

Sticks and Stones: Using Emotions From Bullying To Create Stronger Figurative Language

Author

Steve Haslam
English & Creative Writing
Copper Hills High School
West Jordan, UT

Time

60-90 Minutes

Grades

9-12

Subjects

English; Creative Writing

The Big Question

How do I get my students to use stronger figurative language in their writing?

Context/Hypothesis

After being exposed to and learning the basic elements of poetry, students of creative writing can eventually become better writers by developing strategies for creating stronger figurative language. By focusing on metaphors specifically, students will learn to look for unique comparisons that will strengthen their use of imagery and descriptive detail. Using the topics of bullying and depression to pluck at the heartstrings of students, the teacher can engage students to use either the memory of bullying or the desire to stop future incidents as subjects for a good poem. As students use emotions from example poems and their own experiences to write a stronger poem, they will cultivate their ability to create stronger writing.

Research

Behn, Robin. (1992). *The Practice of Poetry: Writing Exercises From Poets Who Teach* Harper Collins.

- “I want to engender a sense of how individual and how essentially solitary our relation to words is, and to elicit responses that testify to a fundamental diversity of experience.”

Damico, James S. (2005) *Evoking Hearts and Heads: Exploring Issues of Social Justice through Poetry*. National Council of Teachers of English

- “Students who initially thought poetry as "sappy" have somehow changed their perceptions as they begin to learn more about it. Through various poems, these students came to see how poetry can be a catalyst for a provocative inquiry

question.”

Ruurs, Margaret. (2000). *The Power of Poems: Teaching the Joy of Writing Poetry*. Maupin House Publishing, Inc.

- “At first, language is the only tool they need to write poems: lots of words to describe their thoughts and feelings—words that enable them to see something in a new light. Poetic language comes naturally to children and many will already be using concepts of which they do not know the technical terms or definitions.”

Schugar, Jordan T. (2008). *Metaphor Instruction in One English Teacher's Classroom: His Understandings, Instructional Practices, and Attitudes*. J ProQuest.

- “Their research suggests that when teaching metaphors, students may be able to comprehend and apply complex metaphors when they are accompanied by some illustration. However, as high school poetry and prose are rarely accompanied by pictures, teachers would either have to find a picture similar to what the literature suggests, or, have students create their own before making an attempt to comprehend and interpret a metaphor.”

Objectives

1. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound–letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
2. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
3. Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.
4. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.
5. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

Materials Needed

Multi-colored index cards or multi-colored cardstock (3 colors)

Copies of “To This Day” By Shane Koyczan (Koy-Zan)

Youtube or downloaded version of animated “To This Day” By Shane Koyczan

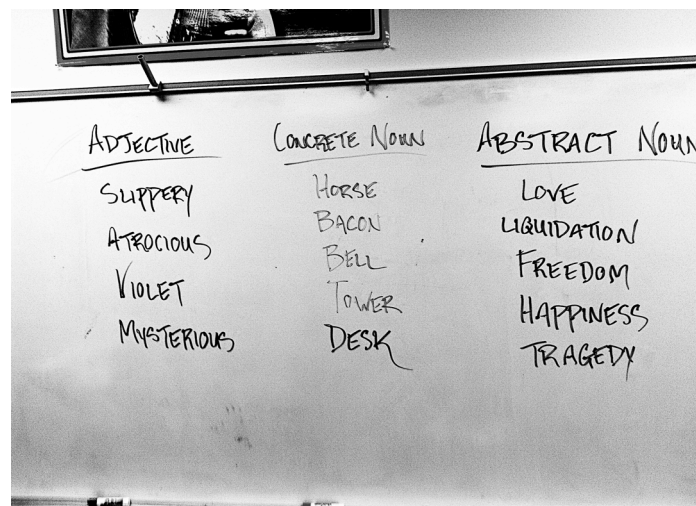
Optional Powerpoint or Smartboard Version of Info

