

# **The Fifth Dimension of Fluency: Reading and Writing Poetry in the ELL Classroom**

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## **Introduction**

This unit intends to expose students to a rich variety of art and poetry in its many forms, while also scaffolding language in a way that supports student discussion, close reading, analysis, and imitation of poetry. Within the context of learning about ekphrastic poetry, students will develop vocabulary, grammar functions, and content knowledge to listen, speak, read and write about art with authority. Further, students will implement newly learned language and skills to create original written pieces with confidence and style. Moreover, this instructional unit intends to develop student understanding of the beauty and versatility of language as a vehicle for personal expression and human connection--the 5th dimension of fluency.

## **Background**

John Dickinson High School is public school that primarily serves students from the city of Wilmington, Delaware, and its suburban surroundings. The school's building houses two programs-- a Middle Years Program (MYP), for students in grades 6-8, and a high school for students grades 9-12. As a result of the school choice legislation in the state of Delaware, Dickinson's MYP has seen a steady growth in student enrollment, while the high school student body continues to shrink in both size and diversity. In one year, between the 2016-17 school year and the 2017-18 school year, the MYP saw a student body growth of 28%. Meanwhile, the high school's student body shrunk by 3% within the same timeframe, continuing the consistent declining trend in enrollment over the last several years.

Despite declining high school enrollment numbers, the need for special services and education-related interventions amongst the high school student body has steadily trended upward. As of the 2017-2018 school year, 45% of the Dickinson high school student body is classified as low-income. Furthermore, 16% of the high school students have an IEP, and nearly 12% of students are classified as English language learners (ELL).

A significant number of ELL students who enroll at the high school level are new to the United States, and are unfamiliar with the English language, as well as American culture. As one of John Dickinson's two English language teachers, my teaching efforts have focused (and remain focused) on providing language-rich, content-packed

instruction for both newly arrived ELL students and ELL students in the various stages of acquiring English language proficiency.

At the high school level, beginner-level ELL students are placed in my sheltered English classroom, or ELL1. In this setting, students are introduced to the language with basic vocabulary and grammar instruction in an academic context, and across academic content areas. For instance, students learn the future verb tense in the context of a science unit on climate change. Students work through a range of language units designed to help the learner acquire vocabulary and grammar they can use to make meaning in each of their content area classes.

An ELL student who successfully progresses through ELL1 will continue to an additional sheltered English class, or ELL2. In this course, students continue to learn English vocabulary and grammar appropriate for high novice and low intermediate users of English; however, the context of the class is more strictly focused on the English language arts content area. In essence, students are exposed to more authentic works of classical English literature that are in, or are aligned with, the standard ELA curriculum for the Red Clay Consolidated School District.

After two years in sheltered English instruction, students who have made adequate progress in acquiring academic English will move to mainstream English classes with native English speakers. In these classes, students may receive some language specific supports if they are available, but will be more reliant on their newly acquired knowledge of English to adapt and learn in the mainstream English class. Thus, it is critical that students receive specific, highly contextualized instruction in academic English while they are in the sheltered English classroom, so that they are adequately prepared for the challenge of the mainstream English classroom.

With this language pathway for secondary ELLs in mind, I have developed a teaching unit that will primarily focus on content and language outcomes suitable for the ELL2 (or high-novice, low intermediate) classroom. However, learning activities within the unit may be adapted for both beginner and more advanced English learners.

## **Rationale**

There are two fundamental reasons for teaching English learners poetry within the context of ekphrasis. First, students learn language best when it is appropriately contextualized for age and literacy level. Secondary ELL students are often given learning material that is age-inappropriate, or content-inappropriate because English proficiency level is frequently confused with literacy level. It is not only important, but fundamental that ELL students are given access to age and grade-appropriate content so that they are actively learning new content, while they are also acquiring language. Poetry lends itself neatly to this idea because of its tendency to be shorter, with less

words than a traditional short story or narrative. More importantly, poetry is packed with meaning and opportunities to explore English language arts content. Poetry is also rich with active verbs, adjectives, and adverbs, offering ample opportunity for students to study word and phrase level meaning, while also accessing the same content of their native-speaking peers. According to Vicki Holmes and Margaret Moulton, specifically teaching language through poetry provides students with opportunities to inductively discover language patterns and grammar rules, a key component of critical thinking. “The ability to infer, or discover structure in a grouping of words encourages hypothesis testing, which is essential for critical reasoning, as well as language acquisition.”<sup>1</sup> Poems are an opportunity for students to take a magnifying glass to English literature, to analyze how it is used, to compare it to their own language, and to envision how they might use it themselves.

