

Lesson 5: Narrative Poems

What's on for today and why:

We're going to be looking at two poems by African American women writers one which is a personal narrative and one that is a stream of thought poem. This is to show the students that narratives don't have to be written just in prose form, but can also be in lyric form, but also that there is a different way to write a personal piece that doesn't have to be a narrative..

What to do:

1) First hand out "The Bistro Styx" by Rita Dove. Ask for volunteers to read the poem stanza by stanza and ask the students if anyone notices a similarity to the chapters in Golden's novel. This is a narrative poem in a similar style to the chapters in the novel and the students should be able to recognize that. Once they have talk about the emotions and reactions of the narrator. Ask if they like the poem better or worse than the novel and why?

2) Now hand out "The Mother" by Gwendolyn Brooks and repeat the steps from the first task. This poem is a bit different than the first because it is more in the style of stream of thought. It contains introspection, but no action the way the novel and Dove's poem both do. Explain to the students that while this is a personal poem it is not really a narrative because it isn't describing actions.

3) Homework: give the students Handout #2 and ask them to follow the instructions for writing a personal narrative poem as well as a stream of thought poem to be handed in on day 6. Also read pages 72-97 in *A Woman's Place*.

How did it go?

Although some students may have been put off by the fact that you gave them poetry the similarities to the novel should have helped you to get them interested and involved. Both poems are about mother/child relationships, which fits nicely with the action from the novel that they read last night. By having them write some poetry they are having another chance for expression, but also this kind of poetry does not have as many writing rules as other kinds and should make it easier for the students to express themselves in lyric form.