

GRADE 8 English Language Arts Reading and Responding: Lesson 12

Read aloud to your students the material that is printed in **boldface type** inside the boxes. Information in regular type inside the boxes and all information outside the boxes should **not** be read to students. Possible student responses are included in parentheses after the questions.

Any directions that ask you to do something, such as to turn to a page or to hand out materials to students, will have an arrow symbol (\implies) by them.

Purpose of Lesson 12:

In this lesson, the tutor and students will

- read a poem,
- practice test-taking strategies,
- practice answering multiple-choice questions, and
- practice answering short-answer questions.

Equipment/Materials Needed:

- Student Worksheets Reading and Responding Lesson 12 – 1 and 12 – 2
- Pencils

Preparations before beginning Lesson 12:

- You will read aloud the poem “Lineage” found on page 129.

LESSON 12: Reading and Responding

Following your introductory remarks to students, say:

Today's lesson will help you strengthen your strategies or techniques for reading. If you are going to be a successful reader, you need to have a wide range of techniques. When you use these techniques every day, you make them habits. Those habits will help you to understand reading assignments in all your classes. Athletes practice. Musicians practice. Readers have to practice! You don't just wake up one morning knowing all these little tricks and techniques! You have to read and you have to read a lot of different things, in order to improve your techniques and strategies.

Today we will focus on the strategies you use when you read poetry. Some students complain that poetry is hard to read and to understand. It may be that those students just don't know what to do with a poem. They haven't practiced enough! Let's begin with the structure of a poem. Can you look at a reading passage and know it is a poem just by looking at it? Pause. (Response: yes)

Sure. A poem just looks different. Instead of sentences, you have lines. Instead of paragraphs, you have stanzas. Sometimes poems are shaped funny! Have you ever noticed that they look different? Pause. In fact, there are some poems in which the title is even longer than the poem! Poems sound different, too. Sometimes they rhyme. We like lines that rhyme because rhymes are easy on our brains. Poems have a rhythm. We like the rhythm because it allows us to *feel* the music of the poem.

Poets use language in a different way. They sometimes create images, sometimes tell stories, and sometimes explore feelings or ideas in new and different ways. Because they use language or words differently, they also use punctuation differently. By looking carefully at the punctuation marks, you may find some new tricks or techniques for reading poetry.

Reading a poem takes a lot of energy and effort!

⇒ Distribute Student Worksheet Reading and Responding Lesson 12 – 1.

Then say:

Look at your worksheet. Is this selection a poem? Pause. How can you tell?

(Response: It has lines; it has stanzas; it looks different.)

Some students may have difficulty explaining why it is a poem.

Poems are just not structured like a fictional or nonfictional selection. When you see that a reading assignment includes a poem, you know that you need to use your poem strategies or your poem tricks!

The first strategy focuses on punctuation. Punctuation marks are signals to us: a period means stop and a comma means pause. Look at this poem. Pause.

In the first stanza, there is a period at the end of every line. Right?

Pause.

Look at the second stanza. Pause. There is no punctuation at the end of line one, line two, or line three. Therefore, you will read on without stopping or pausing until the end of the fourth line.

Please read the poem silently now.

Pause to allow students time to complete the task.

Say:

As you read the poem, did you notice a particular line that was repeated several times? Pause.

(Response: Yes, my grandmothers were strong.)

The poet repeats the line “my grandmothers were strong” three times. Repetition is one way poets use language to convey their thoughts. By repeating the line, the poet makes sure the reader knows what she thinks about her grandmothers.

Say:

Now, let's read the poem together.

It will probably take two or more readings of the poem for students to develop the rhythm of reading aloud.

If you have students who are willing, allow them to read the poem aloud.

Another technique successful poetry readers use is to identify the speaker. You have heard your teacher talk about “the speaker in the poem.” What exactly does “the speaker” mean? Pause.

The *speaker in the poem* is the voice that the poet creates to deliver his or her message. Sometimes the speaker is the poet directly. Other times, the poet creates a character to communicate the message. You, the reader, need to figure out who the speaker is. That early identification will help you to understand the poem.

So, who is the speaker in this poem? Pause.

(Response: most likely, the poet herself)

This poem is pretty straight-forward. She is writing about her grandmothers.

Then say:

You already have a couple of strategies to use when reading a poem...remember to look at the punctuation closely. You look and listen for repetition or rhyme. Then you figure out who the speaker is. All these steps are important to understanding the poem. You have to practice using them.

Here's one more technique that can help you to understand a poem. It is called paraphrasing. *Paraphrasing* simply means putting the poem into your own words.

Say:

When you translate the poet’s words into your words, you are able to understand the poem more fully. Who is willing to paraphrase the first stanza?

Pause. If no one volunteers, you paraphrase it.

(Response: The grandmothers worked hard in the fields, plowing and planting.)