The second reason that poetry works well with ELL students is often ignored, but critical to the growth and health of the young English learner-- that is, second language identity. Many of my ELL students are new to the United States. Among the multitude of challenges they face, they are tasked with carving out an identity to present to the world, and their teenaged peers, with a handful of common phrases, a repertoire of 30-40 verbs, and a still-developing ability to understand and fully engage in the social norms of an American English conversation. While this might be an exaggeration for some students, it is an example of how a young ELL might feel frustrated that he or she cannot fully express themselves in front of English-speaking peers and adults. Amanda Gulla notes in her essay about her experience working with English learners in New York City that “students described the experience of being unable to be understood as ‘feeling as if they no longer existed.’”<sup>2</sup> What’s more, when content and academic language is the focus during the seven hour school day, students are left with little time to sort out who they are when they speak and write in English. Using poetry with ELL students naturally makes space for students to think, question, and discover their second language identity, both in speaking and writing. Students are provided time to think deeply and reflectively on their frustrations, hopes, and dreams before writing on their own terms, with the support of examples and models. In this way, poetry, art, and ekphrasis not only serve as learning tools, but as tools to help students navigate their new surroundings and to access who they believe themselves to be in their newly acquired language.

## **Objectives**

My first objective for this teaching unit is that students will discover and understand the sound, meter, and figurative language of poetry. This objective is closely aligned with the learning objectives of the district curriculum, thus giving students sheltered access to content that is learned concurrently by their native-speaking peers. Moreover, students will take a close look at how word choice, grammar, sound, and rhythm affect meaning. I will use a blended instructional approach, in which students are explicitly taught lessons on poetic concepts, as well as given opportunities to inductively explore these concepts in

small groups. Exploring language is critical to acquisition, as Rodney Jones and Graham Lock explain in their book *Functional Grammar in the ESL Classroom: Noticing, Exploring, and Practising*. According to Jones and Lock, “exploring activities help learners discover how forms are related to meaning and context.”<sup>3</sup> It is crucial that students notice how poets use particular constructions to create a desired effect on the audience.

Moreover, my second goal for students is that they will consume, analyze, and imitate art in varied mediums with confidence. In other words, students will learn the necessary language and skills to listen to, read, discuss, and write about works of art, such as poems, paintings, illustrations, songs, and movies. Students will confidently approach a piece of art by making detailed observations, reflecting on artistic choices, and then propose ideas that analyze why an artist made a particular decision, and the effect of that decision on the piece’s overall meaning. Finally, students will imitate poetic works of art by writing their own poetry. In this task, students will have the opportunity to explore and discover their own voice and second language identity in the target language.

My third, and final, goal is to scaffold students’ language and rhetorical knowledge of written analysis so that they are able to write a concise literary analysis at the end of the unit. To do this, students will first learn how to read, write, and listen to poetry with a critical eye and/or ear. Students will begin learning about figurative language, author purpose, and the effect of language on meaning. Next, students will read literary analyses to explore, notice, and practice with the rhetorical structure of written analysis. Finally, students will write an end-of-unit analysis on a classmate’s work of poetry.

## **Unit Overview**

To start my unit, I want to first teach students the necessary vocabulary with which to analyze and discuss poetry. To do this, students will develop a figurative language toolbox. Students will receive multiple, purposeful exposures to short poems in which students will be asked to identify figurative language. As their understanding of these concepts develop, they will begin to experiment with and implement figurative language into their own poems.

Next, students will be work with several selected poetic forms with which to begin developing their own authorial voices. Developing the second language identity in each of my students is a critical goal for my unit. To do this, we will develop predictable cycles of poetry reading, poetry analysis, form analysis, and finally, experimentation in authorship. When students begin experimenting with form, writing activities will be highly scaffolded, as many second language learners are skeptical and reluctant writers. However, student responsibility will be gradually released from whole class, to small group, to individual writing tasks. As a general rule, students will first read and analyze an example poem before being asked to create an original poem that follows the

specifications of the pattern. This cycle of reading, analyzing, and writing will be modeled through whole group instruction before students are required to perform the task in small groups, and finally, as individuals. The use of patterns and focus on form during this learning phase is fundamental. Patterns are critical to modeling language, but also for initially engaging student interest and motivation, especially for reluctant writers. In his book *Wishes, Lies, and Dreams*, Kenneth Koch explains that “children often need help in starting to feel free and imaginative about a particular theme.”<sup>4</sup> By providing ELL students with patterns for their poems, they will spend more time on the intentional use of words and sounds to “imagine” and create meaning, rather than remaining stuck on form and structure.

