

Carl Sandburg Home National Historic Site



Pre-Visit Lesson: Perfectly Pertinent Persuasion Poems Grades 6-8

Lesson Length

Approximately one hour

Learning Targets

- Students will understand how opinions can influence poetry and how poetry is used to influence opinion.
- Students will discover that many of the issues Carl Sandburg wrote about still exist in the 21st century.
- Students will show how a writer's use of figurative language develops theme and tone.

Common Core State Standards

Standards for Reading Literature

- RL.8.1 Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- RL.8.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.
- RL.8.10 By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of grades 6–8 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

Standards for Speaking and Listening

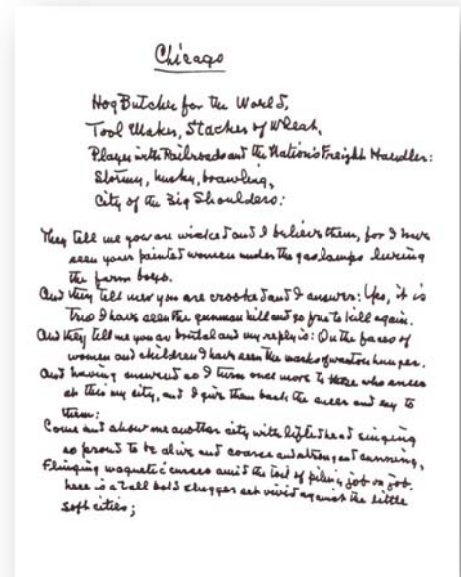
- SL.8.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

Standards for Language

- L.8.5 Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

Materials Needed

- Excerpts from [Chicago Poems](#) by Carl Sandburg (included)
- Perfectly Pertinent Persuasion Poems worksheet



Procedure

1. As a class read one or two of Carl Sandburg's poems from his book *Chicago Poems* such as "Mill Doors," "Buttons," and "Joy." (do they have this book? include these poems on PPPP sheet)
2. Ask students if they can infer which social issue Mr. Sandburg was writing about in the poem.
3. Discuss how Sandburg often wrote about issues which he witnessed.
4. Working in pairs, have students complete the "Perfectly Pertinent Persuasion Poems" worksheet which includes having students match a Sandburg poem to a particular social issue and analyze how Sandburg's use of figurative language develops both theme and tone. If students have difficulty with the questions, model using a different poem.
5. Close with a full group discussion of the issues on which Sandburg wrote, the current relevance of those issues, and the rhetorical and poetic devices he used to make his points.

Mill-Doors

You never come back.
I say good-bye when I see you going in the doors,
The hopeless open doors that call and wait
And take you then for – how many cents a day?
How many cents for the sleepy eyes and fingers?

I say good-bye because I know they tap your wrists,
In the dark, in the silence, day-by-day,
And all the blood of you drop by drop,
And you are old before you are young.
 You never come back.

Buttons

I have been watching the war map slammed up for advertising in
 Front of the newspaper office.
Buttons – red and yellow buttons – blue and black buttons – are
 Shoved back and forth across the map.
A laughing young man, sunny with freckles,
Climbs a ladder, yells a joke to somebody in the crowd,
And then fixes a yellow button one inch west
And follows the yellow button with a black button one inch west.

(Ten thousand men and boys twist on their bodies in a red soak
 along a river edge,
Gaspings of wounds, calling for water, some rattling death in their
 throats.)

Who would guess what it cost to move two buttons one inch on the
 war map here in front of the newspaper office where the
 freckle-faced young man is laughing at us.

Joy

Let a joy keep you.
Reach out your hands
And take it when it runs by,
As the Apache dancer
Clutches his woman.
I have seen them
Live long and laugh loud,
Sent on singing, singing,
Smashed to the heart
Under the ribs
With a terrible love.
Joy always,
Joy everywhere –
Let joy kill you!
Keep away from the little deaths.

Perfectly Pertinent Persuasion Poems

Carl Sandburg was a very passionate man. He had his opinions about what he believed was right and what he believed was wrong about society. He often used poetry to voice his opinion about such things. In fact, his very first book of published poetry, *Chicago Poems*, was page after page of what he thought about the city he loved.

