

**Title:** “Take my Advice”: Poems with a Voice

**Grade Ranges:**

    K-4

  X   5-8

  X   9-12

**Subject Tag:**

Creative Writing: Poetry

Reading Skills

**Synopsis:**

Students often feel like they must work hard to find out what a poem means. This lesson shows students that they can discover much of a poem’s meaning by just listening to the voice of the poem and imagining the situation described in the poem. Students will “try on” new voices in their own writing, examine the voice in Langston Hughes’ “Mother to Son,” and then write their own advice poem.

**Keywords:**

poetry, speaker, situations, tone, voice, Langston Hughes, “Mother to Son,” advice poems

**Body:**

*Part I: Leading students to a definition*

Prepare students for a discussion of *voice* and *tone* by drawing on what they already know. Ask a general question about the meaning of the phrase “tone of voice.” Let students wrestle with a definition, and perhaps jot answers down on the board. Before giving them an answer, let them try the following exercise:

From a hat, have students draw slips of paper on which are various situations like one of the following:

YOU ARE:

- A coach during time-out of a basketball game with five seconds left to play, and your team is losing by one point

YOU ARE:

- Your mom walking into your messy room, after she’s asked you four times to clean it up

YOU ARE:

- A police officer, seeing a three-year-old little boy, alone and crying in the park

YOU ARE:

- A student who forgot to do today’s math homework and is trying to get a classmate to share his or her answers

Give students 10 minutes to write as though they were the person in the situation. Be sure they understand that they are to take on the part of the *other* person, not themselves. Instruct them to imagine the situation and then “talk on paper.” They are to try staying with the one voice. Since some students will be tempted to describe the situation or turn it

into dialogue rather than write in the voice of the single person, it may be necessary to illustrate with an example.

After students respond to the situations, have several students read their examples without telling the class the situation, and then ask the following kinds of questions:

- Can you guess who the speaker is and what the situation is?
- How did you know?
- What are some words or phrases to describe the way the speakers' voices sound to you? (Encourage students to use adjectives, and push them to be as specific as possible. For example, for an angry mother, get beyond "mad" to "frustrated" or even more specific to "raspy and irritated.")

Try gathering all of the descriptive words and phrases on the board. Let students try defining the literary term *tone*. Push them towards considering *tone* as the *attitude of a speaker or of a writer toward his or her subject*.

*Part II: Reading poetry and listening for the speaker's voice*

Have students read along while Langston Hughes' "Mother to Son" is read aloud **without the title**. Give students a minute to go back and reread the poem to answer these questions:

1. Whose voice do you hear in the poem?
2. To whom is that speaker talking?
3. What is that speaker saying to the one who's listening?

Once students have answers to those questions, ask the following:

4. How would you describe the speaker's tone of voice? (refer to previous exercise)

*Part III: Writing a Poem of Advice*

Have students come up with their own situations that call for giving someone else advice. Encourage them to be creative in their choices and to think about these questions before getting started:

- a. To whom are you giving advice?
- b. What's the situation?
- c. What, specifically, do you need to tell them?
- d. What kind of voice would you use?

Have students write their poems, but tell them that they don't have to make the poems rhyme. Advise students to try breaking up their ideas into lines that make sense to them.

**Related Links:**

**TeenLit.com**

<http://www.teenlit.com/workshop/poetips.htm>

A site designed just for young writers. This page features a short list of accessible poetry-writing tips.

**Features:**

- \_\_\_ Contains special education tips
- \_\_\_ Quick Activity (less than 30 minutes; story starter)
- \_\_\_ Requires Internet access for students to complete

**Objectives:**

To take students through a process of defining a literary term by example. To illustrate the term in a poem and then have students use that device in their own writing.

**Standards:**

**NY: 1:** Students will read, write, listen, and speak for information and understanding. **2:** Students will read, write, listen, and speak for literary response and expression.

**NYC: E2b.** The student produces a response to literature. **E5a.** The student responds to non-fiction, fiction, poetry, and drama using interpretive, critical, and evaluative processes; that is, the student: interprets the impact of authors' decisions regarding word choice, content, and literary elements.

**CT: 1.** Reading and Responding. Students will read and respond in individual, literal, critical and evaluative ways to literary, informational and persuasive texts. **2.** Producing Texts. Students will produce written, oral and visual texts to express, develop and substantiate ideas and experiences.

**NJ: 3.3:** All Students Will Write In Clear, Concise, Organized Language That Varies In Content And Form For Different Audiences And Purposes. **3.4:** All Students Will Read Various Materials And Texts With Comprehension And Critical Analysis.

**Prerequisite Skills:**

1. Appropriate age-level reading skills

**Time Required:**

80 minutes

**Technology and Materials Needed:**

1. Blackboard
2. Copies of Langston Hughes' "Mother to Son"
3. Pens/Pencils
4. Student Notebooks

**Procedures:****Assessment Criteria:**

1. Are students able to identify the speaker and situation of a poem?
2. Are students able to describe a speaker's tone of voice in a poem and support with examples from the text?

**Recommended Lesson Plan Review Date:**

**Review Comments:**  
Check Web site.