

Dialogue Poems

THEME: CULTURAL CONTEXTS (ANY)

LANGUAGE: ANY

STANDARDS: COMMUNICATION CULTURES CONNECTIONS COMPARISONS
1.2 1.3 2.1 3.1 3.2 4.1 4.2

Time Frame:

Two to five class sessions

Materials Needed:

- Sample of a dialogue poem (provided)
- Rubric for assessing poems (provided)

Description of Task:

Context:

A dialogue poem (see sample provided) offers an excellent opportunity to assess students' understanding of different perspectives on cultural themes. A dialogue poem reflects a dialogue between two people who represent different perspectives on a particular theme, issue, or topic. For example, in the sample provided, two women, one representing the peasant or working class and one representing the elite, discuss their experiences after the election of Salvador Allende as president of Chile and after his murder during the military coup in 1973.

Controversial themes such as the one portrayed in the sample poem work especially well, but dialogue poems also lend themselves well to any theme. For instance, a dialogue poem between a U.S. student and a target culture student discussing their birthday celebrations (or another holiday) provides a good way of getting at students' understanding of the different cultural perspectives.

In order for students to have the background knowledge necessary for writing dialogue poems, the teacher needs to provide them with multiple resources for exploring the perspectives during the pre-writing stage or to carry out a unit on a particular theme, then assign the dialogue poem as a culminating project at the end of the unit. Here we offer some examples of

Level:

Intermediate-Mid

Purpose:

To demonstrate an understanding of different perspectives on cultural themes

Communicative Function(s):

Imaginative: Creating poetry

Referential: Understanding descriptions; interpreting information

Language Structure(s):

First person singular form of various verb tenses

Cultural Aspects:

Distinct perspectives on a cultural theme

Modalities:

Reading

Writing

Dialogue

NOTES

themes that might be of interest and explain how a teacher might go about organizing pre-writing, writing, and post-writing activities.

Pre-Writing:

During the pre-writing stage, the teacher needs to provide students with input about the different perspectives by using e-mail exchanges, videotapes, magazines and other print material, websites, etc. (The Gender Roles unit offers a detailed example of how to go about this exploration). This stage may last from one class session to several weeks depending upon the depth of the exploration. It is also important during the pre-writing stage to generate lists of potentially useful vocabulary and to review or introduce particular grammatical forms that will be necessary for creating the poems. The first-person singular forms of various verb tenses, for example, are likely to emerge in most dialogue poems. Subtle differences in language (and punctuation) should also be discussed. For example, in the sample poem, the elite woman says “We had to eat rice,” while the working class woman says “We had rice.” The teacher should discuss these differences with students; how might the subtle differences in language and punctuation cue differences in intonation when the poem is read?

Dialogue poems can take a variety of forms but should always be a reflection of different perspectives. These perspectives may be distinct due to cultural differences, social class differences (such as those demonstrated in the sample poem), gender or age differences, etc. They may be perspectives between two distinct cultures (e.g., U.S. and target culture, France and Canada, Spain and Mexico, etc.) or within a particular culture (e.g., Francophones and Anglophones in Quebec; Catalanes and Castillians in Barcelona, etc.). They can be reflective of modern times or historical times. The possibilities are endless! A variety of examples follow.

1. *Distinct perspectives between two cultures*—Cross-cultural perspectives in relationship to any number of themes could be explored by students through dialogue poems. Here are some examples that might work well:
 - U.S. and target culture teens dialogue about schools, drinking (legal ages; common behaviors among teens), leisure activities, tobacco use, driving, fashion, etc.
 - A target culture pet vs. a U.S. pet dialogue about their lives.
 - A French student and a Senegalese student discuss their daily activities.

