

Lesson Plan 1 for *The Lantern Room*: Persona Poetry: Voice, point of view, and creating characters

Discipline(s): Creative Writing: Poetry, Literary Interpretation: Poetry, Studies in Poetry

Audience: Undergraduate and Graduate (MA & MFA)

Overview: After reading *The Lantern Room*, the class will discuss the techniques and implications of persona poetry, from voice to point of view, to creating characters.

Objectives: Improve close reading, analysis, interpretation, and writing skills, understanding the importance of voice and persona in poetry and applying that understanding to their own writing, building characters in poetry.

Discussion questions: 2 sets of discussion questions, 20 minutes on the first set, 30 minutes on the second.

Introductory questions:

- If a poem is written in the first person, are the speaker and the author the same person?
- Can you think of some examples of persona poetry you've encountered before? What purpose did this technique serve?
- How would you define persona poetry?

Questions about *The Lantern Room*:

- Can you identify the speaker in *The Lantern Room*? How would you describe them?
- In the second section of the poem, "The Common Room," Honum introduces a set of new characters in the psychiatric ward. Read: "Lunch Break in the Day Patient Ward," "Group Therapy," "Stay Beside Me," "The Ward Above," "Late Afternoon with Geese," "New England Lyric," and "Note Home." How does Honum build the characters of "the boy with the injured body," and "the Vietnam vet" in these poems?
- How are these additional characters perceived by the speaker?
- How does Honum's approach to including multiple characters throughout the collection affect your understanding of the poems?

Short writing prompts: These are a culmination of the class discussion on persona poetry, they can be in-class exercises or assigned as homework.

- At the end of *The Lantern Room*, Honum includes a note that the narrator of the poem is a "supposed person," thus drawing a distinction between herself and the speaker. Write a poem in the first person, but from someone else's perspective. It can be anyone: a real or fictional person, a family member or a celebrity.
- Now write another poem *about* that person, but from your perspective, and compare the two. Are there differences in the voice, the tone of the poem?

Critical Writing Assignment:

“Tell the truth but tell it slant” is a quote from Emily Dickinson that Honum mentioned in an interview with Betsy Bonner at the *Cortland Review*. This is especially interesting when it comes to poetry written in the first person. To what extent should poetry draw from personal experience? And what are the implications of the “I” in poetry? Why would a poet choose a different speaker for their poem? Your paper doesn’t need to answer all these questions, but it should use them as guidelines to help build your argument. Use *The Lantern Room* as your primary source, and analyze at least three poems from the collection. You should also include at least **two scholarly** sources.

All citations must be in MLA style.

Length: 2000-2500 words in 12 point Times New Roman.

Creative Writing Project: This is the final project of the unit; students should start drafting early in the semester and bring in their poems to be workshopped in class. The writing prompts will help build up to their creative project.

For this project, you will put together a chapbook of your own poems. The collection will include 15-30 poems relating the same event/theme but from different perspectives. Use the short writing prompts as a starting point to help you create different characters and give them all distinct voices. The speaker should be different from yourself. This is a creative exercise in persona poetry and character building to help you experiment with voice and point of view. The chapbook should have a unified theme that runs through the different poems. The theme/topic can be as abstract as an emotion (grief, love, anger, envy) or as specific as an event (real or fictional) that happened at a certain place or time. If you choose to include dialogue, do it in italics, as Honum does in *The Lantern Room*. You can use the prompts below to help you:

- Honum uses dialogue, names, and physical descriptions to build the different characters in *The Lantern Room*. Write a series of short poems (3-5) that have recurring characters. Give them all distinct voices and/or features or habits that make them identifiable.
- Write a poem, in response to one of the poems in *The Lantern Room*, from the point of view of one of the characters that we meet: the Vietnam veteran, the girl in the soft boots, the master of dreams, the boy with the injured body, one of the women at St. Mary’s, or the angel.
- Write a dialogue poem where two characters have a conversation.

