

ELA: Grade 7, Lesson 11, The Railway Train

**Lesson Focus:** This lesson focuses on a riddle-like poem by Emily Dickinson that describes a train without ever stating its subject explicitly.

**Practice Focus:** Students will analyze closely the words and phrases used by a poem’s speaker.

**Objective:** Students will look for “clues” in the poem as they work to figure out its mystery subject.

**Academic Vocabulary:** lap, omnipotent, peers, shanty, pares, quarry, punctual, omnipotent

**TN Standards:** 7.RL.KID.1; 7.RL.CS.4

**Teacher Materials:**

- The Teacher Packet for ELA, Grade 7, Lesson 11

**Student Materials:**

- Paper, pencil, and a surface to write on
- The Student Packet for ELA, Grade 7, Lesson 11 which can be found on [www.tn.gov/education](http://www.tn.gov/education)

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<p><b>Opening</b> (1 min)</p> <p><b>Hello! Welcome to Tennessee’s At Home Learning Series for literacy! Today’s lesson is for all our 7<sup>th</sup> graders out there, though everyone is welcome to tune in. This lesson is the first in this week’s series.</b></p> <p><b>My name is ____ and I’m a ____ grade teacher in Tennessee schools. I’m so excited to be your teacher for this lesson! Welcome to my virtual classroom!</b></p> <p><b>If you didn’t see our previous lesson, you can find it at <a href="http://www.tn.gov/education">www.tn.gov/education</a>. You can still tune in to today’s lesson if you haven’t seen any of our others.</b></p> <p><b>This week, we will be spending time reading, rereading and analyzing a mysterious poem by Emily Dickinson.</b></p> <p><b>Before we get started, to participate fully in our lesson today, you will need:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paper, pencil, and a surface to write on</li> <li>• The Student Packet for ELA, Grade 7, Lesson 11 which can be found on <a href="http://www.tn.gov/education">www.tn.gov/education</a></li> </ul> <p><b>Ok, let’s begin!</b></p>	<p>Students gather materials for the lesson and prepare to engage with the lesson’s content.</p>
<p><b>Intro</b> (1 min)</p> <p><b>This week’s poem has no title! Our goal today is to read this poem and infer its subject by reading like a detective to uncover the clues in the words and phrases. As we explore this poem by Emily Dickinson, we will ask and answer questions. We will keep track of evidence from the text to support our ideas about each question. Finally, I will give you independent practice to get ready for our next lesson.</b></p>	<p>Students prepare to follow the gradual-release trajectory, understanding that they will be doing more listening at first and more “doing” toward the end of the lesson.</p>

