

ELA: Grade 8, Lesson 6, *William Blake Part I*

Lesson Focus: The focus of today's lesson will be on William Blake and one of his poems, "The Fly."

Practice Focus: Students will analyze an informational text to determine the main ideas; students will also analyze one of Blake's poems using a strategy for unlocking its meaning.

Objective: Students will use "William Blake 1757-1827" and "The Fly" to learn about William Blake and one of his important poems with a focus on determining the main ideas in the texts as well as author's craft for creating meaning.

Academic Vocabulary: distinct, expression, engraver, radicals, veiled, retribution, connotation, personification, symbolism, melancholy, abstract

TN Standards: 8.RI.KID.1, 8.RI.KID.2, 8.RI.KID.3, 8.RI.CS.4, 8.RL.KID.1, 8.RL.KID.2, 8.RL.KID.3, 8.RL.CS.5, 8.RL.CS.6

Teacher Materials:

- Lesson script
- PowerPoint
- Chart paper
 - Will need to write out the TPCASTT template onto chart paper; you only need to include the headings for each section as the commentary will be covered in the script
 - Will need to write the independent practice questions on chart paper so students can see them and copy them onto their own paper

Student Materials:

- Paper, pencil, and a surface to write on

Teacher Do	Students Do
<p>Opening (1 min)</p> <p>Hello! Welcome to Tennessee's At Home Learning Series for literacy! Today's lesson is for all our 8th graders out there, though everyone is welcome to tune in. This lesson is the first in this series.</p> <p>My name is ____ and I'm a ____ grade teacher in Tennessee schools. I'm so excited to be your teacher for this lesson! Welcome to my virtual classroom!</p> <p>In this lesson set, we will be studying some very well-regarded and widely studied poets. We will learn about English poets William Blake and A.E. Housman as well as an American poet, Emily Dickinson. Poetry has been a powerful mode of writing in American and British history and our goal is to gain a deeper understanding of some of the most successful poets and how they impacted their respective societies.</p>	<p>Students gather materials for the lesson and prepare to engage with the lesson's content.</p>

<p>We will begin today by learning about William Blake and his poetry! Before we get started, to participate fully in our lesson today, you will need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper, pencil, and a surface to write on <p>Ok, let's begin!</p>	
<p>Intro (1 minute)</p> <p>Today our goal is to read an informational text, "William Blake 1757-1827," in order to understand important details about William Blake that will assist us in understanding his poetry. We will also take some time to learn a helpful tool for understanding poetry. I will guide you in learning how to use this tool and you will practice with one of Blake's poems, "The Fly."</p> <p>We will begin with me reading the short text as a whole and then we will reread it and pause along the way for deeper understanding.</p> <p>At the end of the lesson, I will assign you independent work that you can complete after the video ends.</p>	<p>Students listen to the teacher's introduction.</p>
<p>Teacher Model/Read-Aloud (15 minutes)</p> <p>Now, let's dig in to the first text we will be studying, which is a brief introduction to William Blake's life and work. The title of the informational text is "William Blake, 1757-1827," which of course indicates his life span and that he lived to be approximately 70 years of age. The author is not listed for this text so we will simply refer to him/her as "the author." Let's read the text:</p> <p>"From the time he was a child, William Blake had a distinct, or unique, way of looking at the world. As a young boy, he returned from a walk in the country to tell his parents that he had seen "a tree filled with angels." And this type of creative expression, or communication, likely paved the way for his poetic future. Blake began writing poetry within a few years of that incident. His first printed work, Poetical Sketches, was published in 1783.</p> <p>In addition to being a poet, Blake was also a skilled painter and engraver. An engraver is someone who inscribes something onto an object. He frequently worked for London booksellers engraving illustrations for books and magazines. Through this work, he also made connections to other people who were making waves in the literary and political movements of the time.</p>	<p>Students follow along, comprehending the text. They use teacher think-alouds and tips (e.g., definitions of words) to support their comprehension, and they think or write as directed in response to prompts and questions.</p>

Living in England at the time of Britain's war with the American colonies, Blake often addressed political topics in his work. He took a stance, or opinion, against King George and his country's treatment of the colonists and sided with radicals like Thomas Paine. A radical is someone who supports complete reform. Much of Blake's work also addressed religious and spiritual themes. Even his works that some people view as simple and childlike, such as *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*, contain veiled, or partially hidden, criticisms of society.