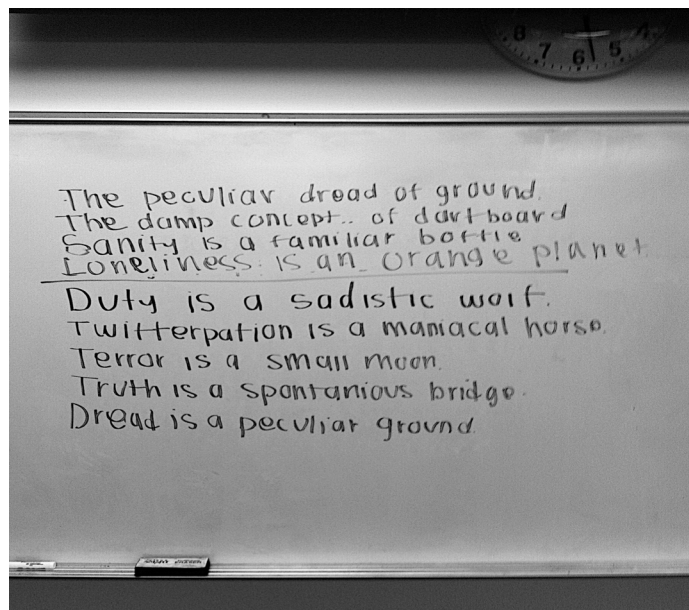
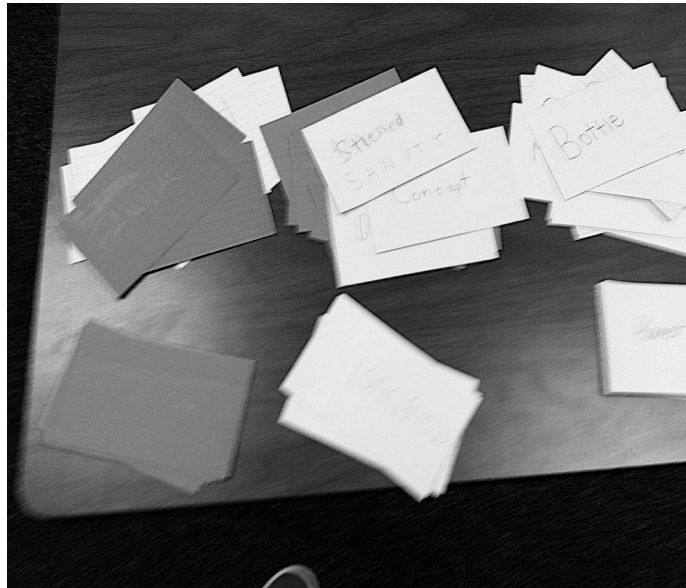
Markers/Markerboard

Optional “Make it Stop” music video by Rise Against

Building Stronger Metaphors Activity (20 Mins)

1. Pass out one index card of each color to all of the students.
2. Review briefly the purpose of/define an adjective. Call on students to provide examples. Write them on the board. Encourage students to use strong, vivid, colorful words i.e. blue, squeaky, slimy, sacred, and transparent.
3. Have the students choose one adjective and write it on the first, colored card.
 - a. Walk around and make sure students are writing the correct forms on their cards. Collect the cards, shuffle them, and place them on a desk or table at the front of the room.
4. Next, briefly review/define concrete nouns. Have students come up with a few good concrete nouns and write them on the board. i.e. shovel, mountain, cape, sock etc.
5. Have the students pick one concrete noun of their own and write it on the 2nd card.
 - a. Walk around and make sure students are writing the correct forms on their cards. Collect the cards, shuffle them, and place them next to the first stack at the front of the room.
6. Next, briefly review/define abstract nouns. Have students come up with a few examples and write them on the board. i.e. beauty, sadness, fear.
7. Have the students pick one abstract noun of their own and write it on the 2nd card.
 - a. Walk around and make sure students are writing the correct forms on their cards. Collect the cards, shuffle them, and place them next to the first stack at the front of the room.
8. Have one student at a time come forward and pick up a card from each stack. The three can be used in order to create a metaphor. i.e. The blue mountain of fear. Or backwards i.e. Beauty is a sacred shovel.
9. Go over the examples on the board with the class. Discuss why each one may or may not surprisingly work as a metaphor or line in a poem. How can beauty be a sacred shovel? Why not.





