ABSTRACT
        Designed to help students respond in a positive way
to poetry, poetry theater integrates dramatic technique with various
aspects of reading, writing, analyzing, and reciting poetry. Poetry
theater presentations require approximately five class periods to
complete, allowing 45 minutes per class. The first class period
should be devoted to choral reading. In this period, the class should
be familiarized with the techniques of choral reading and then broken
into groups of five or six students. Each group then creates a
presentation of the same poem used with the entire class. The second
class session should be devoted to the discussion of themes for a
presentation, finding poems related to the theme chosen: selecting
lines, phrases, or words from those poems to use in the presentation:
deciding on the final order of the poem to be presented: assigning
specific lines to people in the group: determining appropriate
movements and voice levels: and practicing. The third and fourth
class sessions should involve refinement of the presentation, and the
last session is the presentation itself. In addition to providing
positive experiences with poetry, poetry theater gives students
valuable group work experiences and helps them to become more
creative. (FL)

POETRY THEATER – INTEGRATING DRAMA AND POETRY

Rose M. Feinberg, Ed.D.
Director of Reading and Language Arts,Lunenburg, Mass.

Workshop presented at the National Council of Teachers
of English CEE/Secondary Section Program,1979

The Poetry Theater approach integrates dramatic
technique with various aspects of reading, writing,
analyzing and reciting of poetry. The development of
Poetry Theater was prompted by my search for ways to help
middle and junior high school students become more positive
and responsive when asked to read or write poetry, and has
proved successful in classrooms from grade four through
college. As students create Poetry Theater presentations
in groups, they not only search for and read poems; but
also become excited about selecting lines from poems, adding
lines, and ultimately generating a unique poem for dramatic
presentation. The following description of the Poetry
Theater approach can be easily modified to be used with
almost any grade level beyond the primary grades.

POETRY THEATER ACTIVITY CARD appears on the following
page. The detailed description for the reader's benefit
correlates with the activity card and should clarify the
process for implementation.

Rose M. Feinberg, Ed.D.

POETRY THEATER ACTIVITY CARD

Steps With The Class

1. Divide into groups of 5 or 6 to practice CHORAL READING of the same poem. Focus on presenting the poem using different voices, different levels and dramatic interpretation.

2. Discuss possible THEMES for Poetry Theater presentations, looking through poetry books and other sources to find a topic (Ex: seasons, night, feelings, animals, holiday...).

Steps Within Each Group   POETRY THEATER PRESENTATION

1. Select a theme for your group. Come to agreement about your theme, using poetry books to help determine a topic (Ex: people, colors, houses, love, fear, need, money...).

2. Skim through poetry books and other sources to find 5 or 6 poems (minimum of one from each group member) relating in some way to your theme.

3. From poems found, select lines, phrases or words to include in your presentation. You will integrate several poems and add ORIGINAL LINES, creating an original group poem.

4. As you determine lines to be used from published poems, write the source. Include author, poem title, book and page. This will enable you to cite works used in the group poem.

5. Decide on the final order of the poem which the group is creating. Try several variations, listening to various arrangements before writing out the group poem for each member.

6. Assign specific lines to people in the group. Use various voices (solo,echo,group...) to determine which combinations sound best for your poem. People should have more than one turn during the presentation and should learn the entire poem.

7. Determine appropriate movements, gestures, voices and levels to give the presentation a dramatic quality. Try variations before making a final decision.

8. PRACTICE until you feel confident about your Poetry Theater presentation. Each group will show its POETRY THEATER to the class.

Poetry Theater   R. Feinberg

The explanation of Poetry Theater provided below
follows the progression outlined in the POETRY THEATER
ACTIVITY CARD.   Approximate class period directions are
provided, allowing forty-five minutes per period.   The
introductory lesson would be best done in one period,
with shorter amounts of time from class sessions allowed
to complete the group work required.   Most classes should
be able to complete Poetry Theater presentations by the end
of one week, if time is given daily for a portion of the
period.

FIRST CLASS PERIOD (approximately 45 minutes)

I.   Choral Reading With the Class

Pass out any short poem (or use a literature book) and
practice choral reading, demonstrating variations of voices.
The following are samples of possible directions to students.

- First row or group says the first line.

