

“I like to see it lap the Miles”

Intended Grade Levels

Academically advanced students in grades 5–8

Materials

- Handout 1: “I like to see it lap the Miles” by Emily Dickinson
- Handout 2: Blank Literary Analysis Wheel

Note to Families: This lesson uses the Literary Analysis Wheel to support the development of more complex questions to ask your child(ren) as they read through stories or poems at home. The text and questions used in this example lesson can be used to engage high-achieving and gifted students in grades 5–8. We suggest that the following process be used:

- **Read** the poem. Discuss any unknown vocabulary or sections that did not make sense as students read the text.
- Discuss the questions in the **Comprehend** section. Reread the poem as needed to discuss each question.
- **Analyze** the text using the Literary Analysis Wheel as a guide, drawing arrows to show relationships among various elements on the wheel. Help your child see that various elements interact to help create meaning.
- **Extend** your child’s learning by completing one or more projects in this section or visiting other websites provided for further learning.

Read

- Read Handout 1: “I like to see it lap the Miles” by Emily Dickinson. Students will benefit from having a hard copy of both the poem and the Literary Analysis Wheel (Handout 2). You may wish to consult analyses of the poem online before guiding the discussion with students. One online example of analyses can be found [here](#).
- Due to the accelerated nature of this particular poem, we encourage you to walk through the poem line by line with your student to build understanding of certain literary features (alliteration, simile, metaphor) and vocabulary words that will be necessary to build understanding. The following terms may need to be defined, either through inference or using the dictionary: *prodigious*, *supercilious*, *Boanerges*, *omnipotent*, *quarry*, and *pare*.

Comprehend

- What is the _____ (setting, conflict, point of view, etc.)? What figurative language do you notice?
- According to the poem, does the author enjoy watching this object? (Sample response: The poem says, “I like to see it,” yet there are a lot of negative connotations about the object.)
- Does the author like the object itself? How do you know? (Sample response: No, negative connotations about the object—supercilious, complaining, horrid, hooting—are combined with its omnipotence. It carves out the quarry to fit its own needs “to fit its sides”—which is not welcome in Dickinson’s world.)
- What feelings can we associate with some of the words used in this poem? What emotions do some of the words/lines evoke in us (e.g., horrid, hooting, omnipotent, supercilious, complaining, punctual)? Are the connotations positive or negative?
- Ask students to tell you what the poem is about, using evidence from the poem to support their response. (Most students will say it is a horse, but guide them through the object’s comparison to a horse. They will discover that it is a railway train.) Ask students to highlight all comparisons of the train symbolized through a horse. Note that the train was referred to as an “iron horse” during the time period in which the poem was written.
- How does the rhythm affect the poem’s meaning? (Sample response: It has the feel of a train moving.)
- What evidence is there that suggests that the train is more powerful than nature/humans? (Sample response: It peers down at shanties, it is omnipotent, it pares a quarry.)
- What are the consequences of the train’s actions? What message is Dickinson relaying to her audience about the train’s role in nature?

Analyze

Asking complex questions: The Literary Analysis Wheel is a tool that can be used to ask more complex questions. Note that literary elements such as setting, point of view, character, etc., each have their own block of space on the wheel and information can be added as you ask simple questions. Complex questions arise when students explore the interaction between two or more elements. Encourage students to cite textual evidence throughout the conversation as they explore the complex relationships within the literature. Drawing arrows to show the relationship between two elements can be helpful for students.

The following notes may be helpful in guiding students through the analysis:

- **Themes:** Themes relate to the intrusion of technology on nature, the power of change, and the power of technology.
- **Character:** The train can be considered the main character, the “iron horse,” who is proud and powerful, changing the landscape to fit its own needs. The train’s values are to be efficient and strong, with a motivation to arrive punctually at its destination.
- **Setting:** The use of “shanties” in the setting implies how the train condescendingly looks down upon human things. The train “pares” a quarry, indicative of the invading landscape.
- **Conflict:** Consider the conflict of technology versus nature and how symbols support that theme.
- **Symbols:** Symbols such as the horse imagery (lick, stop, neigh, stable door) and Boanerges, an allusion to a vociferous Biblical disciple, should be explored.
- **Tone:** Dickinson’s tone toward the object is ambiguous—both positive and negative (she hates it, but she is in awe of its power). At times, her tone may be described as unwelcoming or disapproving. The tone shifts to be more positive toward the end.