The Sticks & Stones Bullies Use (20 Mins)

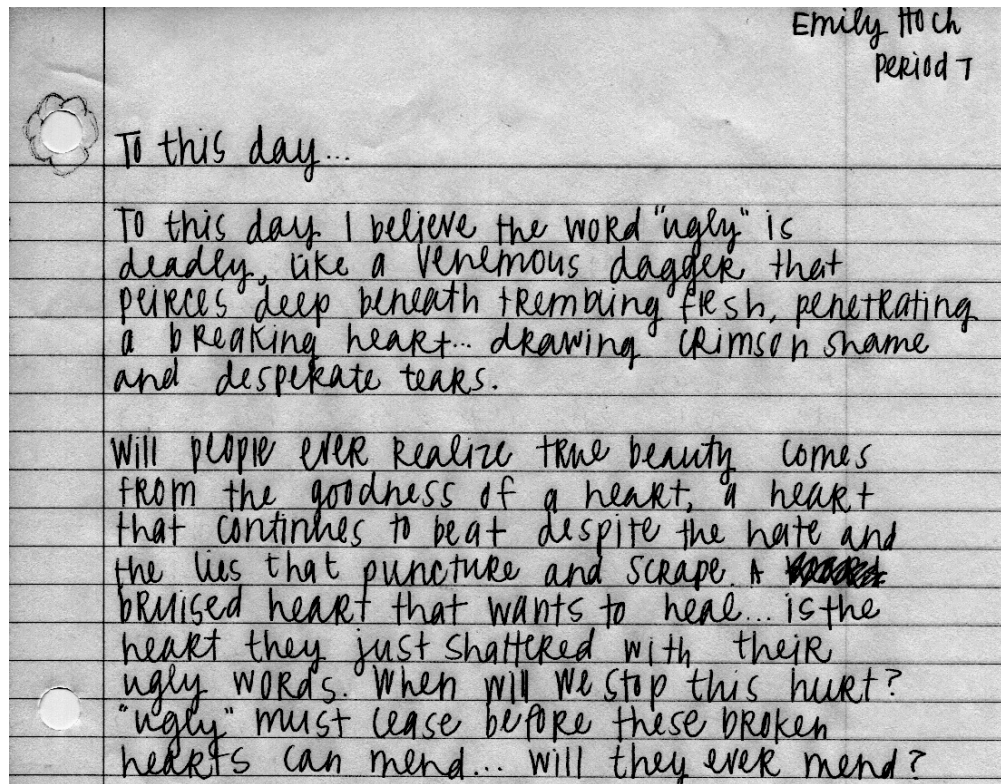
Pass out copies of "To This Day" By Shane Koyczan

1. Inform the class that you will be looking at the poem "To This Day" By Shane Koyczan. Ask the students to look for metaphors that stand out to them as being particularly interesting when it comes to Bullying.
2. Watch the Youtube animated video of "To This Day" with the class.

