

***In Another's Voice***  
**Developed by Susanna Lang\***  
**August 2014**

This lesson focuses on poems that enter into a voice other than the poet's, perhaps not even a human voice, so that students can explore the dramatic possibilities within a poem.

Periods

This lesson will require three 50-minute periods:

- Day 1: Model
- Day 2: Guided practice
- Day 3: Group performances and closure

If you ask your students to write as well as read and perform, they will need at least one additional class session.

NCTE Standards

While Poetry Out Loud fulfills NCTE Standards 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 (with writing extension), 6, 8, 9, 11, 12, this lesson focuses on Standard 4.

Common Core State Standards

While Poetry Out Loud can involve work on multiple Common Core State Standards, this lesson focuses on the following:

- 9-10.RL.3
- 11-12.RL.3
- 9-10.RL.5
- 11-12.RL.5

*Depending on which writing extension, if any, is chosen:*

- 9-12.W. 4
- 9-12.W. 9

Introduction

One of the tools available to poets is *persona*, the choice to enter into a voice that is not the writer's own, whether it is a person who lives in another time or place, a person at another stage of life, a person whose experience has been different from the writer's—or not a person at all, perhaps an object or an animal. In this way, the poet sees the world through other eyes; speaking directly to the reader, the persona helps us see the world differently as well. This is a distinction from dramatic monologues in which the speaker addresses a silent listener who is usually not the reader.

In Poetry Out Loud, the performer is already entering into another voice, the poem's voice; but a young person new to poetry may have difficulty inhabiting that voice. In persona poems, the writer gives explicit cues to help the reader imagine the speaker, so these poems will support

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students in preparing their recitation. Persona poems often have dramatic elements, which will help students work on the “dramatic appropriateness” of their performance.

### Learning Objectives

Students will learn how to

- analyze the poet’s characterization of the speaker in each poem;
- analyze the ways in which the poet suggests a dramatic situation or narrative for its speaker; and
- adapt his/her speech to the task of recitation.

In addition, if you choose the literary writing extension, students will be able to:

- write an effective persona poem of their own.

If you choose the academic writing extension, students will be able to

- compare two persona poems, making a claim that is true of both poems and supporting that claim with textual evidence.

### Materials and Resources

To teach this lesson you will need:

- A computer with speakers; if possible, a laptop cart with earphones
- Printed copies of the poems you select from the Poetry Out Loud Anthology (<http://www.poetryoutloud.org/poems-and-performance/find-poems>).

Recommended selections:

- John Berryman, “Dream Song 14” (Paul Muldoon reading this poem with others by Berryman <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QfvwNnKXZc8>)
- William Blake, “The Chimney Sweeper: When my mother died I was very young” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JC4Dq2scQDI>)
- Gwendolyn Brooks, “a song in the front yard” (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oWA6V3OaoR8>)
- Robert Browning, “Confessions” (student performance <http://www.poetryinvoic.com/videos/brogan-carruthers-confessions-robert-browning>)
- Brenda Cárdenas, “Zacuanpapalotls” [*Note: most appropriate for students who have at least some knowledge of Spanish*] (student performance <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wq7qUV7DP7w>)
- Victor Hernández Cruz, “Two Guitars” (student performance <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PgZQwghvhiI>)
- Countee Cullen, “Incident” (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4TYn844thuM>)
- Mark Doty, “Golden Retrievals” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z2MR75POgzk>)
- Thomas Hardy, “The Man He Killed” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0PgU7RvyTc4>)
- Rudyard Kipling, “Harp Song of the Dane Women” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X7i85oNoome>)
- Edgar Lee Masters, “Anne Rutledge” or “Lucinda Matlock” (<http://librivox.org/spoon-river-anthology-by-edgar-lee-masters/>)

- Lisel Mueller, “Monet Refuses the Operation”  
([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dR1j-o\\_0x5A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dR1j-o_0x5A))
- Grace Paley, “That Country”
- Ezra Pound, “The River-Merchant’s Wife: A Letter”  
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S64EHUz-7iw>)

### Activity Description

#### ***Day 1: Model***

1. Group your students (groups of 2-4) according to their learning needs, and choose poems that are appropriate to each group of readers, based on reading level, students’ interests, etc. Include at least one poem where the speaker is not human, and you might include a poem by Brenda Cárdenas or Victor Hernández Cruz if you have students with some knowledge of Spanish.
2. Model an approach to one of the poems:
  - a. Choose one of the poems for which you have an audio performance, one that is most appropriate for your cohort as a whole. Distribute copies of the poem and ask the students to think about who is speaking in the poem while they listen—not who is performing, but who is the dramatic character.
  - b. After they listen, have them read the poem silently to themselves, annotating the text with the same lens: who is speaking, and how does the poet let us know who the speaker is? What lines show us different aspects of this speaker? What is the dramatic situation in which the speaker finds himself/herself?
  - c. Have students meet in small collaborative groups to share their annotations and develop a group description of this speaker. Listen to the discussions and guide the students’ understanding.
  - d. Small groups report out to the whole class, with the teacher leading the discussion towards a full understanding of the speaker. Introduce the terms “persona” and “voice” in this discussion, as some of the tools that poets have available to them.
  - e. If time permits, you can begin the guided practice on the first day; description is included in Day 2.