- Two or three voices say the first few words of the next
  line.

- Each person of the next group or row says one word each
  of the following line.

- The class says any repeating refrain or line.

- One voice says the beginning syllable of the word,
  and three voices complete the word.

- Two voices say the last few words and the next voice
  repeats (echoes) those words.

Make assignments of this type until the entire poem's

reading has been designated.

Using the same poem, provide different directions
for voice variations (whisper, draw out the word, clip
syllables, shriek...) and for movement (stand, reach out,
look upward, hang head, some stand, some sit on floor...).
By directing the entire class, you provide models of
various approaches for incorporating dramatic techniques
into choral reading.

II. Choral Reading In Groups

Divide the class into groups of five of six, insisting
that no group contain all males or all females. My
rationale for this stipulation is to provide greater
variety in voice and presentation of the poetry reading.
Since the group formed for this choral reading activity
will be the same group which will work together to create
the Poetry Theater, I find it important to establish the
cooperative nature of the task at this point.

Each group is instructed to take the same poem as
used in the class choral reading and to create a presentation,
incorporating movement, various voices and use of different
levels. Encourage groups to focus first on voice, then to
incorporate movement and levels (visual effect of some
standing, others sitting...). Movement for each phrase
or word in not necessary and should not be encouraged.

Each group needs to reach consensus to determine the manner of its presentation. Students should be encouraged to try suggestions made by group members, experimenting with variations until consensus is reached. A time limit needs to be given, with a reminder when five minutes are left. I generally emphasize that this will not be a finished product since time is limited. The purpose of this activity, as explained to the groups, is to work on the process of preparing a Poetry Theater presentation.

One group at a time shows its presenation of the poem. After each presentation, ask audience groups to focus on the variations and approaches used in the observed presentation, pointing out effective techniques employed by the group. In some cases, groups have difficulty reaching consensus and working cooperatively. Their presentations may not be ready to show, and the alternative I've used is to have the group merely say the poem. Since the emphasis is on the process, not product, time limits should be maintained.

SECOND SESSION (The following could be done in one period or parts of two periods.)

I. Distribution and Discussion of Poetry Theater Activity Card

Provide a copy of the Poetry Theater Activity card for each student. Review the directions, beginning with "Steps With the Class," pointing out that step one was done the previous period.

Brainstorm theme possibilities with the class after
clarifying the understanding of "theme." List suggestions
on the board, providing topics at intervals during the
brainstorming. Seasons, times of day, feelings (ranging
from love to fear), necessities, specific holidays,
machines, specific colors, weather (sun, rain, moon and
other aspects relating to nature), specific animals
(cats, dogs, birds, insects, tigers), the sea, mountains,
windows...are only some of the many possibilities. Remind
students that the first task of the group will be to select
a theme. They will have some time during class to do this,
using poetry books and anthologies.

Steps Within Each Group directions are reviewed with
the class before they are again divided into their groups
formed during the previous session. Those absent the
previous session can be added to groups already formed.

1. Select a theme for your group...

Students are told that they will use references
before making a group decision. Theme selection is often
based on poems available on themes of interest. Consensus
will be necessary; but teacher guidance will be available.
Groups having problems deciding on a theme would have a
theme assigned to them by the teacher.

2. Skim through poetry books...to find poems relating to theme..

Remind students that each group member will have to contribute at least one poem relating to the theme. They will have some time in the library or will use classroom poetry books. In addition, they should explore other sources for poems, including home and the public library. The poetry contribution should be written in a form ready to share with the group. Original contributions of a student's are encouraged, in addition to use of a reference.

3. From poems found, select lines, phrases or words to include...

This step involves an important sharing process, where group members will read poems and lines selected. As they listen, group members will determine which lines, phrases and words should be included. An important step will be to create original lines or find a basic refrain which will tie together the different poems into one poem.

4. As you determine lines...write the source...

Review the need to write the reference used, both in terms of giving credit and for again finding the reference. You may decide to provide specific guidelines for writing references or merely stipulate the information which should be included. The samples on the following pages include references used, and suggest different formats.

5. Decide on the final order of the poem...

Encourage students to try many variations of line
order and to experiment with different original lines
created by group members. When some consensus has been
reached, a copy of the completed group poem should be
made for each group member, with an extra copy given to
the teacher. Each group member could write out the poem,
or one person could copy the poem on a master to be run
off for everyone in the group.