With a partner, read these poems aloud. Can you figure out what issue in society Carl Sandburg is concerned with? On the following page, jot down your best guess for each poem. Also, ask yourself, “Do any of these issues exist today?” Put a star beside any issue that is still a problem. Finish by answering a few questions about the poem you and your partner like best.

They Will Say

Of my city the worst that men will ever say is this:
You took little children away from the sun and the dew,
And the glimmers that played in the grass under the great sky,
And the reckless rain; you put them between walls
To work, broken and smothered, for bread and wages,
To eat dust in their throats and die empty-hearted
For a little handful of pay on a few Saturday nights.

Anna Imroth

Cross the hands over the breast here—so.
Straighten the legs a little more –so
And call for the wagon to come and take her home.
Her mother will cry some and so will her sisters and brothers.
But all of the others got down and they are safe
 and this is the only one of the factory girls who
 wasn't lucky in making the jump
 when the fire broke.
It is the hand of God and the lack of fire escapes.

Child of the Romans

The dago* shovelman sits by the railroad track
Eating a noon meal of bread and bologna.
 A train whirls by, and men and women at tables
 Alive with red roses and yellow jonquils,
 Eat steaks running with brown gravy,
 Strawberries and cream, eclaires, and coffee.
The dago shovelman finished the dry bread and bologna,
Washes it down with a dipper from the water-boy,
And goes back to the second half of a ten-hour day's work
Keeping the road-bed so the roses and jonquils
Shake hardly at all in the cut glass vases
Standing slender on the tables in the dining cars.

**derogatory slang for an Italian immigrant*

Halsted Street Car

Come you, cartoonists,
Hang on a strap with me here
At seven o'clock in the morning
On a Halsted street car.

Take your pencils
And draw these faces.

Try with your pencils for these crooked faces,
That pig-sticker in one corner—his mouth—
That overall factory girl—her loose cheeks.

Find for your pencils
A way to mark your memory
Of tired empty faces

After their night's sleep,
In the moist dawn
And cool daybreak,
Faces
Tired of wishes,
Empty of dreams.

Ashes and Dreams

Silence
Dry sobs of darkness
Faces
In the house and fields
O mothers of the world
Watching.
Hour on hour
The trenches call
And the ditches want
And the shovels wait.

White faces up,
Eyes wide and blind,
Legs stiff and arms limp,
Pass them along

And pile them in
And tumble them over,
Ashes and dreams together

(Mothers of the world, your waste of work)

Perfectly Pertinent Persuasion Poems Worksheet

After reading each poem, decide with your partner what social issue the poem explores. Write your answer in the blank next to the poem title. Keep it short: no more than three-four words. Sometimes a single word will work.

They Will Say

Halsted Street Car

Child of the Romans

Anna Imroth

Ashes and Dreams

Next, choose one of the poems in the left column, and answer the following questions about it.

Name of Poem _____

1. Find one example of figurative language in the poem (e.g. hyperbole, metaphor, simile, imagery, understatement, alliteration).
Copy it here:

2. Explain why you think Sandburg used this literary device in the poem. What does it “add” to the poem? Does it create the mood or reveal the tone or theme in some way?

3. Is the social problem in the poem still happening today? How is the problem the same now? How has it changed since Sandburg’s time

Perfectly Pertinent Persuasion Poems Example

Modeling Example – Answers will vary

SUGGESTED RESPONSES:

<i>They Will Say</i>	child labor
<i>Halsted Street Car</i>	struggle
<i>Child of the Romans</i>	class
<i>Anna Imroth</i>	fair labor practices
<i>Ashes and Dreams</i>	war

Next, choose one of the poems in the left column

Poem _____ "*They Will Say*" _____

1. Find one example of figurative language in the poem

Personification: "You took little children away from the sunshine and dew..."

2. Explain why you think Sandburg used this literary device in the poem. What does it "add" to the poem? Does it create the mood or reveal the tone or theme in some way?

Sandburg uses second person point-of-view and seems to personify the city. Maybe the reader is supposed to see himself as part of the problem since people make up a city. Even if he/she doesn't own a factory, looking on and doing nothing is wrong, too. We think this makes the theme personal to Sandburg's readers and compels them to act.

3. Is the social problem in the poem still happening today? How is the problem the same now? How has it changed since Sandburg's time?

Children still work in bad conditions today although it's supposed to be illegal in the U.S. What about migrant children and children in other countries? Do we think about them when we buy products made internationally?