machine, I come to you 800 times a day  
like a crazy monkey lover:  
in and out, in and out, in and out.

And you, you hardly ever break down,  
such clean welds, such sturdy parts.  
Oh how I love to oil your tips.

Machine, please come home with me tonight.  
I'll scrub off all the stains on your name,  
grease and graffiti.

I'm tired of being your part-time lover.  
Let me carry you off  
into the night on a hi-lo.

That guy on midnights,  
I know he drinks,  
and beats you.

Jim Daniels

### Help Is on the Way

#### 1 Frankenstein's Wife Writes to Ann Landers

Dear Ann, I think I am losing my husband.  
 He never straps me to the bed anymore  
 or fiddles with my parts.  
 I haven't had a charge in weeks.  
 Sometimes I think he wants to do me in.  
 There were intimations of this last week  
 when I found water in my oil can.  
 Am I going crazy?  
 I have faulty wiring and poor compression,  
 yet he won't fix anything around my body.  
 Lately, strange arms appeared beneath the couch,  
 and a leg under the table,  
 and teeth in my teacup.  
 I began to put things together.  
 And finally, last night, he robbed the grave  
 of that little tramp  
 who died down the street.  
 What shall I do?  
 Should I sever connections?  
 I would like to make this marriage work.  
 But where have I failed? I try to keep neat.  
 Heaven knows it's difficult with no help  
 in the kitchen, and nothing to wear,  
 and vapor lock to contend with.  
 I think I am pregnant, and he won't pay the bills.  
 What will I do when they turn off the lights?

#### 2 Ann Landers Replies to Frankenstein's Wife

Listen Toots, I've had letters,  
 but this one takes the cookies.  
 You are one of a kind.  
 Did you ever stop to think  
 the fault may be yours?  
 You may not have much to work with  
 but there is no excuse for being run-down.  
 Shock him with a frilly new nightgown,  
 set a nice table. It's the little things that count.  
 Have you checked your breath lately?  
 Personal hygiene is the ticket, and he'll stop  
 playing footsie with that leg under the table.  
 Give the rooster a roost to crow about  
 and he'll send the other chickens home  
 is my motto. I don't really think  
 he is trying to do away with you.  
 If he does, see a lawyer. If he doesn't,  
 see a psychiatrist. You may need help.

Herb Scott



## *Award*

*A Gold Watch to the FBI Man who has followed me  
for 25 years.*

Well, old spy  
looks like I  
led you down some pretty blind alleys,  
took you on several trips to Mexico,  
fishing in the high Sierras,  
jazz at the Philharmonic.  
You've watched me all your life,  
I've clothed your wife,  
- put your two sons through college.  
what good has it done?  
the sun keeps rising every morning.  
ever see me buy an Assistant President?  
or close a school?  
or lend money to Trujillo?  
ever catch me rigging airplane prices?  
I bought some after-hours whiskey in L.A.  
but the Chief got his pay.  
I ain't killed no Koreans  
or fourteen-year-old boys in Mississippi.  
neither did I bomb Guatemala,  
or lend guns to shoot Algerians.  
I admit I took a Negro child  
to a white rest room in Texas,  
but she was my daughter, only three,  
who had to pee.

Ray Durem

## GIVING IN

at school  
 i raised my hand to answer a question  
 & my arm flipped right off,  
 thudding on Becky Dozer's desk behind me.  
 wrong answer, i thought.  
 Becky simply brushed the arm  
 to the floor.

sound

Mikey O'Brien was called on  
 by the teacher & when he started to talk,  
 his voice disappeared, silence, nada,  
 completely gone.  
 we looked down his throat  
 to find his vocal cords  
 ripped out.

sight

each stanza creates  
 a vivid picture . . .

Bob the Bruiser was summoned  
 to the chalkboard for math drills,  
 but both legs broke off  
 as soon as he stood up.  
 we lifted his torso back  
 to the seat as Becky kicked  
 his legs under the desk.

sight

the teacher rubbed her chin & frowned.  
 you know, she said, education  
 is not always easy. you have to give up  
 one thing to take in another.  
 sometimes you have to make sacrifices.  
 she said, now, who wants to be the first  
 to cut out  
 the heart of a frog?

what sacrifices do you  
 have to make to learn?

-change the way you think  
 -change the way you act  
 all because knowledge challenges myth, tradition,  
 prejudice, and the world is different than what you  
 originally thought . . .

what might happen to the person  
 who does this?

David James

# THE NATURE OF HUMAN BEANS

"Nathan's not a human bean; he's a little bean."

The melting pot of America  
is overflowing with human beans. ←  
Those chubby, fat, awkward ones  
you see hogging whole bus seats  
are called porkand beans.

meaning: human beings

The ex-drug addicts,  
eyes glazed and out of control:  
refried beans.

And you have  
the patriotic navy beans,  
or the candle makers, wax beans,  
or those lonely ones sitting  
at the ends of beds,  
unable to let go and love,  
frozen beans.

what does getting "cooked" mean?  
(get burned/ caught/ wasted/ no)

Some of us grow wild and bushy;  
others are picked from the start  
to get cooked. →

Even the most famous of our kind  
ends up off the plate,  
a has bean.

I'll struggle through this life  
growing, working, branching out  
as a human bean,  
only to find myself  
adding up the years,  
sitting in a rocking chair,  
gazing into the garden,  
just another  
old fart. ↓

beans lead to farts. and farts refer to nasty, grumpy old people

David James

## INTIMATES

Don't you care for my love? she said bitterly.

I handed her the mirror, and said:  
Please address these questions to the proper person!  
Please make all requests to head-quarters!  
In all matters of emotional importance  
please approach the supreme authority direct!—  
So I handed her the mirror.  
And she would have broken it over my head,  
but she caught sight of her own reflection  
and that held her spellbound for two seconds  
while I fled.

Unknown

### THE PURIST

I give you now Professor Twist,  
A conscientious scientist.  
Trustees exclaimed, "He never bungles!"  
And sent him off to distant jungles.  
Camped on a tropic riverside,  
One day he missed his loving bride.  
She had, the guide informed him later,  
Been eaten by an alligator.  
Professor Twist could not but smile.  
"You mean," he said, "a crocodile."

Unknown

# THE DIGNITY OF LABOR

Labor raises honest sweat; *a*  
 Leisure puts you into debt. *a*

Labor gives you rye and wheat; *b*  
 Leisure gives you naught to eat. *b*

Labor makes your riches last; *c*  
 Leisure gets you nowhere fast. *c*

Labor makes you bed at eight; *d*  
 Leisure lets you stay up late. *d*

Labor makes you swell with pride; *e*  
 Leisure makes you shrink inside. *e*

Labor keeps you fit and prime, *f*  
 But give me leisure every time. *f*

} all perfect rhymes

Unknown

## THE HIPPO

A Head or Tail—which does he lack? *a*  
 I think his Forward's coming back! *a*  
 He lives on Carrots, Leeks and Hay; *b*  
 He starts to yawn—it takes All Day— *b*

Some time I think I'll live that way. *b*

Theodore Roethke

## The Experiment with a Rat

Every time I nudge that spring *a*  
 and a man walks out of a cage *b*  
 assiduous and sharp like one of us *a*  
 and brings me cheese. *b*

How did he fall  
 into my power?

Carl Rakosi

## A MAXIM REVISED

Ladies, to this advice give heed— *a*  
 In controlling men: *b*  
 If at first you don't succeed, *a*  
 Why, cry, cry, again. *b*

Unknown

## BE CAREFUL

I'm careful of the words I say, *a*  
 To keep them soft and sweet, *b*  
 I never know from day to day *a*  
 Which ones I'll have to eat. *b*

Unknown

## ADVICE

Folks, I'm telling you,  
 birthing is hard  
 and dying is mean—  
 so get yourself  
 a little loving  
 in between.

Langston Hughes

## Song of the Open Road

I think that I shall never see *a*  
 A billboard lovely as a tree. *a*  
 Indeed, unless the billboards fall *b*  
 I'll never see a tree at all. *b*

Unknown

## MORNING AFTER

I was so sick last night I  
 Didn't hardly know my mind.  
 So sick last night I  
 Didn't know my mind.  
 I drunk some bad licker that  
 Almost made me blind.

ababcb

Had a dream last night I  
 Thought I was in hell.  
 I drempt last night I  
 Thought I was in hell.  
 Woke up and looked around me—  
 Babe, your mouth was open like a well.

dedefe

I said, Baby! Baby!  
 Please don't snore so loud.  
 Baby! Please!  
 Please don't snore so loud  
 You jest a little bit o' woman but you  
 Sound like a great big crowd

ghghih

Langston Hughes

the one unrhyming line  
 in each stanza will trick  
 most groups



## THE NEED FOR CURRICULUM REFORM

(a parable)

Once upon a school year, there was a diligent, well-meaning teacher who devoted her life to teaching. She believed in this time honored profession, and was proud, competent, and, of course, had tenure. Her special field was Crap. She could teach Crap better than any of the other teachers. She had studied it in college and had seventeen years of experience behind her.

