

poetic YOUTH

Lesson 1: Persona Poems

Learning Objectives: Introduce “persona poetry.”

Supplies: Folders, paper, pens (just in case), handouts of select persona poems.

Length of session: 60 minutes

Opening: Introduction and brief statements by facilitators. Each facilitator shares a short persona poem from “The Book of Frank” and says something like “My name is (blank) and I want to share a poem with you.” Then, play the opposite game, for example, “My name is Jason and the opposite of a lamp is a fish...” The next person states their name and replies, “The opposite of a fish is...” Encourage participants to be as random and as fun as they please. Go around the circle three times before ending at the starting facilitator.

Length: 10 minutes

Warm-Up: Discuss group goals and create a code of conduct. Discuss the nature of poetry: start with poet’s definition of poetry, and then have students come up with their own definitions.

Length: 10 minutes

Writing Exercise: Read excerpts from “The Book of Frank,” by CA Conrad. Perhaps choose some select poems that are more fun and random than the others and some longer persona poems from other poets (make printed copies of the excerpts for the group to have). Ask the group what they think about the poems and what they like about them. Explain the basic aspects of a persona poem -- you write from the perspective of someone else as if you are in their shoes; you can take on a completely different voice and can portray life as it is for someone else. Give them an optional prompt, such as, “I am a [blank]” or “In my [good/bad] dream...”

Length: 10 minutes

Like “The Book of Frank,” ask the group to choose a person/animal/object and write a poem from their perspective. Ask them to list 5–8 words that describe the persona they chose. Then, do a timed writing exercise on their chosen persona. To switch it up, have them do 2–3 different persona poems (of varying lengths that they can decide) within the allotted time. Encourage them to be as creative and inventive as they want. No rules, other than the ones established earlier.

Length: 15–20 minutes

Closing: Share the persona poems. One or two facilitators should go first to open the floor. Allow students to share a section of their poem or their whole poem, if they feel comfortable. Applaud after each group member who has shared. Ask students specific questions like, “What was the most challenging aspect of writing a poem?” and “What do you think are ways to improve writing this type of poem?” If time is running out, pass around a piece of paper and have the students write down their favorite line. Once everyone has contributed, a facilitator will read aloud the new collaborative poem. As we collect poems, ask for commentary about the lesson.

Length: 5–10 minutes