In the final phase of this unit, students will read and analyze an ekphrastic poem. *The Vietnam Wall* by Alberto Rios will serve as our anchor text for our unit on ekphrastic poetry, and serve as a reference as students discover the meaning of ekphrasis, and how poets use this concept in writing about works of art. Using previously learned figurative language concepts and knowledge about form and meaning, students will analyze *The Vietnam Wall* as a class. The class will collaboratively write an analysis of this ekphrastic poem to serve as an example that will guide students as they embark on collaborative and individual authorship and analyses of ekphrastic poetry.

## Concepts

### Artists and Authors Create Experiences

Our seminar has focused a great deal on the way in which artists create experiences for the viewer or reader. Students in this unit will view, observe, reflect, and write about the art that they view, and thus, will draw comparisons between how visual artists create experiences similarly or differently from poets and authors. While students will work with several works of visual art throughout the unit, the focus of this unit will address the way in which authors and poets use figurative language to create an experience for readers.

As discussed in seminar, figurative language such as metaphor, simile and imagery are the tools that authors use to evoke experiences in readers. Careful word choices that elicit concrete images can create powerful sensory experiences in a reader that make a poem difficult to forget. Figurative language is often the mechanism with which authors are able to make abstractions, such as love, time, and space, real and tangible experiences.

However, figurative language presents a unique challenge to language learners. As noted by Barbara Palmer et al., figurative language does not often translate from one language to another, and can lead to significant language breakdowns for English learners. These breakdowns are not limited to reading comprehension—idiomatic language and expressions are frequently used in classroom instruction. Instructors who

frequently use idioms during classroom instruction often take for granted the cultural and linguistic knowledge necessary to understand these phrases. According to Palmer, “without proper instruction, it is difficult for these students to weave through the complexity of language as they work to become proficient English-language speakers, readers, and writers.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, students will acquire an understanding of figurative language in order to enjoy, analyze, and write poetry, as well as improve their social and academic understanding of figurative language to apply to the mainstream content classroom.

### Experiences are Conveyed Through Form

Artists, authors, and English learners are bound by a concept fundamental to art, poetry, and language: form. Artists employ visual form, authors rely on rhetorical form, and English learners use grammatical forms as they develop language proficiency. While each of these users has a very specific need and use of form, all users are conveying, or preparing to convey, some sort of experience through form.

English learners acquire forms through carefully planned instruction in which they are scaffolded to notice, explore, and practice with the form they are learning. Vocabulary and grammatical forms give English learners access to listen, read and understand the experiences of others, as well as speak and write about the experiences they want to convey.

Form becomes especially significant when teaching language learners how to read and write poetry. Novice and intermediate learners often rely on patterns for reinforcing existing knowledge of English grammatical forms, while also learning new structures. In his study of poetry and second language learning, David Hanhauer describes how poetry allows language learners to extend “their understanding of the potential uses and meanings of existing linguistic structures.”<sup>6</sup> The myriad forms of poetry give learners a space to use previously learned grammar and explore word and phrase level meaning more deeply. What’s more, learners have the opportunity to learn new grammatical forms that become that may be more easily noticed in a poetic form that is often shorter and less wordy than traditional literature.

Students will read, analyze, and imitate multiple poetic and grammatical forms throughout the unit. First, students will be introduced to the lyrical form. This poetic form lends itself well as an introduction to poetry because of its similarities to songs. In fact, the earliest meaning of lyric poetry was “a poem made for singing.”<sup>7</sup> I am confident that my students will quickly warm to the similarities between this form of poetry and the modern song. Following lyrical poetry, students will be introduced to the cinquain and haiku. The cinquain is a five-line poem that follows a predictable rhyme scheme. The form was revolutionized by Adelaide Crapsy, who wrote the cinquain in a five-line pattern of 2/4/6/8/2 syllables.<sup>8</sup> The haiku is similar to the cinquain in that it follows a

