

Lesson Plan: The Tone Map

Periods: 1 to 3, depending on the final project chosen

NCTE standards: 1, 2, 3, 6, 12

INTRODUCTION

In his introduction to the Poetry Out Loud CD (track 2, “The Power of Poetry”), poet Dana Gioia says that reciting poetry and listening to others recite it can train our “emotional intelligence.” Later, in track 30, Gioia points out that most poems tell a “narrative of emotions”: that is, they move through a series of moods and tones of voice, arranged in a particular order to tell a particular emotional story. Even when the poem seems like a simple series of images and even when we can’t say exactly what events took place in the poem, there is usually an emotional drama playing out from the beginning of the poem, through the middle, and into the end, as the poem tries to arrive at some emotional resolution.

As students learn to name the tones of voice that the poem moves through, they will learn to describe mixed emotions, such as “sweet sorrow,” and to distinguish subtle shifts in tone and mood. They will build their vocabulary of feeling, train their emotional intelligence, and prepare themselves to speak more accurately and confidently about any piece of writing or work of art.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this lesson, students will have opportunities to:

- Listen to poems being recited, with an ear to how the performer has adopted different tones of voice over the course of the performance
- Mark, visually, where and when those shifts of tone occurred
- Use a rich and varied tone vocabulary to name each shift in tone, looking up words they do not know
- Practice “mapping” a poem on their own, in a precise and nuanced way
- Write instructions to a classmate on how he or she should recite the poem, with evidence to support why this series of tones of voice is correct

MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

- The Poetry Out Loud CD or access to the online Poetry Out Loud Audio Guide
- A CD player or computer
- Printed copies of the poems you play from the CD, which can be found in the Poetry Out Loud anthology
- A good dictionary

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

1. The day before you begin this lesson, hand out a copy of the tone list at the end of this lesson plan. Feel free to trim the tone list to suit your students, however, the longer it is, the more varied and subtle your students' descriptions of tone will be. Explain that they will be using this list to describe the changing tones of voice that an actor uses to convey the emotions in a poem, and ask students to circle any words on the list they do not know. Assign students to look up some or all of these words—no more than two or three words each, probably—and to bring in the definitions and the full tone list when they return.

2. To begin the lesson the next day, introduce the idea that most poems tell a “story of emotions”: a series of moods that change as the poem moves from start to finish. Whether or not we understand what everything in the poem means, we can experience, enjoy, and convey to others the poem's emotional drama. We do this by recognizing the changing tones of voice that the speaker of the poem adopts as the poem moves from beginning to end.

- On track 32 of the CD, introducing “Miniver Cheevy,” Gioia speaks about how recitations must sometimes convey mixed emotions. You can also illustrate this point with “Jenny Kissed Me,” which is somewhat shorter and perhaps therefore easier to work with in class.

3. Play Kay Ryan's recitation of “Jenny Kissed Me” (track 3). Ask students to listen for the tonal turning points they hear in Kay Ryan's recitation. You will probably want to play it several times. At this point, students need only jot down notes about where in the poem—at what words or phrases—they hear the poem shift in mood, or the performer shift in her tone of voice.

4. Now, using the tone list, have the students brainstorm names for each tone they have heard. Encourage them to combine terms whenever they need to: for example, “bantering disbelief” is different from “stunned disbelief,” and both are different from “horrified disbelief.” You could explain that emotions don't always come in primary colors; often colors blend, and shade into one another. The more accurate their descriptions are, the more distinctions they can learn to recognize.

- Perhaps bring in and hand out some free color samples from a paint store to illustrate this: bright white is different from eggshell white is different from cream, etc.
- If there is a tone word they wish to add to the list, let them.
- Students do not need to agree on the tones they hear; however, they should be able to support their descriptions by reference to the poem, and by reciting the section of the poem at issue, in the tone of voice that they hear. Let other students evaluate whether the poem makes emotional sense when said that way.

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5. Hand out the “tone map” of “Jenny Kissed Me” printed below. (You may download it from the Teacher’s Guide on the Poetry Out Loud website.) Explain the format: in the left column we find the poem, divided into sections according to where the tone might shift. Note that tone shifts may be the same as the poem’s lines, stanzas, or sentences, but shifts in tone may also take place in shorter units, such as phrase by phrase. In the right column are names for the tone of voice one might hear in the poem, and therefore try to convey in performance.

Section	Tone
Jenny kissed me when we met,	Fond reminiscence
Jumping from the chair she sat in;	Amused, affectionate
Time, you thief, who love to get Sweets into your list,	Still amused (now by Time, rather than by Jenny), but growing a little wary, a little scornful
Put that in!	Disdainful
Say I’m weary,	Shrugging
Say I’m sad,	Candid, a little sad
Say that health and wealth have missed me,	Lightly or playfully regretful
Say I’m growing old,	Real regret
But add,	Rallying, insistent
Jenny kissed me.	Marveling, contented

Discuss the tones in this “tone map” with the students. Are these the tones they heard in Kay Ryan’s reading? If not, how would they describe what they heard? Do they think that parts of the poem should be read in a tone that is different from both Ryan’s recitation and the tone map? What tone seems better in what section, and why?