6. Assign specific lines to people in the group...

Refer to the poetry presentations done the previous
session. Encourage the group to practice many variations
and to select the most interesting one. The group should
use many voice variations for the presentation, making
sure that line assignments are equitable.

7. Determine appropriate movements, gestures, voices and
    levels to give the presentation a dramatic quality...

Once lines are learned, group members will be
ready to work on other aspects of the presentation. They
can add movement, arrange themselves in various formations
using different levels (heights, chairs, floor...), and
add props (paper moon, snowflakes, costume...), if
appropriate. The final product sought is a Poetry

Theater- a dramatic presentation of a group poem which
would be viewed by an audience of peers and, perhaps, by
other teachers.

8.   Practice...show to class.

        Students will need some time in class each day
for work in groups on the Poetry Theater. The refinement
of the presentation does take practice and time. With
practice, groups can create Poetry Theaters which can be
shown with confidence and pride.

        If time permits following the review of directions,
allow groups to use references and select a theme.

THIRD SESSION AND FOURTH SESSION

        During these sessions, groups follow the steps
outlined on the Poetry Theater Activity Card. While the
groups are working, you rotate, assisting in decision-
making and in guiding groups toward consensus. If appropriate,
groups could, at this early stage, show trial runs of presentations,
seeking feedback and suggestions for improvement from their
peers or from the teacher.   I have used videotaping to
show students presentations for self-evaluation, and to
share final productions with other classes.

FIFTH SESSION   (If more time was given for allowing groups
    ' to refine presentations, this would be a later session.)

    The   PRESENTATION of the Poetry Theaters could be
scheduled for a particular day in advance or be informally
conducted when groups are ready. When groups are
particularly proud of their presentations, they often wish
to show them to other classes. This could be handled by
students becoming "traveling players," where a particular
group makes arrangements to visit a class to present its
Poetry Theater; or, other classes could be invited to see
all the Poetry Theater presentations. Videotaping of the
presentations can be used for viewing by other classes and
for critical viewing by the performers; particularly,if
they wish to further refine presenations or to create
new Poetry Theaters in the future.

CONCLUSION:

    The obvious purpose of Poetry Theater is to involve
students in reading, writing, creating and performing
poetry. As I developed Poetry Theater and implemented
it with students, I consciously tried to incorporate
additional learning aspects within the framework of the
approach. Based on teacher feedback and my own observations
of students who have participated in Poetry Theater, I
feel that in addition to experiences with poetry, students

gain positive group experiences, learn to be more open to

variations and alternatives and become more creative in

their thinking. With guidance and time for practice, groups

do create Poetry Theaters which they are proud to perform

and to publish.

The following poems were written by groups in grades

five, six, seven and eight and represent Poetry Theater

presentations created in my school system in the fall of

the school year.

NOTE: Poetry Theater contains elements of Readers Theater,

Story Theater and Chamber Theater, other approaches for

dramatizing readings. Excellent descriptions of these

"Theater" techniques for readings are contained in

Student-Centered Language Arts and Reading, K-13 by

James Moffett and Betty Jane Wagner (Houghton Mifflin,1976).

Any reading or English program would be enriched by the

inclusion of these approaches which integrate drama with

reading and writing.

SAMPLES OF POETRY THEATER GROUP POEMS

Lunenburg Public Schools, Massachusetts, Grades 5,6,7,8

Prince of Bombay   (Grade Five)

Once upon a valley	"The horse that had a flat tire," Poems Here and Now, p.18.-19 by Richard Brautigan
There was a prince of Bombay	"Animals friendly and tame," Laughable Limericks,p.21
Who always wanted his own way	Walter Parke
So he bought himself a horse	by group: Pam,Bobby,Richard,Chris,Kevi grade five
Which ran fast, of course	
And now he spends his money on hay	

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Birds   (Grade Five)

Thrushes sing as the sun is going	"Proud Songsters," A Flock of Words, Thomas Hardy,p.90
Nesting in holes and making a mess	"The Starling," A Flock of Words, Jonathan Stobs,p.91
I don't much approve of its habits And birds sing in ones and pairs I think it can sing too	Other lines from "The Starling"
How pleasant the life of a bird must be	"Birds in Summer," My Poetry Book, Mary Howitt,p.235

