



The art of **POETRY** SUGGESTED SCHEDULES

Learning to read poetry is not only an important literary discipline and academic skill it also forms the moral imagination and trains our sentiment. Lewis says this about this formation “that it is by this middle element (the heart) that man is man: for by his intellect he is mere spirit and by his appetite mere animal (The Abolition of Man).” At any step in a student’s academic life poetry can be read profitably toward this end. I often in the same day or week will teach the same poem to third graders and to college students. From each I see something different, but always I am amazed at the free flowing insight that any human being has in relation to this heart-forming art. Yesterday a third grade home-schooled student told me that William Blake’s *On Another’s Sorrow* reminded her of how she felt with her mother as she battles cancer. She copied “wiping all our tears away” onto the picture she made of the mother near the cradle—an image in the poem of the watchful care of “he who smiles on all.” To read this way at age 9, out the depths of your experience adds to the poem and the poem adds to the experience—gives us a language adequate to the experience, and confirms our intuitions. Suddenly, poetry isn’t simply about rhyme or iambic pentameter—those artistic features are contextualized in our lives and our lives (or a moment of it) in the poem.

What follows are sample weekly schedules for various uses of this text. Many have explained why poetry is essential to education (Robert Frost to name one—see post on the *Art of Poetry* blog: www.ArtOfPoetryOnline.com).

Whether you decide to include it in your curriculum as a yearlong, half year or intermittent but regular part of your school year, these plans address a way to do that. This curriculum is ideal to teach students of different ages (particularly junior high and high-school but could be adapted for younger) for the reasons I mentioned above—students have a relationship to poetry and their access is similar regardless of their age, returning to poems never makes them tired but rather beloved (like a piece of music).

SCHEDULES:

Template for the following schedules are included in this document:

- One-Year Suggested Schedule (32 weeks)
- Half-Year Suggested Schedule (16 weeks)
- Four-Year Suggested Schedule (A poetry appreciation course)
- Elective or Co-op Suggested Schedule (A semester-long poetry enrichment course)

ONE-YEAR SUGGESTED SCHEDULE:

Take two weeks to go through each chapter for a total of 32 full weeks.

Use this schedule as a template for every two weeks, changing the concepts, poems, and activities for each chapter. Before talking about each poem, always read it aloud several times.

WEEK 1

- Day 1:** Read intro in the book, have each student freewrite on an image of significance in his/her life. Share image with the class, be sure to define what an image is (as opposed to an abstraction) and how images become metaphors or symbols (this completes activity 1 and slightly combines it with activity 2 at the end of the chapter).
- Day 2:** Discuss the *Panther* in light of its images but also on the whole. Give students the end of class to write about the poem after talking about it.
- Day 3:** Have students look at poems in this chapter that have a seasonal tie-in: *Storm Ending*, *Dust of Snow*, *In a Station of the Metro*, *The Swing*. Discuss the atmosphere created by the images, also describe how each family of images creates the context and emotional cast of the poem as a whole. Do activity 1 at the end of the chapter. Do activity 3 together as a group, let the images relate to a season.
- Day 4:** Look at *The Crow* and *Cavalry Crossing a Ford*—two very different poems, while attending to their images, look at how the formal choices mentioned in the “Learning to Read Closely section” are handled in each poem. Compare and contrast them (lines, stanza, caesura, shape) in addition to the other elements you are learning (see vocabulary on page 12). Do Activity 7.
- Day 5:** All week have students study vocabulary as well as keep their own writer’s journal where they copy favorite images from their life as well as favorite poems (hand copy into journal), snippets of lines or words from the poems should also go here. Give a vocab test this day, and then have students take the remaining time to write a poem along the lines of activity 9, 8, 6.

WEEK TWO

- Day 6:** Show DVD where including the intro as well as the discussion of a first poem (*The Panther*), have them take notes on what strikes them in the conversation. Break students up into groups (or in a family discuss between siblings or with a parent and a sibling, or have your student respond to the DVD in writing) to discuss the insights that the students in the DVD uncover. Have several people in the class read the poems they worked on last class aloud. As often as possible have students write at the end of a class, meditations on the thoughts that were significant to them in class that day.
- Day 7:** Show DVD (the rest of it) including poem discussion and activities at the end. Again, break up into small discussion groups and do likewise.
- Day 8:** Have students draft a thesis driven paper that makes some argument that you have disagreed about in class in relation to one or more poems. Have them write an analytical paper on this. Give them class time, use a staged writing process where they turn in different pieces along the way.
- Day 9:** Have students break up and critique each other’s rough drafts.
- Day 10:** Final draft to turn in. Have students read several papers to the class or have students read an abstract of their papers.

Be sure that the culminating project is not always an argumentative paper—let it sometimes be a reading of a small collection of related poems, or a read aloud where all choose a poem and read it aloud in a solemn setting having practiced carefully the best way to demonstrate its meaning with their voice, or a memorization and recitation. This close attention (2 weeks of study) on an element of poetry and on a few key poems is an excellent preparation for writing a good paper.

HALF-YEAR SUGGESTED SCHEDULE:

Take one week to go through each chapter for a total of 16 full weeks.

Use this schedule as a template for every week, changing the concepts, poems, and activities for each chapter.

