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High School Students + Fun Poetry Activities If you're an English teacher, looking for fun poetry activities for high school or middle school students, I've got you covered. I'm opening up my poetry toolbox and sharing some of my favorite (and most successful) poetry games and activities! Whether you're looking for a stand-alone lesson or something more, there's something here for everyone. Pop Sonnets The creation of pop sonnets is one of my favorite poetry activities to use in conjunction with the reading of a Shakespearean play, but it can be used as a stand-alone lesson. The hook is that modern-day songs have been turned into Shakespearean sonnets. You can study one of Shakespeare's sonnets and ask students to modernize it. Then, work in reverse by re-working a modern-day song as a sonnet. Or, just use this as a "hook" to help students feel more comfortable with Shakespearean language. Take a look and thank me later. Songs as Poetry Studying modern-day songs is a great way to teach about figurative language and poetic devices while studying poetry. Try reading the lyrics, but omitting or re-writing the metaphors and talking about the change in message/meaning. Look for examples of imperfect rhyme in one of Eminem's cleaner songs. Study poems as paired texts. Analyze lines from a famous soundtrack. Ask students to bring in their favorite songs and discuss. So Many. Options! Here are 12 great songs to analyze if you aren't sure where to start: "Across the Universe" by the Beatles "Angel" by Sarah McLachlan "Blank Space" by Taylor Swift "Chasing Pavements" by Adele "Infinity" by Mariah Carey "Stereo Hearts" by Gym Class Heroes "Counting Stars" by One Republic "It's Time" by Imagine Dragons "Imagine" by John Lennon "Mad World" by Gary Jules "Zombie" by The Cranberries "Letter to Me" by Brad Paisley Slam Poetry Students need to know that poetry is not dead. It's living. It's breathing. It's storytelling. It's cool. In April, my classes come alive with the magic of slam poetry as students become authors and performers. They re-discover wonder and learn to let down their guard. They learn that there is intersectionality between their story and the stories of others. They are appreciated. They appreciate others. When I use this fun poetry activity for high school students, my classroom really becomes a true community. Grab my slam poetry "mini" unit to get your students started with slam poetry! Not sure which slam poems are school-appropriate and engaging? Here are 40 of my favorite slam poems! Paint Chip Poetry This poetry writing activity is FREE if you're willing to grab some paint chips from your local hardware store, preferably ones with multiple colors in one. Or, Amazon sells an awesome paint chip poetry "game." Have students use one of the color names as the title for a poem. Have students write poems in stanzas, using each of the color names as inspiration. Have students use all of the color names somewhere in a poem. Have students choose two contrasting colors and make a poem of contrasts. Have students choose two complimentary colors and make a poem. Have students choose a color and write an identity poem. Blackout Poetry This is an oldie, but goodie poetry writing exercise for high school students. Copy a page or two from a whole class novel. Or better yet, choose a completely divergent text, maybe a science textbook or page from a dictionary. Students string together words on the page to form a poem, and black-out the rest of the words. If they want to go above and beyond, they can create an original illustration to accompany their blackout poem. Book Spine Poetry Take your students to the library (or have them browse a site like Goodreads) and challenge them to create poems from book titles. Each title becomes a line in the poem. An optional challenge: have students choose (or randomly draw) a theme, and their poem has to relate to their chosen theme. If you're looking for some FREE templates, I've got you covered: Click Here! I created these templates as a quick fun poetry activity for high school sophomores after my librarian told me that having my classes pull so many books would be a pain to re-shelve. Poetry Tasting A lot of teachers are loving my reading progressive dinner stations. Poems are short and accessible texts that always rock when used with this activity. Here are some options for poetry stations, a fun group poetry activity. Choose a certain kind of poem or a certain poetic movement to explore at ALL the stations, i.e. the ghazal or Imagist poetry. Choose different kinds of poems or movements to explore at each station. Choose poems related to ONE thematic idea. Choose poems written by teenagers. Choose "famous" poems. Choose slam poems. Poetry Transformations If you're studying word choice and tone in poetry, why not have students transform a poem, switching from one tone to another? Then, have students write a reflection analyzing why they made 4-5 important changes. Found Poems This poetry activity is exactly what it sounds like. Have students choose / cut-out words from magazines to form "found" poems. Or, have students listen to a TED talk or story, writing down a certain # of words they hear. Then, ask them to use these words + ones of their own