



Socially-based Curriculum Unit: Political Poetry

Unit Title: Political Poetry

Time Frame: 4 lessons (300 – 450 minutes)

Unit Developer(s): Chris Coculuzzi

Developed for Course Name and Course Code: English, Grade 11 University Preparation (ENG3U)

Strand(s) and Curriculum Learning Expectations Addressed:

Oral Communication

OV0.1 Listening to Understand: listen in order to understand and respond appropriately in a variety of situations for a variety of purposes;

OC1.2 select and use the most appropriate active listening strategies when participating in a range of situations;

OC1.3 select and use the most appropriate listening comprehension strategies before, during, and after listening to understand oral texts, including increasingly complex or difficult texts;

OC1.4 identify the important information and ideas in oral texts, including increasingly complex or difficult texts, in a variety of ways;

OC1.5 develop and explain interpretations of oral texts, including increasingly complex or difficult texts, using evidence from the text and the oral and visual cues used in it to effectively support their interpretations;

OC1.6 extend understanding of oral texts, including increasingly complex or difficult texts, by making effective connections between the ideas in them and personal knowledge, experience, and insights; other texts; and the world around them;

OC1.7 analyze oral texts, including increasingly complex or difficult texts, focusing on the ways in which they communicate information, ideas, issues, and themes and influence the listener's/viewer's response;

OC1.8 identify and analyze the perspectives and/or biases evident in oral texts, including increasingly complex or difficult texts, and comment with growing understanding on any questions they may raise about beliefs, values, identity, and power;

OC1.9 evaluate the effectiveness of a variety of presentation strategies used in oral texts, including increasingly complex or difficult texts, and suggest other strategies that could be used effectively;

OV0.2 Speaking to Communicate: use speaking skills and strategies appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes;

OC2.1 communicate orally for a range of purposes, using language appropriate for the intended audience;

OC2.3 communicate in a clear, coherent manner, using a structure and style effective for the purpose, subject matter, and intended audience;



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OV2.4 use appropriate words, phrases, and terminology, and a variety of stylistic devices, to effectively communicate their meaning and engage their intended audience;

OV2.5 identify a variety of vocal strategies, including tone, pace, pitch, and volume, and use them effectively and with sensitivity to audience needs and cultural differences;

OV0.3 Reflecting on Skills and Strategies: reflect on and identify their strengths as listeners and speakers, areas for improvement, and the strategies they found most helpful in oral communication situations

OV3.1 explain which of a variety of strategies they found most helpful before, during, and after listening and speaking, then evaluate their strengths and weaknesses in oral communication to help identify the steps they can take to improve their skills;

Reading and Literature Studies

RLV0.1 Reading for Meaning: read and demonstrate an understanding of a variety of literary, informational, and graphic texts, using a range of strategies to construct meaning;

RL1.1 read a variety of student- and teacher-selected texts from diverse cultures and historical periods, identifying specific purposes for reading;

RL1.2 select and use the most appropriate reading comprehension strategies to understand texts, including increasingly complex or difficult texts;

RL1.3 identify the most important ideas and supporting details in texts, including increasingly complex or difficult texts;

RL1.4 make and explain inferences of increasing subtlety about texts, including increasingly complex or difficult texts, supporting their explanations with well-chosen stated and implied ideas from the texts;

RL1.5 extend understanding of texts, including increasingly complex or difficult texts, by making appropriate and increasingly rich connections between the ideas in them and personal knowledge, experience, and insights; other texts; and the world around them;

RL1.6 analyze texts in terms of the information, ideas, issues, or themes they explore, examining how various aspects of the texts contribute to the presentation or development of these elements;

RL1.7 evaluate the effectiveness of texts, including increasingly complex or difficult texts, using evidence from the text to support their opinions;

RL1.8 identify and analyze the perspectives and/or biases evident in texts, including increasingly complex or difficult texts, commenting with growing understanding on any questions they may raise about beliefs, values, identity, and power;

RLV0.2 Understanding Form and Style: recognize a variety of text forms, text features, and stylistic elements and demonstrate understanding of how they help communicate meaning;

