Introduction

1. As students enter the classroom, the list of attached literary terms will be displayed on the Smart Board.
2. I will be standing outside the classroom, supervising hall activity per school instructions.
3. As students enter the classroom, I will instruct them to follow the directions on the Smart Board.
4. At the bell, I will enter the class and again remind students to follow the directions on the Smart Board, which instruct them to write down the literary terms on the Board, define the ones they are familiar with, and leave blank the ones they are unfamiliar with.
5. As students continue to work, I will take attendance, collect the previous day’s homework, etc.
6. “We’re going to be working with literary terms today, so it’s important that we have a good grasp on what they are, and how they function in works of literature.”
7. I will review each literary term with the students, providing examples of each.
8. “Who can tell me what a simile is?”
9. Students answer.
10. Repeat steps 8-9 for other literary terms: metaphor, alliteration, assonance, consonance, personification, iambic pentameter, and enjambment.
11. If students are unable to answer, I will provide a definition.
12. “Today we’re going to be reading and discussing the poem “Thanatopsis” by William Cullen Bryant.”
13. “We’re going to use these literary terms to investigate the poem’s meaning and effect.”

Lesson

1. I will now pass out the “Thanatopsis” worksheet.
2. “This is a worksheet due at the end of the hour—but don’t look at it just yet. We’re going to cover each part of it, I promise, so just wait.”
3. “Before we talk about the poem, let’s talk about the guy who wrote it.”
4. “Thanatopsis was written by William Cullen Bryant.”
5. “Bryant lived from 1794-1878. He wrote “Thanatopsis” sometime in the 1810s; there’s some indication he may have been 17 when he wrote it, and he certainly wasn’t older than 21. Remember that.”
6. “Bryant was a Romantic—who can remember from *The Scarlet Letter* what Romantics believed?”
7. Students should remember some of this, since they studied *The Scarlet Letter*, a Romantic novel.
8. In case they don’t: Romantics valued a personal and emotion connection to nature that bordered on rapturous. Their freedom of expression and emotion set them apart from the strict American literary tradition of the Puritans who had come before.
9. “Look for evidence of Bryant’s Romanticism in the poem.”
10. “Let’s talk a little bit about Bryant and how young he was when he wrote the poem. Do any of you have any friends that are really dramatic about their emotions? Like, they have dark thoughts and can be depressing to be around?”
11. Students answer (hopefully yes).
12. “William Cullen Bryant was one of those teenagers. This is a poem that’s all about death. Death, death, death. So why are we talking about it?”
13. “‘Thanatopsis’ is often considered the first great American poem; one editor, upon reading it, exclaimed that it was impossible for such a fine poem to have been written in America.”
14. “American art is maturing in this time period; it’s changing and taking on new character.”
15. “What I want to focus on today isn’t the poem’s meaning, but the effect it has on the reader, and the literary techniques it uses.”
16. “What we especially want to talk about is tone, because tone can make a big difference in how information is received.”
17. I will now provide an example of tone.
18. “So if I say, ‘Marquis, you’re an idiot, man,’ in a joking manner, what do you think about our relationship?”
19. Students answer that we’re friends.
20. “What about if I say, ‘Marquis, you’re an idiot, man’ in an angry manner, what do you think now?”
21. Students answer that I’m angry with him.
22. “So tone—the words we use and how we use them—can play a big part in meaning. That tone and how it’s established—the literary techniques Bryant uses—are what we’re going to focus on today.”
23. “To that end, before we read the poem, I’ve rewritten it in modern-day English line for line so we can understand what it means and we don’t have to spend time asking about that. Remember who’s writing this: we have a moody 17-to-21-year-old who’s captivated by an intense personal relationship with nature.”
24. I will read the rewritten poem.
25. “What is the tone here?”
26. Students answer that it’s really gloomy, because it is.
27. “Keep that in mind as we now read the actual poem itself.”
28. I read the poem “Thanatopsis.”
29. “Again, let’s not focus on the meaning or theme, but the language and the effect it has on the reader.”
30. “What are lines or phrases that stuck out to you? Anything you liked or sounded interesting?”
31. Students answer.
32. For each answer, I ask them why it stood out/why they liked it.
33. The goal here is to get students away from interrogating a poem for meaning, but instead to get them thinking about the poem’s language and technique, and starting to analyze it in some way.
34. I will then shift the class discussion to the literary techniques discussed earlier at the start of class.
35. “Let’s look now at how ‘Thanatopsis’ uses some of these literary devices.”
36. I will now model analyzing how literary devices affect a reader and the poem’s tone.
