



## POETRY WORKSHOP - IS THIS A POEM?

### IS THIS A POEM?

This is a session came out of a unit of work on poetry. The class had been doing philosophy for 16 weeks and were doing a unit of poetry in their English classes.

Ever since Socrates, philosophers have tried to define terms clearly and exhaustively. This has resulted in a good deal of rigour and precision. Philosophers often speak of 'necessary and sufficient conditions', or, what I call 'what's needed and what's enough'. The problem is: it's not easy to do. For instance, just try - as the 20th century philosopher Wittgenstein challenged us to do – to define, precisely, what a game is. It's not easy. There always seems to be an example of a game that escapes whatever definition you can come up with. Try it by yourself, with your colleagues/friends in the pub and with your class. Poetry and philosophy are two of the worst offenders when it comes to eluding clear and precise definitions.

A 'Thoughting' is a new kind of poetry for something that is not quite poetry and not quite philosophy whilst, at the same time, being both poetry and philosophy for the classroom. They are light-hearted exercises for the brain, or, études for the mind, (mostly) in verse.

Here is a Thoughting for you to use with your class for National Poetry Day.

First of all, an exercise for any age group with the slippery task of defining poetry. Read (or show) your class the following 'Thoughting':

#### **Stimulus**

“

Is  
This  
A  
Poem

”

#### **Task Question**

- ✓ Is this a poem?
- ✓ What is a poem?
- ✓ What does it need to have?
- ✓ What does it not need to have?

#### **Plan**

1. Record ideas as a mind map (some pupils suggestions: communicates feelings, story, describes, makes sense, teacher says so). Later we started circling ones that weren't necessary for it to be a poem.

#### **Use following examples to elicit more things for your mind map:**

- ✓ Show a plain piece of paper - Is this a poem?
- ✓ Write "Is this a poem? is there any way of knowing?" on a piece of paper. Rip it in half - is it still a poem? Throw it away - is it still a poem?
- ✓ Pretend to read it off an imaginary piece of paper, recite it from memory, recite it in your head, get them to recite it in their heads - is it a poem?
- ✓ Change it to a sentence: "Is this a poem? Is there any way We call tell?" - Is this a poem?
- ✓ Pick up a prose book open at a random page and show - Is this a poem?
- ✓ Read a bit as prose - Is this a poem?

- ✓ Read the same bit but as if it were poetry (difficult but illuminating) - Was that a poem?
- ✓ Copy the prose on to the board as rhyming or non-rhyming couplets(or any poem format, I guess) - *Is this a poem?*
- ✓ Read the couplets from the board as if they were prose - is this a poem?
- ✓ You don't actually need to use all these ideas but they're there for you to pick and choose from.

### **Extension Task:**

Following this split into groups of 5/6. Each group chooses their own word, based on philosophy they have done over the year:

- ✓ Reality
- ✓ Knowing
- ✓ Philosophy
- ✓ Fairness
- ✓ Happiness
- ✓ Freedom
- ✓ Friend(ship)
- ✓ Person
- ✓ Justice
- ✓ Nothing
- ✓ Time

Each group then has a peer facilitator who runs a 10 minute session eliciting a mind map for their given word.

Finally modelled an 'I wonder' poem based on David's ideas from TPS, incorporating their ideas from the mind map;



"I wonder what a poem is  
Does it have to rhyme?  
I wonder what poetry is  
Is it a story this time?"

I wonder what doing poetry is  
Do you need a pen?  
If Sir says 'That's no poem!'  
Should I start again?"



Then get the children to use the same format (but play around with it a bit!) to write their own poem using the mind map they were working on e.g.

I wonder what fairness is?

Is it...