RL2.1 identify a variety of characteristics of literary, informational, and graphic text forms and explain how they help communicate meaning;

RL2.2 identify a variety of text features and explain how they help communicate meaning;

RL2.3 identify a variety of elements of style in texts and explain how they help communicate meaning and enhance the effectiveness of the texts;



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RLV0.3 Reading With Fluency: use knowledge of words and cueing systems to read fluently;

RL3.1 automatically understand most words in a variety of reading contexts;

RL3.2 use decoding strategies effectively to read and understand unfamiliar words, including words of increasing difficulty;

RL3.3 use a variety of strategies, with increasing regularity, to explore and expand vocabulary, focusing on the precision with which words are used in the texts they are reading;

RLV0.4 Reflecting on Skills and Strategies: reflect on and identify their strengths as readers, areas for improvement, and the strategies they found most helpful before, during, and after reading;

RL4.1 explain which of a variety of strategies they found most helpful before, during, and after reading, then evaluate their strengths and weaknesses as readers to help identify the steps they can take to improve their skills;

RL4.2 identify a variety of their skills in listening, speaking, writing, viewing, and representing and explain how the skills help them read more effectively

Writing

WRV0.1 Developing and Organizing Content: generate, gather, and organize ideas and information to write for an intended purpose and audience;

WR1.1 identify the topic, purpose, and audience for a variety of writing tasks;

WR1.2 generate, expand, explore, and focus ideas for potential writing tasks, using a variety of strategies and print, electronic, and other resources, as appropriate;

WR1.3 locate and select information to effectively support ideas for writing, using a variety of strategies and print, electronic, and other resources, as appropriate;

WR1.4 identify, sort, and order main ideas and supporting details for writing tasks, using a variety of strategies and selecting the organizational pattern best suited to the content and the purpose for writing;

WR1.5 determine whether the ideas and information gathered are accurate and complete, interesting, and effectively meet the requirements of the writing task;

WRV0.2 Using Knowledge of Form and Style: draft and revise their writing, using a variety of literary, informational, and graphic forms and stylistic elements appropriate for the purpose and audience.

WR2.1 write for different purposes and audiences using a variety of literary, informational, and graphic forms;

WR2.2 establish a distinctive voice in their writing, modifying language and tone skillfully and effectively to suit the form, audience, and purpose for writing;

WR2.3 use appropriate descriptive and evocative words, phrases, and expressions imaginatively to make their writing clear, vivid, and interesting for their intended audience.



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Desired Results

Unit Description:

Often derided as polemical, poetry with a focus on politics has a long tradition in English literature as well as in a Canadian context. In this unit, students will have the opportunity to explore that tradition through a variety of political poetry by mostly Canadian authors. Students will read and analyze specific poems for use of language, poetic devices, and political context, as well as create their own poems inspired by pressing social issues in their local or national interest. The culminating activity for this unit can either be a poetry slam or a coffee house at a local establishment.

Enduring Understandings / Learning:

By the end of this unit students will:

- Understand the tradition of political poetry in English Literature and within Canada;
- Understand the use of poetic devices such as (but not limited to) metaphor, alliteration, simile, and personification;
- Understand and identify various forms of poetry, such as (but not limited to), ballad, free verse, sonnet;
- Know how to use print and/or electronic technology for research purposes, including electronic databases;
- Use their own imagination, informed by research, to create poetry based on issues of a local and/or national focus;
- Be able to communicate with confidence and clarity their own creative expressions to a wider audience;

Assessment Tasks

Performance Tasks and Other Evidence That Will Demonstrate the Knowledge and Skills Acquired:

There are three main performance tasks/products students will be responsible for:

1. A report outlining their local and/or national issue researched (complete with appendices)
2. A journal of poetry that includes analyses of poems studied as well as their own creations
3. A recital of their poetry through either a poetry slam or coffee house

Assessment Criteria: See **Appendix E**



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Unit Planning Notes

Prior Learning Necessary (if any): Exposure to poetry and poetic devices at earlier grades, as well as an introduction to print and/or electronic research methods.

