

Project Title: “Nothing Was Ugly Just Because the World Said So”

Target Audience: Grades 4-12 or Mixed age groups, school or community center setting

Time: Approximately 1 hour, quantity and length of activities adjusted as needed

Objectives

- 1) To introduce a targeted literary device, such as simile, metaphor, or hyperbole, as poetic language that can make ordinary or even ugly things beautiful. Determination of targeted literary device would be made based on ages of the participants and in collaboration with the classroom teacher. Very young students (Grades 4-5) would emphasize simile, upper elementary students would emphasize metaphor. Middle school students would focus on distinguishing between simile and metaphor; high school students and older would emphasize all three devices.
- 2) To help emerging poets recognize that helping people notice beauty is part of our “job” as poets

Materials

- Large self-stick butcher paper, markers
- Binder Paper, blank paper, pens/pencils, 1 set of colored pencils for each group of 5
- Large close-up color picture of a praying mantis (or something else “ugly”)
- Copies of poems: “Valentine for Ernest Mann,” and one other poem appropriate for the audience, such as Shel Silverstein’s “Picture Puzzle Piece,” that celebrates something that is often thought of as unattractive.
- Pre-made poster of “guidelines” on “Making Ugly Things Beautiful,” in the following format
 - 1) Appreciate! Find something positive to say about the thing you are making beautiful.
 - 2) Tell the truth. Don’t lie or flatter the object--make sure what you appreciate is genuine.
 - 3) Use [targeted literary device] to transform the object into something beautiful. A [targeted literary device] is [definition]

Lesson

1) Warm Up: Tell everyone in the room that they are ALREADY poets, and that to warm up as poets, we’re going to play with words. Have students write their first name on a piece of paper, then brainstorm as many words as possible that start with the same letter as their first name. Complete the activity by having students compose a “silly” sentence using as many words on the page as possible. Model this on the board (Example:

“Maurisa makes magical marshmallows on melodious Mondays.”) Older students should be reminded that this activity involves alliteration, part of the “music” of poetry. (5-10 min)

2) Segue by saying poets not only play with words, they also notice things that others might not notice, and introduce “Valentine for Ernest Mann.” Read first stanza, modeling enthusiastic prosody, and let enthusiastic participants read remaining stanzas. Encourage them to “read it like they wrote it.” For younger audiences, read the entire poem aloud. (2 min)

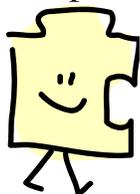
- 4) Ask participants to reread the poem silently, and “popcorn” read aloud favorite lines and explain why they liked these lines. Use the line “Nothing was ugly/ just because the world said so” to segue into goal of workshop: to write about something that others might not think is beautiful, but you do. (5 min)
- 5) Review “guidelines” for making something beautiful. Emphasize that the guidelines “Appreciate” and “Tell the truth” mean don’t flatter—say what you mean, and it has to be true. Point out examples in Nye’s poem of the literary device emphasized in the third guideline (5 min)
- 6) Share the poem “Picture Puzzle Piece” as an example of a poem that follows these guidelines. (5 min)
- 7) Present picture of praying mantis, share appreciations for them (e.g., they eat pests in organic farming). Divide class into groups. Have each group write 6 lines describing the “ugly bug” as beautiful, using the literary terms that have been introduced or reviewed in the workshop if possible. Have participants address the mantis directly, using “you.” Students should write 2 lines about what the mantis “looks like,” what it “does,” and “why we appreciate it.” Circulate and read a few lines aloud (15 mins.)
- 8) Have participants brainstorm as a class other “ugly” items that they could make beautiful in a poem 5-10 “ugly” things on a piece of paper. Make sure students are respectful and name things outside of school (no put-downs). (5 minutes)
- 9) Have participants choose an item from the (new) list and write a “free-write” poem about it, making the “ugly” thing beautiful. (15 minutes or as time allows).

- 10) Have participants read their poems aloud! If time permits, conclude the activity by allowing students to illustrate a line in the poem.

Picture Puzzle Piece

by **Shel Silverstein**

One picture puzzle piece
Lyn' on the sidewalk,
One picture puzzle piece
Soakin' in the rain.
It might be a button of blue
On the coat of the woman
Who lived in a shoe.
It might be a magical bean,
Or a fold in the red
Velvet robe of a queen.
It might be the one little bite
Of the apple her stepmother
Gave to Snow White.
It might be the veil of a bride
Or a bottle with some evil genie inside.
It might be a small tuft of hair
On the big bouncy belly
Of Bobo the Bear.
It might be a bit of the cloak
Of the Witch of the West
As she melted to smoke.
It might be a shadowy trace
Of a tear that runs down an angel's face.
Nothing has more possibilities
Than one old wet picture puzzle piece.



FOG

by **Carl Sandburg**

The fog comes
on little cat feet.

It sits looking
over harbor and city
on silent haunches
and then moves on.



Homage to My Hips by **Lucille Clifton**

these hips are big hips
they need space to
move around in
they don't fit into little
petty places. these hips
are free hips.
they don't like to be held back
these hips have never been enslaved,
they go where they want to go
they do what they want to do.
these hips are mighty hips.
these hips are magic hips.
I have known them
to put a spell on a man and
spin him like a top!

Valentine for Ernest Mann

You can't order a poem like you order a taco.
Walk up to the counter, say, "I'll take two"
and expect it to be handed back to you
on a shiny plate.

Still, I like your spirit.

Anyone who says, "Here's my address,
write me a poem," deserves something in reply.

So I'll tell you a secret instead:

poems hide. In the bottoms of our shoes,
they are sleeping. They are the shadows
drifting across our ceilings the moment
before we wake up. What we have to do
is live in a way that lets us find them.

Once I knew a man who gave his wife
two skunks for a valentine.

He couldn't understand why she was crying.

"I thought they had such beautiful eyes."

And he was serious. He was a serious man
who lived in a serious way. Nothing was ugly
just because the world said so. He really
liked those skunks. So, he reinvented them
as valentines and they became beautiful.

At least, to him. And the poems that had been hiding
in the eyes of the skunks for centuries
crawled out and curled up at his feet.

Maybe if we reinvent whatever our lives give us
we find poems. Check your garage, the odd sock
in your drawer, the person you almost like, but not quite.
And let me know.

- Naomi Shihab Nye, from *The Red Suitcase*, Brockport, NY: BOA
Editions, 1994.

<http://www.journaltherapy.com/poem/archive/2002/poem0204.htm>

Making Ugly Things Beautiful In a Poem

- 1) **APPRECIATE!** Find something positive to say about the thing you are making beautiful.
- 2) **TELL THE TRUTH.** Don't like, or flatter the object—make sure what you appreciate is genuine.
- 3) **USE SIMILES, METAPHORS, AND HYPERBOLE TO TRANSFORM THE OBJECT INTO SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL.**
 - ❖ A simile compares two things using “like” or “as”
 - ❖ A metaphor compares two things directly using “is”
 - ❖ Hyperbole is an extreme exaggeration