37. “The first area we should look at is iambic pentameter, a form of blank verse. Who remembers from the introduction what iambic pentameter is?”
38. Students answer that it’s a rhythmic meter pattern consisting of da-DUM, da-DUM, an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable.
39. “What effect does it have on the reader?”
40. I guide students to the answer that it provides a comforting, consistent sound; your brain picks up on it even if you’re unaware.
41. “Now let’s talk about enjambment. What’s enjambment? Check your notes.”
42. Students answer.
43. “The thing about enjambment is it pulls you along throughout the poem. By not stopping at the end of a line, you automatically keep reading. It also has the effect of greatly emphasizing when there is a stop at the end of a line, such as in line 30.”
44. “That’s a signal to the reader that that part of the poem is over, and the poet is starting a new thought.”
45. “What about personification? Where do you see that in the poem?”
46. Students answer. There are numerous instances of personification in the poem, and they are fairly recognizable, so I would like the students to find them on their own here.
47. “What’s the effect of personification?”
48. I lead students to the answer that it offers up a personal connection with something usually impersonal.
49. “Let’s talk now about sound; I’m lumping alliteration, assonance, and consonance together here.”
50. “Sound is an underrated part of poetry, but your brain notices when similar sounds are grouped together, even if you consciously don’t. Your brain likes the patterns involved.”
51. “So for instance, look at line 38, where Bryant describes the hills as ‘rock-ribbed.’ You can hear just from those hard r’s a sense of how hard the rock in the hills is.”
52. “What is rock-ribbed an example of?”
53. Students answer alliteration, because it occurs at the beginning of a word.
54. At this point, the lesson could potentially move in two different ways, which I’m going to describe below.
55. If the students are engaged in this work, we will move on to assonance and consonance. That will look something like this.
56. “In the same family as alliteration, who can tell me what assonance is?”
57. Students answer the grouping of similar vowel sounds.
58. “A good example of this is in lines 12-13, with ‘narrow’ and ‘grow’—they both have that long ‘o’ sound at the end.”
59. “The long ‘o’ sound is also a sound that the brain tends to associate with bad things, so it makes sense for this part of the poem.”
60. “What’s the opposite of assonance?”
61. Students answer consonance.
62. “Very good! A good example of consonance occurs in lines 69-70 with ‘matron’ and ‘maid.’ This is also an example of alliteration.”
63. If, on the other hand, I can tell student interest is lagging at step 51, I will not talk about examples of assonance and consonance, but will instead move below straight to step 64 to talk about sound in general, because I believe it is a more critically important aspect of poetry and poetry analysis.
64. “Let’s take one last look at sound overall, and how it can impact the poem.”
65. I will call on a volunteer to read lines 5-8.
66. “How do those words sound to you? Gentle or harsh?”
67. Students answer gentle.
68. If they do not, I will lead them to that conclusion.
69. “Right. The only word that sounds harsh in these lines is ‘sharpness’ because ‘sh’ is a really hard sound. But it’s surrounded by all these gentle sounds, so the harshness is muted, just like the poem says nature steals away the sharpness from bad thoughts.”
70. The lesson is now entering a “Think—Pair—Share” phase.
71. Think—“Let’s try it on your own.”
72. “Working in silence, write down two literary techniques you notice in the poem on your worksheet. **Those should be examples we have not already discussed**. Then write down what you think the effect they have on the reader is.”
73. This activity should take about 5 minutes.
74. Pair—“discuss with a partner next to you what techniques you identified, and what you think the effect is. “
75. Students discuss among themselves.
76. During this time, I walk around the classroom, interacting with groups.
77. Share—students share examples they noticed with the class and their opinions.
78. I return to the front of the class.
79. “Who would like to share some of the examples they noticed?”
80. I call on students and hear their answers.
81. During this, I will attempt to provide class discussion with the students by asking students what they think of other students’ answers.
82. I will call on at least 5 groups.
83. “These are all really good examples of literary devices. Now let’s turn to analyzing the poem as a whole.”
84. “We already have talked about the meaning, so remember: our goal here is tone. What is the poem’s tone, and how it is achieved?”
85. “With that in mind, keep everything you’ve heard today swirling around in your brain, and then answer the next questions on your worksheet about the poem’s tone.”
86. As students work in silence, I go around the classroom to monitor progress.
87. “Hand in the worksheet when you’re done.”
88. Students hand in worksheet when it is complete.

