

Poetry Island
by
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This is an activity that I pieced together from suggestions on the NCTE-Talk listserv. It is a poetry unit that gets students to read a variety of poems, learn some new terms, talk about poems using the new terms learned, and have a little fun with poetry. My ninth grade students seemed to enjoy the activity and were very engaged with poetry for the week we spent on this unit. The activity comes from the “reality” television shows that are currently popular, such as “Survivor” and “Temptation Island.” I spent part of a 90-minute block class on this activity for six or seven days.

Poetry Island is basically a competition for students to find a great poem. Each day the class votes weaker poems off of the island. Poems can be granted immunity each day if they meet certain criteria. The last poem wins. It’s pretty simple, but the students like it and they learn something about poetry.

Materials

You will need some butcher paper (green or decorated to look like an island), a list of poetry terms and definitions of these terms, and access to lots of poems.

Procedures

Preparation:

Create a huge “island” from the butcher paper. Decorate it to look like an island and label it “Poetry Island.” Divide the island in two to have room for two teams. I have two English classes so I made each class a team. Post the island on the wall.

Day One

Students are given the handout describing the project (see the attachment below). You may choose to give them the poetry terms and definitions before looking for the perfect poems or later. Both ways work. Students work in pairs as they look through books to find the perfect poem. (In my class some looked for poems that they really liked while some just went straight to the list of terms and found a poem that exhibited many poetry terms.)

When students find a poem that they like, they copy it onto their own paper and tape it up on the island.

Students sign up to teach a poetry term to the class. They receive information about their term and a day to teach it.

Day Two and Following:

Each day students teach the class about their poetry term. After each person teaches the term, the class decides which poems on the island exhibit that term. If a poem demonstrates the poetry term taught, it receives immunity that day. After each term has been taught that day, the class votes for the poem they want to leave the island. Eventually there is only one poem remaining and that poem is declared winner and kept on the board. Note: I was sure to point out that just because a poem didn’t win doesn’t mean it’s a bad poem; I did not want students to think that only poems that exhibit many different poetic devices are good poems.

Evaluation

After the winning poem is decided, I ask students to write their own poems. Volunteers are then asked to read their poems, and I ask students to comment on poems using some of the terms just learned. They were able to move beyond “That was *good*” to comments such as, “I liked the way that poem *rhymed*” and “that poem was *free verse* because it didn’t *rhyme* or have *rhythm*.” After talking about student poetry and reading other poems and discussing them using the terms learned, I gave a poetry quiz. The quiz had two poems and all of the poetry terms listed. I asked students to write about each poem using at least four poetry terms.

Attachment

Poetry Island

We are beginning a unit on poetry. In this unit, you will select and critique poetry, learn poetic terminology, and have a chance to have a little fun. Here is what you will do:

After reviewing the poetry terms, find a poem that you think is really good. You may use the books I have brought into class, a poem you know of personally, or any of the poems I have read in class so far. This poem will be placed on the poetry island and hopefully will win the poetry island contest.

Each day, students will teach new terms from the poetry terms sheet. Each poem from the island will then be checked to see whether or not it represents the terms learned that day. Each poem that represents the poetic terms taught will be safe from being voted off the island that day (they will receive immunity). The rest of the poems will then face a vote each day and some will be voted off. Hopefully, if you picked a good poem, you will win the grand prize.

When your poem is voted off the island, you will need to write a paragraph in response. Do you think it is fair that your poem was voted off? Why was yours better than others? Do you agree with the vote? If your poem wins, you will not need to write this paragraph.

Finally, the class will have a quiz on the terms learned in this unit, so teach them well.

Good luck! I hope your poem wins.