



All Aboard the Choo-Choo Train

Language Arts

Overview

This lesson helps young students understand about rail safety, while simultaneously teaching an aspect of the language arts curriculum in poetry. Students learn the poetic term, onomatopoeia, and begin to both appreciate and write poetry using it. Students also get a more in-depth understanding of four different types of trains that fall under the “passenger rail” umbrella — subways, light rail, commuter rail, intercity trains — as well as the reasons why trains make the sounds they do. They write about trains using onomatopoeia and choosing a point of view from which to write (from an assigned list). It is assumed that students have some familiarity with point of view prior to this lesson.

Time Allotment

Two to three 45-minute class periods

Learning Objectives

On completion of this lesson students will be able to:

- Identify words that are onomatopoeic in nature, such as choo-choo, ding-dong, bling, etc.
- Understand the way onomatopoeia is used in poetry.
- Create a poem using onomatopoeia, that represents their experiences with trains in their community and train sounds.
- Distinguish between four types of passenger trains: subways, light rail, commuter rail, intercity trains.
- Demonstrate through sound descriptors the differences between four types of trains.
- Explain why sounds of trains are an important aspect of train safety.

Vocabulary

onomatopoeia - the formation of names of words from sounds that resemble those associated with the object or action to be named, or that seem suggestive of its qualities: atishoo [achoo], babble, cuckoo, croak, ping-pong, sizzle. (Oxford English Dictionary)

Media Components

- Teacher presenter station with computer, projector, speakers and screen
- Access to the Internet
- Access to iTunes or other audio archive
- Web Resources: www.voicesnet.org/poemcategories.aspx (scroll down to “Types” and click on “Onomatopoeia”) Many examples of onomatopoeia in poems are provided on this site.

Materials and Student Handouts

- Poems available through voicesnet.org (subject to Fair Use in face-to-face teaching setting)
- OLI brochure, “Key Safety Tips Around Commuter, Subway & Light Rail Trains.” (available online at www.oli.org/documents/OL-passengerrailbrochure08.pdf)

Teacher Preparations

- Prepare in advance for all media and technology to be used in lesson.
- Review poems on Voices Network website before using them in class to assure appropriate content (some are dually categorized for children, such as “Bake a Cake”).

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- Visit iTunes store and search “sound effects trains” for several downloadable sounds for the Introductory Activity. Each effect costs about 99¢. Train sounds are differentiated and can represent different settings and types of trains.

OLI Safety Tip

Under Community Connections, a field trip to a local station is suggested. With today's security regulations and basic safety concerns, it is essential to contact the local station to pre-arrange the visit. Station managers will most likely want student groups to avoid rush hour, and they will tell you other times that are inconvenient. Also, be sure to obtain enough adult chaperones for a 3 or 4:1 ratio of students to adults.

Introductory Activity

1. Focus: Have students sit quietly. Ask them to close their eyes and use their ears to listen to some sounds. Tell them they first must guess what kinds of sounds they are. Then, they must imagine where they might be when they hear such sounds. They should keep their ideas to themselves until you tell them to open their eyes for a class discussion.

Activity: Play the sounds of different trains, each separately. After all sounds have been played, ask students to open their eyes for discussion.

Follow-up: Ask: What kinds of sounds did you hear? Where did you let your imagination take you when you heard each sound? Were the sounds representative of the same train over and over again? How do you know they were not? What kinds of trains do you think you heard?

Engage students in a discussion of some issues of safety that can be related to the sounds of trains. For example, ask: Why might trains have horns? What is their purpose? (They have horns to alert people and drivers that a train is approaching; they are a warning.) Explain that the sounds trains make are an important part of train safety.

2. Focus: Tell the students to listen again to each sound, this time with their eyes open, and to write down a word that they think helps to describe the

sound. Do one together, a train whistle that sounds like “choo-choo” or “woo-woo.” Have them write down a word. Did they write down choo-choo or woo-woo?

Activity: Continue listening and writing words that represent the sounds they hear from trains.

Follow-up: Ask students to convey the “sounds” they wrote down in word form. Does anyone know what it’s called when you represent a sound in word form? The word you use is a poetic term called onomatopoeia. Write it on the board and note that there are four o’s in this word! Today we’re going to explore sounds as words and write some poems that use onomatopoeia. And we’re going to explore commuter, subway, light rail and intercity trains.

Learning Activities

1. Focus: Have students listen to the onomatopoeia in the words that follow. Say (or have students say) the series of words using the best oral interpretation possible, attempting to embody the sounds the words make: plop, splish-splash, trilling, whoosh, flutter, slap, flap, croaks, whistles, babbling, ding-dong, bubbling, chick, chuck, creek, crack, whoo-who, choo-choo, splat!

Activity: Show examples of onomatopoeic poetry from voicesnet.org, using the teacher projection station and computer Internet access. Select student volunteers to read the poetry to the rest of the class, indicating that this type of poetry (especially) should be read aloud.

Follow-up: For each poem, ask students to identify and evaluate the onomatopoeia used. Is it appropriate to the subject matter? Why or why not? What other words might have been used? How does the poet create an image by using sound words?