Conclusion

1. With about a minute left in class, I will re-gather the students’ attention.
2. “So today we’ve talked a lot about literary terms and literary analysis.”
3. “What’s the difference between just saying what the poem means and the way the poem says it?”
4. Students answer.
5. “Moving forward, I would encourage each of you, when you read a poem, to not just try and figure out its meaning, but to flow with the language. Read it for its story and the way it makes you feel before you start interrogating it.”
6. “Focus on those literary techniques when you’re asked to analyze poems.”
7. The bell rings, and students are dismissed.

Thanatopsis in Plain, Modern-Day English

If someone loves nature and spends time

in it, nature supports all their moods.

When they’re happy, nature is happy

with them, and nature is there

when their mood turns dark,

and steals away those dark thoughts

before they become too painful.

When you start to think about the fact

that you’re inevitably going to die

and it depresses you and makes you afraid,

go outside and spend time in nature,

and listen to what she has to say:

all around you there will be a small voice:

Not much longer, and you’ll won’t see the sun again.

Your face and image won’t exist in the ground

where you were buried with tears by your friends

and family, or in the embrace of the ocean.

The earth, that gave you life, will swallow you back up,

and everything that made you who you are

will disappear, mixing with the rock

and soil the farmers till and walk over.

The oak tree will send its roots

into your corpse and pierce you.

But you couldn’t wish for any better place

to rest, and you won’t be alone:

every famous person who ever lived

will be there with you too: all the rich,

the powerful, the wise, the good people,

the pretty ones, and old wise folks,

all together in one huge grave.

The hills, the meadows, the rivers,

the woods and even the oceans

decorate the earth, like flowers

on a tomb—the tomb of all humans.

The sun, the planets, and the stars

are shining on the earth and its dead

throughout all the long ages of time.

Everyone living right now—all

seven billion of us—are just a handful

when compared to all the dead people

already in the ground. Go out into the world—

the desert, the woods, lonely places

where rivers talk only to themselves

and there isn’t a sound of any creature—

yet the dead are there: in all those places,

so it’s been since the beginning of the world,

the dead rule there by themselves.

You’ll die just like them, but don’t worry

if you die friendless and alone.

Everything in the world will end up just like you.

Happy people will still be happy when you’re gone,

sad people will still be sad, everyone will

still chase their favorite pleasures and dreams,

but in time they will come and join you.

As time goes on and on, everyone:

the strong men; the young children;

the Instagram models, the grandmothers,

the smallest child and the oldest man

will all die and be laid to rest beside you

by those who will in turn be laid to rest themselves.

So don’t be afraid and worry—live,

so that when your time to die comes,

you don’t go like a prisoner,

forced and whipped into a dungeon,

but go to your grave with a trust,

and prepare to die like someone lying down

for a good rest filled with pleasant dreams.

**Simile**—a comparison between two different things using “like” or “as.”

“In the summer, St. Louis is as hot as a desert.”

**Metaphor**—a comparison between two different things that does not use “like” or “as”

“Each November, my mother, a stain refusing to clear, rises again.”

**Alliteration**—the repetition of similar sounds at the start of words grouped closely together

“Who’s the king of these ludicrous lucrative lyrics?”—Eminem, “Renegade”

**Assonance**—the repetition of similar vowel sounds in words grouped closely together

“Through the backyards of prefabs and ramblers”—Anders Carlson-Wee, “Clausen’s Dog”

**Consonance**—the repetition of similar consonant sounds in closely grouped words

“All our sorrows have been borrowed.”

**Personification**—assigning human qualities to non-human entities

“He always thought of the sea as ‘la mar’ which is what people call her in Spanish when they love her….the old man always thought of her as feminine and as something that gave or withheld great favors, and if she did wild or wicked things it was because she could not help them.”—Ernest Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea*

**Iambic pentameter**—a rhythmic, metrical structure in blank verse. Iambic pentameter consists of five iambs in a line, where an iamb is an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. The rhythmic pattern is thus “da-DUM, da-DUM, da-DUM, da-DUM, da-DUM.”

“Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player

That struts and frets his hour upon the stage

And then is heard no more. It is a tale

Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury…” *Macbeth*, William Shakespeare

**Enjambment**—in poetry, a sentence continuing beyond the end of a line; the poem is meant to be read to punctuation, and not to the line

“Speak, Memory—of the cunning hero,

The wanderer, blown off course time and again

After he plundered Troy’s sacred heights.” Homer, *The Odyssey*

To him who in the love of Nature holds    enjambment

Communion with her visible forms, she speaks    iambic pentameter

A various language; for his gayer hours

**She has a voice** of gladness, and a smile    personification

And eloquence of beauty, and **she glides**

**Into his darker musings, with a mild**

**And healing sympathy, that steals away**

**Their sharpness, ere he is aware**. When thoughts

Of the last bitter hour come **like a blight**    simile

Over thy spirit, and sad images   10

Of the stern agony, and shroud, and pall,

And breath**less** dark**ness**, and the narrow house,    consonance/internal rhyme

Make thee to shudder, and grow sick at heart;—    assonance

**Go forth, under the open sky, and list**

**To Nature’s teachings**, while from all around—

Earth and her waters, and the depths of air—

**Comes a still voice**—  speaking here: what does the dash represent?

                                       Yet a few days, and thee

The **all-beholding** sun shall **see** no more    contrast/antithesis

In all his course; nor yet in the cold ground,

Where thy pale form was laid, with many tears, 20

Nor in the embrace of ocean, shall exist

Thy image. Earth, that nourished thee, shall claim

Thy growth, to be resolved to earth again,

And, lost each human trace, surrendering up

Thine individual being, shalt thou go

To mix for ever with the elements,

To be a brother to the insensible rock

And to the sluggish clod, which the rude swain

Turns with his share, and treads upon. The oak

Shall send his roots abroad, and pierce thy mould. 30

     Yet not to thine eternal resting-place

Shalt thou retire alone, nor couldst thou wish

Couch more magnificent. Thou shalt lie down

With patriarchs of the infant world—with kings,

The powerful of the earth—the wise, the good,

Fair forms, and hoary seers of ages past,

All in one mighty sepulchre.   The hills

**Rock-ribbed** and ancient as the sun,—the vales    alliteration

Stretching in pensive quietness between;

The venerable woods—rivers that move   40

In majesty, and the complaining brooks

That make the meadows green; and, poured round all,

Old Ocean’s gray and melancholy waste,—    personification

Are but the solemn decorations all

Of the great tomb of man. The golden sun,

The planets, all the infinite host of heaven,

Are shining on the sad abodes of death,

Through the still lapse of ages. All that tread

The globe are but a handful to the tribes

That slumber in its bosom.—Take the wings 50    allusion

Of morning, pierce the Barcan wilderness,

Or lose thyself in the continuous woods

Where rolls the Oregon, and hears no sound,

Save his own dashings—**yet the dead are there**:    personification

And millions in those solitudes, since first    dash for emphasis

The flight of years began, have laid them down

In their last sleep—the dead reign there alone.

So shalt thou rest, and what if thou withdraw

In silence from the living, and no friend

Take note of thy departure? All that breathe    60 not even a big deal if you die alone

Will share thy destiny. The gay will laugh

When thou art gone, the solemn brood of care    consonance

Plod on, and each one as before will chase

His favorite phantom; yet all these shall leave

Their mirth and their employments, and shall come

And make their bed with thee. As the long train

Of ages glide away, the sons of men,    assonance

The youth in life’s green spring, and he who goes

In the full strength of years, matron and maid,

The speechless babe, and the gray-headed man—   70

Shall one by one be gathered to thy side,

By those, who in their turn shall follow them.    long list: no point in running

     So live, that when thy summons comes to join   indentation here for emphasis/new section

The innumerable caravan, which moves

To that mysterious realm, where each shall take

His chamber in the silent halls of death,

Thou go not, like the quarry-slave at night,

Scourged to his dungeon, but, sustained and soothed

By an unfaltering trust, approach thy grave,    what should we trust? doesn’t seem religious

Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch

About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams. don’t be scared

Name\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

“Thanatopsis”

Identify two literary techniques, and analyze their impact on the poem’s tone.

1)

2)

What is the poem’s tone towards death?

Why do you think so? Mention at least one literary device and how it contributes to the poem’s tone.