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6. To begin the next part of the lesson, remind students that performers will find different emotions in a single poem, and will convey these in contrasting tones of voice. Play track 11 of the CD, with three performances of Hamlet’s “To be or not to be” speech, as an example. Have students discuss the contrasting tones they hear in these different readings. What different questions do the actors seem to be asking? Which performance do they prefer? Why?

7. Now hand out a copy of William Wordsworth’s sonnet “The World Is Too Much With Us.” Working in pairs, have students mark where the shifts in tone seem to occur, and next to the poem have them draft a “tone map” of the poem using the tone list.

8. From the CD, play Angela Lansbury’s reading of “The World Is Too Much With Us” (track 13). In this performance, we hear an actress trying to bring out the emotional drama in a poem that may seem merely intellectual or abstract. Ask the students whether Lansbury’s performance of the poem matches their “tone map,” either in terms of where she has shifted tones, or in terms of the tones and emotions she brings to the poem. Where does Lansbury’s differ from theirs? How would they describe her shifts in tone? Which choices do they prefer, and why?

9. As a final project for this lesson, choose one of the following options:

- Have students write a “Memo to Lansbury,” as though they were her director. The memo should go through the poem section by section, explaining any problems they find with the tones portrayed in Lansbury’s performance, and how they think she should perform the poem differently. Tell students that they must justify their recommendations to the actress—who is, after all, a trained professional—in terms of the emotions and ideas and motivations they see in each section of the poem.
- Have students choose a poem they wish to recite from the Poetry Out Loud anthology, and format it as a two-column “map” at home. Before they perform their poem, they should tell their classmates the series of tones they wish to convey. After the recitation, students should respond by telling the performer whether he or she was successful at conveying those tones, and also whether they think that the tone for any section or sections was incorrect—and if so, why, and what it ought to be.
- Have students choose a poem they want to recite from the Poetry Out Loud anthology, and exchange it with a classmate. Students will then prepare, at home, a two-column “map” of the poem and write a short “Director’s Memo” that explains the tones of voice that the performer should convey, with an explanation for each. The next day, have students pair up, exchange maps and memos, and recite one another’s poems. They can then give each other feedback on what seemed right or unsuccessful in both the director’s memo and in the performances.

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THE TONE LIST

Here is a list of tones that students may find in poems. It is not comprehensive, and students should be encouraged to add to it as needed; as the teacher, you should also feel free to trim it to suit your students and class level. Keep in mind that the longer the list is, the more nuanced and powerful your students' emotional vocabulary will be.

You may download the Tone List from the Teacher's Guide on the Poetry Out Loud website.

abashed	biting	cutting	fearful
abrasive	bitter	cynical	flippant
abusive	blithe	defamatory	fond
acquiescent	boastful	denunciatory	forceful
accepting	bored	despairing	frightened
acerbic	brisk	detached	frivolous
admiring	bristling	devil-may-care	ghoulish
adoring	brusque	didactic	giddy
affectionate	calm	disbelieving	gleeful
aghast	candid	discouraged	glum
allusive	caressing	disdainful	grim
amused	caustic	disparaging	guarded
angry	cavalier	disrespectful	guilty
anxious	childish	distracted	happy
apologetic	child-like	doubtful	harsh
apprehensive	clipped	dramatic	haughty
approving	cold	dreamy	heavy-hearted
arch	complimentary	dry	hollow
ardent	condescending	ecstatic	horrified
argumentative	confident	entranced	humorous
audacious	confused	enthusiastic	hypercritical
awe-struck	coy	eulogistic	indifferent
bantering	contemptuous	exhilarated	indignant
begrudging	conversational	exultant	indulgent
bemused	critical	facetious	ironic
benevolent	curt	fanciful	irreverent



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joking	pragmatic	self-justifying	sympathetic
joyful	proud	self-mocking	taunting
languorous	provocative	self-pitying	tense
languid	questioning	self-satisfied	thoughtful
laudatory	rallying	sentimental	threatening
light-hearted	reflective	serious	tired
lingering	reminiscing	severe	touchy
loving	reproachful	sharp	trenchant
marveling	resigned	shocked	uncertain
melancholy	respectful	silly	understated
mistrustful	restrained	sly	upset
mocking	reticent	smug	urgent
mysterious	reverent	solemn	vexed
naïve	rueful	somber	vibrant
neutral	sad	stern	wary
nostalgic	sarcastic	straightforward	whimsical
objective	sardonic	stentorian	withering
peaceful	satirical	strident	wry
pessimistic	satisfied	stunned	zealous
pitiful	seductive	subdued	
playful	self-critical	swaggering	
poignant	self-dramatizing	sweet	