to write an original poem. Easter Egg Poems If 'tis the season, you might as well use those plastic easter eggs you may have lying around. Put "poetry inspiration" in each egg. At the very least, I suggest a word or phrase. If you want to go "all-in," create a combination of the items below: Random household objects, i.e. a piece of string, a bead Newspaper/magazine clippings Words/phrases Famous first lines A "mentor" poem, copied and folded up Tell students that their challenge is to write a poem inspired by these objects. Or, if you prefer, have students incorporate words / ideas from each object in their poem. Favorite Poem Project If you've never seen the site "Favorite Poem Project," I suggest checking it out as a poetry unit resource. The site's goal is to interview a variety of different people about their "favorite poems." In each short video, an individual shares a personal connection to his/her poem and reads the poem out loud. After being a fan of this site for some time, I decided to have my students make their own "favorite poem" videos. They explored, chose a poem that they liked "best," and created videos on Flipgrid discussing their thoughts about the poem and reading it aloud. These videos were then viewed by classmates. Everyone enjoyed this a lot! Metaphor Dice Taylor Mali, the very first slam poet I ever listened to (and still one of my favorites), has a ton of great poetry writing exercises for high school students on his site HERE. His best-selling metaphor dice are a great way to get students to think "outside the box" when it comes to poetry writing. This is a really fun poetry activity for high school students! Each new metaphor is a different poem! Poems as Mentor Texts Using mentor texts for writing is a powerful strategy for poetry instruction, yet one that I find myself "skipping" because there isn't time. I have to remind myself to "make" the time because it's important. If we're going to spend time analyzing texts, it only makes sense to have students try to use those writing moves in their own writing. After all, students should be writing frequently, and not always for an assessment grade. Here are 12 great mentor poems if you're not sure where to start: Magnetic Poetry A fun activity to fill extra class time, or just for fun: magnetic poetry. Give each student (or pairs of students) a handful of magnetic poetry pieces. See what they come up with. Take pictures and display around the room. Interactive Poetry Bulletin Board Sort of like magnetic poetry, but with a twist, it's fun to set-up an interactive bulletin board as a fun poetry activity for high school students to try before or after class. You can do this in several different ways. Poem of the day + a "feel-o-meter" for students to rate the poem on a scale from "mild sauce" to "hot sauce." You can have students use push pins to vote. Large scale magnetic poetry + a bulletin board becomes "push pin poetry." You choose the words. Students move them around to form poems. Hey, if you loved this post, I want to be sure you've had the chance to grab a FREE copy of my guide to streamlined grading. I know how hard it is to do all the things as an English teacher, so I'm over the moon to be able to share with you some of my best strategies for reducing the grading overwhelm. Click on the link above or the image below to get started! Tired of hearing groans when you announce it's time for some poetry? Poems can be hard for kids to connect with, so it helps to have some clever poetry games and activities up your sleeve. Try these with our favorite poems for sharing with elementary students and middle and high school students! (Just a heads up, WeAreTeachers may collect a share of sales from the links on this page. We only recommend items our team loves!) 1. Watch poetry videos Let YouTube do some of the work for you with this roundup of poetry videos for elementary students. See authors read their own poems, learn about poetry terms, and more. 2. Climb a hill with Amanda Gorman Young poet Amanda Gorman took the world by storm when she read her poem, "The Hill We Climb," at President Biden's inauguration. Kids can really relate to her and her words, so try this roundup of poetry activities to introduce her in your classroom. 3. Take inspiration from nature Nature has always provided inspiration for poets, and it can help your students find their own way to a love of poetry. Find out how poet David Harrison uses nature to help kids tap into their poetic sides here. 4. Read a novel in verse Help kids find more meaning in poetry by reading novels told in verse. When they have a story to follow, they're more likely to be engaged and open to learning about the poetic elements. Here are some of our favorite novels in verse for students of all ages. 5. Stack up book spine poetry Pull some books off the shelves and stack them so their titles create a poem. Kids can take a pic, write the titles down as they are, or use their stack as inspiration for a more fleshed-out masterpiece. Learn more: Living the Learning Life 6. Build a Humpty Dumpty wall For most of us, nursery rhymes were the first poems we read, and they're the perfect place to start with poetry games. Write words on building blocks (try this set of Giant Cardboard Blocks from Amazon), then stack