#### ***Day 2: Guided practice***

3. Remind students of the work they’d completed on the first poem and invite them to read a new set of poems in the same way. Have them think about who is speaking in the poem and describe the dramatic situation in which the speaker finds himself/herself.
  - a. Assign each group another poem. Providing laptops and earphones so students can listen to a performance would enhance their experience, but is not necessary.
  - b. Invite them to go through the same process in their groups, listening first if possible, reading silently while annotating, then discussing. The discussion should focus on developing a description of the speaker and of his/her dramatic situation. Students should be able to identify the lines that led them to understand the speaker and his/her situation.
  - c. Their discussion will allow the students to prepare to read the poem aloud, which they can do in the way they feel is most effective: one voice or several voices, together or sequentially or in a pattern that moves between one and several voices.

Remind students that reciting poetry differs from theatrical presentation, and that the Poetry Out Loud rubric discourages character voices.

- d. Guide the groups' discussion and rehearsal and ask students to articulate why they are offering a particular interpretation or making certain choices for performance.

### ***Day 3: Group performances and closure***

4. Invite each group to perform their poem to the class and then explain why they chose to perform it as they did. Their explanation should include their understanding of the speaker's identity and what situation the speaker finds himself/herself in. After each group performs, ask the audience to identify what these students did especially well, being specific in their feedback. Also ask them to pose any questions they have about the poem or the performance.
5. Closure: Lead students in a discussion of what they learned from these poems about voice and character; or ask students to complete an exit slip in which they sum up what they're taking away from these poems.

### ***Day 4 (optional): Written extension***

6. Try this optional literary writing extension: Invite students to write a persona poem of their own. Remind them that the speaker does not have to be human, and that the essential task of the poem is to enter into a voice and a point of view different from the student's own voice and perspective. If students finish writing with time to spare, they can share their drafts with each other and offer feedback similar to the feedback they gave for the performances: being specific, what did the writer do especially well? What questions does the reader have about the poem, focusing on the speaker and the speaker's situation? They might also read one another's poems aloud if there is time.
7. Additionally, here's an optional academic writing extension: Invite students to write a comparison of two poems that other students presented in class. They should read and annotate both poems, develop a claim that is true of both poems, and look for text evidence that supports their claim. They are unlikely to finish this writing early, but if they do, they can share drafts and offer feedback, focusing first on what the writer did well, and then on questions that the reader has about the analysis.

### **Assessment**

- Group performances and introductions
- Optional exit slips
- Optional persona poem (rubric below)
- Optional written comparison (rubric below)

**Literary Writing: Rubric for persona poem**

	<b>1 (Inadequate)</b>	<b>2 (Developing)</b>	<b>3 (Meets)</b>	<b>4 (Exceeds)</b>
<b>Voice</b>	Poem does not establish an identifiable voice	Poem attempts to establish an identifiable voice but is not consistent	Poem establishes an identifiable voice	Poem establishes a strong, credible voice
<b>Dramatic Situation</b>	The poem does not identify the speaker's situation	The speaker's situation is not entirely clear	The reader can identify the speaker's situation	The reader can imagine and empathize with the speaker's situation
<b>Expression</b>	Written in a text block; no attempt to use specific or poetic language	Uses shape if not line; attempts to use specific language	Written in lines; language is clear and precise	Poem makes effective use of line and (if appropriate) stanza; poetic devices serve the poem's purpose

**Analytic writing: Rubric for comparing two persona poems**

	<b>1 (Inadequate)</b>	<b>2 (Developing)</b>	<b>3 (Meets)</b>	<b>4 (Exceeds)</b>
<b>Claim</b>	Claim only accounts for only one text, or does not demonstrate accurate understanding of texts	Claim uses commonalities and differences between poems to demonstrate partial understanding of both texts	Claim uses commonalities and differences between poems to demonstrate adequate understanding of both texts	Claim uses commonalities and differences between poems to demonstrate in-depth understanding of both texts
<b>Persona</b>	Does not correctly identify the speaker and dramatic situation in either text	Correctly identifies the speaker in one text, or partially identifies the speaker in both texts	Correctly identifies the speaker's identity and dramatic situation in both texts	Correctly identifies and perceptively interprets the speaker's identity and dramatic situation in both texts
<b>Analysis</b>	Does not support a claim with relevant textual evidence	Supports a claim with partial textual evidence	Supports a claim with relevant textual evidence	Supports a claim with the strongest textual evidence
<b>Expression</b>	Very difficult to read	Language may be difficult to follow in some places	Language is clear, and errors do not interfere with reading	Language is precise, with few or no errors

### Further Reading

Rebecca Hazelton, "Teaching the Persona Poem," [www.poetryfoundation.org](http://www.poetryfoundation.org)

### NCTE Standard 4

Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.

### Common Core State Standards

9-10.RL.3. Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

11-12.RL.3. Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

9-10.RL.5. Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.

11-12.RL.5. Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

9-12.SL.6. Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

*Depending on which writing extension, if any, is chosen:*

9-12.W. 4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

9-12.W. 9. Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.