



OBJECTIVES

Students will

- answer comprehension-level questions about a text.
- interview a classmate and accurately record his/her answers.
- write a bio poem using their questions and answers as a springboard for composition.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Giovanni, Nikki. “Knoxville, Tennessee.” (1968). from *Sing a Song of Popcorn: Every Child’s Book of Poems*. New York: Scholastic, 1988. Permission pending.

Inquiring Minds Want to Know!

Asking Questions to Gather Information

Grade 4

ABOUT THIS LESSON

One way students can learn new information is to interview someone who is an expert on a particular subject. Using a guided questioning strategy, this lesson helps students practice their speaking and listening skills as they interview a classmate. Students will use the information they learn about their classmate to create a bio poem that is patterned after Nikki Giovanni’s autobiographical poem “Knoxville, Tennessee.” Students will complete the writing process by illustrating their bio poem for classroom display.

This lesson is included in the National Math and Science Initiative’s Laying the Foundation (LTF) program in Module 5: *Discovering and Researching*.

TEXTUAL COMPLEXITY

Passages for LTF’s ELA lessons are selected to challenge students, while lessons and activities make texts accessible. Guided practice with challenging texts allows students to gain the proficiency necessary to read independently at or above grade level. The poem used in this lesson is identified as an exemplar text for Grades 2-3 in Appendix B of the Common Core State Standards.

COGNITIVE RIGOR

ELA lessons for LTF are designed to guide students through a continuum of increasingly complex thinking skills, including those outlined in taxonomies such as the Revised Bloom’s Taxonomy and Webb’s Depth of Knowledge Levels. The activities in this lesson ask students to answer comprehension-level questions about text (DOK 2). Students will interview a classmate and apply the information they learn to the creation of a poem (DOK 3). The activities ask students to move through the Remember, Understand, Apply, and Create levels of the Revised Bloom’s Taxonomy.

CONNECTION TO COMMON CORE STANDARDS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

The activities in this lesson allow teachers to address the following Common Core Standards:

Explicitly addressed in this lesson

- RL.4.1** Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.
- W.4.4** Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- SL.4.1b** Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions and carry out assigned roles.
- SL.4.1c** Pose and respond to questions to clarify or follow up on information, and make comments that contribute to the discussion and link to the remarks of others.

Implicitly addressed in this lesson

- RL.4.10** By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poetry, in the grades 4-5 text complexity band

proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.

W.4.10 Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

- copies of the Student Activity
- drawing paper
- colored pencils, markers, or crayons

ASSESSMENTS

The following kinds of formative assessments are embedded in this lesson:

- group activity
- guided questions
- writing task

TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

This lesson can be introduced in two or three ELAR blocks. Students could complete the reading activity during the first ELAR block and interview their classmate and write the bio poem in the second/third ELAR block.

Activity One:

This lesson uses Nikki Giovanni’s poem “Knoxville, Tennessee” as the central text. Help students establish context for reading the poem by asking them to think about their favorite time of year. Have students volunteer reasons why they chose their favorite season and write their responses on the board. Consider asking the following follow-up questions:

- What places do you go to during this season? What makes this places special?
- What people do you connect with this season? Why? (e.g., grandparents, cousins, camp friends, etc.)
- What foods do you associate with this season? Why?
- What makes this season “the best” of all the seasons?

After the initial discussion, read the poem “Knoxville, Tennessee” aloud to students. Depending on the needs of your students, you could use the questions included in Activity One to guide a whole-class discussion, or you could have students work through the questions in pairs or small groups. Have groups share responses with the whole class. Help students focus on the idea that families participate in traditions and groups that help define who they are. For example, the foods listed in “Knoxville, Tennessee” are associated with the southern United States. Ask students to think about what foods or activities are representative of their families or cultures.

Activity Two:

When students have completed Activity One, explain that they will be writing a poem about one of their classmates that follows the structure of Giovanni’s poem. Review the term **interview** and explain that interviewing, or asking questions of an expert, is one way of gathering information about an unfamiliar topic. Have students find a partner to interview, and then ask them to ask each other the interview questions listed in Activity Two. Remind students to take careful notes, as they will use the information they learn during their interview to write a bio poem about their partner.

