

LINE IT UP



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Outcomes


This assignment is designed to draw students attention to the different ways poets use lines, line-breaks, stanza breaks and white space in free verse poems.

Based on a lesson by Frances Ashe, Kate Oneschuk (Holliston High School, Holliston, MA), Monica Hiller (Watertown High School, Watertown, MA) and Allyson Sklover (Boston Latin Academy, Dorchester, MA)





Ideas and Methodologies

- Teachers will present several poems typed each as a single paragraph, with no line-breaks or stanza breaks. You may want to review some useful terms with your students — enjambment, end-stopped lines, caesura.
 - Put the students into groups, and give each group a poem-paragraph. Each groups will arrange the text into lines and stanzas, aiming to create textured lines with rich sounds, listening to the cadences of the phrases and sentences and looking for possible exciting ambiguities created by considered line-breaks (aiming to create at least one line that speaks to both the line that precedes it and the line that follows it).
 - Encourage students to experiment — not merely breaking the text into syntactical units. They may arrange the same text a couple of different ways — trying longer and shorter lines, various stanzas. Together, the group will write a reflection about the process, explaining some of the choices and pointing out the lines that really seem to shine.
 - Groups will briefly present and discuss the arrangements with each other, then compare them to the original poems and continue discussion.
 - This assignment would be a fine introduction to lessons on American Modernist poets or the Imagists. The teacher can extend the discussion to include grammar and mechanics (punctuation, sentence structure). Inevitably, looking closely at a poem's texture will also bring up questions of tone.
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Lesson Resources

Suggested Poems:

"The Farmer" by William Carlos Williams

"This is Just to Say" by William Carlos Williams

"One for the Rose" by Galway Kinnell

"A Lover" by Amy Clampitt

"Song" by H. D.

"The Red Wheelbarrow" by William Carlos Williams

"a(l)" by E. E. Cummings

"in-Just Spring" by E. E. Cummings

(For additional suggestions, and a variation on this lesson, look at

"Learning the Lines" in the middle school lesson plans).



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