

Jay Thompson: Creative Writing Learning Plan

Title: November Guests: Describing Our Emotions

Schedule: 1 hour 45 minutes

Teaching Artist: Jay and partner

Classroom Teacher: Jay and partner

Grade(s)/Age(s): Gr 6-adult

Number of Participants: 5-12

Materials & Space: White board, handouts, writing paper, pencils

Big Idea: Writing creatively about our emotions can help us understand them and heal ourselves.

Student Learning Assessment

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| Learning Objectives | Assessment Criteria  |
| **1.** Students use imagination and self-reflection to describe their inner and outer world. | **1.** Students list “inside” things including a variety of inner experiences (dream, worry, frustration, observation, body-feeling). Students list “outside” things including things on the body, in the room, far away. |
| **2.** Students use “outer world” sense modalities to imaginatively personify an important emotion and feel it more deeply.  | **2.** Students use the 5 senses, and respond to at least 5 prompt questions, to create a detailed description and personification of an emotion.  |
| **3.** Students reflect on a changed perspective this activity gave them on their emotions. | **3.** Students share a new awareness these activities gave them about their emotions, or share a moment that surprised or affected them in sharing. |

**Vocabulary:** *Personification:* To describe a thing, event, or state as if it were a person. *Detail:* Extra, small, specific information about something.

State Standards: Washington state ELA standard / Writing Standards Gr. 6-12, Text Type & Purpose 3: “Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.”

Instructions:

Room setup. Chairs ideally arranged in an open circle with room for me and whiteboard at front. All students have paper and pencils.

I welcome students, then frame today’s activity in terms of the big idea: that writing creatively about our emotions can help us understand them and heal ourselves.

**Writing Prompt 1**

I explain that writing often consists of connecting our inner worlds to our outer worlds, then give the first prompt:

*List five things that are inside of you: for example, feelings, thoughts, memories, worries, questions, or a way your body is feeling.*

*List five things that are outside of you: for example, something on your body, something in the room, something far away.*

Students share their writing aloud in a circle.

* **Formative Assessment Checkpoint for Objective #1:**

*Objective:* Students use imagination and self-reflection to describe their inner and outer world.

*Criteria:* During sharing, I name how work shared fits guidelines of “inside” and “outside” things, or help students refine it toward guideline if it doesn’t.

*Method/Tool:* Verbal feedback with additional comments on note sheet.

At the end of sharing of work, I ask a student to name the five senses, which I write on the whiteboard. Then I ask students to brainstorm, on another sheet of paper, five emotions that feel important in their life right now. Then I ask them to circle the one that feels most vivid.

I lead the class in a brief calming and centering activity: shutting our eyes, taking three slow breaths. While students wait with their eyes closed, I ask them to recall the emotion that feels most vivid. Where do they feel it in their body? What do they imagine as they feel it? What places and times does it remind them of? Our emotions aren’t just ideas—they exist in our bodies, too.

**Writing Prompt 2**

I ask students to open their eyes and I give the second prompt:

*Use the five senses to describe how this emotion feels in you. What does it look like? What sound does it make, or remind you of? If you could touch it, how would it feel? If you could smell or taste it, what would you smell or taste? Use detail.* [Define term “detail” here.]

I give the students five minutes to write quietly. Then I invite students to each share *one* observation from the senses about their emotion.

I make space for student observations about the activity. How did it feel to describe emotions this way? Did students share any that others felt were very powerful, or expressed their own feelings clearly?

I distribute copies of Robert Frost’s poem “[My November Guest](http://www.bartleby.com/117/3.html)” to the class, with unfamiliar terms (“it were vain,” “vexes me,” “worsted,” etc.) defined at bottom of page. I explain that this poem will describe an emotion. One student reads aloud. We discuss the poem after. Questions for discussion:

* What is going on in this poem? What makes you say that?
* Who is “the November guest”? What do we know about her?
* How does Frost’s sorrow *feel* about November? What feels “sorrowful” about November, particularly, as opposed to another month?
* Which details in the poem felt most powerful to you? Did any of the descriptions describe a feeling of yours clearly?
* Why describe an emotion this way, as if it were a visitor or guest? Why not simply write a poem about feeling sorrow in November?
* What else can we find in this poem?

Having read this example, I now define what this poem is doing: *personification*. (I invite students to share other examples of personification; if necessary, I name a few more, such as how AA discusses addiction as a “disease” threatening us, that we encounter face to face.)

**Writing Prompt 3**

I now give students the pre-writing step for the third prompt. On a new sheet of paper, write an emotion that’s important in your life. (It could be the one from the second prompt or not.) Then, I ask them to read the following questions on the board and write a sentence or two about each:

*How does this emotion dress? What does it look like?*

*What is this emotion’s favorite season, or favorite month?*

*What is its favorite color?*

*What temperature does it prefer?*

*What animal is it like?*

*Where do you meet it?*

*What gift does it want?*

*Who else is there, if anyone?*

*Who else just left, or may be coming?*

*What question does it have for you?*

*What question do you have for it?*

*What magic can it perform?*

Then, I give the third prompt:

*Write something personifying this emotion. Begin with the line, “My [emotion], when [she/he/they] [is/are] here with me…”*

I ask them to incorporate at least five of their answers above. I explain that this will be their longest writing time in the class. I encourage them to elaborate: if they feel stuck, they can re-read what they wrote and ask themselves, “What question do I have about this?” and respond to that question in writing. They can also elaborate on any detail they want to say more about.

I give the students ten minutes to write quietly.

Before sharing, I remind students that we’re listening for how the readers understood, and used, personification. I remind them too to listen for at least five answers to the prompt questions. Then I invite students to share their work.

* **Formative Assessment Checkpoint for Objective #2:**

*Objective:* Students use “outer world” sense modalities to imaginatively personify an important emotion and feel it more deeply.

*Criteria:* During sharing, I name how students used the 5 senses, and respond to at least 5 prompt questions, to create a detailed description and personification of an emotion. I also encourage listeners to share their observations of these guidelines.

*Method/Tool:* Verbal feedback with additional comments on note sheet.

**Writing Prompt 4**

After sharing, I bring back the lesson’s big idea: Writing creatively about our emotions can help us understand them and heal ourselves. I ask the students to share how well they did at this goal.

I then ask students to write briefly about one of these questions:

*Do you now feel different about the emotion you wrote about?*

*Did writing and engaging with this prompt bring up any new awareness for you?*

*Was anything about this activity helpful or empowering?*

*If we did this activity again, what emotions would you choose to explore?*

* **Formative Assessment Checkpoint for Objective #3:**

*Objective:* Students reflect on a changed perspective this activity gave them on their emotions.

*Criteria:* Students share a new awareness these activities gave them about their emotions, or share a moment that surprised or affected them in sharing.

*Method/Tool:* Student reflection, with comments recorded on note sheet.

At the end of our time, I thank them for their honesty, courage, and energy in writing.