- **Language:** Dickinson uses alliteration with the /s and st. the st- helps create the sound a train might make. The rhythm of the poem almost sounds like a train. The entire poem is a metaphor (horse compared to train) and supported through similes (e.g., “neigh like Boanerges”) and personification (“like the valleys,” “feed itself,” “step”).
- **Context:** Dickinson lived from 1830–1886, and this poem was first published in 1955. She lived in Amherst, MA. Her works were published posthumously. There was an enormous railway boom in America from 1830–1860. Her purpose may have been to express her feelings toward the new technology.

Complex Questions:

- *How does Dickinson’s use of language help develop our understanding of the character and the narrator’s point of view?* She uses both positive (“docile,” “omnipotent”) and negative (“horrid,” “Boanerges,” “supercilious”) connotations to show an ambiguous point of view—she loves and hates the train at the same time. The positive and negative connotations about the character help establish Dickinson’s point of view.
- *How does the use of language help develop symbolism?* The horse imagery (“neigh,” “feed itself at tanks,” “stable”) establishes the idea of “the iron horse.” The st- alliteration helps create the sound of a train slowly stopping. The rhythm of the poem almost sounds like a train. The entire poem is a metaphor (horse compared to train) supported through similes (e.g., “neigh like Boanerges”) and personification (“lick the valleys,” “feed itself,” “step”).
- *How does setting help establish our understanding of the train’s character? How does the setting help us understand the conflict?* The train can be considered as the main character, the “iron horse,” who is proud and powerful, changing the landscape to fit its own needs. It pares a quarry to meet its own needs. The use of “shanties” in the setting implies how the train condescendingly looks down upon human things. The train “licks” the valleys up, revealing how it authoritatively takes layers off the landscape.
- *How does the tone and conflict establish the theme of the poem?* Dickinson’s tone and attitude toward the new technology establish the conflict of nature versus technology. This clearly establishes the theme of the power and intrusion of technology on our lives.
- *If Dickinson were to change the theme to “overcoming obstacles,” how would this affect how she describes the setting and character?* The character (the train) would be described more positively or even heroically. The setting would not showcase the train’s domination; rather, it might be a hindrance to a train. Consider how the story “The Little Engine That Could” shows a contrasting theme (e.g., the setting poses an obstacle for the train instead of the train imposing on nature; rather than the train having “power” over the setting, the setting poses “power” over the train).

Assess

At the end of the lesson, students should be able explain with evidence the interactions that exist between literary elements (e.g., setting + conflict, word choice + mood, etc.). Ask your student(s) to select the interaction that had the strongest impact on the message of the poem and defend their response with evidence from the poem.

Extend

Ask your student(s) to complete one or more of the following:

- Consider how Dickinson's view of technology (the train) in the poem is similar to new technological advances in today's society (i.e., cell phones, scooters). Create a Venn diagram to show the comparisons.
- Review one or more of the following resources and select another poem, such as "The Brain is Wider Than the Sky" or "Tell all the truth but tell it slant." In a paragraph, explain three ways literary elements contribute to developing an idea related to an overarching concept (power, hope, freedom, etc.). Cite specific evidence from the poem.
 - » [Emily Dickinson Archive](#)
 - » [Emily Dickinson Museum](#)
- Create your own poem about some new advancement in your life that you are in awe of or have a love-hate relationship with. Match the rhythm and style of the poem to your object, just as Dickinson did with the sound of the train.
- Select a decade in the last 200 years and research the major technological advancements that were emerging. Assume a historical identity from that time period and write an editorial about the imposing nature of that piece of technology. In your editorial, provide commentary about the pros and cons of that specific piece of technology.



Note. This lesson has been adapted for at-home use from the following Programs for Talented Youth curriculum for advanced students in conjunction with Prufrock Press as a way to support student learning through the COVID-19 shelter-at-home. Adapted from *Perspectives of Power: ELA Lessons for Gifted and Advanced Learners in Grades 6–8* (pp. 19–26, 179–182), by T. Stambaugh and E. Mofield, 2016, Prufrock Press. Copyright 2016 by Prufrock Press. Adapted with permission.

Handout 1

"I like to see it lap the Miles" by *Emily Dickinson*

I like to see it lap the miles,
And lick the valleys up,
And stop to feed itself at tanks;
And then, prodigious, step

Around a pile of mountains,
And, supercilious, peer
In shanties by the sides of roads;
And then a quarry pare

To fit its sides, and crawl between,
Complaining all the while
In horrid, hooting stanza;
Then chase itself down hill

And neigh like Boanerges;
Then, punctual as a star,
Stop—docile and omnipotent—
At its own stable door.