One day, in the middle of her lecture, diagramming Crap on the chalkboard, one of her students asked, "Mrs. Pooplowske, why do we have to learn all this boring Crap?"

"Mr. Jalen," she replied, "that is an excellent question. We have had many, many students before you learn this Crap and go on to become successful and productive citizens. This is the kind of Crap that differentiates an educated person from an uneducated person."

"But I don't see how I'm going to use it."

Mrs. Pooplowske grinned. "Suppose, young man, you walked outside and found a mound of Crap. Is it from a dog or cat? Cow or goat? Rabbit or deer? You would be able to tell. Knowledge like this is power."

The student was still befuddled. "Is it *that* important in the end?"

"It has always been taught, and it always will be," the teacher replied in a slightly hostile tone. "By the way, it is not your duty to question what should or should not be taught. The School Board knows what is best for each one of you. Now, be quiet until I get all of this Crap on the board."

So the students put their heads down, and went back to copying and drawing in the notebooks, memorizing every shape and texture and smell to earn their Crappy grades, required for graduation.

Mrs. Pooplowske piled on the homework, assuring the class that this kind of Crap was good for them.

In the back row, one student whispered to herself, "This stinks," and she was right.

David James

Crap stands for what? (all that is taught in school that has little or no real value. but which continues to be taught out of tradition. etc.)

## GOOD FRESH COUNTRY EGGS

simile → Forty-acre farmers bring eggs to market  
in milk pail, basket, cases  
layered like cakes, gathered from nests  
perched high above king snakes,  
skunks, egg-sucking dogs and cats;  
or stolen from weeds where would-be mother hens  
stash them away to hatch a family.  
"Laid this morning," the farmer says.

metaphor → We read the eggs by candle light,  
four moons in each hand shine  
translucent, clear and fresh,  
someone's breakfast. "Yolks that  
stand up and holler *good morning*,"  
the farmer says. In others

← metaphor

the foetus curls, an old drunk,  
suspended in liquid, does a dead man's  
float. We crack them, skulls in a bucket,

← metaphor

stillborn children. The news travels ← connotation: what is news? (  
through your nose. "Good fresh country  
eggs," the farmer says. "None of your  
city eggs with crap all over.  
Country chickens know how to wipe their asses."

Herb Scott

## THE POEM YOU ASKED FOR

My poem would eat nothing.  
I tried giving it water  
but it said no,

worrying me.  
Day after day,  
I held it up to the light,

turning it over,  
but it only pressed its lips  
more tightly together.

It grew sullen, like a toad ← simile  
through with being teased.  
I offered it all my money,

my clothes, my car with a full tank.  
But the poem stared at the floor.  
Finally I cupped it in

my hands, and carried it gently  
out into the soft air, into the  
evening traffic, wondering how

to end things between us.  
For now it had begun breathing,  
putting on more and

more hard rings of flesh.  
And the poem demanded the food,  
it drank up all the water,

beat me and took my money,  
tore the faded clothes  
off my back.

said Shit,  
and walked slowly away,  
slicking its hair down.

Said it was going  
over to your place.

whole poem is a metaphor. poem

Larry Levis

Poem is a metaphor for writing. The author had writer's block and couldn't write (My poem would eat nothing.) By writing about it, his poem came to life, he was successful in creation, but his poem went a little too far--it took over the writer's life and girlfriend, etc.

## **How Not to Read A Poem**

1. Skim it once quickly.
2. Approach the poem like a difficult puzzle.
3. Read the poem to yourself, not outloud.
4. Feel free to add parts of your own, assuming the poet left some out.
5. Grope for symbols.
6. Assume there is a moral for every poem.
7. Try to sum up the meaning with general phrases like, "Love is kind." or "The good guy always wins in the end."

**Prayer on a Morning My Car Wouldn't Start**

I sit behind the wheel  
 And finger the keys like a rosary.  
 Surely there is some prayer  
 That can move pistons.  
 If spirits slaughter germs,  
 Or bring about a sudden burst  
 Of hope or courage, even love,  
 Why not something simple, something  
 Closer to expedience? Why not dispatch  
 One lonely angel to caress my carburetor,  
 Fix my fan belt, or unclog my fuel line,  
 Just one greasy-winged mechanic,  
 Inept at saving souls, but damned  
 Good at getting me on my way.

Jack Ridl

Title: not usually the kind of thing people pray for (a practical poem)

Car won't start and he's frustrated.

If prayers can be about sickness, hope, forgiveness, why can't they be about mundane things as well? Why can't a prayer be about starting a car and "getting me on my way"? It's a poem that poses this question, and desire.

## DEAR HAIRLINE

Where the hell are you going?  
 You're losing your grip with age,  
 falling up and back over my skull.  
 You seem to take pleasure  
 in undressing my forehead,  
 tossing precious hair  
 down the drain,  
 on the bathroom counter,  
 clumps sleeping on my pillow.  
 It won't be long now—  
 you'll keep slipping away  
 until you're alive only  
 in photographs and memories.  
 And I'll be a cue ball,  
 glaring into the future,  
 baldly going where bald men  
 have gone before.  
 I'll save money on barbers.  
 I'll buy a convertible.  
 I'll have a great hat collection.  
 I'll let my wife stroke my smooth skin,  
 buff my head with bee's wax.  
 The only hairline I'll have in five years  
 will be something I can hang out  
 on the clothesline, easy on,  
 easy off.

But who cares anyway?  
 Hairlines are for babies  
 and snotty-nosed boys.  
*Real* men like us don't have to cover up  
 who we really are:  
 with only our shine  
 and brains to get us through,  
 we accept what God  
 meant for us and head out  
 into the world,  
 face first.

David James

## A WORM'S LIFE

The earthworm has five hearts.

It would take that many  
to love yourself  
as a worm.  
Even with your blind ambition,  
you cannot deny  
your best friend is dirt.  
For fun, you burrow out of sight  
and explore the underworld  
with ants, grubs, parasites.  
Your body, a pencil-thin tongue,  
arches, inches, aches,  
curls and writhes in a language  
of darkness, of moist silence.  
With five hearts, your journey  
toward love is suspect.  
Since you carry both eggs and sperm,  
at once father and mother,  
you look for a one-nighter,  
time enough to lie around  
fertilizing, getting fertilized.  
Then off you slide,  
never looking back,  
never writing or calling,  
never a second thought about love.

You live out your life  
in a rut, down and out,  
slipping through blackness,  
praying for no sudden rain.  
And on those strange occasions  
when you are allowed to dream,  
you picture yourself  
riding across the open plains,  
leading a million worms westward,  
wind against your slimy skin,  
sun glaring through your transparency.  
You let out a "Yeehah!"  
The birds ripple into the sky  
until all of your five hearts  
beat you back  
into a worm.

David James

### **Advice to a Friend Entering the Factory**

**Don't be afraid to act stupid--  
stupidity is excused, cleverness isn't.**

**Wear all the protection you can get--  
for you there are no replacement parts,  
only replacements.**

**Learn how to yell and swear and kick and scream--  
it is a way of life.**

**Don't let your anger grow inside,  
it is wasted energy  
Machines don't get angry.**

**There are only two important seniority dates:  
90 days and you're in the union:  
30 years, and out.**

**Once you're in the union, use your committeeman--  
he's paid to bitch for you.**

**Don't let anyone bully you--ever  
or they'll jump on you and push you  
to the edge.**

**Do no more, no less work than anyone else--  
either extreme causes resentment.**

**Try to stay sober at work--  
again, no replacement parts.**

**There are blacks and there are whites.  
There is coexistence, there is not friendship.**

**Watch out for the men wearing ties--  
they are not there to help you.**

**Talk to the oldest man in your department--  
he may tell you secrets.**

**If you find yourself liking the job,  
quit.**

Jim Daniels



## LITTLE MISS MUFFET

First of all,  
 the spider was not interested  
 in Miss Muffet.  
 In fact, he was engaged  
 to Sylvia Satwicks,  
 the long-legged one  
 who lived in the rose bush  
 down the lane.  
 No, there was no romance here.  
 Secondly,  
 he did not want the curds & whey.  
 He thought it was ghastly stuff,  
 too mushy, too blah,  
 too civilized for his taste.

