

Name: _____ Teacher: _____ School: _____

Grade 8: Lesson 7

Lesson Focus: The focus of today's lesson will be on William Blake's poetry and argumentative writing.

Practice Focus: Students will analyze one of Blake's poems, "A Poison Tree," in order to determine its meaning. Students will also analyze an argumentative essay on Blake's poem in order to study author's craft in writing arguments.

Objective: Students will use "A Poison Tree" and "Analysis of 'A Poison Tree'" to learn about William Blake's poem and to learn about author's craft in writing arguments.

Academic Vocabulary: wiles, beheld, stole, veil'd, connotation, figurative, personification, symbolism, cohesion, resentment, unexpressed, nurtures, hyperbole, grievance, transitional phrase, literary device

Texts for lesson:

"A Poison Tree"

I was angry with my friend;

I told my wrath, my wrath did end.

I was angry with my foe:

I told it not, my wrath did grow.

And I **waterd** it in fears,

Night & morning with my tears:

And I sunned it with smiles,

And with soft deceitful **wiles, which means "flattering someone insincerely"**.

And it grew both day and night.

Till it bore an apple bright.

And my foe **beheld, or "saw,"** it shine;

And he knew that it was mine,

And into my garden **stole, which means he entered without the speaker's knowledge,**

When the night had **veild the pole, which means "when the sky was covered in darkness"**

In the morning glad I see;

My foe outstretched beneath the tree.

Analysis of “A Poison Tree”

The poem “A Poison Tree” by William Blake is about a person who holds onto anger and resentment, which is anger at having been treated unfairly, until it grows into something poisonous to be used against an enemy. Through an extended metaphor of a tree that is nurtured by the poem’s speaker until it yields a deadly fruit, the poem suggests that when anger goes unexpressed, or unspoken, it festers and grows and can have very negative consequences.

Throughout the entire poem, Blake uses a metaphor of a growing tree to develop this central idea. Just as one would water a tree to keep it alive, the speaker nurtures, which means to provide food and nourishment to, his anger until it takes root. In the first stanza, the speaker compares how he dealt with anger in two situations: first with a friend and then with an enemy. When he was upset with a friend, he told the friend, and his anger went away. But in contrast, he held on to his anger against his enemy, and his “wrath did grow.”

In the second stanza, Blake introduces the metaphor of the speaker’s wrath as a living, growing thing. The speaker says, “And I watered it in fears, / Night and morning with my tears.” The speaker’s anger is now likened to a growing seed, “sunned” with his fake smiles and “deceitful wiles.” In other words, he nurtured his anger in secret rather than expressing it honestly and directly. His feelings are very strong, yet he keeps them hidden from others.

Also in this stanza, Blake’s use of the similar phrases “night and morning” and “both day and night” suggests that he never stops thinking about his anger. This exaggeration, or hyperbole, effectively conveys to the reader that the speaker’s wrath has become an obsession.

Finally, the speaker’s hidden feelings take on the form of a shiny, bright apple. The enemy steals and eats the apple without the speaker’s knowledge. In the last stanza, the speaker is happy to find his enemy sprawled out under the tree, poisoned by the apple he has eaten. The speaker says, “And my foe beheld it shine. / And he knew that it was mine.”

This part of the metaphor shows that the speaker has deceived the enemy by hiding his true feelings. Similarly, the false attitude that the speaker portrays toward the enemy is represented by the beautiful bright apple that “shines” on the surface, but is deadly inside. Just as there are negative feelings behind the deceptively nice treatment of the enemy, there is poison inside the apparently perfect piece of fruit.

In “A Poison Tree,” William Blake uses figurative language to dramatic effect as he explores what can happen when a person refuses to let go of a grievance, or a grudge, against another person. Through the use of an extended metaphor that compares unexpressed anger to a tree that bears deadly fruit, Blake seems to be warning readers that when resentment is “watered” with fears and negative feelings, the situation can have very negative consequences. The speaker suggests a better alternative in the first stanza: “I was angry with my friend: / I told my wrath, my wrath did end.”

TP-CASTT Poetry Analysis

TITLE: Consider the title and make a prediction about what the poem is about.

PARAPHRASE: Translate the poem line by line into your own words on a literal level. Look for complete thoughts (sentences may be inverted) and look up unfamiliar words.

CONNOTATION: Examine the poem for meaning beyond the literal. Look for figurative language, imagery, and sound elements.

ATTITUDE/TONE: Notice the speaker’s tone and attitude. Humor? Sarcasm? Awe?

SHIFTS: Note any shifts or changes in speaker or attitude. Look for key words, time change, punctuation.

TITLE: Examine the title again, this time on an interpretive level.

THEME: Briefly state in your own words what the poem is about (subject), then what the poet is saying about the subject (theme).

Independent Practice questions:

1. What stood out to you the most regarding William Blake's poem, "A Poison Tree"? What are some lessons that you can learn from it that you can apply to your own life?
2. What did you learn the most in our analysis of the argumentative essay? Although it can seem a bit tedious to learn the components of good argumentative writing, why do you think it is important? In what ways could it help you be an effective communicator?



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