strict syllabic pattern. Haiku are organized into three lines of 5/7/5 syllables.<sup>9</sup> Both haiku and cinquain poems depend on brief, powerful descriptions of an image or experience due to the brevity of their forms. This brevity and attention to form makes both of these forms accessible to English learners, and provides them with a predictable, accessible framework to experiment with their own authorial voice. Lastly, students in this unit will experiment with the narrative poem in the context of ekphrasis. The narrative poem is intended to “tell a story” and typically requires that the poet create a character(s), describe a setting, and relay a chain of events.<sup>10</sup> Ekphrasis is defined as “a vivid description of a scene, or more commonly, a work of art.”<sup>11</sup> The narrative poem lends itself well to the ekphrastic context that requires a great deal of description; therefore, language learners will use narrative poetry as a vehicle to write thoughtfully about works of art.

Providing students with poetic forms also gives them an adequate amount of structure so that students feel more comfortable taking risks when writing. (For some learners, simply finishing a poem might be a risk!) Further, students are required to think critically about word choice and how words and phrases fit together (or don't) to make meaning that they themselves and others will experience. This is a fundamental premise in Michael Halliday's framework of meaning making, in which language is entirely influenced by society and our social surroundings.<sup>12</sup> In this way, form is not only critical for making meaning, but also essential for social interaction and the sharing of experiences with others.

### Art is Imitation

The developing writer is often stalled by the cognitive overload of a given writing task. Though students (especially English learners) may not be able to verbalize concise reasons for their hesitation toward writing, most students are, in some way, acutely aware of the complex skills that writing requires. When presented with any writing task, a learner must consider the background knowledge necessary to complete the task, the formulation of a viable idea or ideas, the selection of an appropriate form and precise language, and the development of an original style and authorial voice. For a learner of any age, writing tasks can be intimidating at best. Thus, English learners must be given multiple opportunities to experiment with language, structure, and style until they have developed the knowledge, confidence, and repertoire of writing skills to write proficiently in response to a given writing task.

The use of mentor texts and imitation is critical to the student writer's evolution into an author. Through the use of mentor texts, learners can “try on” different styles until they find one (or some) that resonates with their personal writing philosophy. It is important to note that this “philosophy” can only be discovered through exploration and experimentation. In this way, mentor texts serve as footholds in which students are able to build fluency, confidence, and make decisive maneuvers toward personal style. For

language learners, the mentor text takes on an even more important role. Students with linguistic and cultural differences are often familiar with the rhetorical styles of their native language. However, rhetorical style and structure often differs between languages. Thus, mentor texts serve as useful rhetorical templates that language learners often need to successfully write their own thoughts and ideas in the target language. Imitation is not only the highest form of flattery, it is a mechanism that demands innovation and helps scaffold new writers to successfully write their own original products.

## **Teaching Strategies**

### Visualization

Visualization is a natural connection between art and poetry that not only lends itself to teaching figurative language, but also gives students an additional opportunity to showcase their artistic skills. This strategy is intended to help students understand metaphor, simile, imagery, and idiomatic expressions by having students draw a literal interpretation of a particular phrase and the intended, figurative meaning of the same phrase. For example, the phrase “It’s raining cats and dogs” might elicit a literal image of cats and dogs falling from the sky adjacent to an image of a springtime downpour.

This strategy reinforces the concept that art and poetry convey experiences intended to be imagined, touched, and felt. Moreover, visualization deepens student comprehension of complex figurative language. As students continue to read and sketch figurative language, the process of seeking out and comprehending figurative language in texts will become more familiar, less intimidating, and perhaps even enjoyable for language learners.

### Guided Looking and Noticing

Aesthetic education is a student-centered teaching approach in which observation and inquiry are the primary vehicles for learning. One technique that we explored in our seminar was guided looking and noticing. This teaching technique scaffolds a student’s observation, interpretation, and reflection on a piece of artwork that naturally leaves space for a student to think critically about the artwork, without the fear “getting it wrong.”<sup>13</sup>

As we discovered in our exercises in guided looking and noticing with teaching artist Nanci Hersch, even the most reluctant of students can be gently coaxed into engaging deeply with a work of art. In this technique, students are given a work of art and are asked to simply look at it for five minutes, taking in the colors, shapes, graphics, forms, etc. This requires no particular skill, except for noticing. Then, students turn the work of art over and write down everything they remember about the work of art. Next, students share their observations with a partner, who is then asked to write a poem about the art



based on his/her partner's observations. Finally, the students share their poems and reveal the work of art that corresponds to each poem. This activity is particularly suitable for the language learner, as it is low pressure, but hyper focused on meaning making using a student's existing language repertoire and prior knowledge. Moreover, the activity requires students to use the listening, speaking, reading, and writing modes of communicate in the target language in a grade and age appropriate context for learning.

