

Lesson Plan: Poetry on the Farm

Objective: Students will learn to interpret poetry of a specific poet by viewing how a writer takes her own history and that of her family, her life on a farm, and her feelings about those to create poetry about memories, topics, and issues of farming.



Inspiration: Poems by Jacqueline Jackson, poet and writing teacher (formerly with UIS) and her oral history interview describing her growing up on a dairy farm. See sample poems below.

Activity: Students will view video clips of Jacqueline Jackson's interview in the ISM Oral History of Illinois Agriculture database. (searching by keywords chores, barn, and poetry).

They will read some of her poems and have a class discussion about the content and form. The EDSITEMent Lesson on poetry appreciation has some important points on poetic language and paraphrasing for understanding.

http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=639

Some topics of discussion could be:

- What details in her poems show you that she really grew up on a farm?
- As she looks back on her childhood on a farm, how does she feel about it (give some examples)?

Read another interview with Jackson (questions about writing) on her website:

<http://jacqueline-jackson.com/materials/interview.htm>

With Jackson's poetry, a discussion of artistic liberties with punctuation offers itself.

- What responses do students have of reading poems where the reader has to find where the thoughts begin, end, and transition?

Rubric for Poetry Appreciation and Interpretation:

3 pts. - Students paraphrase a poem by summarizing it in their own words in correct sequence.

2 pts. - Students summarize the poem in their own words in a more general way.

1 pt. - Students do not have a clear statement of the poem's content, so interpretation is vague.

ISBE Standards: Listening

Late Elementary: 4A2a: demonstrate understanding of the listening process (sender, receiver, message) by summarizing and paraphrasing spoken messages orally and in writing in formal and informal situations.

Middle School: 4A3a: demonstrate ways (ask probing Qs, providing feedback summarizing,

4A3b: compare a speaker's verbal and non-verbal messages.

Early High School: 4A4a: apply listening skills as individuals and groups in a variety of settings (e.g. Interviews).

Late High School: 4A5b: use techniques for analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating of oral messages.

Extension: Writing a poem in the style of Jacqueline Jackson

- Students use Jackson's poems as a model.
- They view or hear other interviewee's oral history clips (search by a farm topic they are interested in, such as barns, insects, or pigs; farming during the Depression, the waning of the small family farm, or changing technology, for examples).
- They use the notes taken from these clips to create a poem that explores feelings, attitudes, and facts about their topic.
- They will format their poem in a similar way that Jackson does.

ISBE Standards for Extension: Writing a poem in the style of Jacqueline Jackson Writing:

Late Elementary: 3C2a: write for a variety of purposes and for specific audiences in various formats- narrative. fiction., autobiography; expository. report, essay, persuasive.

Middle School: 3C3a: write for a variety of purposes and for specific audiences in various formats- narrative. fiction., autobiography; expository. report, essay, persuasive.

Late High School: 3C5a: communicate information/ideas in narrative, informational, and personal writing. Adapt content, voice, tone, etc, for audience.

Resources for more practice or extension:

One Illinois farm poet Web site is this one for John Gwaltney, containing:

<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~jgholson/>

Scroll down to find 50 poems.

<http://www.jalc.edu/activities/siwg/index.html> Southern Illinois Writer's Guild. Speaker's Archive, contest, events.

<http://www.wiu.edu/foliopress/illinois/ipoes.htm> An Illinois Portfolio: Poems

Poems by Jacqueline Jackson, Springfield, Illinois
appearing in *The Illinois Times* newspaper 2005-2009

2005

April 7

kitchenpoem #1

I notice I'm having
an orange breakfast
orange orange
orange chunk of
butternut squash
orange egg
yes orange because
it's from a cage-free
drug-free
organically-nourished
yard hen named
h e a t h e r f e d b e t t e r
who lives in port washington
wisconsin and bids me
have an eggcellent day
thank you heather
and the same to you

(*Heather Fedbetter* is a trademark
of Egg Innovations LLC)

April 21

kinquotepoem #3

a friend says your poems
aren't profound

my dad tells of the city chap
who waited by the fence
thinking he'd surely glean
some weathered wisdom from
the grizzled tiller of the soil
the farmer paused to
turn his team the stranger asked
what do you think about
when you plow all day
the farmer said I think about
how straight the furrow is
behind me

December 29

Barn Cat

I wanted my old cat.
My old cat curled around my neck
Like a black velvet collar.
She purred in my ear.
She talked all the time,
And when she was irritated
She talked very loud.
She rode my shoulders
Upstairs and downstairs
And even out to the dumpster.

This mouse-fattened barn cat
Is far too heavy
To circle anyone's neck,
Even had he a mind to.
He never talks.
His mew is pusillanimous.
He is a litter-flinger.
He is a food-off-the-table snatcher.
He is a reacher-outer when you go by
And a catch-you-with-a-clawer.
He is a grab-your-hander with his sharp teeth
When you play with him,
Never warning you of sudden pique.
He does purr a lot.
And you have to take the barn cat
When the barn is gone,
Don't you?