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Aunt Maud   (Grade Five)

I remember, I remember	A Treasure Chest of Poetry by Thomas Hood
I had written to Aunt Maud	Humorous Poetry for Children by W.Cole
Who was on a trip abroad	
What a fact!	By group: Karen, David, Chris, Kenny
She wrote me back	
And said she'll be back in September	

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Jack Frost's Winter   (Grade Six)

Summer fading, winter comes

Frosty morning, tingling thumbs

(people sitting, moving hands)

Picture Books in Winter, Robert Louis
Stevenson, "A Children's Guide to Verse"

Of a great forest

    in one night

    I make a wilderness

    of white
(person throwing snow)

"The Snowflake" by Walter de la Mare
An Inheritance of Poetry, p.221

In the winter time we go

    Walking in the fields of snow

(three people walk,then stop)

Every bush and every tree

    Is as white, as white can be

(continue walking)

"White Fields" by James Stephens,
An Inheritence of Poetry, p.224

I glitter and fly

    Beneath the sky

    And lean against the gale

My feet wear blades

    Of diamond dust

    As I etch a frosty trail

(group skating)

"Skating" by Lee Bennett Hopkins and
Misha Arenstein in Potato Chips p.60

The Moon   (Grade Six)

It's a slice of moon they cry   (Chris)

A slice of slivery moon in a green sky (Jen & Pam)

The moon will not hurt me when I'm old (Jen & Mar)

But the years will make me sad and cold (All)

The moon is above the earth (Pam & Jen)

And it's been there since its birth (Mar)

The moon is in the sky at night (Chris)

It shines over the earth with a glowing light (All)

Hey, didle, diddle, the physicists fiddle
(Pam)   (Chris, Mar,Jen)

The bleep jumped over the moom (Pam)

The little dog laughed (Jen) To see such fun (Chris)

And died the following June (All)

Potato Chips and a Slice of Moon

"A Slice of Moon" by
   M. Livingston, p.2

"Day Moon" by D. Thorr, p.47

Faces and Places

"The Traveler" by P. Hubbell

"The Slave of the Moon" by
      M. Yarmen

Reflections on a Gift of
Watermelon Pickle
"Hey Didle, Diddle" by P. Dehn

Halloween   (Grade Seven)

(1) Moan! (Maria) Wail! (JoAnn) Rustle!(Maria) Shriek! (JoAnn)

(2) Rattling windows (Stuart) doors that creak (Kyle)

(3) Shrieks of cats (Danielle) and flying bats (Kyle)

(4) Witches and their tall black hats (Maria and repeat by Dan.)

(5) Moans and groans in the night (JoAnn and "night" three times by all)

(6) And shadows from a pumpkin light (Danielle)

(7) White as a ghost (Stuart and Maria)

(8) That scares you the most (Kyle)

(9) Pale moon faces (Maria and Kyle), eyes of green (Stuart)

(10)Sh! (Joann & Kyle)   Spooks! (Maria,Dan.,Stuart) Halloween!!!! (All)

Lines 1,2,3,9,10 from "Sh!Spooks!" by Florence Eakman, Poems for Children
Lines 4,8   from "Colors" by Mary O'Neill, Hailstones & Halibut Bones
Lines 5,8,6,7, MADE UP BY GROUP

The Sea Farers   (Grade Seven)

Far off, the sea is gray and still
    as the sky (Ken, sitting on chair)
        "A Weekend by the Sea," by E.L. Masters
        Modern American Poetry

Great waves roar to the shore
    (Heidi, Susan on desk)
  Like conch shells (all)

Desolate and lone (sadly, John)
        "Lost," by Carl Sandburg
        Poems to Enjoy

  All night long (Sheri, Ken)

On the sea where fog trails (Heidi, Susan repeat "trail")

  And mist creeps (all creep with fingers)

The western tide crept (move slowly, Helen)   "Sands of Dee" by Charles Kingley
                               One Hundred Story Poems

  along the sand (on chair, John, Sheri)

And o'er and o'er the sand (make circle with hands like when you're smoothing something)