2. *Distinct perspectives within a particular culture:*

French:

- A “Beur” (a child of a North African immigrant) adolescent and a French adolescent discuss conditions of their lives
- A Francophone and an Anglophone voice their views on the separatist movement in Quebec (or two Francophones with opposing views)

German:

- A “foreigner” born in Germany (but unable to gain citizenship) and a German citizen discuss reform of German citizenship laws
- A “West” German and an “East” German discuss government subsidies to former East Germany

Spanish:

- A “ladino” and an “indio” discuss land rights in Guatemala
- A Basque and a Spaniard discuss the separatist movement and terrorist actions in support of the movement
- An “illegal alien” and a representative of the INS discuss immigration law
- An avid fan of bullfights and an animal rights activist voice their opinions

Any target language:

- Teens show opposing viewpoints about a current debate in their school (e.g. a new dress code, random locker searches, a debate about removing a book from a required reading list in the school district)
- Two opposing voices discuss the “English-only” movement
- A teen from a rural area and a teen from an urban area discuss daily activities
- Two opposing voices express their thoughts on beauty pageants or other controversial topics in society

Writing:

Pairs of students should be assigned to write the dialogue poem based on the theme that the class has explored during the pre-writing stage. The teacher may choose to require multiple drafts and peer review activities fundamental to the process approach to writing (see the task entitled “Let’s go to Costa Rica!” in the section entitled “From Presentation to Creation” for a detailed explanation of all the stages in the process approach to writing).

Post-Writing:

The student pairs read or “perform” their dialogue poem for the class. They should practice prior to reading the poem aloud so that their intonation reflects the different perspectives in the poem. The teacher may want to audiotape the performances to facilitate assessment.

Assessment:

The teacher may choose to assess students’ poems with a multitrait rubric. While it is likely that the rubric will need to be fine-tuned to align more closely with the content of the poems, it may also be possible to use a more “generic” rubric such as the sample we provide.

Extensions:

Suggestions for adapting the task for various levels:

For beginning levels: The class could construct one joint dialogue poem with most of the background information on the perspectives presented in English.

For advanced levels: Students could create poems having multiple voices and perspectives around a particular cultural theme.

Other extensions:

The dialogue poems could be expanded into role plays.

Cultural extensions:

Students could be paired via e-mail with target culture keepals and write “on-line” dialogue poems.

References and Resources:

The dialogue poem “Two Women” has been reprinted with permission from: *Sojourners*

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Washington D. C. 20009
Phone: 202-328-8842 / 1-800-714-7474.

It appears in:

Bigelow, B., Christensen L., Karp, S., Miner, B., & Peterson, B. (Eds.).
(1994). *Rethinking our classrooms: Teaching for equity and justice* (pp. 112-113). Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools, Ltd.

Reflections:

“Dialogue Poems” Multitrait Rubric for Assessment

This rubric can be used by the teacher (and, with guidance) by other students to assess the students’ oral reading of the poems. Each reader is assigned a score (1, 2, 3, or 4) for each of the three categories. The maximum score is 12.

	Dialogue Reading of the Poem	Language Control	Content/Reflection of Distinct Perspectives
4	Pronunciation and intonation are level-appropriate and reflect subtle nuances suggested by the language; smooth and fluent speech; evident that readers rehearsed sufficiently before reading.	Excellent control of language; includes a wide range of well-chosen vocabulary; first person singular form is used accurately with multiple verb tenses.	Poem reflects distinct perspective quite well; it is clear that students put a lot of thought and effort into portraying the distinct perspectives based on information gathered.
3	Always intelligible, though one is aware of definite accent and lapses in intonation; some of the intonation seems to be lacking; speech mostly smooth; some hesitation and unevenness; some evidence that readers rehearsed before reading.	Good control of language; good range of relatively well-chosen vocabulary; some accurate use of first person singular form with several verb tenses.	Poem reflects distinct perspectives somewhat; it is clear that students put some thought and effort into portraying the distinct perspectives based on information gathered.
2	Pronunciation problems partially impede comprehensibility; speech is hesitant and jerky; appropriate intonation is lacking; rehearsal on the part of the readers not very evident.	Adequate control of language; limited vocabulary range; little accurate use of first person singular form with a limited number of verb tenses.	Poem does not reflect distinct perspectives very well, although it is evident that students made some attempts to portray the distinct perspectives based on information gathered.
1	Very difficult to understand because of pronunciation problems; speech is slow with many pauses; no attention to intonation; no evidence of rehearsal prior to reading.	Weak control of language; basic vocabulary choice with some words clearly lacking; inconsistent use of first person singular form with just one or two verb tenses.	Poem does not reflect distinct perspectives at all; no apparent attempts to portray the distinct perspectives based on information gathered.