them up to build a wall. Kids will get a kick out of knocking the wall down and then building it up again! Learn more: Toddler Approved 7. Plant a poe-tree "I think that I shall never see/a poem as lovely as a poe-tree!" Hang a paper tree, then fill it with leaves covered with poetry from your students. Learn more: HarperCollins 8. Try paper bag poetry Introduce poetry to little ones with a paper bag filled with several items of different sizes, shapes, textures, etc. Kids reach into the bag without looking and describe what they feel in a few words. These words make their first poem. Learn more: Bulldog Readers and Bobcats Blog 9. Explore a Poem of the Week We love the idea of using a pocket chart with sentence strips to post a poem broken down by lines or phrases. Do a different activity each day throughout the week to help students make a connection. Learn more: Proud to be Primary 10. Go on a poetry speed date This is a cool way to introduce older readers to a poetry unit. Gather up all the poetry books you can find, and invite students to bring their favorites too. Students spend the class period "speed dating" the books—they simply browse and skim, looking for poems and authors that catch their eye. Encourage them to make notes of their favorites for further reading. Learn more: Nouvelle ELA 11. Have a poetry book tasting Here's a cool spin on the speed dating idea—a book tasting! Set up your room to look like a restaurant, play classical music in the background, and then invite students to sit down and try a variety of poetry books. Get more ideas on how to hold a book tasting here. 12. Pair up songs and poems One of the easiest ways for many students to connect with poetry is by linking it with song lyrics. Visit the link below to find 15 fantastic song and poem pairings. Then, challenge your students to make their own pairings and explain the reasoning. Learn more: The Literary Maven 13. Read poetry in different ways Poetry is all about the reader's (or listener's) experience. Experiment with that idea by having kids read poems out loud in a variety of ways. How does it change the experience when you read a sad poem in a silly voice or a funny poem in a scared voice? Learn more: The Classroom Nook/Poetry Voices 14. Spin to generate discussion A poetry discussion can be hard going for kids at first. Use this free printable spinner to give them conversation starters or to help them choose a topic for further exploration. Learn more: Poetry Spinner/The Classroom Game Nook 15. Create colorful paint chip poetry This is easily one of the most popular poetry games, and for good reason. Colors are so easy to relate to and evoke lots of feelings and memories. Paint chip poetry works for every age group, too, and makes for a neat classroom display. Learn more: Fabulous in Fifth 16. Expand on paint chip poetry Feeling a little guilty about furtively stuffing paint chips in your pocket at the store? These printable paint chip poetry games are here to help. They include multiple ways to use paint chips for poetic inspiration too! Learn more: Building Book Love 17. Have a "Hey, Diddle, Diddle" puppet show Nursery rhyme poems were just made to be acted out! Create stick puppets for "Hey Diddle, Diddle" using the instructions at the link, then expand to your other favorite rhymes to assemble a whole puppet show. Learn more: All Kids Network 18. Compose acrostics Acrostics are simple enough for beginning poets, but even Edgar Allan Poe used this style to create beautiful works. Writing one is almost like putting together a puzzle! Learn more: My Poetic Side 19. Match DIY rhyming dominoes Rhyming poetry games are a lot of fun, and this one starts with some DIY dominoes made from sentence strips. This is a clever way to help kids find rhymes for writing their own poems. Learn more: No Time for Flashcards 20. Scoop up some ice cream poetry Jack Prelutsky's "Bleazer's Ice Cream" is a kid's poetry classic, and it's sure to spark your students' imaginations. Have them write and illustrate their own ice cream poems, with a focus on alliteration and other literary devices. Learn more: Creative Curriculum 21. Give haiku a hand Haiku poems with their standard 5-7-5 syllable structure are fun to write. And let's face it, most of us count the syllables on our fingers when we do! So this haiku helping hand is a perfect tool for kids. Have kids trace their own hand and write a haiku on it, too. Learn more: The Techie Teacher 22. Fetch a doggie haiku Once you start with haikus, there's just so much you can do! Elementary kids will love hearing the story of Doug, a dog looking for his forever home, in Dogku by Andrew Clements. As you might guess, the tale is told entirely in haikus. After you read the book, have kids create and illustrate their own "Dogku" poems. Learn more: Teaching Fourth 23. Roll the haiku dice These are so cool! Haikubes are perfect for all sorts of poetry games. Roll the cubes and create a haiku, or draw a handful from a bag and use them to make your poem. You can use these for other poetry activities too. Buy it: Haikubes on Amazon 24. Craft 3-D tunnel haiku books Haikus are fun to write, but a 3-D tunnel haiku book is next-level awesome. This project looks harder than it is; all you really need are index cards, basic school