- Day 1:** Read intro, write image of significance, turn to neighbor and describe it, Discuss the *Panther* in light of its images and as a whole.
- Day 2:** Look at seasonal poems: *Storm Ending*, *Dust of Snow*, *In a Station of the Metro*, *The Swing*. Discuss the atmosphere created—as mentioned above. Or look at *The Crow* and *Cavalry Crossing a Ford*—two very different poems, while attending to their images look at how the formal choices mentioned in the Learning to Read Closely section are handled in each poem. Compare and contrast them (lines, stanza, caesura, shape). Choose to do one activity: either 1, 3, or 7. Have students begin working on vocabulary by both mentioning it in class and making flashcards (for homework) to memorize outside of class.
- Day 3:** Show half of the DVD, have students take notes on striking parts of the conversation, break them up into groups to discuss the one insight of the video that struck them. For homework have students work on the poem that they started as well as record images and poems that are significant to them. As often as possible have students write at the end of class (even 5 minutes) meditating on thoughts and images and language that were significant to them in class that day.
- Day 4:** Have students draft a thesis driven paper that makes some argument that you have disagreed about in class in relation to one or more poems. Have them write an analysis of this supporting their argument with details from the poems. Let them begin these papers in class and speak in groups sorted by people writing on the same poem. By the end of class they should have significant free-writing done on the poem and have their thesis with a brief sketch of their supporting details.
- Day 5:** Have them either turn in their final draft today or bring a final rough draft to be critiqued by classmates (3 to a group), have them read their papers aloud and respond to each other in discussion and in writing. Have them read abstracts or compression (whole paper gathered into 5 typed out sentences that sustain the language and interest of the paper) aloud to the class. Let them do one more activity from the week's chapter—play them one of the activity sections on the DVD where the author performs the activity, have the students do likewise for the remainder of the class period.

You can adjust this weekly schedule to include more poems and discussions or small creative writing assignments depending on what you are aiming for in your skill objectives.

Be sure that the culminating project is not always an argumentative paper—let it sometimes be a reading of a small collection of related poems, or a read aloud where all choose a poem and read it aloud in a solemn setting having practiced carefully the best way to demonstrate its meaning with their voice, or a memorization and recitation. This close attention (1 week of study) on an element of poetry and on a few key poems is an excellent preparation for writing a good paper.

Continue with a chapter a week, be sure that they read everything in the chapter and then have them discuss the poems according to the element of poetry you are teaching. For the last half of the book it will be easier to put all the elements of poetry together in your discussions.

FOUR-YEAR SUGGESTED SCHEDULE:

Use the book for poetry appreciation over a period of years in the classroom or at home

Under this method you would slowly make your way through the book over several years by having students select a poem every week or two and having various students read it to the class multiple times. Have them keep a notebook over four years where they record the poems that have been chosen as a class. Give them opportunities to write or draw in response to the poem (in the same spot they keep the poem). From time to time, ask the students to use the poems to characterize something you are learning about in history, philosophy, or literature. For instance, in reading *Man's Search for Meaning* by Victor Frankel a student might think of *Hope is a thing with feathers* by Dickinson and connect the two in the sense that both Frankel and Dickinson are talking about the same notion of hope—that it is fierce, that it has a will to live and to push itself into any human situation almost beyond the will of the particular human being and the actual hope latent within the circumstances. Take time to link your reading in this way and develop a shorthand for your shared experiences in the classroom and in books. Every now and then have students memorize poems you are studying for the week or month (for instance, whenever you are absent, with a substitute students can come up with hand motions, stand up and drill the poem and discuss it until they have it memorized). Throughout the school year, use the DVD set for literature period where a substitute is presiding, then have students do the same activity that Christine Perrin demonstrates at the end of each chapter. Because the DVD set is complete as a taught class, you can use this as a course in a box that you use whenever you have need of an organized and delightful break in the normal pattern of school (either because of substitutes or other interferences in the homeschool routine)

ELECTIVE OR CO-OP SUGGESTED SCHEDULE:

Use the book for a semester long elective class for a homeschool co-op or school elective.

Depending on how your elective schedule works, you will have to adjust this to fit. This suggested schedule assumes the students meet from 1-2 hrs per week at one time or spread out over two times.

The elective can run itself with a student or parent proctor if you have the DVD set—show a piece of it each week and then have the students do likewise with another poem and choose an activity to write their own poem.

After several weeks have students take a period for workshop where they take a close look at the work of classmates and prepare comments on what the poem's next step is according to the Checklist found in Chapter 8 on Tone. Get in the habit of speaking about the poem's strengths and weaknesses in articulate and earnest ways. Have students come to class with written comments, prepared to voice them constructively together.

After being work-shopped students can take their poems and the comments from peers and revise them for a final portfolio or final reading that the class has together either at the school or at a local coffeehouse or church.

Take turns looking at poems and studying the elements of poetry (either through the DVD series or through reading the lesson at home and talking through the poems together in class), then work-shopping. Be sure to create an atmosphere of collegiality, shared respect, and genuine interest and delight in the particulars of each other's work. Either do a chapter a week or a chapter every two weeks alternating workshop with study/writing week (chapter a week would be for a ½ yr elective, chapter every 2 weeks for a year long elective). Students who don't get work-shopped one time should be on the list for the following time.

Add some variety and get through more poems by breaking up the group into 3-4 person mini-workshops (depending on how many are in the class).

If you are interested in having students commit to a year another way to break up the elective would be to spend ½ a year studying the book and ½ a year doing a workshop (instead of alternating as described above). You will have to judge what level your students are and how ready they are to dive in and write poems, the alternating method gets them writing poems sooner, which may be an encouragement.