As far as the eye could see (strain eyes as if looking for something)

The rolling came down (lower hand to the floor) and hid the sea

I must go down to the sea again
        "Sea Fever," by Grace Huffard
        My Poetry Book

  To the lonely sea and the sky
    (look up at sky)

The waves came down from the edge of the sky
        "The Waves," by Jay Smith
        Sea Ships and Sailors
The shattered water made a misty din
        "Once by the Pacific," by Robert Frost
        Modern American Poetry

I must go down to the sea again (All)
    Again (All) Again (All whisper)

In The Beginning (Grade Seven)

In the beginning, If one there be
        Imaginations, Other Places, p. 14

To the valley of death rode on a mare
        Sea, Ships and Sailors, p.42

A demon so dark not seen in the night
A time when the moon was not very bright
Into the cemetery the demon rode
So brave, so brave, no fear he showed   All lines created by group
But when he reached the passage to Hell,
Off came his head and down he fell.
The Village people, rich and poor, now were   **17**
    free and feared no more.

Thunderstorms   (Grade Eight)

The wind began to rock the grass   "Thunderstorms," by W. Cole
                                                    Book of Nature Poems
   (steps kneeling in front of
   audience,hands raised-one voice)

With threatening tunes and low!
          (steps in front of audience,speaking powerfully-one voice)

He flung a menace at the earth/A menace at the sky!
          (standing on chairs,hands upraised,speaking loudly - 3 voices)

Deep into the darkness peering   The Raven by Edgar Allen
          (speaking loudly and mysteriously - one voice)

Long I stood there wondering (softer, kneeling on chairs - 2 voices)

Fearing! (pretending to be afraid - 6 voices)

And rained its life as though it bled   "Red,Gold Rain," by S. Sitwell
          (kneeling on chair -one voice)   Crystal Cabinet Poems

In the long days full of fire
          (spoken softly - 2 voices)

We wake to hear the storm come down   "So Ghostly Then, The Girl
                                                    Came In" by S. Sitwell
   Sudden on roof and pane

(spoken strongly- 3 voices- repeat sudden,sudden,sudden)

The thunder's loud, and the hasty wind

   hurries the beating rain   (shouted in front of people - 4 voices)

And, in the windless hour between (spoken softly -one voice)

The last of daylight and night (same tone standing on chairs-2 voices)

When fields give up their ebbing green (3 voices and 2 for ebbing green)

And two bats interweave their flight (arms outstretched - all voices)

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Love   (Grade Eight)

Background Music: Evergreen by Barbara Streisand (played very softly)

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways. (J.B. to Laura - J.B. kneeling)

What lips my lips have kissed and where and why
     (Cheryl)   (Larry)

To write and to command,   to lust and to rage
(Laura)   (J.B.)   (Laura)   (both standing)

forever be the same
 (Cheryl,Larry   (Caryn echoes line)   (3 levels of height)

If no more I should see you,   I shall send you still replies
      (Laura)   (Cheryl)   (J.B.)   (J.B.middle of girls)

What the eye loses , Let   the heart recover
(Laura) (Caryn)   (Larry)   (Caryn)

One eve in the garden, I met the   Love-Talker
   (J.B.)   (Larry)   (Caryn & Cheryl)

Love is like a dizziness, Won't Let a poor man go about business
   (Laura)   (Cheryl)   (Laura & Cheryl)

Love is like a singed pig hanging up for bacon
(All)(Caryn)(Cheryl) (Laura,Larry,& J.B.)   (standing apart,semicircle)

Love is like a disease, leaves your poor heart achin'
(All) (Laura)   (J.B.,Cheryl,Caryn)   (Larry)

LOVE (all)

References:

Adventures in English Literature, p. 481 Sonnet 43 by Robert Browning   Line #1

The Treasure of American Poetry, "What Lips My Lips Have Kissed"   Lines #2,8,9

The Winged Horse Anthology,p.124,504 "Love's Diary" and "Lovesight"   Lines #3,5

Modern American Poetry, p.560 "Change Then Forever by Louis Untermeyer   Lines #6,4

The Poet, A New Book of Story Poems,p.192,194   Line #7
     "The Love-talker" by William Cole

By Group   Lines #10,#11