During his life, Blake did not become well known as a poet among the general population, and was actually more highly regarded as an engraver. His work as a poet grew in popularity after his death. He continues to be well respected as a poet and an artist today."

Now that you have a big picture view of the text, let's revisit the text paragraph by paragraph so we can analyze it at a deeper level.

"From the time he was a child, William Blake had a distinct way of looking at the world. As a young boy, he returned from a walk in the country to tell his parents that he had seen "a tree filled with angels." And this type of creative expression likely paved the way for his poetic future."

Notice that the author uses the word "distinct" to describe Blake's way of viewing the world. Based on the context, what is a word or phrase that would be similar in meaning to "distinct." Take a moment to think and write your answer on your paper. Be sure to include a detail from the text that supports your answer.

(Pause for 30 seconds)

Did you write "unique" or "different" or "specific"? Or something else similar? That is indeed the meaning of "distinct" in this context. Let's take 30 seconds and practice using this word in a sentence. In 1-2 sentences, describe someone you know who is unique and creative. Be sure to use the word "distinct" and to include precise detail of that person.

(Pause for 1 minute)

Excellent work! Let's revisit a sentence we read earlier.

“And this type of creative *expression* likely paved the way for his poetic future.”

What does the author mean when he/she uses the word “expression” here? Using context clues from what we have read, write down a word or phrase that captures its meaning. Be sure to include a detail from the text that supports your answer.

(Pause 30 seconds)

If you said “communication” or “assertion” or “statement,” you are capturing the meaning used by this author. Let’s take a look at the next 2 sentences.

“Blake began writing poetry within a few years of that incident. His first printed work, *Poetical Sketches*, was published in 1783.”

Now, we have already learned that Blake was distinctly creative and that this creativity led him to write poetry. Based on what you know about poetry, why do you think Blake was particularly drawn to this type of writing? Write your answer on your paper.

(Pause 30 seconds)

Yes! One of the unique aspects of poetry is that it is non-literal. You are allowed plenty of latitude, or freedom, with the words you choose and how you use them. This is much different than someone who writes informational texts where the purpose is to communicate something directly and precisely. With poetry, there are no rules! This type of writing would therefore be very attractive to someone uniquely creative like William Blake.

Let’s revisit paragraph 2:

“In addition to being a poet, Blake was also a skilled painter and *engraver*. He frequently worked for London booksellers engraving illustrations for books and magazines.”

Based on the context, what do you think the word “engraver” means here?

(Pause)

If you thought “someone who inscribes something onto an object,” you are correct. Note that during this time, books and magazines would have had illustrations much more complex in their creation than the prints we see today.

Let’s keep reading.

“Through this work, he (Blake) also made connections to other people who were making waves in the literary and political movements of the time.”

When you hear the phrase “made connections with other people who were making waves in the literary and political movements of the time,” how might this be significant for Blake (knowing what we know so far)? Take a moment and write your answer on your paper.

(Pause for 30 seconds)

You may have said that it might create opportunities for him to express his creativity in more professional settings. That’s absolutely right. Making connections is an important step in finding opportunities in the professional world.

Let’s keep reading.

“Living in England at the time of Britain’s war with the American colonies, Blake often addressed political topics in his work. He took a *stance* against King George and his country’s treatment of the colonists and sided with *radicals* like Thomas Paine.”

Based on the context, what do you think the term “radicals” means here? Write your answer on your paper and include evidence from the text.