The reason he came down  
 from the tree  
 & sat beside Little Miss Muffet,  
 the reason he shot his gossamer  
 & tightroped down to the tuffet  
 was because  
 he wanted to scare the crap  
 out of her!

She sat there day after day  
 eating her lunch,  
 believing herself to be God's gift  
 to the world,  
 stroking her golden curls,  
 talking to the sky like a mirror.

He wanted to bounce around  
 making his ugliest face  
 & send that uppity bitch screaming,  
 wanted to see her dress flapping  
 around her waist as she ran,  
 for once  
 he wanted to be  
 the cause of something  
*BIG.*

internal rhyme (pointing to stuff and civilized)  
 internal rhyme (pointing to stuff and crap)  
 slant rhyme (pointing to world and curls)  
 internal slant rhyme (pointing to ugliest and uppity)

David James

### Goodbat Nightman

God bless all policemen  
and fighters of crime,  
May thieves go to jail  
for a very long time.

They've had a hard day  
helping clean up the town,  
Now they hang from the mantelpiece  
both upside down.

repetitive 'h' sound

A glass of warm blood  
and then straight up the stairs,  
Batman and Robin  
are saying their prayers.

internal rhyme  
vowel sounds

They've locked all the doors  
and they've put out the bat,  
Put on their batjamas  
(They like doing that)

They've filled their batwater-bottles  
made their batbeds.  
With two springy battresses  
for sleepy batheads.

alliteration of 'b' sounds

They're closing red eyes  
and they're counting black sheep.  
Batman and Robin  
are falling asleep.

Roger McGough

### Zimmer in Grade School

In grade school I wondered  
 Why I had been born ← alliteration  
 To wrestle in the ashy puddles,  
 With my square nose  
 Streaming mucus and blood,  
 My knuckles puffed from combat  
 And the old nun's ruler.  
 I feared everything: God,  
 Learning and my schoolmates.  
 I could not count, spell or read.  
 My report card proclaimed  
 These scarlet failures.  
 My parents wrang their loving hands. ← internal slant rhyme  
 My guardian angel wept constantly.

But I could never hide anything.  
 If I peed my pants in class ← alliteration  
 The puddle was always quickly evident.  
 My worst mistakes were at  
 The blackboard for Jesus and all  
 The saints to see. ← alliteration

Even now  
 When I hide behind elaborate mask  
 It is always known that I am Zimmer,  
 The one who does the messy papers  
 And fractures all his crayons,  
 Who spits upon the radiators ← slant rhyme  
 And sits all day in shame  
 Outside the office of the principal.

internal rhyme

Paul Zimmer

## DEAD HORSES

"There's just nothing like a dead horse."

They are much easier  
to mount this way.  
Mother has nothing to fear  
as Susie heads out to ride  
the dead horse.  
In fact, she saves hundreds  
on grain, hay, veterinarian bills. ← internal rhyme  
And yet the horse can still be groomed,  
combed, brushed, prepared for show,  
braids and ribbons displayed. ← internal rhyme  
The two commands that always work:  
"Lay down. Play dead."

slant rhyme  
(groomed/combed)

There's just nothing like a dead horse.  
Easy to convert into a coffee table,  
a bench chair, a conversation piece.  
"So, how long have you had  
your dead horse?" or  
"Let's go back to my place  
and I'll show you my dead horse."

A dead horse is quiet, ← internal rhyme  
serene, majestic in an odd way,  
requiring a minimum of care.  
It's natural enough:  
horses die, like everything,  
but they aren't like everything. → perfect rhymes  
So much power, so much pure grace. →  
It seems more of a disgrace  
to bring the tractor in,  
drag the body out to some meadow,  
spend half the day digging. ← alliteration  
So I pull it in the house,  
this symbol of young America,  
a perfect addition  
to anyone's three bedroom ranch. ← alliteration

David James

**APPENDIX B**  
**Non-Humorous Control Poetry**  
**(teacher's copy)**

## JACK AND JILL

Even though  
they were the same age,  
Jill was far more mature  
than Jack.  
To her, he was  
a puny neighbor boy  
who looked like an idiot  
wearing that stupid crown.  
When they went up  
the hill,  
Jack had one thing in mind:  
fetching a pail of water.  
Jill thought of other things,  
real things, but went more  
to help Jack than to make  
something older happen.  
He was just a little boy.  
And then he tripped,  
grabbed onto Jill,  
and they both yelled  
tumbling and rolling to the bottom.  
Of course, Jack broke his crown,  
was laid up in bed for weeks after.  
Jill stood up, unhurt,  
and climbed the hill again.  
The well water was cold  
and she was happy to drink it,  
to taste it out of her own hands,  
to know how delicious  
it could be  
alone.

David James

## Moving My Grandfather

He wouldn't move  
after fifty years in the same house.  
He put a burglar alarm sign on his door  
a chewed-up shoe in his yard  
a baseball bat by the door  
though he had no alarm, dog, strength.

He didn't carry a wallet.  
Pinned money to his shirt  
but had no sign for that.  
He got jumped often  
for change not worth  
kicking an old man's ass for.

Last time they cracked his skull  
blood in his white hair.  
He came out of the hospital  
lobotomized by fear  
sitting in his front room  
listening to the street.

We packed up his belongings  
three broken tvs  
a stringless harp from the burned-out  
church across the street.  
My father cried its music  
up and down the stairs.

We loaded up fast, in daylight  
one truckload. No one could figure out  
how to free the rocking chair  
chained to the porch  
so we left it  
creaking in the heavy air.

Jim Daniels

## OLD GREEN

Old Green stops to say goodbye.  
retiring after 43 years.  
No green coveralls today.  
Dressed in street clothes  
hair slicked back  
he even manages a shy smile  
as I shake his hand.

The Company gave him an aerial photo  
of the plant, and all the guys  
sign their names around it  
and *Good luck*.  
All you can see is the roof  
and the parking lots  
and the tiny, tiny cars.  
As hard as you look  
you'll never find him.

Jim Daniels



## DEAR HEART

"A man is only as good as what he loves."     Saul Bellow

I have you to blame  
 for making me the sap I am today.  
 I'm the one guy in the western hemisphere  
 who still cries every time he watches  
*It's A Wonderful Life*.  
 Songs on the radio touch you  
 and pull the tearstrings daily.  
 When you well up in my throat  
 I have no choice: a stifled cry  
 comes to my face as I fight to hold it in.  
 You've given yourself away  
 to my wife and children,  
 and you act as if you have a mind  
 of your own, lodged in my chest,  
 thinking up ways to make me bow down to you,  
 to say love is the only thing  
 worth praising.

Maybe you're right.  
 Maybe all of our words,  
 all of our actions,  
 our thoughts and ideas,  
 were meant to travel through the heart first,  
 before entering the world.  
 You pound away at me like a second brain,  
 subversive and graceful,  
 wanting it all.  
 And one day, if I'm lucky,  
 I'll let you have it.

David James

## A BLESSING

specific location

visual images

Just off the highway to Rochester, Minnesota,  
 Twilight bounds softly forth on the grass.  
 And the eyes of those two Indian ponies  
 Darken with kindness.  
 They have come gladly out of the willows  
 To welcome my friend and me.  
 We step over the barbed wire into the pasture  
 Where they have been grazing all day, alone.  
 They ripple tensely, they can hardly contain their happiness  
 That we have come.  
 They bow shyly as wet swans. They love each other.  
 There is no loneliness like theirs.  
 At home once more,  
 They begin munching the young tufts of spring in the darkness.  
 I would like to hold the slenderer one in my arms,  
 For she has walked over to me  
 And nuzzled my left hand.  
 She is black and white,  
 Her mane falls wild on her forehead.  
 And the light breeze moves me to caress her long ear  
 That is delicate as the skin over a girl's wrist.  
 Suddenly I realize  
 That if I stepped out of my body I would break  
 into blossom.

sense of touch

final image explains  
 in concrete language HOW  
 he is feeling inside

James Wright

## 40 — Love

middle	aged
couple	playing
ten	nis
when	the
game	ends
and	they
go	home
the	net
will	still
be	be
tween	them

Roger McGough

Poem is a visual representation of the emotional distance between the middle-aged couple.