Moreover, the skill of noticing is essential to language learning. It is critical that students learn how native speakers construct meaning in different contexts as they become proficient in English; thus, the language teacher must become an expert in helping students notice language patterns in these different contexts. As students practice noticing and observing in the guided looking activity for a work of art, they are building skills of inquiry that they can apply when learning new and unfamiliar grammar functions. Students who are unfamiliar with an inductive approach to language learning may become easily frustrated when asked to notice and make hypotheses about form and grammar in texts. However, the guided looking strategy for engaging with a work of art builds student confidence in their ability to take risks and test hypotheses, which naturally scaffolds a student's ability to make more complex observations about language patterns in texts.

### Close Reading

Like most public school classrooms, my ELL classes are replete with a range of language proficiencies, literacy levels, and cultural and educational backgrounds. Close reading is a skill that is critical for all students to function in a rigorous academic environment, but is especially important for the English learner, who must often rely on their own skill set to comprehend texts in the content area classroom, such as science and social studies. The close reading skill set can be applied to all content areas and are an ELL student's best coping mechanism when left with little or no language specific support.

While the process of close reading differs from classroom to classroom, most educators agree that close reading skills are essential to student success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century classroom. Close reading requires that the reader not only comprehend a text, but also be able to interpret a text's multiple layers of meaning, analyze author choices, and evaluate the effectiveness of a text using evidence-based reasoning. Moreover, close reading necessitates multiple, focused interactions with a text so that students are able to uncover author choices, rhetorical patterns, and meaning.<sup>14</sup>

In my ELL class, language learners interact with a text several times for different purposes before they are asked to evaluate the text in analysis. On the first read, students are asked to identify vocabulary words and phrases they want to clarify. Students can ask a partner, or search for the definition of vocabulary words and phrases. In this way, students rely on the closest resources at their disposal, rather than remaining dependent

on the instructor. After students have clarified vocabulary, they read the text again and answer text specific comprehension questions. These questions range from low-level comprehension questions such as determining the sequence of events, to higher-level questions that require students to consider author choices. Finally, students read a third and final time in order to prepare a response to a question in which students must make inferences and support their responses with evidence from the text.

### Modeling and the Gradual Release of Responsibility

Modeling activities for English learners is a critical part of language teaching. Because most classes of language learners include a wide range of English proficiency levels, modeling and gradually releasing responsibility to students helps to prevent confusion and disengagement among students who have difficulty following oral and/or written directions. When an activity is modeled for a student and then practiced in small, collaborative groups, as the gradual release of responsibility dictates, students have more opportunities to ask questions, process new concepts, and make mistakes without fear of summative grade penalties. After several opportunities to learn and apply new content as a whole class and small group, most students are amply prepared to take on the responsibilities of the learning task independently.<sup>15</sup>

In my own teaching, I tend to begin a lesson by modeling the activity I want students to perform, and I slowly start asking students to participate in the lesson I am modeling. Though this does not follow the gradual release of responsibility with strictness, I still believe that instruction should generally move from whole-class, to small group, to independent work. This cycle works well with language learners, as it gives them opportunities to negotiate the new content with peers (many of whom share the same native language) and receive small group guidance as I facilitate learning during the small group portion of the lesson. What's more, "theories suggest that learning occurs through interactions with others, and when those interactions are intentional, specific learning occurs."<sup>16</sup> Most students tend to gain the skills and confidence necessary to then complete the learning task individually. However, for students who need additional one-on-one instruction, I am more available to offer this assistance when students are working in the independent phase.

### **Activity 1: On "My" Terms: A Vocabulary and Concept-Based Inquiry into How Artists and Authors Create Experiences and Make Meaning**

I have found that many students, regardless of language background, often struggle to find the language with which to express why they enjoy a particular poem or song. When put on the spot to explain their poetic or musical preferences, many students will pause... think... furrow their eyebrows, and then sigh, "I just like the way it sounds!"

While students may not have the vocabulary to express their preferences for poetry or music, it must be noted that most students are unconsciously aware that certain elements interact in poetry and music to create some sort of experience for the audience. In this activity, I will attempt to build on this basic understanding in order to scaffold students to the understanding that artists and authors make conscious decisions to create experiences for a given audience.