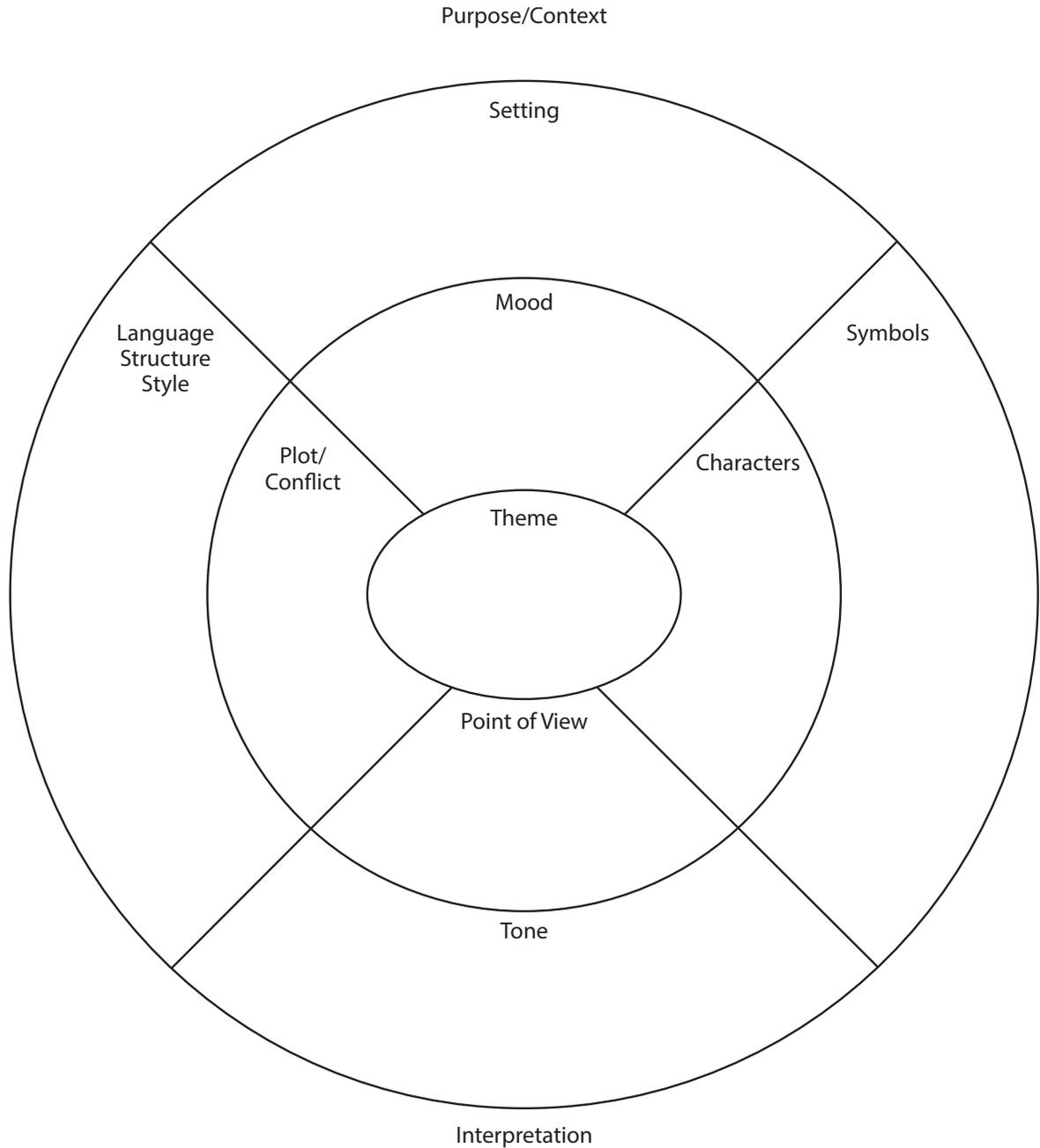
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Handout 2

Blank Literary Analysis Wheel

Directions: Draw arrows across elements to show connections.

Text: _____



Created by Tamra Stambaugh, Ph.D., & Emily Mofield, Ed.D., 2015.



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