(Pause for 30 seconds)

You may have said “someone who is extreme in their beliefs.” That is certainly part of the meaning here. But there is a nuance, or subtle difference in meaning, that is not as easily noticeable. The term “radicals” in the political sense does not necessarily mean “extreme” as we often understand it. It can also simply mean someone who differs greatly from the established political or religious system. It would really therefore depend on your perspective. Both the “radicals” and the established groups just have different ideas but neither would necessarily be extreme!

<p>Let's see how Blake's work fits into this by continuing reading.</p> <p>"Much of Blake's work also addressed religious and spiritual themes. Even his works that some people view as simple and childlike, such as <i>Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience</i>, contain <i>veiled</i> criticisms of society."</p> <p>Some of you may be unfamiliar with the term "veiled." When we look at the root word, "veil," you may recall that a veil is a headpiece that can be worn to partially conceal someone's face. It has a very similar meaning here. Considering this is an adjective that describes his criticisms, what do you think the author means when he/she says Blake's work contained "veiled criticisms of society"? Why do you think Blake would express criticism in this way? We'll pause and let you write your answer on your paper.</p> <p>(Pause for 1 minute)</p> <p>You may have written that "veiled" criticism might mean "partly hidden" or "indirect" criticism, and that Blake may have been careful not to draw attention to himself or his opinions for fear that those in power might take revenge on him. It could also be that this is his preferred mode of expression, or communication, since he writes poetry, which as we mentioned earlier, is indirect by nature.</p> <p>Let's take a look at the last paragraph.</p> <p>"During his life, Blake did not become well known as a poet among the general population, and was actually more highly regarded as an engraver. His work as a poet grew in popularity after his death. He continues to be well respected as a poet and an artist today."</p> <p>It is often the case that someone becomes more famous after they have died. In Blake's case, as the text states, his poetry and his artistry are what he is remembered for the most.</p> <p>Now that we have a solid understanding of Blake's life and work, let's take a brief look at one of his poems.</p>	
<p>Guided Practice (10 minutes)</p> <p>This poem by Blake is called "The Fly." We are only going to do an initial read right now as we will take a deeper look into it shortly. Let's read the poem.</p>	<p>Students follow along and think and act as instructed, gradually gaining confidence and competence.</p>

<p>The Fly</p> <p>Little fly, Thy summer's play My thoughtless hand Has brushed away.</p> <p>Am not I A fly like thee, meaning a fly like you? Or art not thou, meaning or are you not A man like me?</p> <p>For I dance And drink and sing Till some blind hand Shall brush my wing.</p> <p>If thought is life And strength and breath, And the want Of thought is death,</p> <p>Then am I A happy fly, If I live, Or if I die.</p> <p>This is a really unique poem that contains layers of meaning. Remember that poetry is communicating meaning both directly and indirectly. It is a difficult genre of literature to analyze, which is why we are going to use a tool to help us do it. Let's take a look at this tool before we dig into the poem deeper.</p> <p>It is important to pay attention here as your independent practice will include you using this tool. Let's get started. The tool is called TPCASTT.</p> <p>(display TPCASTT template for students to see)</p> <p>Notice that each of the sections begins with the respective letter in the acronym:</p> <p>T = Title P = Paraphrase C = Connotation A = Attitude/Tone</p>	<p>Students will be able to use the TPCASTT tool to analyze poetry.</p>
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S = Shift(s)

T = Title (Revisiting the Title)

T = Theme

Let's create a fresh template so you can practice on it. On a clean sheet of paper, sketch 7 sections going down your paper like the one I'm showing you. Don't worry about labeling yet as I will go over each section individually. Your template does not need to look fancy or perfect. Just give yourself enough room in each section to take notes. It is important to take notes on what goes in each section so you will know how to complete them.

