

Language of Poetry

Approach: One to one

Focus: Understanding metaphors in poetry.

Resources: Three short poems.

Level: Year 4 and year 8

Questions/instructions:

In this activity we will be reading parts of poems that have words with special meanings. Words in poems sometimes mean something different from what they actually say. I'll read some short pieces of poetry with interesting uses of words. Here is the first piece of poetry.

Show Poem 1 and read to the student.

Guard Dog

The guard dog howled.
The young man scowled.
He had a face like thunder.

Anonymous

Then point to words "a face like thunder"

1. What does "a face like thunder" mean?
2. What does it make you think of?

	% responses	
	y4	y8
highly appropriate, rich response	1	1
relevant, reasonably full response	15	24
relevant but quite limited response	57	60
any other response	27	15

Show Poem 2 and read to the student. YEAR 8 ONLY

Some Days

Some days this school
is a huge concrete sandwich
squeezing me out like jam.

David Harmer

Then point to the words "a huge concrete sandwich squeezing me out like jam"

3. What does "a huge concrete sandwich squeezing me out like jam" mean?
4. What does it make you think of?

highly appropriate, rich response	-	3
relevant, reasonably full response	-	23
relevant but quite limited response	-	44
any other response	-	30

% responses
y4 y8

Show Poem 3 and read to the student.

My Cat

My cat
becomes a tiger.
His eyes are
wide and bright.
He shimmers
in the shadows,
then melts
into the night.

Alan Bagnall

Then point to the words
"then melts into the night"

5. What does "then melts into the night" mean?
6. What does it make you think of?

highly appropriate, rich response	2	4
relevant, reasonably full response	12	25
relevant but quite limited response	45	50
any other response	41	21

Commentary:

Year 4 students attempted poems 1 and 3 only. A substantial number of students explained the literal meaning but could not link this to keywords like "thunder" and "melt". This meant that they could not enjoy the figurative richness of the simile. Ten to 15 percent more year 8 than year 4 students scored in the top two categories.