Readers: _____

Total Score _____

Two Women

This poem was written by a working-class Chilean woman in 1973, shortly after Chile's socialist president, Salvador Allende, was overthrown. A U.S. missionary translated the work and brought it with her when she was forced to leave Chile. This is to be read by two people, one reading the bold-faced type and one reading the regular type.

I am a woman.

I am a woman.

I am a woman born of a woman whose man owned a factory.

I am a woman born of a woman whose man labored in a factory.

I am a woman whose man wore silk suits, who constantly watched his weight.

I am a woman whose man wore tattered clothing, whose heart was constantly strangled by hunger.

I am a woman who watched two babies grow into beautiful children.

I am a woman who watched two babies die because there was no milk.

I am a woman who watched twins grow into popular college students with summers abroad.

I am a woman who watched three children grow, but with bellies stretched from no food.

But then there was a man;

But then there was a man;

And he talked about the peasants getting richer by my family getting poorer.

And he told me of days that would be better, and he made the days better.

We had to eat rice.

We had rice.

We had to eat beans!

We had beans.

My children were no longer given summer visas to Europe.

My children no longer cried themselves to sleep.

And I felt like a peasant.

And I felt like a woman.

A peasant with a dull, hard, unexciting life.

Like a woman with a life that sometimes allowed a song.

And I saw a man.

And I saw a man.

And together we began to plot with the hope of the return to freedom.

I saw his heart begin to beat with hope of freedom, at last.

Someday, the return to freedom.

Someday freedom.

And then,

But then,

One day,

One day,

There were planes overhead and guns firing close by.

There were planes overhead and guns firing in the distance.

I gathered my children and went home.

I gathered my children and ran.

And the guns moved farther and farther away.

But the guns moved closer and closer.

And then, they announced that freedom had been restored!

And then they came, young boys really.

They came into my home along with my man.

They came and found my man.

Those men whose money was almost gone.

They found all of the men whose lives were almost their own.

And we all had drinks to celebrate.

And they shot them all.

The most wonderful martinis.

They shot my man.

And then they asked us to dance.

And they came for me.

Me.

For me, the woman.

And my sisters.

For my sisters.

And then they took us.

Then they took us,

They took us to dinner at a small, private club.

They stripped from us the dignity we had gained.

And they treated us to beef.

And then they raped us.

It was one course after another.

One after another they came after us.

We nearly burst we were so full.

Lunging, plunging — sisters bleeding, sisters dying.

It was magnificent to be free again!

It was hardly a relief to have survived.

The beans have almost disappeared now.

The beans have disappeared.

The rice — I've replaced it with chicken or steak.

The rice, I cannot find it.

And the parties continue night after night to make up for all the time wasted.

And my silent tears are joined once more by the midnight cries of my children.

And I feel like a woman again.

They say, I am a woman.

The period of rice and beans for the poor woman in the poem occurs after the election of the socialist, Salvador Allende, as president of Chile. Allende was elected in 1970. He was overthrown in a military coup in September 1973 after a long period of destabilization launched by the wealthy classes and supported by the U.S. government and U.S. corporations such as International Telephone and Telegraph. Along

with thousands of others, Allende was killed by the military. The coup, under the leadership of Gen. Augusto Pinochet, launched a period of severe hardship for the working and peasant classes. Although Chile currently has a civilian government, the military is still the country's most powerful institution. (See p. 184 for lesson ideas.)

Reflections:

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