In this weeklong activity, students will create a vocabulary toolbox of poetic elements with which to read poetry critically. Next, students will apply vocabulary terms in analyzing lyric poetry and songs. Students will be exposed to a number of short, lyric forms to receive adequate practice in identifying newly learned vocabulary and concepts. Gradually, student “exposure” to poetic elements in lyric poetry will require students to not only identify the elements, but also consider how the interaction of poetic elements affect meaning and overall theme. Finally, students will begin developing a concept for the conscious decisions that authors and artists make in order to create an experience for an audience. As this awareness develops, students will compare techniques that authors use in different poems and how these techniques influence the effect on the audience.

To begin each lesson, students will be exposed to various works of art ranging from music to images to short, lyric poems. Students will be asked to complete a quick write that will be guided by a question, such as “What images come to mind when you listen to this clip of music?” Students will write for two minutes without stopping. Then, we will discuss the responses as a class. Throughout the week, I will gradually guide students toward the idea that authors and artists are precise and purposeful in the process of creating art. Furthermore, we will a class definition of what defines art and how humans interact with works of art. These quick writes and discussions are intended to set the groundwork for student understanding that art and authorship is a conscious act. Moreover, these warm-ups serve as opportunities for language learners to consider what they want to say before they are asked to speak in front of their peers. This is often overlooked, but essential, for English learners who may need additional wait time to develop their thoughts in the target language.

On the first day of this unit, students will begin to develop a vocabulary and concept toolbox of figurative language. I will begin the activity by modeling the station work in front of the class. The topic will focus on imagery. As a class, we will define imagery using the [learnersdictionary.com](http://learnersdictionary.com). Then, we will review a graphic organizer that visually depicts the five senses, which are essential to our understanding of imagery. Next, we will read a lyric poem and identify the author’s use of imagery as it relates to our five senses. Finally, we will organize our examples of sensory imagery in the corresponding parts of the five senses graphic organizer.

After modeling the vocabulary station work, I will pair students up or arrange them into small groups to complete definitions and corresponding tasks for the following

vocabulary terms and concepts: personification, tone and mood, metaphor and simile, and the 3 R's (rhythm, rhyme, and repetition). At the conclusion of the lesson, students will have a vocabulary and concept toolbox that they will use as a reference for the remainder of the unit.

Once students have completed their vocabulary and concept toolboxes, they will begin a close reading and inquiry based project using a chosen lyrical poem or song. Students will be asked to read and identify existing figurative language within their chosen piece. Moreover, students will reflect critically on the impact of the author choices and how these choices shape the theme of the written piece. To do this, students will "become" the author and prepare for a panel discussion amongst their peers. Because students will be asked questions in the panel discussion, they must become experts and prepare for both lower and higher order questions from their audience. Not only does this activity ask students to closely read and analyze a written work of art, but it also requires students to shift from the mindset of passive reader to active author. Students must think deeply about author choices and how those choices influence tone, mood, and theme.

To adequately prepare for this "Ask the Author" activity, I will model the activity for students as a whole class, and then have students work in small groups to complete the same activity with a pre-selected poem. Students will read the pre-selected poem several times. First, students will read for clarification. Then, students will read for comprehension and will be required to answer several comprehension questions. Finally, students will generate questions about the poem and answer them on note cards. Students will also be supplied with questions that they must prepare answers for. As a small group, students will prepare and practice for a "test" panel discussion in which all the students will listen and respond to each other's questions about the poems they have read and analyzed.

Once students have received adequate guided practice in close reading, students will select a poem or song, and then conduct a close read of the written work. Students will collect their observations on a graphic organizer. Then, students will make connections between the existing figurative language and the overall tone, mood, and theme of the written work. Students will create note cards for each of these connections in preparation for their panel discussion. Furthermore, all students will prepare note cards for "superficial" questions, such as "When did you write this?" or "What is the subject?" Students who are not presenting will ask these questions during the panel discussion. During the panel discussion, audience members will be awarded points for asking questions. Audience members will receive one point for a "superficial" question, and two points for an analytical question, such as "What is the meaning of the metaphor in line 4?" The analytical questions are worth more points, as students must identify newly learned figurative language "on the spot," as the mock author presents and answers questions about his/her poem.