Preparation Notes (if any): Ideally teachers would have access to a computer lab in order for students to conduct research online. If not, time in the library to access vertical files and other print sources would suffice. Teachers, with the assistance of students may wish to investigate local establishments to hold a poetry slam or coffee house. Alternatively, teachers could easily hold the poetry slam or coffee house within their own classroom or another room in the building that might accommodate an atmosphere that would not resemble a traditional classroom. Teachers may need to book a TV with Video and/or DVD player to help facilitate suggested media resources.

Learning Plan

Lesson 1: Introduction to Political Poetry (75–150 minutes)

1. Teachers may wish to review/refresh with the class poetic forms (including meter and rhythm), as well as the more common poetic devices, before starting the next item.
2. The teacher relates the background and main events surrounding the Peterloo Massacre in Manchester, England in 1819 (See **Resources**). The teacher then distributes Shelley's "England in 1819" as a handout/on the board/as an overhead/with LCD projector for individual reading and reaction (use **Appendix A**) and instruct the students that this will be the first worksheet in their Poetry Journal. The teacher takes up with the class the four responses on the worksheet in order to determine poetic form and devices, as well as various responses and interpretations (see **Resources** for some excellent analyses of Shelley's poem online). *Note: Before taking up the worksheet with the class, the teacher may wish to read the poem aloud or ask a student(s) to volunteer.* After discussing poetic form and meaning, the teacher discusses with the class the connection between the poem and the Peterloo Massacre. Possible teacher prompts include: *Why do you think Shelley wrote this sonnet as a response to the Peterloo Massacre? Do you feel that the Peterloo Massacre would be an appropriate topic for writing a poem? Do you consider any topics to be inappropriate for inspiring poetry?* After the discussion, the teacher introduces the idea of political poetry: poetry that is inspired by and/or comments on political/social issues as opposed to stereotypical assumptions about poetry being inspired by, or commenting on, themes such as Love and Beauty.
3. *Extension:* Allow students to write a sonnet on the Peterloo Massacre to include in their Poetry Journal.



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4. The teacher relates the background and main events surrounding the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919—see **Resources**, especially “Labour History in Manitoba, Canada” pages 6-10. The teacher then distributes “By Permission of the Strike Committee” (see page 11 of same article) as a handout/on the board/as an overhead/with LCD projector for individual reading and reaction (use **Appendix A**) and instruct the students that this will be the second worksheet in their Poetry Journal. The teacher takes up with the class the four responses on the worksheet in order to determine poetic form and devices, as well as various responses and interpretations. *Note: Teachers may wish to assign this worksheet to be evaluated in the Poetry Journal.* After the discussion (or ample time to fill out the worksheet), the teacher discusses with the class the political nature of the poem. Possible teacher prompts include: *In what ways is this poem similar and/or different to Shelley’s? Do you feel that the poems have similar or different purposes?* After the discussion, the teacher introduces the concept of a history of political poetry and poets in Canada.
5. *Extension:* Allow students to write a poem on the Winnipeg General Strike to include in their Poetry Journal.

Lesson 2: Introduction to Canadian Poets (75-150 minutes)

1. Teachers can choose from a variety of poems from Canadian authors (see “Canadian poetry” in **Resources**). The teachers set up stations in the room for small groups (of three-four) with a copy of a political poem by a Canadian author. Students are instructed to use the format of **Appendix A** to work together and write down their analysis and then take turns presenting their assessment to the class. Presentations should begin with a reading of the poem, and teachers can encourage students to practice “performing” the poem through use of shared lines, choral speak, and varying tone, pitch, and speed. If teachers would like to extend this into a formal presentation or formative assessment as preparation and feedback prior to the Coffee House/Poetry Slam, see **Appendix B** for a rubric on presentation.
2. With time permitting and a reasonable access to media resources, teachers present a documentary on a Canadian poet—see sample titles under **Resources**, along with sample handout **Appendix C** that would be added to the student’s Poetry Journal.
3. *Extension:* Allow students to write a poem either based on the individual poet, or an issue/topic raised in the documentary to include in their Poetry Journal.