Lesson Plan 2 for *The Lantern Room*: Historical Poems & Erasure Poetry: Techniques and Structure

Disciplines: Creative Writing: Poetry, Advanced Creative Writing: Poetry, Studies in Poetry

Audience: Undergraduate and Graduate (MA & MFA), Community Workshop,

Overview: After reading *The Lantern Room*, the class will learn about the origins, structure, methods, and practices of historical poems with special emphasis on erasure poetry. This unit is

designed to teach students the different uses of erasure poetry and its infinite potential for intertextuality and nuance, while giving them a chance to experiment with their own work.

Objectives: Focusing on word choice and improving language skills, paying close attention to form and structure, and their relationship to meanings and themes in poetry.

Potential Zoom session with Chloe Honum

Additional resources: a list of erasure texts: <https://poets.org/glossary/erasure>

- Ronald Johnson's *Radi Os*:
- Jen Berving's *Nets*:
- Janet Holmes's *The ms of my kin*:
- Travis Macdonald's *The O Mission Repo*:
- David Dodd Lee's *Sky Booths in the Breath Somewhere, The Ashbery Erasure Poems*
- Yedda Morrisson's *Darkness*
- Karla Kelsey's *Feminist Poetics of the Archive*: <https://www.tupeloquarterly.com/uncategorized/feminist-poetics-of-the-archive-a-forum-edited-by-karla-kelsey/>

Discussion Questions: Spend 5-7 minutes on each question, discuss as a class or in group, depending on the class size. The questions should culminate in a short lecture given by the educator.

- Can you think of other examples of erasure poetry you have encountered in the past?
- Erasure poetry can be a way to reclaim the past, to retell a story from a different perspective and shed light on particular events or topics. What was your first impression of “St. Mary’s Home for Unwed Mothers in Ōtāhuhu, Auckland” when you read it?
- How does Honum make use of erasure poetry to tell the story of St. Mary’s Home for unwed mothers?
- Read “Read More About Our History” and “St. Mary’s Home for Unwed Mothers in Ōtāhuhu, Auckland.” What is the effect of these two poems? How do they fit into the collection?
- How does the visual presentation shape the meaning of the text? What is Honum’s purpose in leaving blanks as opposed to blacking out certain words? Is it an act of violence, intervention, or a way of redirecting our attention?

Writing prompts: you can use the list of example erasure texts provided with this lesson plan as an example: Start the exercises in class (10-20 minutes per prompt), and assign them as homework if you run out of time.

- Freewrite two pages of poetry. It can be about anything you like, it doesn’t even have to make sense. Once you have your two pages, take a pen and strike through everything you *don’t* want to keep in your poem. Erase as much as possible, narrowing down your poem to half a page. Copy the words you kept on another paper. That’s your first erasure poem.

- Write a poem in reaction to a historical event.
- Research a historical event, come to class with newspaper articles or other documents about, then, work in small groups (2-3) to erase parts of it and make your own erasure poem. The poem could retell the event from a different perspective, criticize it, or celebrate it.

Critical Writing Assignment:

Erasure poetry can be used as a method of collaboration, by creating a new text from an old one, thus offering the possibility for a dialogue between the two, but it can also be a way to challenge and contradict older texts. Discuss the implications of erasure poetry and its different uses. Use **one primary erasure text** of your choosing and at least **2 scholarly sources** to help back your argument.

All citations must be in MLA style.

Length: 2500-3000 words in 12 point Times New Roman.

Creative Writing Project: This is the final project of the unit; students should start drafting early in the semester and bring in their work to be workshopped in class. The writing prompts will help build up to their creative project.

For this project, you will work with a primary source of your choosing (historical documents, poems, etc,...) to create a collection of erasure and historical poems. Like Honum's poems about St. Mary's Home, your collection should contain a mix of historical poems and erasure poems. The historical poems should give the reader some insight into the event or primary source you chose and the erasure poems should relate to that event/source either by adding to the conversation and expanding on its themes or by criticizing it. You can also include artworks and photography.

Length: 10-15 pages - you can experiment with fonts spacing, and other sorts of formatting. Be creative!