3. Discuss the poem with the students.
 - a. What stood out to you?
 - b. How did it make you feel etc?
4. Have the students write responses to the following statements and questions:
 - a. Think of events from your childhood. Specifically, think of things you got into or did that maybe you got in trouble for.
 - i. Ex – I wasn't much of a rebel child by any means. If I got in trouble, it was usually for coming home too late or throwing fruit or snowballs at neighbors' homes or passing cars. Now, there was a cul-de-sac next to the home where I grew up. In this cul-de-sac there were four homes and an empty, inclined lot covered in oak trees. We used this forest just as Robin Hood would, for base and for battle. If we were playing 'war,' it was real. We had tree houses, large pits, sticks, stones, and water. People got hurt.
 - b. Now think of similar events, or more specifically things you did that maybe this poem specifically reminded you of. Write them down. Maybe make a list of two, three, or five.
 - i. Ex – I would buy flowers, lotion, CD's, or write poems for girls that I thought were cute. They always took the goods, but found different ways of rejecting me. Once a girl responded by buying me a combo pack of a comb, some cheap cologne, and some binaca. I was bullied through rejection.
 - c. Now, I want you to write down names that you were called.
 - i. Ex – ugly, brace face, lurpy, lurch, lanky, different, butter-fingers, hands like a frying pan, stevie wonder, wonder boy.
 - d. With these names, write down how you received them; what happened that made people decide on this name.
 - i. Ex – For me, I was always tall and super skinny. That's how the lurch, lurpy, things came. My family called me Stevie until I was like 15. I've always been shaky.
 - e. Lastly, I want you to write down how this made you feel. What emotions were stirred up as a result.
 - i. Ex – depressed, unwanted, unattractive, alone, different
5. Now, alluding to the metaphor technique from the activity earlier, instruct the students to create a metaphor with those emotions. Make a metaphor about how you felt in that scenario.
 - a. This can be as simple as adjective, concrete noun. Abstract noun, or an extended metaphor.
 - i. Ex – Rejection is a harsh silence.
6. Have the students share the metaphors with their groups.
7. Each group must then pick the best metaphor from each group to share.
8. Instruct the students to now think of a specific event from their past involving bullying.
9. Have the students look back at the poem "To This Day"

- a. Look for specific parts or lines from the poem, which talk about ways in which Shane and or his friend were bullied.
10. Ask the students to think about the images used in the animation. What kind of images would you try to use in a poem about bullying?
 - a. (Optional) Have students watch the film with no sound.
11. Have the students write down a specific event in their past that included bullying.
 - a. Ex –
12. Have the students write down a few things they would do to make them feel better.
 - a. Ex – Listen to music etc.
13. Instruct the students to write their own “To This Day” poem. Potential starting lines to help them get started can include: “To This Day, When I Was a Kid, I would,...
14. After 20 minutes or so of writing, invite students to share.

Results



Bret
Anderson

To This day life has moved toward clearer
days never once did I think cuts and
scars were the roads that we drive.
Avenues to the core of being, showing
now more and more that you are strong
Pain is the barbed book you are
charged to read, and you do. You
flip the pages like the sea eats the
beach. Erasing brutally the useless of
great once gone by.

To this day

I shop one size fits all
I fold my arms and hold my waist
because 'fat' was not the only weight
-insult for me.
Because words like 'stick' and 'eat'
and 'flat' kept me inside - That's -
where I sat.
Baggy clothes make me look bigger.
But my bones still showed despite
the deeply hidden emotions.
How come being 'fat' can be beautiful?
But being skinny means I have an
eating disorder?
Why are curves something to defend
and my metabolized tiny frame
something to be ashamed of?
My existence is background noise
and I am kept still, and silent.

To this day, I choose to
believe the words that are, were, and always
will be said to me.

I never fathomed what middle school could bring,
tears, anxiety and self loathing.
It didn't seem to be a problem,
I tried to laugh it off
but when you're called fat everyday
you begin to see changes in yourself
I isolate myself,
I don't want others opinion.
You tell me I'm beautiful,
you're lying

"Look at her picture!" I heard him yell.
Pages were turned
and laughter erupted in the classroom.
She is so ugly,
She is so quiet,
She is alone

I soon realize year books are useless,
they are filled with empty compliments
"It was great having a class with you!"
You never talked to me,
no one ever talks to me.

High school will be better,
I tell myself.
Lies are the grit of the world
and I could feel it between my teeth

Jasmine
Yard

What Would I Do Differently?

There were some students who said they had never been bullied or who acted as if the Koyczan poem didn't affect them. I would have used additional materials or images to reach the students, potentially using different emotions or past times for reaction writing.