

***Love That Dog* Novel Study**  
**An 11-lesson novel study/poetry unit for Grade 4 and up**  
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Sharon Creech's novel *Love That Dog* is just perfect for fourth grade (or for fifth or sixth, or higher). Written entirely in poetry, it tells the story of a boy who balks at writing poems at school, but discovers that they are an effective way for him to reveal the heartbreak of his beloved dog's death. The poems imply a dialogue between the narrator, Jack, and his teacher, Miss Stretchberry, but we only ever read Jack's side of the discussion. Students love this narrative trick!

As Jack journeys through Miss Stretchberry's poetry unit, readers also explore the classic poems that she introduces – everything from “The Red Wheelbarrow” by William Carlos Williams, to “The Pasture” by Robert Frost. By studying this novel, students noodle around the general topic of poetry, write their own versions of famous works, and enjoy Jack's story. There's even a mystery poet!

Here are eleven easy-to-follow lessons for this easy-to-read book. By the end, students will have read a whole novel together, built a timeline, and written an impressive variety of poems that can be displayed on a bulletin board or collected into book form. Printing them on specific-coloured photocopy paper (no lines) looks jazzy, and is an easy way for you to track students' completion of poems. As they are completed, you can tack them one on top of the other on the bulletin board, so that each student accumulates a stack of completed poems, each on a different colour of paper. Ideally, everyone completes them at the same time, and so all of the colours on the bulletin board are the same on each day, but if someone hasn't finished a poem, you will notice right away. Colours are suggested here, but you might like to change them, or not use coloured paper at all.

As students research each poet, you might like to put the poet's name and birth/death dates on a timeline. This timeline can share dates that you are studying in other subjects (the arrival of Europeans to North America, the Second World War, the invention of the light bulb, etc.), so that the poets' lives are examined in a historical context.

Your librarian can borrow a class set of the novel. You can also use just one copy under a document camera. You might like to let each student examine a photocopied booklet of the poems at the end of the book. One caution about the actual novel: Some copies of this book are poorly bound, so take care to keep the pages attached and intact.

Love That Dog  
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### **Lesson 1**

Discuss: What is a poem? How do you know it is a poem? How do you write a poem?

In your writer's notebook, write a poem -- anything that comes to mind. Now read page 1.

Discuss: Do boys write poetry? How about men? Can you name a poet? Read page 2.

Homework: Who is William Carlos Williams?

### **Lesson 2**

(At this point, the class begins a timeline with the poets' birthdates and places of birth.)

Discuss: Who is William Carlos Williams? Plot his information on the timeline.

Read "The Red Wheelbarrow."

Discuss the poem and its structure. If possible, put it up on the board or write it on chart paper to take a close look at its form.

Model how to write a new poem with the same structure as "The Red Wheelbarrow." Begin your poem with "so much depends upon." Note the everyday topic, the number of words on each line, capitalization, punctuation, etc.

In your writer's notebook, write a poem with the same structure as "The Red Wheelbarrow."

Read pages 3, 4, and 5.

Homework: Who is Robert Frost?

### **Lesson 3**

Discuss: Who is Robert Frost? Add his information to the timeline.

Read “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening.”

Discuss.

Read pages 6 and 7.

Discuss.

Write your “Red Wheelbarrow”-style poem in your best printing on blue paper. (Teacher will mount poem on slightly larger yellow paper for bulletin board.)

Homework: Who is William Blake?

### **Lesson 4**

Who is William Blake? Add his information to the timeline.

Read “The Tiger.”

Discuss.

Read pages 8-11.

Model how to write a new version of “The Tiger.”

In your writer’s notebook, using the structure and rhyming pattern of “The Tiger,” write a poem about an animal.

Homework: Who is Valerie Worth?

### **Lesson 5**

Who is Valerie Worth? Add her information to the timeline.

Read pages 12-14.

Read “dog.”

Discuss.

Read pages 15-19.

Create an illustration of the dog from the poem. You can add this to the bulletin board, if you like.

### **Lesson 6**

Read “The Pasture.”

Discuss.

Read pages 20-30.

Print your “The Tiger”-style poem on pink paper. (Teacher will display it.)

Homework: Who is Arnold Adoff?

### **Lesson 7**

Who is Arnold Adoff? Add his information to the timeline.

Read “Street Music.”

Discuss.

Read pages 31-34.

Write a poem about your street, the playground, the school hallway, or any other place. Capture the sounds of that specific place.

Print your good copy on green paper. (Teacher will display it.)

Homework: Who is S.C. Rigg?

### **Lesson 8**

Who is S.C. Rigg? Add her information to the timeline.

Read “The Apple.”

Discuss.

Read pages 35-41.

Write a poem in the style of “Apple.”

Because it is so intricate, your first copy is already your good copy. Print your good copy on lilac paper. (Teacher will display it.)

Homework: Who is Walter Dean Myers?

### **Lesson 9**

Who is Walter Dean Myers? Add his information to the timeline.

Read “Love That Boy.”

Discuss.

Read pages 42-63.

Write a poem in the style of “Love That Boy.”

Print your good copy on yellow paper. (Teacher will display it.)

(If you plan to serve brownies on the last day, you might like to plan ahead!)

### **Lesson 10**

Read pages 64-74.

Discuss.

### **Lesson 11**

Read pages 75-86.

At this point, it is wonderful to share a plate of delicious brownies!

Discuss what you just read.

What have you learned about poems and poets?