What does 'net' stand for? Is it really a tennis net?

### Those Winter Sundays

internal rhyme  
(banked/thanked)

Sundays too my father got up early  
and put his clothes on in the blueblack cold,  
then with cracked hands that ached  
from labor in the weekday weather made  
banked fires blaze. No one ever thanked him.

internal rhymes

I'd wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking.  
When the rooms were warm, he'd call,  
and slowly I would rise and dress,  
fearing the chronic angers of that house,

internal slant rhyme

Speaking indifferently to him,  
who had driven out the cold  
and polished my good shoes as well.  
What did I know, what did I know  
of love's austere and lonely offices?

internal rhyme

Robert Hayden

### Accomplishments

I painted a picture—green sky—and showed it to my mother.

She said that's nice, I guess.

So I painted another holding the paintbrush in my teeth,

Look, Ma, no hands. And she said

I guess someone would admire that if they knew

How you did it and they were interested in painting which I am not.

I played clarinet solo in Gounod's Clarinet Concerto  
With the Buffalo Philharmonic. Mother came to listen and said

That's nice, I guess.

So I played it with the Boston Symphony,

Lying on my back and using my toes,

Look, Ma, no hands. And she said

I guess someone would admire that if they knew

How you did it and they were interested in music which I am not.

I made an almond soufflé and served it to my mother.

She said, that's nice, I guess.

So I made another, beating it with my breath,

Serving it with my elbows,

Look, Ma, no hands. And she said

I guess someone would admire that if they knew

How you did it and they were interested in eating which I am not.

So I sterilized my wrists, performed the amputation, threw away

My hands and went to my mother, but before I could say

Look, Ma, no hands, she said

I have a present for you and insisted I try on

The blue kid gloves to make sure they were the right size.

Cynthia Macdonald

LOVELIEST OF TREES, THE CHERRY NOW

Loveliest of trees, the cherry now Is hung with bloom along the bough, And stands about the woodland ride Wearing white for Eastertide.	aabb
--	------

Now, of my threescore years and ten, Twenty will not come again, And take from seventy springs a score, It only leaves me fifty more.	ccdd
--	------

And since to look at things in bloom Fifty springs are little room, About the woodlands I will go To see the cherry hung with snow.	eeff
--	------

Gerard Manley Hopkins

## THE GUITARIST TUNES UP

With what attentive courtesy he bent *a*  
 Over his instrument; *a*  
 Not as a lordly conquerer who could *b*  
 Command both wire and wood, *b*  
 But as a man with a loved woman might, *c*  
 Inquiring with delight *c*  
 What slight essential things she had to say *d*  
 Before they started, he and she, to play. *d*

Frances Cornford

## MY PAPA'S WALTZ

slant rhyme (dizzy/easy)	<p>The whiskey on your breath          Could make a small boy dizzy;          But I hung on like death:          Such waltzing was not easy.</p>	abab
slant rhyme (pans/countenance)	<p>We romped until the pans          Slid from the kitchen shelf;          My mother's countenance          Could not unfrown itself.</p>	cdcd
	<p>The hand that held my wrist          Was battered on one knuckle;          At every step you missed          My right ear scraped a buckle.</p>	efef
	<p>You beat time on my head          With a palm caked hard by dirt,          Then waltzed me off to bed          Still clinging to your shirt.</p>	ghgh

Theodore Roethke



## STEP ON HIS HEAD

Let's step on daddy's head shout  
the children my dear children as  
we walk in the country on a sunny

summer day my shadow bobs dark on  
the road as we walk and they jump  
on its head and my love of them

fills me all full of soft feelings  
now I duck with my head so they'll  
miss when they jump they screech

with delight and I moan oh you're  
hurting you're hurting me stop and  
they jump all the harder and love

fills the whole road but I see it run  
on through the years and I know  
how some day they must jump when

it won't be this shadow but really  
my head (as I stepped on my own  
father's head) it will hurt really

}

did he really step  
on his father's head?

hurt and I wonder if then I will  
have love enough will I have love  
enough when it's not just a game?

James Laughlin

What does 'head' stand for in this poem?

Stepping on HEAD means standing up for oneself, becoming one's own person, not relying upon one's father. Symbolically, the son/daughter steps on the parent and pushes him/her into the ground in order to live . . . They must bury their parents, literally and symbolically, to become their own unique persons.

## SLEEP

It has a name.  
Your name, my name.  
Some nights I walk around  
in your sleep,  
and you in mine.  
We awake hopelessly tangled.

Some nights we cross  
and do not recognize  
each other.

simile



Some nights we sleep  
like two chairs  
side by side.

A page keeps flopping  
back and forth  
across our seats.



metaphor

Greg Kuzma

# FOR THE ANNIVERSARY OF MY DEATH

Every year without knowing it I have passed the day  
 When the last fires will wave to me ← personification  
 And the silence will set out  
 Tireless traveller  
 Like the beam of a lightless star ← (human qualities to inhuman)  
 Then I will no longer  
 Find myself in life as in a strange garment ← simile  
 Surprised at the earth  
 And the love of one woman  
 And the shamelessness of men  
 As today writing after three days of rain  
 Hearing the wren sing and the falling cease  
 And bowing not knowing to what

connotation (silence=death) →

metaphor →

W.S. Merwin

## **How Not to Read A Poem**

1. Skim it once quickly.
2. Approach the poem like a difficult puzzle.
3. Read the poem to yourself, not outloud.
4. Feel free to add parts of your own, assuming the poet left some out.
5. Grope for symbols.
6. Assume there is a moral for every poem.
7. Try to sum up the meaning with general phrases like, "Love is kind." or "The good guy always wins in the end."

## Factory Jungle

Right after the seven o'clock break  
the ropes start shining down,  
thin light through the factory windows,  
the sun on its way to the time clock.  
My veins fill with welding flux—  
I get that itchy feeling I don't belong here.

I stand behind the biggest press in the plant  
waiting for the parts to drop down into the rack,  
thinking about what that mad elephant  
could do to a hand.

I'd like to climb one of those ropes of light  
swing around the plant  
between presses, welders, assembly lines  
past the man working the overhead crane  
everyone looking up, swearing off booze, pills,  
whatever they think made them see me.  
I'd shed my boots, coveralls, safety glasses, ear plugs,  
and fly out the plant gate  
past the guard post  
and into the last hour of twilight.

The parts are backing up  
but I don't care.  
I rip open my coveralls and pound my chest  
trying to raise my voice  
above the roar of the machines  
yelling louder than Tarzan ever had to.

Jim Daniels

Notice the use of **CONCRETE**  
imagery--the whole poem makes us  
see and experience the factory.

Title: Two unlikely words, factory and jungle.

He works in the factory, but wants to escape and be free.

Life in the factory can be as dangerous as life in the jungle. Also, life in the factory is unnatural, unlike the jungle. Why does he have to yell louder than Tarzan? Because he's in more danger, and it's harder to escape once you're stuck in it. At least in the jungle, you know who the enemy is . . .

### A Good Customer

Stanley came in every day  
for two bottles of white port, \$1.05 each  
and I sold it to him, paper bags full  
of what I knew was death.

His liver: the sweat  
on his forehead bled down  
cheeks full of poison and pain.  
His skin was so doughy I wanted  
to believe I could squeeze his body together  
into someone who wouldn't need this.

His face filled with a sadness  
I had never known, getting my kicks  
off a few beers on weekends.  
Some days, I took longer to wait on him.  
I believe now it was not to cause him pain.  
I watched him scratch with his old claws,  
dancing the slowest dance I ever saw.

In ten years, I've emptied a few bottles.  
I've never seen his face in one of them.  
Maybe he still waits in line somewhere  
his whiskers turning into specks of death.

He was the first person  
I ever wanted to die.

Jim Daniels

## Kissing the Earth

1

I never saw you,  
 not even a picture.  
 You drove your motorcycle  
 under  
 a sixteen wheel semi & they had to wash  
 you down some drain into the St. Clair River.

All I know is that your mother  
 (can't even remember her name)  
 came over to our house  
 & gave me  
 some of your clothes: five pairs of pants,  
 seven shirts, socks, a pair of shoes.

Everything fit me.

2

When I went to Florida  
 my grandfather  
 started rummaging through his closet  
 throwing down  
 a bunch of old flannel shirts.