(Pause for 30 seconds)

Now, let's talk about each section. Each of these sections should be completed in sequential order. Label your first section "Title." You may want to make a note that in this section, your goal is to consider the title of the poem and to make a prediction about what the poem is about. Poets are very intentional, or purposeful, about how they label their poems. There are always very important clues to the poem's meaning in the title, which is why it is a great place to start. For what reasons might the author have chosen the title, "The Fly"? Take a moment to jot down your thoughts about the title of this poem.

(pause for 30 seconds)

Excellent job! In my notes, I wrote down that the title "The Fly" helps us to focus on the importance of something we might not consider that often. Maybe he plans to say something about a fly that will surprise us. Remember that at this point we are just making guesses about why he chose it.

Let's read the poem again before we begin the next section. Pay close attention as you will be paraphrasing the poem after we read it.

(read the poem)

The Fly

**Little fly,
Thy summer's play
My thoughtless hand
Has brushed away.**

Students sketch template on paper and label sections as directed.

Students complete sections of the template as directed.

Am not I

A fly like thee, meaning a fly like you?

Or art not thou, meaning or are you not

A man like me?

For I dance

And drink and sing

Till some blind hand

Shall brush my wing.

If thought is life

And strength and breath,

And the want

Of thought is death,

Then am I

A happy fly,

If I live,

Or if I die.

Ok, let's try the next section in TPCASTT, "Paraphrase." Here the goal is to write *in your own words* exactly what happens in the poem. You are trying to write down what the poem says literally, on the surface, not its many layers of meaning. This is really a simple paraphrase. Take a few moments to paraphrase what you remember in the poem.

(pause for 30 seconds)

Great job! In my notes, I have the following as a brief paraphrase:

A small fly was simply flying about and I carelessly brushed it away, maybe killed it. I asked myself what the difference was between the fly and me. We do a lot of the same things and humans die like flies do. If there isn't much difference, can I be happy if alive or dead?

Can you see that I kept my paraphrase casual and simple? I am simply trying to capture the literal ideas I find.

Let's try the next section, "Connotation." Remember that "connotation" means "an idea or feeling that a word invokes in addition to its literal meaning." Here is where we start to dig a bit deeper. We're looking for meaning beyond the literal. Poets use a lot of tools to do this, including figurative language, or non-literal language, imagery, sound devices, word choice, etc. Some of the most common figurative

language devices are simile, metaphor, personification, which is when a thing such as an idea or animal is given human characteristics, and symbolism, which is the use of symbols to represent ideas. Did you notice any of these present in this poem on the first or second reads? Let's read through the poem again. Look for any of these elements and take notes on your paper. You are not trying to capture every single one - only the ones that you think are the most important to understanding the meaning of the poem.

(read the poem)

The Fly

Little fly,
Thy summer's play
My thoughtless hand
Has brushed away.

Am not I
A fly like thee, meaning a fly like you?
Or art not thou, meaning or are you not
A man like me?

For I dance
And drink and sing
Till some blind hand
Shall brush my wing.

If thought is life
And strength and breath,
And the want
Of thought is death,

Then am I
A happy fly,
If I live,
Or if I die.

I will pause a moment to allow you to finish your notes.

(pause 30 seconds)

Here are some things that I noticed. First, I noticed that the author is telling the poem from the speaker's, which is the human's, point of view and not the fly's point of view. This helps the reader to remain in the mindset of the human reflecting on his/her relationship to the fly. I also noted the

speaker's use of the word "play" in line 2. All humans can relate to play and understand its importance. They can also make an easy connection to a fly's behavior being similar to play. It establishes the connection between human and fly right away. There are a number of other things but I think you understand what is being asked for this section.

Let's take a look at the next section, "Attitude." In this section, we are trying to figure out the speaker's attitude or tone of the poem. Is it humorous? Sarcastic? In awe? Jot down on your paper some adjectives that you think capture the speaker's tone in this poem.

(pause 30 seconds)

I wrote down in my notes, "reflective," "somber," and "melancholy," which means a feeling of thoughtful sadness. Remember that the tone is an important tool that the poet uses to affect how you as the reader are interpreting the poem.