Within this activity, language learners will not only receive ample opportunity to develop close reading skills and practice newly learned vocabulary and concepts, but this activity will provide content-based listening and speaking practice. English learners often fall behind their peers in the acquisition of academic language. This learning activity provides much needed listening and speaking practice within an academic context that is critical to the needs to high novice and low intermediate language learners.

## **Activity 2: To Grammar and Beyond: Using Form and Function to Convey Experiences**

In the second week of this unit, students will gradually take on the role of author and begin to experiment with language and develop their individual voice and style in poetry writing. To appropriately scaffold writing tasks, it is critical that students feel supported by predictable patterns. In this way, students will focus more deeply on content and the intended theme and effects of their writing, rather than struggling with form. In this weeklong activity, students will conduct a hands-on exploration of the grammatical and artistic forms of the cinquain and haiku.

Though students are now well equipped with the figurative language concepts that are often the tools of poets, they have not yet used applied these concepts in their own writing. In order to appropriately scaffold students as they begin their first poems, we will first read and visualize the brief burst of action in short poems, like the cinquain. As a class, we will review parts of speech and practice identifying parts of speech in cinquain poems. As students work, I will ask them to consider what parts of speech carry the most meaning. I will guide students to notice that verbs often carry a great deal of meaning in poems that depict a single, brief experience, like the cinquain. Next, students will be asked to identify the action verbs, the subjects performing the action(s), and the manner in which the action(s) is performed. I will assess student understanding of these actions (and interactions) within the cinquain by using the teaching strategy of visualization. Students will draw a picture of what they visualize after reading the poem. These visual representations will further scaffold student understanding that poets use language to create experiences for readers.

After assessing students' ability to adequately identify actions and images in the cinquain structure, students will draft observations of an outdoor nature experience. Students will collect observations about what is happening in the moment around them (i.e. The wind is blowing, the horses are running, the birds are singing). Upon returning from the nature walk, we will review the syllabic structure of the cinquain. Students will write a cinquain poem using the present progressive tense to describe a single aspect of their outdoor experience. Once students have completed their poems, I will then ask them to conjugate their verbs to present tense and re-write their poems, while still implementing the appropriate syllabic structure of the cinquain. Students may find that

they must add adjectives, conjunctions, and/or adverbs to maintain the appropriate syllabic structure. Finally, I will ask students to reflect on how the tone, mood, and theme of the poem changed with their grammatical revisions. This activity not only provides highly scaffolded writing practice, but also focuses student attention on the connection between grammatical form and meaning. As language learners, awareness of form and meaning is critical to selecting appropriate rhetoric for the intended communicative purpose. By making transformations in their own writing, students will develop an implicit understanding of the important connection between form and meaning.

After students have had adequate practice with the cinquain structure and pattern of syllables, students will be given a haiku in small groups and asked to determine the rules for writing haiku. Students will be given no information, and must work within their groups to negotiate the haiku structure. If students become distressed, I will provide students with guiding questions, such as “How many lines is a haiku?” or “How many syllables are in the first line?” I will ask students to gather as many observations about the haiku poem before revealing the structure to the class. In this way, students will work collaboratively in noticing form and patterns in poetry, while also taking risks and making inferences based on their prior experience with cinquain poetry.

Students will then work in their small groups to write a haiku. I will pass around two envelopes. One envelope will contain a range of subjects (i.e. summer, rain, flowers, etc.) and one envelope will contain the figurative language terms that we defined and practiced with at the beginning of the unit. Students will select a subject for the haiku and a form of figurative language that they must include in the haiku (i.e. metaphor, simile, personification, etc.), all while following the structural rules for the haiku form. Once students have developed and typed their poems, I will print the poems and have students cut their poems into individual words. Once all of the words have been collected, students will select words from a pile at the center of the room and recreate another haiku. Finally, students will reflect on their experience. They will respond to questions such as “What words did you search for first?” and “Were the writing restrictions helpful, or harmful to your writing?” Upon completion of this activity, students will have a better understanding of the way in which word order affects meaning. Furthermore, students will develop confidence in taking risks and experimenting with language, a crucial step in developing voice, style, and identity as a writer.