They used to be my Uncle Art's.  
 He died last year  
 of cancer.  
 The sleeves are a little short for me  
 but when I roll them up nobody can tell  
 the difference.

3

Today  
 I just happen to look down  
 & notice that I'm wearing  
 the dead kid's pants,  
 Uncle Art's shirt.

For the rest of the day  
 I walk down streets and turn corners  
 very slowly, planning every move.  
 I am so careful  
 even my feet touch the earth  
 like lips.

David James

### THE CHILD'S SIGHT

The child's wisdom is in saying  
 They say what they see when they see it  
 I am beginning to remember how  
 When I don't say it when I see it  
 I remember it differently

I am walking with the children  
 They have included me  
 None of us eavesdrops any more  
 We speak the same celestial gibberish  
 Our spirit ticks the same time  
 I feel again and am part of the inside world

The child is a little inspector when it crawls  
 It touches and tastes the earth  
 Rolls and stumbles toward the object  
 Zigzags like a sail  
 And outmaneuvers the room

I am learning the child's way  
 I pick up wood pieces from the ground  
 And see shapes into them  
 I notice a purple velvet bee resting on a flower  
 And stop to listen to its buzz  
 They have included me  
 And though I will not be put away to rock alone  
 And I don't roll down the plush hills  
 Nor spit for luck  
 I am learning their way  
 They have given me back the bliss of my senses

Hy Sobiloff



### TRAVELING THROUGH THE DARK

Traveling through the dark I found a deer  
dead on the edge of the Wilson River road.  
It is usually best to roll them into the canyon:  
that road is narrow; to swerve might make more dead.

By glow of the tail-light I stumbled back of the car  
and stood by the heap, a doe, a recent killing;  
she had stiffened already, almost cold.  
I dragged her off; she was large in the belly.


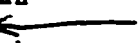
My fingers touching her side brought me the reason —  
her side was warm; her fawn lay there waiting,  
alive, still, never to be born.  
Beside that mountain road I hesitated.

The car aimed ahead its lowered parking lights;  
under the hood purred the steady engine.  
I stood in the glare of the warm exhaust turning red;  
around our group I could hear the wilderness listen.

I thought hard for us all — my only swerving —  
then pushed her over the edge into the river.

William Stafford

### Mama's God

mama's God never was no white man.  alliteration  
 her My Jesus, Sweet Jesus never was neither.  
 the color they had was the color of  
 her aches and trials, the tribulations of her heart  
 mama never had no saviour that would turn  
 his back on her because she was black  alliteration  
 when mama prayed, she knew who she  
 was praying to and who she was praying to  
 didn't and ain't got  
 no color.

Carolyn M. Rodgers

### Bloodline

He carries it with him,  
 a gnarled, brownish  
 heart, his grandmother's.  
 It's in his pocket,  
 a dried, leathery muscle,  
 cracked in the middle  
 from opening it up  
 at parties, at school,  
 at family reunions,  
 pointing out the arteries, veins,  
 the valves

that still click when he fingers them.  
 This is the atrium.  
 This, the right ventricle.

← slant rhyme

For seventy-two years  
 that heart lived  
 inside his grandmother.  
 Set in blackness, in blood,  
 he knew it as a child  
 when she rocked him  
 against her chest,  
 her heart beating inches away.  
 Now he holds it between his fingers.

← alliteration

alliteration { In quiet times,  
 he sits on the stairway,  
 lightly touching  
 the length of heart.  
 And all these nights  
 when he lies in bed,  
 pressing it against him,  
 pulsing toward sleep.  
 his own heart is already floating  
 into the hands of others.

David James

### Frederick Douglass

When it is finally ours, this freedom, this liberty, this beautiful  
 and terrible thing, needful to man as air,  
 usable as earth; when it belongs at last to all,  
 when it is truly instinct, brain matter, diastole, systole, ← internal rhyme  
 reflex action; when it is finally won; when it is more  
 than the gaudy mumbo jumbo of politicians,  
 this man, this Douglass, this former slave, this Negro  
 beaten to his knees, exiled, visioning a world  
 where none is lonely, none hunted, alien, ← internal rhyme  
 this man, superb in love and logic, this man ← alliteration  
 shall be remembered. Oh, not with statues' rhetoric,  
 not with legends and poems and wreaths of bronze alone,  
 but with the lives grown out of his life, the lives ← internal rhyme (lives/l  
 fleshing his dream of the beautiful, needful thing.

↙ ↘  
 slant rhyme

Robert Hayden

**APPENDIX C**  
**Poetry Opinionnaire Instrument**

## Poetry Opinionnaire

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Hour \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Read each statement carefully and circle the phrase below which best represents your current feeling. There are no right or wrong answers. Please be honest and truthful.

1. I feel at ease reading poetry, and I like it very much.

strongly agree    agree    undecided    disagree    strongly disagree

2. I am always under a terrible strain when I read poetry.

strongly agree    agree    undecided    disagree    strongly disagree

3. When I hear the word 'poetry,' I have a feeling of dislike.

strongly agree    agree    undecided    disagree    strongly disagree

4. Poetry is fascinating and fun.

strongly agree    agree    undecided    disagree    strongly disagree

5. Poetry is a subject in school which I have always enjoyed studying.

strongly agree    agree    undecided    disagree    strongly disagree

6. Reading poetry makes me feel uncomfortable, restless, irritable, and impatient.

strongly agree    agree    undecided    disagree    strongly disagree

7. If I had my way, I'd study more poetry in English class.

strongly agree    agree    undecided    disagree    strongly disagree

8. Poetry should be banned from all high school English classes.

strongly agree    agree    undecided    disagree    strongly disagree

9. In the future, I will probably continue to read poetry on my own.

strongly agree    agree    undecided    disagree    strongly disagree

10. Rank the following forms of literature from your most favorite (score of 4) to your least favorite (score of 1):

\_\_\_ short story

\_\_\_ poetry

\_\_\_ drama

\_\_\_ novel

**APPENDIX D**  
**Curriculum Lesson Plans for Teachers**



## LESSON ONE: WHAT IS POETRY?

### INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Students should understand, through reading a variety of definitions, that poetry is in some ways undefineable. They should come to realize that poetry is "the re-creation of human experience, imagined or real, in the most intense form."
2. Students should realize that poems can be about any topic conceivable.

### PROCEDURE

1. Ask the class to name some characteristics of poetry, as a first attempt to define it. Put all of these "traits" on the blackboard without discussing them (5-8 minutes).
2. Give the class the Try-Your-Luck Poetry Quiz (2 minutes).
3. Provide answers and explanations of the Poetry Quiz (5 minutes).
4. Go around the room and have students read the 16 definitions of poetry. After all are read, have the class summarize the major points from these definitions.
  - it's often elusive
  - it requires imagination
  - it focuses on a truth of some sort

"Poetry is the re-creation of human experience, imagined or real, in the most intense form."
5. Read 4 poems to the class from the packet. (Allow class members to read as well. 6-8 minutes)
 

non-humorous	humorous
Jack & Jill	Trying to Live Up to You
Moving My Grandfather	Factory Love
Old Green	Help is on the Way
Dear Heart	Award
6. End the class with two poems which discuss the purpose of poetry--"The Secret" and "You Can't Eat Poetry."
 

Poetry helps to ease us, shock us, or challenge us into seeing the material of our lives, our world, our family, and our emotions in a clearer light. Can poetry really change people? Many people's lives have been deeply touched by poems (read "The Secret"). But there is also another view of what poems can, or cannot, do (read "You Can't Eat Poetry").

Poems carry us from one extreme to another. Which view presented here is right? Both. (8 minutes)

*Homework: Read two poems and write a page about which poem you prefer, and why. What about it impresses you? Why do you like it more?*

non-humorous  
Those Winter Sundays  
Accomplishments

humor  
Intimates  
The Purist

## POETRY DEFINITIONS

1. Poetry is the imaginative expression of strong feeling, usually rhythmical: the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings recollected in tranquility.  
William Wordsworth
2. Poetry is the one permissible way of saying one thing and meaning another.  
Robert Frost
3. Poetry is the expression of the imagination.  
Percy Shelley
4. A poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth.      Percy Shelley
5. Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the best and happiest of minds.      Percy Shelley
6. Poetry is the rhythmical creation of beauty.      Edgar Allan Poe
7. Poetry is a response to the daily necessity of getting the world right.  
Wallace Stevens
8. A poem is a pheasant disappearing in the bush.      Wallace Stevens
9. Poetry is the best words in the best order.      Samuel Coleridge
10. Poetry is the most condensed and concentrated form of literature, saying most in the fewest number of words.  
Laurence Perrine
11. Poetry is the rhythmic, inevitably narrative, movement from an overclothed blindness to a naked vision.  
Dylan Thomas
12. Poetry is the process of discovery, revealing inherent music, the music of correspondences: the evolution of consciousness toward wholeness.  
Denise Levertov
13. Poems are games you invent as you go along.      William Stafford
14. A poem is a serious joke, a truth that has learned jujitsu.      William Stafford
15. Poetry is language that tells us, through a more or less emotional reaction, something that cannot be said.  
Edwin Arlington Robinson
16. Poetry is what poets write.      Robert Frost

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## TRY-YOUR-LUCK POETRY QUIZ

True or False?