supplies, and a lot of creativity. Learn more: Teach Kids Art 25. Be a copycat We're normally opposed to copying in the classroom, but for this activity, it's a OK! Kids write poems that mimic one they've been reading in class. This helps open their minds to the creativity they need to write their own unique verses later on down the line. Learn more: One Sharp Bunch 26. Draw a concrete poem Concrete poems are art and poetry rolled into one! Kids write a poem on any subject they like, then craft it into a shape reflecting their topic. Tip: Use a light board to allow kids to trace shapes if they find drawing a bit too challenging. Learn more: The Room Mom 27. Play Poetry Bingo Is there anything Bingo can't do? Turns out it even works for poetry games! Get free printable sheets to use for this Poetry Bingo game that reviews literary devices and vocabulary terms. Learn more: Teaching With Jennifer Findlay 28. Keep a poem in your pocket There are lots of poem-in-your-pocket activities out there, but we love this one for its sheer creativity! During independent reading time, kids explore and find their favorite poem to share with classmates. After they share, they tuck them in a pocket on this spectacular hallway bulletin board for others to find and read. (Turn this into an online activity by using an online bulletin board program like Padlet.) Learn more: Pleasures from the Page 29. Design your own poetry dice Learn about clauses when you make a set of dice to use for poetry games. Grab this set of Dry Erase Blocks from Amazon and write dependent clauses on one and independent clauses on the other. Roll the dice and enjoy the verses you create! Learn more: Education.com 30. Learn limericks with a rhyming word bank Kids love limericks—and really, who doesn't? Their biggest challenge is usually coming up with the rhymes they need. This cool poetry activity creates a bank of rhyming words students can pull from as they craft their own lovable limericks to share. Learn more: STEAMsational 31. Color in blackout poetry Blackout poems are a unique way of looking at the written word. This activity is easily differentiated for students from elementary through high school, and the results are often stunning. Learn more: Just Add Students 32. Post some pushpin poetry Remember when poetry magnets were all the rage? You can still buy them (find them here on Amazon), but you can also just create your own from paper scraps and push pins. This is a low-cost way to open the door to so many poetry games and activities. Learn more: Residence Life Crafts 33. Make magnetic poetry online Speaking of poetry magnets, did you know you can play with them online? Really! This clever site gives you new words every time, so there are always fresh new ideas to explore. Learn more: Magnetic Poetry Online 34. Say it with sticky notes We love using sticky notes in the classroom, and they're fantastic for poetry games. Have kids write a selection of words of their choice and stick them to the wall or whiteboard. Then let each student select words to use for their own verses. Learn more: Playful Learning 35. Prove that opposites attract Even polar opposites can share similarities. For this poetry activity, students choose two opposite subjects, like the ocean and desert shown here. The middle line of the poem highlights the one similarity between the pair and acts as a transition (in this case: sand). Illustrations help tell the story. Learn more: Joy in the Journey 36. Find poetry everywhere Found poetry is likely to become one of your students' favorite poetry games. Give them a stack of magazines, newspapers, or books to look through, along with a pair of scissors. Have them cut out words and phrases they like, and then arrange them into a brand-new poetic masterpiece! Learn more: There's Just One Mommy 37. Start with simple cinquains Cinquains are five-line poems with a specific structure. There are a variety of styles, but this poetry activity walks kids through the creation of a simple cinquain on any topic they like. This is a neat way to work on "ing" words (also known as gerunds). Bonus: This free printable Character Cinquains worksheet can be used with any book or story. Learn more: Teaching With Terhune 38. Learn metaphors and similes Similes and metaphors are two of the most common literary devices found in poems. Help kids learn to tell the difference with this free printable game. Learn more: Similes and Metaphors/The Classroom Nook 39. Take inspiration from metaphor dice Source The right metaphor is the gateway to a unique and meaningful poem. Roll these dice to find a metaphor that will inspire and challenge your young poets. Buy it: Metaphor Dice on Amazon 40. Host a poetry slam Round off your poetry unit with a poetry slam! These events are a combination of recitations and poetry games, like freestyle rhyme battles. This is the ultimate event for poetry lovers of any age. Hold it in person, or stream it on Zoom so anyone can easily attend! Learn more: How to Host a Poetry Slam How do you get kids to love poetry? Come share your ideas on the WeAreTeachers HELPLINE group on Facebook. Looking for more poetry to use in the classroom? Check out our list of the Best Poetry Books for Kids in Grades K-12.







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