2. Focus: Tell students it’s their turn to try their hand at writing poetry with onomatopoeia. Their challenge is to transform their experiences into words, and their words into sound words. They will need to focus on their sense of hearing and their memories of sounds they have heard in the past. (Children typically don’t sharpen their listening senses deliberately, so this activity may be quite challenging!)

Activity: Conduct a discussion about students’ experiences riding trains. What sounds can they

associate with their experiences? Ask them to close their eyes and imagine the sounds they might have heard. Depending on the types of trains in the local area, responses may be different. For example, since light rail trains run on electric power from overhead, they are much quieter than most locomotive engines. Suggest that even quiet trains make some kind of noise. Different trains use different warning sounds, as well. What sounds have they heard from

trains that warn people to stay clear of the tracks?

Follow-up: Check in with students and provide time for sharing and feedback between students in either an all-class setting or a small group setting. Brainstorm and provide assistance prior to moving to the next focus task.

3. Focus: Provide a copy of the brochure, “Key Safety Tips Around Commuter, Subway & Light Rail Trains.” (www.oli.org/documents/OL-passengerrailbrochure08.pdf) Have students read over the brochure silently, then highlight portions for class discussion.

Activity: Discuss with students the different safety messages in the brochure. Generate a class list of safety tips, including safety around railroad tracks and safety on the train.

Follow-up: Review the class-generated list. Note that different trains use different warning sounds. What sounds have they heard from trains that warn people (or vehicles) to stay clear of the tracks? Discuss other warning sounds (e.g., sounds they might hear when the doors are closing, the train is entering the station, etc.) Inform students that they might use these sounds in their next activity.

4. Focus: Call students’ attention to the portion of the brochure called, “What are the various types of trains?” Ask students to read this portion. Divide class into four groups and assign one type of train to each.

Activity: Each group is responsible for reading the description of their type of train and generating a list of sound words that might be associated with that type of train. They are to use available resources to find out more and to listen to sounds, including the sounds downloaded from iTunes for this lesson and sounds on the Web. They also can

use available resources at home or in school to make sounds that simulate sounds they might hear.

Follow-up: Once students have generated a list of sounds represented by sound words (onomatopoeia), their job is to use those words to write a poem about trains. Each student writes a separate poem, even if using a group list. They can write from the point of view of the train, a passenger, the conductor or a third party looking from afar.

Culminating Activities

Focus: Students have the opportunity to read their poems aloud to the class. In preparing for this, they will need to practice. Work with students individually on developing their oral interpretation skills. Prepare to videotape each student for playback.

Activity: Students read their poetry on tape in front of the class. Each poem is then played back for student critique.

Follow-up: Discuss the use of onomatopoeia by each student. Elaborate on how the poems help to convey information about each type of train.

Assessment

- Students successfully incorporate onomatopoeia into their poetry.
- Students use poetry as a method for conveying information about different types of trains and travel experiences.

Community Connections

- As part of the Learning Activities, or as a follow-up to the entire lesson, arrange a field trip to a local train station with adult chaperones, one per group of 4-5 students. If there is more than one type of train available locally, arrange for trips to all types (e.g., Amtrak, subway, trolley, etc.) Take a tape recorder for each group and have student groups record “ambient sound” (the natural sound within the setting). These recordings can be used as part of their research or as an assessment of the lists they developed using virtual experiences. (Note: Be sure to pre-clear the trip with the local station — See **OLI Safety Tip** on page 2.)

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- Share videotaped poetry on the school’s website or at a parent open house night. Invite guests from the local transit authority to the class to view the videotapes with the class.

Cross-Curricular Extensions

- **Language Arts: Poetry:** Onomatopoeia is just one type of language used in literary texts. Use this lesson as a lead-in to a longer unit study of personification, alliteration, simile, metaphor, hyperbole, etc.
- **Science/Health:** The sense of hearing is one of the senses we often take for granted. What happens when a person cannot hear at all or cannot hear well? Take students through the scientific process with experiments that deny them their sense of hearing (i.e., muffling sound with earmuffs or earbuds from an iPod) and investigate how other senses become more important.
- **Music:** Students develop a musical composition by editing together bits and pieces from the recordings they created while on their class field trip. The music can be used by local Operation Lifesaver volunteers as an example of how teachers are incorporating rail safety messages into their lesson plans.

Adaptations

- If a teacher projection station is unavailable, but two classroom computers are available, use a “stations” approach to this lesson, compacting Introductory and Learning Activities into a simultaneous rotation. Provide activities in four different locations in the classroom:
 - o Student computer station — train sounds from Introductory Activity

- o Student computer station — voicesnet.org poetry examples from Learning Activity 1
- o Student-Teacher discussion station — discuss experiences riding trains and have students write sound words from Learning Activity 2
- o Brochure Station — Learning Activity 3

National Standards

Language Arts Level II [Grades: 3-5]

Standard 1. Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process

5. Uses strategies (e.g., adapts focus, organization, point of view; determines knowledge and interests of audience) to write for different audiences (e.g., self, peers, teachers, adults)

6. Uses strategies (e.g., adapts focus, point of view, organization, form) to write for a variety of purposes (e.g., to inform, entertain, explain, describe, record ideas)

Standard 6. Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of literary texts

7. Understands the ways in which language is used in literary texts (e.g., personification, alliteration, onomatopoeia, simile, metaphor, imagery, hyperbole, rhythm)

Source: *mcrel.org*

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