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. All poems have morals.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Poems are about beautiful things
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Poems are rhymed.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Poems are meant to be read outloud.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Poems are worth more than money.

## Poetry Quiz Answers

1. Some poems have morals, though most do not. If you are looking for a supreme message or moral or a one-line statement that will sum up the meaning of the poem, you will often be disappointed. True, serious poets are trying to communicate something important. But they don't often *tell* you what the poem means: they show you through images. They want you to experience the meaning yourself, the way you experience a baseball game. Some poems are written to

describe a scene	say a prayer
tell a story	portray a person
relive an event	express an emotion

Most poets write to illuminate some small part of the human condition, to focus on a little truth, instead of writing about the "great" truths.

2. Many poems are about beautiful feelings, people, sights, and thoughts. That is, however, by no means the only territory open to poets. All of life can be written about--each thing in the world is poetic in its own way. There are poems about elbows, factory workers, alcoholics, water faucets, warts, gorillas. Be it ugly, sad, bizarre, happy or beautiful, it can be the topic for a poem.

3. Most poems written before 1900 are rhymed and most written after that are not. All poems depend upon musical elements, but contemporary poetry is primarily written in unrhymed lines. Where is it written that poems have to rhyme?

4. Yes, poems are written to be read outloud. Part of the impact of a poem is in the sound of it, the mixture of words, the rhythm of consonants and vowels mixing together. A poet revises a poem to get not only the meaning right, but the sound as well. The only way to hear a poem is to read it outloud.

5. This is a trick statement. The value of a poem lies in its revelation, however large or small, about being human and living on this earth. The thoughts, ideas, and self-knowledge that you are capable of obtaining from a poem are immeasurable, like love or beauty. Though it will not put dollar bills in your pocket, it can help you live more fully and deeply. Which, in the end, is worth more?

**You Can't Eat Poetry**

by John Woods

This poem will cost you.  
It will not register Black voters in Georgia.  
It will not wash oil from ducks.  
This poem will starve the big-bellied babies  
in Angola, if they send it.  
It . . will . . not . . get . . off . . the . . page  
to convince the President  
that loaded guns are dangerous  
and should be kept out of the hands  
of infants and senile demagogues.  
This poem will not feel around under your dress  
down by the lake. It will not be generous  
with its time, nor forgive. It can't be  
warmed up at midnight after the skating  
nor charm the miser out of his hole  
nor proclaim amnesty. It's words,  
God damn it, it's words.

**The Secret**  
by Denise Levertov

Two girls discover  
the secret of life  
in a sudden line of  
poetry.

I who don't know the  
secret wrote  
the line. They  
told me

(through a third person)  
they had found it  
but not what it was  
not even

what line it was. No doubt  
by now, more than a week  
later, they have forgotten  
the secret,

the line, the name of  
the poem. I love them  
for finding what  
I can't find,

and for loving me  
for the line I wrote,  
and for forgetting it  
so that

a thousand times, till death  
finds them, they may  
discover it again, in other  
lines

in other  
happenings. And for  
wanting to know it,  
for

assuming there is  
such a secret, yes,  
for that  
most of all.

## LESSON TWO: THE FIGURE OF A POEM

### INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Students should understand that "figures of speech" are the poet's tools used to communicate experience.
2. Students should understand the concept of connotation.
3. Students should be able to define the following: concrete imagery, simile, metaphor, and symbol.

### PROCEDURES

1. Discuss the job of a poet as "to communicate experience through words." By experience, we mean *imaginatively* experience. How does a poet do this? One way is through figurative language.

2. Exercise: A. Close your eyes. Now picture a tree. Open your eyes. Ask 3-4 people to describe what kind of tree they saw.

B. Close your eyes. Now, picture a pine tree. Open your eyes. Ask 2-3 people what they saw (large, small, with leaves, in wind, with snow, etc.)

C. Close your eyes. Picture a 40-foot maple, ice-covered: as the wind blows, it shakes loose snow and branches.

What do we say when we understand something? "Oh, I see!" Finally, everyone "SEES" a similar tree. Communication is beginning. By using "concrete imagery," I was able to make you see. Concrete language is language that creates a clear image, a smell, a feeling, or sound. The more concrete, the easier it is for us to imagine.

(READ POEM FOR CONCRETE LANGUAGE.)

non-humorous

humor

A Blessing

Giving In

3. Words are the poet's tools. Think of the word "sleep." What does it mean other than "the natural recurring rest for the body"? Ask students.

Death

(sleep of the dead)

Quiet

(the woods were asleep)

Boredom

(the whole class slept through the lecture)

These "other" meanings are called CONNOTATIONS (vs. denotation, the literal dictionary meaning). Most words take on different meanings, or overtones. Think of the words dark, light, bed, time, play, work.



## (READ POEM FOR CONNOTATION.)

non-humorous

humor

40-Love

The Nature of Human Beans

## 4. Have you ever used figurative language?

-You're a pig.

-I'll die if he doesn't call.

-It's raining cats and dogs.

We don't mean these things literally. We use them because they create PICTURES, and express our feelings and experiences with more Power.

## Definition Time!

*Metaphor*: implied comparison of two things essentially unlike.

-The clouds are lions today.

-The snow is milk, spilling in the field.

-Her face, a broken mirror, turned the other way.

*Simile*: an obvious comparison using *like*, *as*, *seems*, etc.

-The clouds are like lions today.

-She was as red as blood.

-The storm rears back like a horse.

*Symbol*: an object, person, image, or action which simply means something MORE than what it literally is. It's really a metaphor--it stands for something other than its dictionary meaning.

## (READ A POEM AS AN EXAMPLE OF SYMBOL.)

non-humorous

humor

Step On His Head

The Need for Curriculum Reform

*Homework*: In the following poems, find examples of metaphor, simile, and connotation.

non-humorous

humor

Sleep

Good Fresh Country Eggs

For the Anniversary

Poem You Asked For

of My Death

## LESSON THREE: THE SOUND OF POETRY

### INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Students should be able to determine the rhyme scheme of a poem.
2. Students should be able to provide examples of a slant rhyme and internal rhyme.
3. Students should be able to identify examples of alliteration within a poem.

### PROCEDURES

1. Remember the Try-Your-Luck Poetry Quiz? One part of that quiz emphasized that poetry is an oral art, meant to be read outloud. Many traditional poems are RHYMING. A rhyme is the use of similar sounding words. These words rhyme: true/blue, fake/cake, sing/ring. When the words are the end of each line it's called an END RHYME.

A rhyme scheme is the pattern of end rhymes in a poem. Read a POEM. Write out the rhyme scheme of the poem.

non-humorous  
Loveliest of Trees  
aa/bb cc/dd ee/ff

humor  
Dignity of Labor  
aa bb cc dd ee ff  
Be Careful (abab)  
Song of Open Road (aabb)

2. Exercise: Divide students into groups of 4-5 students. Have each group read the same 2 poems and write out the rhyme scheme for each. Compare the patterns at the end of this exercise.

non-humorous  
Guitarist Tunes Up  
Papa's Waltz

humor  
The Purist  
Morning After (this poem will trick most  
because of the one unrhyming line...)

3. Most modern and contemporary poems use a variation of end rhyme. Two of the most common are SLANT and INTERNAL.

*Slant*: imperfect rhyme, or off-rhyme, or near-rhyme  
(there/near, one/on, God/blood)

*Internal*: rhyming words within the same or next line, usually NOT at the end.

"None," said the other, "save the *undone* years..."

Read examples of poems and look for slant and internal rhymes.

non-humorous

Those Winter Sundays

humor

Little Miss Muffet

4. Alliteration is another very common device. Alliteration is the repetition of consonant and/or vowel sounds at close intervals.