2006

October 19

kitchenpoem#2

if you're wondering how to
get rid of a pesky housefly
turn off all the lights open
the fridge door he'll fly right into
the sudden brightness slam the
door later on open it cautiously
in his numbed state he's easily
dispatched with a napkin but
be sure you've covered the butter
my grampa had the idea earlier
his cows entered the round barn
through a dim passage a hanging
blanket brushed the flies off their backs
the only light a bright slit overhead
they flew up crawled through
into a closed room all windows
no way out no sense to crawl back
through the now dark slit a farmhand
would sometimes enter the room and
shovel up a bushel of dessicated
bodies not many of us have cows
these days but most of us have fridges
maybe I should send this household
hint to heloise I wonder if she pays

2007

January 25

surgepoem #21,500

for sixty years we milked
a hundred cows a day at first
by hand but in the twenties for
three hundred bucks my grandpa
had the high wire come from
town he then bought six surge
milking machines surge became
a household word just think the
difference if the trillions we've
poured into this deadly war had
been marshaled into milk cheese
butter eggs and poured out to the
starving all over the globe what
a surge of chubby children all
our soldiers milkmen milkmaids

November 29

milkbusiness poem #1

mrs george downey
of 347 hinsdale street
quit taking milk when
my grandfather raised
the price from five
to five and one quarter
cents she said I will never
pay more than a nickel
for a quart of milk

September 13

farmerpoem #1

the pigs I am told are
doing very well there
is lively competition
among them as to who
is to go to the state fair
they are doing so well
in fact only a very
few young boars had to
submit to that major
operation which condemns
them to a life of tranquil
gluttony and an eventual
trip to milwaukee

2008

January 10

ecopoem #6

driving north dense fog I first time ever
pull into the Wisconsin welcome rest area
phone my delay sit still boots on concrete
atop the triangle of land once ours till
I-90 sliced through the farm I know the
Earth under this pavement it's field 12
I walked corn rows for years detasseling
know my dad and uncle raced the fence line
in opposite directions last one back to
the big oak is a rotten egg dad would pause
spit under a stone to ease the stitch in his
side I can't see the barn a quarter mile off
its lacy roof still there till the Indians
built their casino I recall the note grandpa
left on my father's desk blotter Ronald I had
a glorious good time today the sky and clouds
have been grand the team responded to every
touch & were so strong & willing the machines
were good if old that wonderful number 12 field
is such a satisfaction we have been preparing
for that for the past ten years signed dad
I mull the annual loss of arable land to condos
Malls asphalt ours Carrington loam over gravel
Was best in the world same as in the Caucasus
I close the car head on into the blinding fog

January 24

farmerpoem #2

somebody caught a
hoot owl yesterday
and brought it into
the office I tried to
break its neck by
walking completely
around it but couldn't
quite twist it off

February 28

farmerpoem #3

(this is from a 1956 letter from my retired U of
Michigan writing professor, who taught me much
of what I know about writing and living)

I shall never go through another
Lambing season without living on
The place I drove back and forth
Twice a day this year and lost several
Lambs while away lambs start coming
First of march I am going to be there
I want to have one spring at least
When I can get up in the morning and
Watch winter go and spring com in

May 8

farmer'sdiary poem #1

may 11 1949
this morning I
stumbled on a
meadow lark nest
with six eggs and
two cowbird eggs
therein

may 14 1949
checked my
meadow lark
nest a cow
has stepped on it
sic transit
gloria mundi

June 26

backthenpoem #3

my grandpa wrote my dad
and uncle when they were
away from the farm at
phantom lake y camp he said
my dear boys I am missing you
greatly not only because of
your help with the work but
it is lonesome without you
do you know that story of
the lad who had been away
from home a few days and
felt it was years and remarked
well I see you still have the
dame old cat things will be much
the same when you return we
will have the same old cat

July 3

farmerletter poem #3

(to Jackie from her father, 1948)

july 4 we finally got rain about
ten days ago good enough
to start some of the corn that
hadn't sprouted some fields
are good many only about
two thirds of a stand nothing
a complete failure although
it makes me sick to think
how much we stand to lose
just because we couldn't have
had a little thunder shower
about june 1

August 14

milkybusiness poem

I grew up drinking raw milk it
was our dairy's premium brand
grade A guernsey raw all the
doctors recommended it but when
pasteurization became mandatory
we had to drop it now nutritionists
say raw milk is healthier farmers are
again providing it though against the
law amish agriculturalists hauled
off to jail factory farms and monster
dairies train elephant guns at family
cows—lawmakers too; pending in my:
“every person engaged in the pro-
duction of raw untreated milk for
human consumption”
daughter #3 who keeps food thugs
under surveillance writes me what
she and her blog buds are debating
“what about nursing mothers are
they going to need permits as well
I mean a woman is a person and if
she is nursing she is engaged in
the production of raw milk for
human consumption are we wrong?”

September 18

underwearpoem #1

some people hold things against their parents
all their lives mine probably will too my godkids
blame their mother that she made them wear
their underpants a second day inside out well
I remember my grandma doing a huge washing
at the big house every Monday took all day tubs
and scrub boards all the overalls for the help all
the white aprons for the barn and milk house
to say nothing of their personal clothing and
my mother every Monday in the cellar of the
little house toiling over the maytag running
clothes through the wringer using starch and
bluing a big wash for our family of six on rainy
days clothes were strung all over the downstairs
slapped you in the face if you weren't careful
we all felt clammy I don't recall whether I had
to wear my underpants twice or not but it was the
depression we were lucky to have underpants at
all

October 9

roundbarnpoem #3

I trespassed yesterday found a way into
the derelict barn on the farm I grew up on
my dad grew up there too I took some
plaster of paris cleaned out the handprints
where when he was nine and his brother
seven they had made them in the wet cement
I used to wonder If the cow who always
chose that spot for milking knew she had
immortal handprints by her left rear hoof
now they're saved just in reverse now it's
ok for the tornado or wrecking ball to come