



THE NEW JERSEY ITALIAN HERITAGE COMMISSION



VOICES: Stereotypes in the Classroom

Grade Level: 6-12

Subject: Language Arts / World Languages

Categories: Immigration and Prejudice / History and Society / Arts and Sciences

Standards:

Please see page 6 of the lesson plan for complete New Jersey Student Learning Standards alignment.

Objectives:

Students will be able to:

1. define, describe, and analyze the **SPEAKER** in a poem.
2. define, describe, and analyze the **TONE** in a poem.
3. demonstrate understanding of how the speaker's identity as an immigrant (specifically an Italian immigrant to New Jersey) affects her tone and characteristics in the poem.
4. empathize with the speaker's feelings as an immigrant child in the classroom, through the understanding of speaker and tone.
5. create a collage that represents the speaker's characteristics and tone.

Abstract:

This lesson presents poetry that highlights the subtle and often overt ethnic stereotyping that can occur in classrooms.

Materials:

- Your Language Arts Textbook
- Chalkboard & Chalk
- Old magazines, newspapers, clipart, etc.
- Construction paper
- Scissors
- Glue
- Markers, Crayons, Colored Pencils

Background:

Many young people share their classroom with a diverse group of students. Maria Mazziotti Gillan's poem gives voice to those children who sit quietly in the classrooms of New Jersey, feeling ashamed and uncertain of the place they come from and the traditions they hold dear. Through analysis of the speaker and her tone, students will develop a better understanding of the affects school and society as a whole, have on immigrant children. This lesson can be placed in a unit on Italian-American authors, immigrant literature, or even New Jersey history. (NOTE: Students in the Paterson area can tour the Labor Museum, the old silk mill district, and Passaic County Community College, where Gillan is involved with the poetry center, as extension activities.)

Procedures:

- I. Put the following question on the board: "What is the effect on a reader when a poem is written in first person (using "I")?"
 - a. Have students answer the question in their notebooks.
 - b. Ask students for their responses, and list what they say in one of two columns on the blackboard: Positive Effects or Negative Effects.
 - c. For example:
 - i. a positive effect might be that the reader gets to hear from the person experiencing what is being discussed.
 - ii. a negative effect may be that we will only hear one person's side of the story.
 - iii. If students are having difficulty understanding how there can be both positive and negative effects with a first-person speaker, you can give them the following example.
- II. Ask them whether or not, after a lunchtime fight, every student involved gives the same story about what happened.
 - a. This example will help them see how difficult it is to get the "real story."
 - b. Explain to students that understanding who the speaker is in a poem is important to understanding the meaning.
- III. Students are now ready to copy the definition of speaker contained in their language arts textbook.
- IV. Give a brief introduction to the author, and speaker, in "Public School #18: Paterson, New Jersey." (Poem and background attached).
 - a. Be sure to explain to students that the author and speaker are NOT always the same person.
- V. Using whatever technique your students are most comfortable with (i.e., interrupted reading, teacher modeled reading, etc.), read the poem.
- VI. After reading the poem, ask students to write on the chalkboard words or phrases that seem the most powerful to them. You can get them started by writing the last few words of the poem on the board: "and my rage will blow your house down."

VII. Looking at the words and phrases students found most powerful, you will notice that many of the words that express feeling or emotion will be listed. Explain to students that those feelings and emotions express the author's tone.

VIII. Have students copy the definition of tone found in your language arts textbook.

Assessment:

Ask students to create a collage that represents the characteristics of the speaker and her tone.

1. Students may work in pairs or groups.
2. Students may use words and/or pictures from magazines, newspapers, computer graphics, or student-drawn artwork.
3. After all collages are complete, have each pair/group explain their collage to the class, focusing on what they believed best defined the speaker and her tone. Use a teacher-made checklist to score collage.

Extension:

The speaker was eventually able to express her anger, and she rediscovered her pride in her family and in her Italian heritage. Ask the students to use inference to conjecture where the woman ended up by the end of the poem. Ask them whether her Italian heritage had helped her to get to that particular point in her life. Do they think she will be successful? Did her family and her Italian heritage help her to obtain success or failure? How did her heritage contribute to her adult life? Is the speaker the author? Is the author successful?

Resource:

Copy of Maria Mazziotti Gillan's Poem, "Public School#18: Paterson." (See Attached.)