She *b*aked the *b*read the *b*oys *b*ought.

The *c*up *t*ipped on the *m*ap in his *l*ap.

A *m*an *r*an to the *v*an.

Words are chosen for their sound as much as for their meaning. Let's read the following poem and find examples of alliteration.

non-humorous

Mama's God

humor

Goodbat Nightman

*Homework: Read the following poems and find examples of alliteration, slant rhyme, and internal rhyme. Circle and mark examples in the poems.*

non-humorous

Bloodline

Frederick Douglass

humor

Zimmer in Grade School

Dead Horses

## LESSON FOUR: THE MEANING OF POETRY

### INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Students should understand that poems must work first on the literal level. poets are trying to communicate experience.
2. Students should realize that the meaning of most poems cannot be summarized in a simple phrase or sentence.

### PROCEDURES

1. Read the "How Not to Read a Poem" instructions. and discuss each item. (2-3 minutes)

2. Read a poem outloud to the class. Use it as an example for analysis.

non-humorous

humor

Factory Jungle

Prayer on a Morning My Car Wouldn't Start

A. Review the title. What does it imply for the poem? How does it apply to the poem?

B. Who is the speaker and what do we find out/know about him or her? Can you describe the tone of the speaker?

C. What is the poem communicating? What does the poet seem to be saying. through images. words. repetition. or actions? (5-7 minutes)

3. Exercise: Break into groups of 4 and do the exact same thing--Title. Speaker. Message. If you have eight groups. have four do the same poem. After 10 minutes. have one person from each group read the poem outloud to the class. and another person report the group findings to the whole class. (20 minutes total)

non-humorous

humor

Good Customer

Dear Hairline

Kissing the Earth

A Worm's Life

Child's Sight

Advice to a Friend Entering the Factory

Traveling thru the Dark

Intimates

*Homework: Choose one poem not read for today's class and write a short description (no longer than one page) on what you believe the poet is trying to convey in the poem. Remember to support your interpretation with words, images, and actions taken directly from the poem.*

## LESSON FIVE: CREATIVE WRITING

### INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Students should understand that writing a poem is a human act that everyone is capable of achieving. like running or painting.
2. Students should, through several creative writing exercises, end up writing two or three poems themselves.

### PROCEDURES

1. Discuss how writers simply pick up pens and pencils and put them to paper. Sometimes they start with an idea or image, and sometimes with nothing. To become a good writer is like becoming a good basketball player. Practice, practice, practice. Hard work and sweat. Yet everyone can play . . . (2 minutes)
2. Helpful hints about writing.
  - A. Trust yourself and your imagination. Let your mind go.
  - B. Think about IMAGES. Concrete images people understand. Load the poem with things to see and hear and touch.
  - C. Have faith in yourself. Don't worry about whether the poem is good or bad. That's not the point of this exercise. Try to have fun with language.
  - D. The object is not to write a finished poem, but to play with words and images and ideas. Exercise your brain. (3 minutes)
3. Exercise: The object is to write an in-class poem. Everyone will start with the same first line, and then finish the poem.

non-humorous

After filling the jar with fireflies.

humor

There was once a woman whose father  
over the years had become an ox.

Collect the poems in 8-10 minutes and read 3-5 of them outloud *without* naming the authors.

REPEAT the exercise. (10 minutes)

non-humorous

Tonight, you can hear the stars. . .

humor

Title: New Life Soup Game

Line: Collect your dirty socks  
for 2 weeks straight and . . .

*Homework:*

*humor*

*Imagine the dream of one of these animals: a lion, hawk, hippo, or snake.  
Recreate the dream in a poem..*

*non-humorous*

*Write a poem about the ocean or lake, and what it would say if it could  
speak to us on earth.*

## FINAL CLASS SUMMARY:

Let's review what we've learned.

1. Poetry is a form of literature and can be defined many ways. One definition is "the re-creation of human experience, real or imagined, in a most intense form." And poems can be about ANYTHING.
2. Poetry works mainly because of concrete imagery that makes people see with "figures of speech" -- simile, metaphor, symbols.
3. Poetry is meant to be read outloud with rhyme (slant and internal), rhythm, and alliteration to help make the sound.
4. Poetry is elusive because of its goal: to communicate "*experience*." Poems can rarely be summarized in a simple phrase. The best poems are 'felt' in a physical and emotional way.
5. Poems can help us, if we let them, experience dramatically different worlds, and grow richer in the process.

Lesson Plans Provided by David James, 2/3/96

**APPENDIX E**  
**Humor in the Classroom Presentation**



## Humor in the Classroom:

It's No Laughing Matter

By David James

## Today, you will . . .

- Learn about a variety of humor theories
- Enjoy a summary of educational research on humor
- Discover the characteristics of the best teachers
- Generate tactics for using humor in the classroom
- Learn how humor relates to one's quality of life

## Theories and Functions of Humor

- Superiority / Social Function
- Relief / Psychological Function
- Incongruity / Intellectual Function

### Superiority / Social Function

- "We laugh when we see the weakness of another" Plato
- "We laugh at the pleasure of humiliating someone" Aristotle

### Superiority / Social Function

#### TWO FUNCTIONS

- A way to deal with our relationship WITHIN a group
- A way to deal with our place within larger social system

### Superiority / Social Function

- Humor serves as a social lubricant, a bonding agent
- "I learned quickly that when I made others laugh, they liked me." Art Buckwald
- "Laughter is the shortest distance between two people" Victor Borge

### Relief / Psychological Function

- We laugh to relieve tension and anxiety
- Humor is an expression of our natural desires
- Humor is a way of defending ourselves

### Relief / Psychological Function

#### TWO FUNCTIONS:

- A way to deal with taboo subjects
- A way to deal with our fears and frustrations

### Humor Survey

From "Personality and Sense of Humor" (1984)

Survey of 14,500 people regarding  
30 different jokes:

Sex jokes were the most popular . . .

"The ability to laugh at life is right at the top, with love and communication, in the hierarchy of needs. Humor has much to do with pain; it exaggerates the anxieties and absurdities we feel, so that we gain distance and through laughter, relief."

Sara Davidson

### Relief / Psychological Function

"There is no humor in the Garden of Eden."  
Mark Twain

"Humor is just another defense against the universe."  
Mel Brooks

Humor is generated from sadness; it is a way of defending ourselves . . .

### Incongruity / Intellectual Function

- We laugh at that which surprises us
- We laugh at absurdities and illogical events
- Picture: a dog in a field. Now a dog walking into a classroom

### **Incongruity / Intellectual Function**

#### **TWO FUNCTIONS.**

- A way to stretch our brains by tricking us cognitively
- A way to open up new possibilities through absurdities and nonsense

### **What Is a Sense of Humor?**

"It's like trying to tie a hair ribbon on a bolt of lightning."

W.C. Fields

### **Humor Differences**

Source: "Sense of Humor and Dimensions of Personality" (1993)

- MALES generate more humor than females
- FEMALES use more coping humor than males
- As AGE increases, so does humor creation, humor coping, and humor appreciation

### **Educational Research on Humor**

"Using Humor to Promote Learning in the Classroom" (1968)

- Creates a positive learning climate
- Amount and type of humor important
- Relevant content humor is best
- Can assist in learning and retention

### **Educational Research on Humor**

- Can enhance the creativity of students
- Can increase enjoyment and attention
- Hostile humor will have a negative affect

"Education should teach us to play the wise fool rather than the solemn ass." Unknown

### Benefits of Humor

Source: Stanford U. Loma Linda School of Medicine

- Laughter increases white blood cell production
- Laughter releases endorphins, enhancing the immune system

### Benefits of Humor

- Laughter is like internal exercise
- Increases heart rate, blood pressure, respiratory rate, ventilates lungs
- "Ten minutes of belly laughs produced two hours of pain-free sleep." Norman Cousins

### Benefits of Humor

Source: Univ of Michigan Institute for Social Research

- SMILING: breathe through nose, cooling blood entering brain, releasing chemicals to suppress pain
- SMILING: alters direction of blood flow inside face due to muscle changes

### Why Do We Enjoy Kissing?

"When you kiss, you have to breathe through your nose because your mouth is otherwise occupied."

Dr. R. Zajonc, Univ of Michigan

### Beyond the Physiological

Do people with a sense of humor tend to be more creative, less rigid, and embrace new ideas and methods easier?

### Beyond the Physiological

Source: Robert Half International Survey

84 out of 100 personnel directors agree!

