

Personal Reflections on the Poetry of Maya Angelou – Lesson Plan

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Materials

PBS NewsHour article: “Maya Angelou, Renaissance Woman, Dies at 86”

Video: Maya Angelou reciting her poem “On the Pulse of Morning”

Poem: “On the Pulse of Morning”

Warm Up Activity

1) Distribute copies of the PBS NewsHour article “Maya Angelou, Renaissance Woman, Dies at 86” to the entire class. Teachers may read the text aloud or request students read the poem independently.

2) Use these questions to start a short discussion after students have read the article:

- What does it mean to be a “renaissance woman”?
- Maya Angelou was a survivor of childhood sexual abuse. How did she use poetry to deal with it?
- What were some of the challenges she probably faced as a young African American woman growing up during segregation?
- How did Maya Angelou share her talents with the world? Do you think her work changed lives? Why or why not?

Main Activities

- 1) Write the sentence “On the pulse of morning” on the board and ask students to write down as many images that come to mind. Give them three minutes to work silently. Remind the students that there are no right or wrong answers.
- 2) Have students share their answers with the person next to them, comparing and contrasting what they wrote with the other person. Ask each pair to pick one answer to share with the class and go around the room.
- 3) As a class, see if there are any themes or imagery that repeatedly come up in the class’ answers. Write them on the board. Ask students to keep in mind their own answers.
- 4) Now pass out Maya Angelou’s poem “On the Pulse of Morning” to each student.
- 5) Play the video of Maya Angelou reciting her poem “On the Pulse of Morning” and ask students to follow along.
- 6) Immediately after the poem is finished, ask students to individually write down any strong reactions they had to the poem.
- 7) In pairs, ask students to share their immediate reactions to the poem and try to analyze why certain aspects of the poem triggered a reaction (could be positive or negative) in them. Did they have a connection to a word, a phrase or an image? In pairs, have students discuss their answers.
- 8) Finally, ask students to select a phrase from the poem they felt a strong connection or reaction to and examine it. On their own, students should:
 - Copy down the phrase
 - Explain why they felt strongly about it
 - Illustrate what the phrase looks like to them in pictures