Supplemental Information

VOICES: Stereotypes in the Classroom Author Background & Poem

Maria Mazziotti Gillan is the Founder and the Executive Director of the Poetry Center at Passaic County Community College in Paterson, NJ. She is also the Director of the Creative Writing Program at Binghamton University-State University of New York. She has published eight books of poetry, including *Where I Come From*, *Things My Mother Told Me*, and *Italian Women in Black Dresses*. She is co-editor with her daughter Jennifer of three anthologies: *Unsettling America*, *Identity Lessons*, and *Growing up Ethnic in America*. She is the editor of the *Paterson Literary Review*. Her work has appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *The New York Times*, *Poetry Ireland*, *Connecticut Review*, *LIPS*, and *Rattle*, as well as in numerous other journals and anthologies. She has won the May Sarton Award, the Fearing Houghton Award, New Jersey State Council on the Arts Fellowships in Poetry, and the American Literary Translator's Award through a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Public School #18: Paterson, New Jersey

Miss Wilson's eyes, opaque as blue glass, fix on me: "We must speak English. We're in America now." I want to say, "I am American," but the evidence is stacked against me. My mother scrubs my scalp raw, wraps my shining hair in white rags to make it curl. Miss Wilson drags me to the window, checks my hair for lice. My face wants to hide. At home, my words smooth in my mouth, I chatter and am proud. In school, I am silent, grope for the right English words, fear the Italian word will sprout from my mouth like a rose, fear the progression of teachers	in their sprigged dresses, their Anglo-Saxon faces. Without words, they tell me to be ashamed. I am. I deny that booted country even from myself, want to be still and untouchable as these women who teach me to hate myself. Years later, in a white Kansas City house, The Psychology Professor tells me I remind him of the Mafia leader on the cover of <i>Time</i> magazine. My anger spits Venomous from my mouth ; I am proud of my mother, dressed all in black, proud of my father, with his broken tongue,
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proud of the laughter
and noise of our house.
Remember me, Ladies,
the silent one?

I have found my voice
and my rage will blow
your house down.

Maria Mazziotti Gillan

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New Jersey Student Learning Standards

Social Studies

6.1.8.D.4.a Analyze the push-pull factors that led to increases in immigration, and explain why ethnic and cultural conflicts resulted

English Language Arts

SL.6.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 6 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

SL.6.1a Come to discussions prepared, having read or studied required material; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence on the topic, text, or issue to probe and reflect on ideas under discussion.

SL.6.1b Follow rules for collegial discussions, set specific goals and deadlines, and define individual roles as needed.

SL.6.1c Pose and respond to specific questions with elaboration and detail by making comments that contribute to the topic, text, or issue under discussion.

SL.6.1d Review the key ideas expressed and demonstrate understanding of multiple perspectives through reflection and paraphrasing.

SL.6.2 Interpret information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and explain how it contributes to a topic, text, or issue under study.

SL.6.5 includes multimedia components (e.g., graphics, images, music, sound) and visual displays in presentations to clarify information.

SL.7.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 7 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

SL.7.1a Come to discussions prepared, having read or researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence on the topic, text, or issue to probe and reflect on ideas under discussion.

SL.7.1b Follow rules for collegial discussions, track progress toward specific goals and deadlines, and define individual roles as needed.

SL.7.1c Pose questions that elicit elaboration and respond to others' questions and comments with relevant observations and ideas that bring the discussion back on topic as needed.

SL.7.1d Acknowledge new information expressed by others and, when warranted, modify their own views.

SL.7.2 Analyze the main ideas and supporting details presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and explain how the ideas clarify a topic, text, or issue under study.

SL.7.5 Include multimedia components and visual displays in presentations to clarify claims and findings and emphasize salient points.

SL.8.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

SL.8.1a Come to discussions prepared, having read or researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence on the topic, text, or issue to probe and reflect on ideas under discussion.

SL.8.1b Follow rules for collegial discussions and decision-making, track progress toward specific goals and deadlines, and define individual roles as needed.

SL.8.1c Pose questions that connect the ideas of several speakers and respond to others' questions and comments with relevant evidence, observations, and ideas.

SL.8.1d Acknowledge new information expressed by others, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views in light of the evidence presented.

SL.8.2 Analyze the purpose of information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and evaluate the motives (e.g., social, commercial, political) behind its presentation.

SL.8.5 Integrate multimedia and visual displays into presentations to clarify information, strengthen claims and evidence, and add interest.

SL.9-10.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with peers on grades 9–10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

SL.9-10.1a Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.

SL.9-10.1b Collaborate with peers to set rules for collegial discussions and decision-making (e.g., informal consensus, taking votes on key issues, presentation of alternate views), develop clear goals and assessment criteria (e.g. student developed rubric) and assign individual roles as needed.

SL.9-10.1c Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that relate the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas; actively incorporate others into the discussion; and clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions.

SL.9-10.1d Respond thoughtfully to various perspectives, summarize points of agreement and disagreement, and justify own views. Make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented.

SL.9-10.2 Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, qualitatively, orally) evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source.

SL.9-10.5 Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.

SL.11-12.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with peers on grades 11–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

SL.11-12.1a Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.

SL.11-12.1b Collaborate with peers to promote civil, democratic discussions and decision-making, set clear goals and assessments (e.g., student developed rubrics), and establish individual roles as needed.

SL.11-12.1c Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe reasoning and evidence; ensure a hearing for a full range of positions on a topic or issue; clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions; and promote divergent and creative perspectives.

SL.11-12.1d Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

SL.11-12.2 Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.

SL.11-12.5 Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.