<p><b>Teacher Model/Read-Aloud</b> (10 min)</p> <p><b>Before we dive in to the poem, let me check: do you know about the poet Emily Dickinson?</b> [Pause.]</p> <p>Yes, you may have read other poems by her in school, ones that begin “Hope is the thing with feathers” or “Because I could not stop for death.” Emily Dickinson was from Massachusetts and lived from 1830 to 1886—so she was born almost 200 years ago! She lived an isolated life, and most of her poems weren’t even published until after she died. Her poems are quirky and were especially unusual for her day. She almost never gave them titles, so sometimes it’s difficult to tell exactly what they’re about until you read them very carefully. That’s the case with the poem we’re reading today. It’s almost like a riddle!</p> <p>Okay, let’s get started. Remember our goal here is to figure out what this poem is about. As I read the poem, I am going to underline words and phrases that might be clues. [As you advance the slides, they will have the phrases already underlined. You will not have a paper copy.]</p> <p>[Show Slide 1. Be sure to read the first 3 stanzas of the poem with a clear <i>da-DUM, da-DUM</i> rhythm since it is written in iambic pentameter.]</p> <p>I like to see it lap the miles, And lick the valleys up, And stop to feed itself at tanks; And then, prodigious, step</p> <p>The mystery subject is doing a few things in this stanza that might be clues. I am going to underline “lap the miles,” “lick the valleys up,” and “feed itself at tanks.” [Show Slide 2.]</p> <p>I’m not quite sure what these phrases mean yet, but I do know the subject is a thing, not a person, because the poem says “I like to see <i>it</i>” and “feed <i>itself</i>.” What do you think it could be based on the first stanza? [Pause.] Could it be some sort of animal since it licks and feeds? That was your idea, too?</p> <p>One other note on this stanza. Do you know that word “prodigious”? It means “enormous,” or “huge.” So although I’m not sure yet whether we’re talking about an animal here, I know that if it is an animal, it’s definitely not a small one!</p>	<p>Students follow along, comprehending the text. They use teacher think-alouds and tips (e.g., definitions of words) to support their comprehension, and they think as directed in response to prompts and questions.</p> <p>Students use words and phrases from the first stanza to take a first guess at the mystery subject.</p>
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<p><b>Let's continue reading. Remember the last line in the previous stanza was "And then, prodigious, step." [Show Slide 3.]</b></p> <p><b>Around a pile of mountains, And, supercilious, peer In shanties by the sides of roads; And then a quarry pare</b></p> <p><b>The mystery subject is doing some more things in this stanza [Show Slide 4.]: it steps around a pile of mountains, and it peers, or looks, in shanties, which are small, run-down homes; and it is supercilious, or arrogant, like it thinks it's better than everyone else—maybe even better than the mountains it's stepping around! And I don't know about you, but I wouldn't want someone peering in my windows superciliously.</b></p> <p><b>Then there's that last line of the stanza: "And then a quarry pare." A quarry is an open pit from which we take out rocks for building, such as slate and limestone. To pare something is to cut it away. So to "a quarry pare" means to cut away rock from a quarry!</b></p> <p><b>Now, what do you think our mystery subject is? [Pause.] Well, now I think it can't be an animal, either, because animals can't just step around mountains, and they don't usually look into people's homes or cut stone quarries!</b></p> <p><b>Let's continue reading. [Show Slide 5.]</b></p> <p><b>To fit its sides, and crawl between, Complaining all the while In horrid, hooting stanza; Then chase itself down hill</b></p> <p><b>What is the mystery subject doing in this stanza? [Pause.] [Show Slide 6.]. Yes, it is trying to fit itself through a space. You are correct that it is complaining and making a terrible hooting sound. And it's chasing itself going downhill. What are you picturing as the mystery subject? [Pause.] I agree with you – it must be something large, noisy, and fast.</b></p> <p><b>Let's read the last stanza. [Show Slide 7.]</b></p> <p><b>And neigh like Boanerges; Then, punctual as a star,</b></p>	<p>Students use words and phrases from the second stanza to revise their guess about the mystery subject.</p> <p>Students use words and phrases from the poem to determine what the mystery subject is doing to describe it.</p>
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<p><b>Stop-docile and omnipotent- At its own stable door.</b></p> <p>There are quite a few words here that I'll define for you. Boanerges is a type of horse. The word punctual means on time, as you may know. Docile means easy to control: if you have a docile dog, it is very obedient and does what you tell it to do. The word omnipotent has two parts that can help us figure out its meaning. "Omni" is a Latin prefix that means "all." You probably know the word "omnivore" from science – an animal that can eat many different plants or animals. In other words, these animals eat "all" things. What's the prefix that means "all?" [Pause.] Yes, "omni." "Potent" means "strong" or "very powerful". Can you put the parts together to define omnipotent? What is the meaning of "omnipotent?" [Pause.] "You got it! " Omnipotent" means "all-powerful." I'm going to reread the last stanza now that we understand these words better. [Show Slide 8.]</p> <p><b>And neigh like Boanerges; Then, punctual as a star, Stop-docile and omnipotent- At its own stable door.</b></p> <p>Now I notice that it has several horse-related words – neigh, Boanerges, stable. So the subject is like a horse – large, noisy, fast, and powerful. But what is also punctual when it stops?</p> <p>Hmm, we need to keep thinking to figure out what this is.</p>	<p>Students determine that the subject is like a horse.</p>
<p><b>Guided Practice</b> (15 min) Students, please take out your paper and pencil so you can write down your responses to a few questions. [Show Slide 9.]</p> <p><b>Question #1:</b> Let's reread the first line. "I like to see it lap the miles." What is the meaning of the word "lap" in this line? [Pause.] Write what you think it might mean, and why you think that. [Pause.]</p> <p>To help answer this question, let's consider "When have you heard the word 'lap' before?" Yes, there is the lap that is the part of our body we make when we sit on the floor with our legs crisscrossed, and there is the lap like when you run around a track one time. But, the lap in this line is a verb – "lap the miles." What action does it make you think about? [Pause.] You are right, there is the lap that means drinking eagerly, like an animal drinking water with its tongue.</p>	<p>Students follow along and think and act as instructed, gradually gaining confidence and competence.</p> <p>By the end of the guided practice, students should be able to deduce that the mystery object is a train.</p> <p>Students determine the meaning of "lap the miles" and "feed the tank" to add to their clues about the mystery object. They narrow their guesses to machines.</p>

