

Lesson Title: *Spoon River Anthology* Literary Analysis

Lesson Class Name and Grade Level: This lesson is intended for late high school English classes.

Lesson Type: Lecture, Questioning, Group work, Discussion.

Illinois Learning Standards:

2.A.4a Analyze and evaluate the effective use of literary techniques (e.g., figurative language, allusion, dialogue, description, symbolism, word choice, dialect) in classic and contemporary literature representing a variety of forms and media.

2.A.5d Evaluate the influence of historical context on form, style and point of view for a variety of literary works.

Introduction: This assignment is part of an interdisciplinary initiative with the history department. History students will complete primary source research on a member of the community through research in local document repositories (libraries, genealogical societies, etc.) and field work in the cemetery. They will compile information about a person and the historical context of that person's life. Students in the English class have the opportunity to use this research to incorporate it into epitaphs of their own creation.

Goals: When students complete this lesson, they should be able to:

1. Identify poetic devices
2. Incorporate historical context into their own creative poetry
3. Deduce information about historical events based on factual evidence

Materials/Equipment:

1. Copy of a *Spoon River Anthology* poem of your choice
2. Spoon River Anthology Epitaph Worksheet
3. Research from history students

Procedures:

Pre-class Preparation:

- Make all photocopies
- Prepare background knowledge on *Spoon River Anthology* and poetic/literary devices

Statement of Objectives

At the close of the lesson, students will be able to:

1. Be able to identify literary and poetic devices
2. Begin to grasp the relationship between historical context and creative output

Outline of Lesson Contents

1. Introduce *Spoon River Anthology*. Explain the general format of the novel (a series of short, free verse poems that represent the epitaphs of characters, etc.). Explain how this class is aligned with the history project in which students undertake primary research on their own.
 - a. Ask: What is a free verse poem?
 - b. Ask: Why might Masters have used this format to write his epitaphs?
 - c. Ask: This book was very popular when it was published in 1915. Why do you think this is?
2. Go over definitions for poetic devices and literary devices. Keep in mind that literary terms (especially imagery, allusion, and diction) might be more beneficial than poetic device terms since Masters is writing in free verse and his writing is rather prose-like.
3. Hand out a copy of a poem from *Spoon River Anthology* to each student. *Spoon River Anthology* is reproduced online at <http://spoonriveranthology.net/spoon/river/>. Conversely, it is possible that one is already listed in your literature textbook.
4. As a class, analyze the poetic/literary devices used by Masters. The goal is to get an idea of the author's intention.
 - a. Ask: How does [x] device make you feel? What does it do for the reader?
 - b. Ask: Why might Masters have expressed this idea with [x] device?
5. Explain how this class is aligned with a history class. Students will be using research compiled by history students in order to write an epitaph of their own that uses poetic devices. Hand out research from other students and *Spoon River Anthology Epitaph Worksheet*. Have students bring this worksheet in class so that they are able to ask questions. What they do not finish will be their homework.
 - a. Ask: How is this situation just like the situation Masters was in when he wrote *Spoon River Anthology*?
 - b. Ask: How will the historical context of someone's life affect your epitaph?
 - c. Ask: How will you interpret the historical data given to you?

Suggested Reading:

Masters, Edgar Lee, and John E. Hallwas. *Spoon River Anthology: An Annotated Edition*. Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1993.

Russell, Herbert K. *Edgar Lee Masters: A Biography*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001.

Masters, Edgar Lee. "Spoon River Anthology: The Definitive Online Edition." Spoon River Anthology. <http://spoonriveranthology.net/spoon/river/> (accessed March 08, 2010).