Paraphrasing is simply another tool for helping you to understand the poem.

Now that you have a better understanding of how to read a poem, let’s focus on responding to a poem. Today you will respond by answering some multiple-choice questions and some short-answer questions.

Just as you develop techniques for reading and understanding a poem, you develop techniques for reading and understanding the questions.

What techniques could or should you use for multiple-choice questions? Pause.

(Possible responses: read the question carefully; read all the answer choices carefully; eliminate those answers that you know are wrong.)

What techniques do you use when answering the short-answer questions? Pause.

(Possible responses: read the question carefully; identify the key word or phrase; write in complete sentences; write legibly.)

There’s just a lot to do and remember when you are a successful reader and a successful “question answerer”! The demands are why all this practice is necessary.

⇒ Distribute Student Worksheet Reading and Responding Lesson 12 – 2.
Every student will need a pencil.

Say:

Let's continue practicing being a successful reader. Start by quickly reading over the questions.

Pause to allow time for students to read.

Students should not be attempting to answer questions yet.

Why do you think it is important to read over the questions first?

Pause.

(Response: so I will know what to look for; to help me answer them)

Yes, to help you be prepared more fully to answer the questions completely. Some students just jump right in and start trying to answer the questions without really knowing what the question says! Make it a habit to read through the questions first.

One more suggestion for success: before you start answering the questions, read the poem one more time. Then answer the questions.

Students may read silently or you may choose to have the group read in unison.

Allow time for students to respond to the questions.

Then say:

We are going to go over these questions; you check your responses. It is important for you to understand why an answer is correct. It is also important for you to understand why an answer is incorrect.

Number one. "The poet writes, 'They followed plows and bent to toil.' What does *toil* mean?"

What is the correct response?

(Response: Choice B: work.)

How did you know the answer was Choice B: work? Pause.

(Response: They are out in the fields with the plows; a person does not dance, cook, or sew behind a plow.)

Number two asked you to explain the expression *sowing seed*. *Sowing seed* is not a real common expression in this day and age. Will somebody share his or her response?

(Response: *Sowing seed* means to plant or to scatter seed in the fields.)

Yes, you had to realize where the grandmothers were – in the fields – in order to answer question two.

Say:

What does the speaker regret?

Will someone share a response to question three?

(Possible response: The speaker regrets that she is not so strong as her grandmothers.)

Where in the poem do you find that answer? Pause.

(Response: Several times in the poem the poet comments about how strong the grandmothers are; and then in the last line, she asks the question “Why am I not as they?”)

Good job. Let’s do number four. “Which of the following is the best way to read and understand the poem?”

Which answer did you choose?

(Response: Choice B: read it several times.)

Yes, answer Choice B: read it several times. What about Choices A, C, and D? Pause.

(Response: They were just wrong; they were silly.)

However, be sure that you read all the answer choices, even the silly ones!

Say:

Number five. What could you tell about the grandmothers from this poem?

(Response: Choice C: They were sturdy and self-confident.)

Are either of those words – sturdy or self-confident – in the poem?

Pause. (Response: no)

So, how did you know to choose Answer C?

(Response: *Sturdy* means strong; the poet says they are strong; they were not weak and fragile, sickly and confined, or old and wrinkled.)

Good job. Be sure that you continue to practice these techniques and strategies. Use them in all your classes and on all your assignments! Make using these techniques, strategies, and tricks a habit!

Student Worksheet Reading and Responding Lesson 12 – 1

LINEAGE

Margaret Walker Alexander

My grandmothers were strong.
They followed plows and bent to toil.
They moved through fields sowing seed.
They touched earth and grain grew.
They were full of sturdiness and singing.
My grandmothers were strong.

My grandmothers are full of memories
Smelling of soap and onions and wet clay
With veins rolling roughly over quick hands
They have many clean words to say.
My grandmothers were strong.
Why am I not as they?

*“Lineage” by Margaret Walker Alexander from
For My People, copyright© 1942 by Yale
University Press, New Haven Connecticut. Used
by permission.*

Student Worksheet Reading and Responding Lesson 12 – 2

NAME _____

1. The poet writes, “They followed plows and bent to *toil*.” What does *toil* mean?
 - A. dance
 - B. work
 - C. cook
 - D. sew

2. “They moved through the fields *sowing seed*.” Explain the expression *sowing seed*.

3. According to this poem, what does the speaker regret?

4. Which of the following is the best way to read and understand the poem?
 - A. Read it quickly and get it over with.
 - B. Read it several times to get the meaning and message.
 - C. Skim it; it’s not necessary to read every word.
 - D. Read only the first and last lines of each stanza.

5. What can you tell about the grandmothers from this poem?
 - A. They were weak and fragile.
 - B. They were sickly and confined.
 - C. They were sturdy and self-confident.
 - D. They were old and wrinkled.