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### Humor and Classroom Climate

Source: "Student Perceptions of Teacher Humor and Classroom Climate" (1994)

Research Proves: students in supportive climates **RETAIN** more information than students in defensive classroom climates . . .

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### Supportive Climate

#### CHARACTERISTICS

- Sense of equality
- Sense of empathy
- Problem orientation
- Descriptive grading
- Spontaneity

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### Defensive Climate

#### CHARACTERISTICS

- Teacher superiority
- Neutral toward students
- Control orientation
- Evaluative grading
- Strategic class elements

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### Climate Research

Source: "The Effect of Teacher Humor on Student Perceptions of Classroom Communicative Climate" (1967)

- Classrooms with no humor:
  - Low in supportiveness
  - High in order, perceived as 'boring'

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### Climate Research

- Classrooms with little or some hostile humor:
  - Low in supportiveness
  - Unfriendly, competitive, perceived as 'teacher controlled'

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### Climate Research

- Classrooms with humor:
    - High in supportiveness
    - Informal, affirming, perceived as 'interesting'
-

### Why Do Teachers Use Humor?

To maximize the social and psychological functions of humor:

- Create a comfortable setting
- Reduce tension
- Create interest
- Relieve boredom
- Make learning fun

### Humor Frequency

Based on a Univ of Massachusetts' study of 70 classrooms

- Average of 3.34 humor elements per 50 minute class
- Males use MORE humor than females (3.73 to 2.43)

### Humor Frequency

- Male humor associated with enhanced APPEAL, DELIVERY, and EFFECTIVENESS on student evaluations
- Female humor has little to NO EFFECT on student perception

### Humor Frequency

Source: "The Relationship of Teachers' Use of Humor in the Classroom to Instruction and Student Learning (1990)

- High-rated college teachers used 63% MORE HUMOR than middle and low-rated teachers
- Use of personal anecdotes, stories, cartoons, jokes, all topic relevant

### Teacher Sense of Humor Study

Instrument: Minnesota Teacher Attitude Inventory

- 46 teachers, in 4 junior high schools, rated each other for 'sense of humor'
- Then measured teachers' attitude toward students
- FINDING: high 'sense of humor' teachers had highest correlation to 'positive' characteristics of teachers toward students

### Teacher Sense of Humor Study

- Measured the social climate of 46 classrooms (40 question student survey)
- Compared 5 highest rated 'humor' teachers to 5 lowest rated 'humor' teachers
- FINDING: High 'humor' teachers' correlated with 'positive' classrooms at the .01 significance level

### Indirect Teaching Traits

Research finds students achieve more, and have positive attitudes toward school.

- Indirect: accepting, praising, using student ideas, asking questions
- Direct: lecturing, giving directions, criticizing

### Humor and Creativity

Source: "Facilitating Effects of Humor on Creativity" (1976)

- FINDING: experimental groups shown "funny" movies scored statistically HIGHER than control groups given the Torrance Creativity Test
- "Humor can increase divergent thinking skills associated with creativity." Avner Ziv

### Humor and Learning

Will using humor judiciously over an entire semester increase learning?

- Two statistics courses, same teacher, but in one course used 3-4 relevant humor elements per 50 minute class
- RESULTS: based upon a 50 item multiple choice final, humor group scored significantly higher at the .01 level

### Humor in Testing

Will humor reduce test anxiety?

- Premise: Tests stress students.
- Study: 180 nursing students, 1/2 shown humorous video before test.
- FINDING: No difference in test scores among the two groups.

### Humor in Testing

- Practice: 88% of students currently select the humor room over non-humor room prior to testing
- Students feel less stress and anxiety toward test, even though they don't score differently

### Qualities of the Best Teachers

Source: America's Best Teachers (1991)

- Love of students
- Subject matter knowledge
- Excellent communication skills
- Flexibility
- SENSE OF HUMOR

### Qualities of the Best Teachers

Source: 200 student surveys from 1963 and 1989

- Shows respect for students
- Makes subject matter interesting
- Uses HUMOR
- Empathetic and compassionate
- Fair, does not play favorites

### Qualities of the Best Teachers

Source: based on student evaluations of 54 college teachers

- Speaks expressively
- Shows interest
- Moves around class room
- Uses HUMOR
- Enthusiastic

### Qualities of the Best Teachers

Source: "Teacher Immediacy: What Students Consider to be Effective Teacher Behaviors" (1996)

- HUMOR
- Vocal variation
- Dynamic delivery
- Use of personal examples
- Friendly

### Humor and Content Material

Since only 11% of students 'like poetry' upon leaving high school, will using humorous content material enhance students' attitude toward poetry?

### Humor and Content Material

Discretion Experiment

- 1 control group of 10th graders, introduced to poetry reading non-humorous poems
- 2 experimental groups of 10th graders, reading humorous poems only
- Control group and 1 experimental group pre and posttested, 2nd experimental group posttested only

### Humor and Content Material

Study Results:

"Both control and experimental groups  
ENHANCED ATTITUDE TOWARD  
POETRY at the .05 level."



### Humor and Content Material

Study Results:

"The humor group scored significantly higher at the .05 level in their **LIKELIHOOD TO READ POETRY IN THE FUTURE.**"

### Humor and Attitude

Source: *Human Characteristics and School Learning* (1976)

"Where students enter a learning task with enthusiasm and evident interest, the learning should be easier, and . . .

### Humor and Attitude

- "they should learn it more rapidly and at a higher level of attainment or achievement than will students with lack of enthusiasm and evident interest."

### Humor and Quality of Life

Source: "Sense of Humor and Enhanced Quality of Life" (1992)

- High 'sense of humor' significantly related to **GREATER SATISFACTION** with life roles
- High 'sense of humor' significantly related to keeping a **POSITIVE ATTITUDE** as negative life events increase

### Humor and Quality of Life

Conclusion:

"Empirical data exists to support that a greater sense of humor is linked to a positive quality of life . . ."

### Personal Humor Growth

How can I cultivate my own sense of humor?

- Adopt a playful attitude
- Don't take yourself too seriously
- Look for the lighter side of life
- Make a humor first-aid kit
- Associate with people who make you laugh

### Humor in the Classroom

#### Summary:

- It can create a supportive learning climate
- It can increase attention and enjoyment
- It can assist in learning and retention
- It can enhance divergent thinking skills

### Humor in the Classroom

#### Summary:

- It is considered an effective teacher trait
- It is an integral teaching strategy/tool
- It should never be used to demean others
- It should always be content-related

### "He who laughs, lasts."

"I thank you for time and attention. I hope this program has been informative, enlightening, and most of all, useful to you." David James

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## ABSTRACT

### THE USE OF HUMOROUS CONTENT MATERIAL AND STUDENT ATTITUDE TOWARD POETRY

by

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May 1998

Advisor: Dr. Jacqueline Tilles

Major: Curriculum and Instruction

Degree: Doctor of Education

Using humor in educational settings is commonplace; however, few studies can be found exploring the effect of using humorous content material in teaching poetry to high school students. Implementing a Solomon three-group design, with a pretest-posttest component, one treatment group of tenth graders was introduced to poetry using only modern and contemporary humorous poetry while a control group was introduced using non-humorous modern and contemporary poetry. A second treatment group, with no pretest, received the humorous treatment and posttest only. An analysis of affective change indicated that both curricula, the humorous treatment and the non-humorous treatment, significantly enhanced students' attitude toward poetry at the .05 alpha level. Unlike the non-humorous curriculum, the humorous treatment curriculum significantly increased the students' likelihood to read poetry in the future. Recommendations are presented for incorporating humorous content material in the classroom and for training prospective and current teachers in humor theory, research, and practice.

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

David James received his B.A. in English from Western Michigan University, and his M.A. in creative writing from Central Michigan University. He worked as director of admission for Siena Heights College and the University of Michigan-Flint for fifteen years before becoming Dean of Academic and Student Services at Oakland Community College in 1996. His books of poetry include *A Heart Out of This World* (1984) and *Do Not Give Dogs What Is Holy* (1994). He has published poetry in numerous anthologies as well as in journals such as the *Paris Review*, *Iowa Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Seattle Review*, *Quarterly West*, *Mid-American Poetry Review*, and the *New York Quarterly*. James has also published a wide variety of articles in the *Journal of College Admission*, *The Journal of Leadership Studies*, *Admissions Marketing Report*, *Poet Magazine*, *Associated Writing Programs Newsletter*, and *College and University*, among others.