Activity Three:

Review the concept of the bio poem with students. Depending on the needs of your classroom, you might model how to write the poem by letting students interview you, and then fill in the poem template together as a class, using information you provided them during the “class interview.” When students are ready to proceed, have them complete the template individually, using the information they learned about their interview subject to complete the poem. Students who need additional challenge could complete an original poem without the template. After reviewing students’ work, have them write their bio poems on drawing paper. Students could illustrate their work by drawing important images from their poems on their final draft.

Extension: If you would like to include a grammar exercise with this lesson, consider having students add punctuation to Giovanni’s poem so that the text contains independent clauses. Another option is to have students rewrite the lines to remove repeated conjunctions and to add commas where appropriate. Ask students to reflect on how the added punctuation or the eliminated conjunctions change the meaning, rhythm, or “feel” of the poem.

Inquiring Minds Want to Know!

Asking Questions to Gather Information

Activity One: Reading a Model Poem

The poet Nikki Giovanni wrote a poem about her favorite season called “Knoxville, Tennessee.” Read the poem silently, then answer the questions below.

Knoxville, Tennessee by Nikki Giovanni

I always like summer
 Best
 you can eat fresh corn
 From daddy’s garden
 (5) And okra
 And greens
 And cabbage
 And lots of
 Barbeque
 (10) And buttermilk
 And homemade ice-cream
 At the church picnic
 And listen to
 Gospel music
 (15) Outside
 At the church
 Homecoming
 And go to the mountains with
 Your grandmother
 (20) And go barefooted
 And be warm
 All the time
 Not only when you go to bed
 And sleep

1. What is the speaker’s favorite time of year? List three reasons why she likes this season.

Activity Two: Interviewing a Subject

One way of learning new information about a person, event, or topic is to **interview** an expert.

When you interview a person, you ask him or her questions about your topic. You might use the answers to learn new facts about something, write a paper, or complete a project.

When you interview someone, you will want to take good notes and carefully write down the important facts and details he or she says.

For this activity, you will interview a classmate about his or her favorite season of the year. Later, you will use the information you learn during your interview to write a poem about your classmate.

As you prepare for your research, you will want to think of good questions to ask your classmate so you can learn **WHY** this season is his or her favorite time of year.

Use the interview questions below to get you started. As you interview your classmate, be sure to write down his or her answers accurately.

Interview Questions

1. What is your favorite season? _____

2. What three things do you like about this season?
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____

3. What foods remind you of your favorite season?

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

d. _____

e. _____

f. _____

g. _____

4. What people remind you of this season?

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

5. What places remind you of this season?

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

6. What sights remind you of this season?

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

7. What smells remind you of this season?

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

8. What sounds remind you of this season?

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

9. What emotions remind you of this season?

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

10. What important message can we learn about you because this is your favorite season?

11. List one or two other questions you might ask your classmate about his or her favorite season and write down the answers.

Activity Three: Applying Your Research

Use the information you learned during your interview with your classmate to write a **biographical poem, or bio poem**, about him or her.

A **biography** is an account, or story, of an individual’s life written by someone else.
A **bio poem** is a poem written about a person or character.

The **subject** of your bio poem is the person you have interviewed.

Your bio poem will follow the same form and organizational pattern as the model poem “Knoxville, Tennessee.” Use the frame below to help you craft your poem.

Give your bio poem a title that names a place that reminds your classmate of his or her favorite season. When you are finished writing your bio poem, illustrate it with images you used in your poem.

Title: _____
 (Name of a place that reminds your classmate of his or her favorite season.)

Line 1: _____ always likes _____
 (name of your classmate) (time of year)

Line 2: Best

Line 3: He/She can eat _____
 (Pick a food that reminds your classmate of this time of year.)

Line 4: From _____
 (Where does your classmate get this food?)

Line 5: And _____
 (Choose another of your classmate's favorite foods for this time of year)

Line 6: And _____
 (Choose another of your classmate's favorite foods for this time of year)

Line 7: And _____
 (Choose another of your classmate's favorite foods for this time of year)

Line 8: And lots of

Line 9: _____
 (Choose another of your classmate's favorite foods for this time of year.)