There's also the lap that means to pass someone for one whole turn on a track. So what is the meaning of the word "lap" in this line? How do you know? [Pause.]

What did you write? [Pause.] It's almost like some strange combination of "drinking eagerly" and "running down a track," isn't it? "Lap up" makes you think of the "drinking" meaning, but "miles" makes you think of the "running" meaning. That's one of the great things about literature: words often have more than one meaning, and they're both "right"!

Take a moment now to edit or add to your answer to question 1. You'll be able to use these responses later on to remember key points about the poem. [Pause.]

Okay, Question 2: What does the line, "feed itself at tanks" lead you to imagine about the creature the author is describing? [Pause.] If you need some help, think about what you picture in your mind when you read this line. [Pause.] Did you picture something like this? [Show Slide 10.] What kind of "food" would come from a tank? [Pause.] Yes, gas and oil would come in a tank and they provide fuel for things to work. What does the line, "feed itself at tanks" lead you to imagine about the thing the author is describing? Write your response. [Pause.] Great thinking, students! If the creature needs gas or oil to function, then it must be a machine of some sort. Combine this information with your understanding that the creature is traveling or moving very quickly. Now make a sketch in your notebook of what you think it looks like. [Pause.]

[Show Slide 11.] Here are the first three stanzas. To answer Question 3, please write the verbs you see: the words that show what the subject of the poem is doing. Identifying verbs will help us imagine the actions the author is describing. [Pause.] Did you write down these words? [Show Slide 12.] Lick, lap, step, peer, pare, crawl, complaining, and chase.

Let's look at crawl and chase. What do they suggest about the machine? Write down your ideas. [Pause.] Correct! This machine has to crawl to fit in a small space, but it can move downhill quickly. How does the machine complain? [Pause.] Yes, it makes a loud, hooting sound when it travels through these small spaces. Have you figured out what the mystery subject is yet? Take a moment to think and write down your thoughts. [Pause.]

Students sketch an image of what they think the creature in the poem looks like.

Students record verbs that relate to movement and sounds.

<p>If you think you’ve got it, just hold on to your idea for a little longer, in case some of our viewers need another question to be certain.</p> <p>[Show Slide 13.] <b>Question 4: In the poem, Dickinson uses words to describe the natural environment. How does this setting help you determine the subject of the poem? Refer back to the poem to answer this question. Record your response. [Pause.] Great job, students! This mysterious machine travels through nature – in valleys, around mountains, down hills. Remember too that it hoots loudly. I think you have it now! What is Emily Dickinson writing about? [Pause.] Correct! She is writing about the train! A train travels quickly and over different landscapes. It’s also quite large, noisy, and powerful.</b></p> <p><b>Look back at the sketch you made in response to question 2. Does it look like a train? If not, what does it look like? How might you edit your sketch now that you know what the poem is about? [Pause.]</b></p>	<p>Students use all the evidence so far to conclude that the mystery subject is a train.</p>
<p><b>Independent Work</b> (1 min)</p> <p>[Show Slide 14.] <b>For independent practice today, please write a paragraph responding to this question. How do words and phrases in the poem suggest the subject of the poem is a train? Take a moment to write that question down. How do words and phrases in the poem suggest the subject of the poem is a train? [Pause.]</b></p> <p><b>Now, look at the poem again so you can gather a few words and phrases that you want to write about. [Pause.]</b></p>	<p>Students will write a paragraph explaining their understanding about how the words and phrases in the poem give hints the mystery subject is a train.</p>
<p><b>Closing</b> (1 min)</p> <p><b>I enjoyed working on an Emily Dickinson poem and solving the mystery in the poem with you today! Thank you for inviting me into your home. I look forward to seeing you in our next lesson in Tennessee’s At Home Learning Series! Bye!</b></p>	