Let's look at the next section, "Shift." Most poems have a shift, though it may be subtle. It is the moment that there is a realization or a change in something. Look for key shift words like "but," "however," "though," or "although." There could also be punctual changes such as commas, periods, ellipses, semicolons, line breaks, etc.

Let's read the text once again to see where we can identify a shift.

(read the poem)

The Fly

Little fly,
Thy summer's play
My thoughtless hand
Has brushed away.

Am not I
A fly like thee, meaning a fly like you?
Or art not thou, meaning or are you not
A man like me?

For I dance
And drink and sing
Till some blind hand

Shall brush my wing.

If thought is life
And strength and breath,
And the want
Of thought is death,

Then am I
A happy fly,
If I live,
Or if I die.

As you hear the text, where do you hear a shift? Take a few moments and write down on your paper where the shift happens and what you think it means.

(pause 1 minute)

Thank you. In my notes, I marked that I think the shift happens when the author moves from observation and reflection, like he's thinking "the fly behaves similar to me, is it not like me?" to a more abstract, or intellectual, thought concerning life and death, like he's thinking "can I be happy like the fly in life and death?" The poem culminates in a pointed thought concerning life and death.

Let's consider the next section, "Title, revisited." Here, we are looking at the title again to see if it has taken on new meaning after our deeper analysis. Take a moment to write down on your paper any changes from your initial thoughts regarding the title.

(pause for 30 seconds)

After a deeper analysis, I thought the title "The Fly" really seemed to emphasize both the contrast and the comparison of humans and flies. We are focusing so intently on a tiny insect that is so seemingly different from us and yet the author is conducting an in-depth interrogation, or questioning, on whether we are so different after all. We're focused on the fly, which may be the same as focusing on ourselves.

We've reached the final section, "Theme." In this section, we are bringing everything together to determine the underlying message of the poem. What does it say about humanity or the world we live in? Take a moment and write down your thoughts on your paper.

<p>(pause 30 seconds)</p> <p>I see some excellent thinking out there! In my notes, I believe this poem is doing 2 things. I think it really helps us to see that we are not much different from other living beings with whom we interact. I also think it focuses our attention on life as being too short and all the questions we may have about life and death. You may have noticed there are a few different ways we can interpret this poem. That is the beauty of poetry. It is purposefully written that way to allow for its readers to uncover different meanings.</p> <p>I hope that you find this TPCASTT tool useful. Keep in mind that is all it is intended for - a helpful tool to assist you in uncovering a poem's meaning.</p>	
<p>Independent Practice (1 minute)</p> <p>(Teacher - will need to write the independent practice questions on chart paper so students can see them and copy them onto their own paper)</p> <p>Let's reflect on today's lesson. Today we learned about William Blake's life and work and used a handy TPCASTT tool to analyze one of his poems. In the next lesson, we will use this tool to analyze another one of Blake's poems called "A Poison Tree." For your independent work, please respond in writing to the following prompts:</p> <p>(Teacher - display paper for students to read)</p> <p>Students, please write these questions down on your notebook paper so you will have them handy for when you are responding in writing.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What stood out to you the most regarding William Blake's life and work? What personalities in society today are similar to Blake? Are they positive or negative influences? Why? 2. What did you learn the most in our analysis of Blake's poem, "The Fly"? What was the most important thing that you learned in using the TPCASTT tool to analyze his poem? 3. What are your thoughts about the poem? Is it silly or something important to consider? Explain your answer. 	<p>Students will respond to a writing prompt that synthesizes their knowledge from today's lesson.</p>
<p>Closing (1 min)</p>	

<p>I enjoyed working on analyzing William Blake and his poetry with you today! Thank you for inviting me into your home. I look forward to seeing you in our next lesson in Tennessee's At Home Learning Series! Bye!</p>	
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