Line 10: And _____
 (Choose another of your classmate's favorite foods for this time of year.)

Line 11: And _____
 (Choose another of your classmate's favorite foods for this time of year.)

Line 12: _____
(Add a prepositional phrase that describes when or where your classmate eats his or her favorite foods.)

Line 13: And _____
(Add a verb such as **listens, hears, smells, touches, or sees**)

Line 14: _____
(Add a noun that names what your classmate hears, smells, touches, or sees.)

Line 15: _____
(Where does your classmate hear, smell, touch, or see the noun you used in line 14?)

Line 16: At the _____
(Add another detail about where your classmate hears, smells, touches, or sees the noun you used in Line 14.)

Line 17: And go to _____ with
(Name a place your classmate likes to go during his/her favorite season.)

Line 18: _____
(Name a person who reminds your classmate of his or her favorite season.)

Line 19: And go _____
(Add another location.)

Line 20: And be _____
(Add an adjective that describes how your classmate feels.)

Line 21: All the time

Line 22: Not only when _____
(Describe an activity your classmate does.)

Line 23: And _____
(Expand on the activity your classmate does.)

Integrating Grammar Skills into a Close Reading Lesson

Teacher Training Activity

Teachers have not had a good model for teaching grammar, a subject that ought to be enjoyable and useful. Yet we know that students must learn about grammar and must be able to transfer and apply their understanding of grammatical concepts to their own reading and writing. As they advanced through elementary into middle school, students must move beyond merely identifying parts of speech and parts of the sentence into analysis, into knowing how and why authors write the way they do. Research shows that students learn grammar best through their own reading and writing. They absorb the structures of our language through their reading, and their writing mirrors the quality of the kind of texts they read. Reading only simple texts, those without sophisticated sentence structures, negatively influences writing style. Conversely, reading rich texts with a variety of carefully crafted sentence structures strengthens student writing. Eventually, students who encounter syntactically rich texts incorporate their learning from these models into their own style to become skillful and effective writers themselves.

Some general suggestions for the teaching of grammar would include the following methods:

- Include “mini” grammar discussions with each text students read.
- Ask students to rewrite sentences from their reading in different ways. For example, you could ask students to rewrite a sentence from a short story so that the subject comes at the end of the sentence, or you could have students combine two sentences from the same story into a complex sentence.
- Use grammar websites as a way for students to review grammar concepts.
- Use sentences strips to manipulate the parts of a sentence.
- Reduce reliance on worksheets and grammar drills.
- Use effectively written and stylistically interesting sentences in literary texts as models for studying construction of sentences.
- Encourage students to study different kinds of phrases and clauses by using them in writing assignments such as essays, short narratives, and poems.
- Reinforce students’ use of different methods of subordination.
- Focus on one or two grammatical concepts to reinforce with each writing task, and use those concepts to guide student revision.
- Require that students use different sentence patterns and structures in their writing. For example, ask students to include at least one simple sentence, one compound sentence, and one complex sentence in a paragraph response.

1. What are some frustrations you have experienced while teaching grammar to students? How have you addressed these frustrations?
2. What are some successful lessons or strategies you have used to teach different grammatical concepts?

Consider the poem “Knoxville, Tennessee,” by Nikki Giovanni.

Knoxville, Tennessee by Nikki Giovanni

I always like summer
 Best
 you can eat fresh corn
 From daddy’s garden
 (5) And okra
 And greens
 And cabbage
 And lots of
 Barbeque
 (10) And buttermilk
 And homemade ice-cream
 At the church picnic
 And listen to
 Gospel music
 (15) Outside
 At the church
 Homecoming
 And go to the mountains with
 Your grandmother
 (20) And go barefooted
 And be warm
 All the time
 Not only when you go to bed
 And sleep

TEACHER PAGES

What grammatical concepts could you teach using this poem?

What activities or strategies could you use to teach those grammatical concepts?

Giovanni, Nikki. “Knoxville, Tennessee.” (1968). from *Sing a Song of Popcorn: Every Child’s Book of Poems*. New York: Scholastic, 1988. Permission pending.