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Lesson 3: Launch Assignment (75-150 minutes)

1. Teachers should obtain a copy of Joyce's article in the Dec 2007/Jan 2008 issue of *The CCPA Monitor* (see **Resources**) to either read aloud, or preferably make as a handout for students, as a foundation for a class discussion on using digital gaming for social advocacy and change. Teachers may want to use the handout **Appendix C** to accompany the article. In particular, question 4 on the handout could provide the opportunity for debate in the class. Teachers will instruct students to include **Appendix D** in their Poetry Journal.
2. Teachers introduce students to the idea of a poetry slam (see **Resources**) through both instruction and practice. If teachers have access to a computer lab, students can look up some of the suggested sites themselves, otherwise, teachers should use the links to explore variations of the rules and decide whether they want to promote a competitive atmosphere with audience judges or eliminate that aspect altogether. To facilitate the practice poetry slam, teachers will choose another set of Canadian poems to place at stations for small groups of three to four. Students are expected to complete a new worksheet individually analyzing the poem for their Poetry Journal and then work with the group to present the poem in the slam and use **Appendix B** for performance feedback as well as anecdotal comments.
3. Teachers launch the Poetry Assignment with **Appendix E**.

Lesson 4: Work Periods and Coffee House/Poetry Slam

Teachers should allow enough work periods to allow students to write/type their reports as well as create their poems. This enables teachers to supervise and provide opportunities to discuss individual concerns with students. This would culminate in the coffee house/poetry slam at a local establishment or a special setting within the school.

Resources

Joyce, Sean Arthur. "Poets who don't speak out guilty of 'silence that says nothing'." The CCPA Monitor. Dec 2007-Jan 2008: 36-37.

Peterloo Massacre

<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/peterloo.html>

<http://www.cottontimes.co.uk/peterloo.htm>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peterloo_Massacre



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Shelley's 1819

<http://rpo.library.utoronto.ca/poem/1885.html>
<http://www.utscc.utoronto.ca/~mcuddy/ENGB02Y/England.html>
<http://www.nt.armstrong.edu/Rss2005.htm>

Winnipeg General Strike

"Labour History in Manitoba, Canada." Manitoba Social Science Teacher v20, n3. 1994. 6-11. 30 May 2008
<<http://eric.ed.gov>>.
<http://www.civilization.ca/hist/labour/labh22e.html>
http://archives.cbc.ca/on_this_day/05/15/
<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1ARTA0008649>
<http://www.histori.ca/peace/page.do?pageID=347>
<http://www.worldsocialism.org/canada/winnipeg.general.strike.1969.v36n269.htm>
http://www.canadianeconomy.gc.ca/English/economy/1919Winnipeg_general_strike.html
<http://www.socialisthistory.ca/Docs/History/WinnipegStrike.htm>
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winnipeg_General_Strike

Canadian Poetry

15 Canadian Poets x 3. Ed. Gary Geddes. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2001.
Fiery spirits & Voices: Canadian writers of African descent. Ed. Ayanna Black. Toronto: Harper Collins, 2000.
Joe, Rita. We are the Dreamers. Wreck Cove, NS: Breton Books, 1999.
Oxford Book of Canadian Verse. Ed. Margaret Atwood. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1983.
The Common Sky—Canadian Writers Against the War. Ed. Mark Higgins, Stephen Pender, Darren Wershler-Henry. Toronto: Three Square Press, 2003.
Waging Peace—Poetry and Political Action. Ed. Susan McMaster. Manotick: Penumbra Press, 2004.

Canadian Poet Titles from NFB

Earle Birney: Portrait of a Poet. Dir. Donald Winkler. NFB, 1981.
Ladies and Gentlemen...Mr. Leonard Cohen. Dir. Donald Brittain and Don Owen. NFB, 1965.
Irving Layton: An Introduction. Dir. Donald Winkler. NFB, 1986.
In Love and Anger: Milton Acorn – Poet. Dir. Kent Martin. NFB, 1984.
Song of Eskasoni. Dir. Brian Guns. NFB, 1993.

Poetry Slams

<http://www.webenglishteacher.com/poetryslam.html>
http://www.slampapi.com/new_site/background/what_is_poetry_slam.htm
<http://torontopoetryslam.com/slam-rules>
<http://www.poetryslam.com/>
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poetry_slam