### **Activity 3: Imitation through Narration: Using Art, Analysis, and Point of View to Produce Ekphrastic Poetry**

In the culminating two-week activity, students will preview, read, and analyze the ekphrastic poem *The Vietnam Wall* by Alberto Rios. This text is a part of the Collections curriculum that my district uses with all secondary students. As a teacher of English learners, it is critical that I lower barriers to comprehension and scaffold student understanding and skills to access the “mainstream” curriculum. Not all materials in the

curriculum are appropriate or accessible for the language proficiency level of the students I teach; however, the text by Alberto Rios is not only thematically appropriate for my unit, but provides my English learners with an additional, rich opportunity to access grade level content that will keep them on track with their native-speaking peers. Rios' poem will also serve as an anchor text, from which students will define ekphrasis, write an ekphrastic poem, and analyze the ekphrastic poem of a classmate. Within this activity, students will not only develop a respect for the art of well-known artists and writers, but also learn to value their peers as artists and authors in their own right.

Before students read *The Vietnam Wall*, it is critical that students develop a working knowledge of the causes and effects of the Vietnam War, both domestically and abroad. Students will spend one to two class periods working through a web quest with maps, photographs, short video clips, and interviews with Vietnam veterans. As students complete the web quest, they will fill in information and answer comprehension questions so that they can complete a well-informed summary of the Vietnam War in which they will identify the causes, effects, and long-lasting impacts of the war on the U.S. and Vietnam.

Once students have a solid understanding of the Vietnam War, they will conduct a close read of the poem *The Vietnam Wall* by Alberto Rios. Before reading, I will post a picture of the Vietnam War memorial in Washington D.C. and ask students to make observations about it. Then, students will complete their first read of the poem and answer comprehension questions, using textual evidence to support their responses. Next, students will complete their second close read of the poem and be tasked with identifying and annotating explanations of the figurative language in the margins of the text.

Before moving forward, I will ask students to consider the question, "What is art?" and have students brainstorm ideas about the items that can be classified as art. Then, I will ask students to consider if memorials, monuments, and statues can or should be considered art. After discussion, I will then define ekphrasis for them, and ask them to consider if Alberto Rios' poem is or is not an example of ekphrastic poetry. Students will then read the poem a third time, and form a response in which they argue that Rios' work does or does not constitute ekphrastic poetry.

After thoroughly analyzing and discussing Rios' poem, I will explain to students that we will write an analysis of the poem using textual evidence that demonstrates how Rios created an intended tone and theme for his audience through his use of figurative language. We will spend at least one class period looking at student samples of literary analyses and how the information is organized. Students will then consider how to organize information in our own analytical essay of *The Vietnam Wall*. We will begin the essay together as a class, with me modeling the analytical essay structure. Then, students will work in groups to complete parts of the analytical essay. Next, we will combine the constituent parts of the essay, reorganize as necessary and revise errors. This class written

collaborative essay will serve as the students' main example when they are required to write their own analysis of a classmate's ekphrastic poem.

Once students have read and analyzed an ekphrastic poem, they will have the opportunity to write an ekphrastic poem of their own. Within this activity, students will be guided to look at certain aspects of a work of art, in order to notice a particular feature of the art—in other words, guided looking and noticing. I will set up several works of art around the room and ask students to write words and phrases for each work of art on sticky notes. Students will then choose a work of art and collect the words and phrases that surround that work of art. Next, students will choose a particular point of view from which to write their poem. The point of view could be a character or an object in the art, or could be from the viewer's perspective outside of the work of art. Finally, students will write an ekphrastic poem from their chosen perspective, using as many of the words and phrases as possible that they collected from their classmates. Students will repeat the activity as much as necessary before they feel comfortable writing a narrative poem about a work of art.

For the final project, students will search for and choose a work of art that they will write a narrative poem about. Again, students must choose a given perspective from which to write. Each student must also incorporate at least three figurative language concepts in their narrative poem. Once students have composed and revised their poems, they will then exchange their poems with a classmate. Students will analyze the work of a classmate by close reading their classmate's poem and writing a one to two page analysis of how the author achieves a particular theme using figurative language.

By providing English learners with grade-level content and age-appropriate assessments, English learners are made aware that they are not only capable of achieving high standards, but more importantly, have the right to access learning opportunities with high standards. Through the appropriate modeling and scaffolding within this activity, English learners will receive the educational opportunities they deserve.

## **Appendix A: Standards**

The standards I will address in this unit will include standards from the World Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) consortium and the English Language Arts Common Core. I will target the WIDA English Language Development standard 2, which states that English language learners communicate information, ideas, and concepts necessary for academic success in the content area of Language Arts. Further, this unit will target CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.9, which states that students will draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research. Finally, I plan to teach to the CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.4, which states that students will determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including



figurative and connotative meanings. Students will also analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone.

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## Notes

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