



Exploring 'Math Lesson (from the Garden)' by Irene Latham

Key topics: Metaphor · Short poems · Ekphrasis · Class poem · Individual writing

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Getting to know the poem

Ask your pupils to sit with their eyes closed and read the poem out loud to them. Ask them which words and images stuck in their minds. There are no wrong answers!

Display the poem (see below) or hand out copies and read it again. Count how many words there are in the poem. Not many – poems don't need to be long! You can have a big impact in a short piece.

Why do they think Irene has chosen the title 'Math Lesson'? It's not a straightforward mathematical sum in the poem! What lesson do they think the poem contains? Perhaps that counting and numbers aren't just found in the classroom?

Ekphrasis and van Gogh

'Math Lesson (from the Garden)' is inspired by a painting by Vincent van Gogh, called [Still Life of Oranges and Lemons with Blue Gloves \(1889\)](#). When a poem is inspired by another work of art, we call it 'ekphrastic'. Ekphrastic poems try to capture something about the original artwork alongside their own ideas.

What details of the painting has Irene chosen to focus on, in her poem? What has she left out? Do the painting and the poem make you feel the same way? Do they make you feel the same sensations? Again, there are no wrong answers!

Metaphor

In the poem, Irene describes the oranges and lemons of the painting as "suns". Ask your class, what do we call it when a writer describes one object in terms of another? Irene is using a metaphor. Discuss together how the sun and a piece of fruit could be seen as similar, for example: they are golden, warm, round, glowing, health-giving, precious, only here some of the time...

[continued overleaf]

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Can they think of any other metaphorical descriptions they could use for the oranges and lemons? For example, yellow moons, chunks of amber, pools of honey, golden eggs, fallen stars, get-ready traffic lights...

Class poem

Explain to the class that you are going to write new poems inspired by Irene's, first as a class, and then individually. Like Irene, you will choose numbered details to focus on. Create a list on the board of some fruits and vegetables. Then create another list of places where you might find this produce, for example: the garden, an allotment, a farm, a woodland, a supermarket, a market stall, the kitchen table, a lunch box...

Choose one of these items of produce and a place where it may be found, for example, strawberries on a market stall. What will you choose for your equivalent to Irene's "two blue gloves" and "one wicker basket"? For example, one striped awning, four wobbly table legs, one rustling paper bag, two careful hands, ten clutching fingers, one bustling street... Write up the first two stanzas of your poem on the board.

How many strawberries will you choose for your poem? Irene describes her fruit as "just-plucked" – what adjective will you pick for yours? Write up your third stanza. Finally, can you think of a metaphor for your strawberries? What do the shape and colour remind you of? For example, hearts, rubies, crimson half-moons... Write the final line of your poem.

Individual writing

Invite the children to write their own poems, following Irene's structure but using their own ideas to change the details. They can use the fruit and places on the board or come up with their own. Encourage them to redraft, scribble out and change things – poets almost never get their poem right first time and their notebooks tend to be very messy! When they're ready to write it up neatly, you may like to use the print-out template below. What will they choose as their title?

Explain that if you have written a poem inspired by someone else, it's important to acknowledge them – and the easiest way to do this is with a short line underneath the title (see below).

We would love to see what your pupils come up with! Tag us on Twitter @tygertygermag with a picture or email us on tygertygermagazine@gmail.com for some personalised feedback.



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after 'Math Lesson (from the Garden)' by Irene Latham

by





Math Lesson (from the Garden)

after *Still Life of Oranges and Lemons with
Blue Gloves* (1889) by Vincent van Gogh

It takes
two blue
gloves

plus one
wicker
basket

to hold
nine
just-plucked

suns.

by Irene Latham

