

The Lady of Shalott by Alfred, Lord Tennyson, illustrated by Charles Keeping

Rationale for selecting this poem

This classic narrative poem by Tennyson is loosely based on Arthurian legend, in which a lady is locked in her tower by a powerful curse and can look at the world only through a mirror. This is a poem of love, shadows and death. The language is beautiful and evocative, and Charles Keeping's illustrations perfectly complement the poem's mood.

Key teaching approaches

Reading aloud and rereading

'Tell me'

Reading Journals

Retelling

Text marking

Role play

Performing poetry

Session 1: Reading the poem aloud and helping all groups of children to enjoy it

This poem is quite a demanding read; over the course of the unit you will need to read it aloud to the class a few times to enable the children to hear how it sounds and become familiar with the story and the language.

Reading the poem out loud helps all children to appreciate its beauty and its literary style and rhythms. All children in the class will need the opportunity to listen to the poem, to become familiar with it, and to explore it creatively. Less experienced readers need even more exposure to this kind of literature than experienced readers do.

Tell me and reading journals

Was there anything you liked about this poem?

Were there parts that stuck in your mind?

Was there anything that puzzled you?

Individual children will have their own questions; write these up on a flipchart/whiteboard, along with the class's responses to them. Encourage speculation and interest, giving time for children to develop their lines of thought.

Give time for children to develop their personal responses to the poem in their journals.

Sessions 2 and 3: Oral and written retellings of the story: focusing on language and imagery

Ask children to retell the story to each other in pairs, encouraging them to use words or phrases remembered from the poem. Afterwards, talk about how this went and jot on a flipchart/interactive whiteboard the language that children remembered, talking about why these lines or words were memorable.

Pick out some of the clearest pictures from the poem. Discuss how particular language use adds to the poem (eg 'the broad stream in his banks complaining'.) Ask children to pick out any interesting language and highlight or underline these for discussion.

Children can go on to retell part of the story in writing, using their reading journals. Help them to decide which part to focus on.

Session 4: Text marking: exploring the language of the poem

Text marking helps to direct children's attention to the language and structure of the poem. It uses what children notice about language and develops their knowledge. Text marking works best as a collaborative activity, with children working in pairs. Provide each pair with an enlarged copy of the poem on A3 sheets of paper. They will need coloured pens for marking up the text. Any of the following activities can provide a focus for text marking:

- **Likes and dislikes**

Invite the children to highlight words or phrases they like, or dislike and note any questions they have about these in the margin. When they have finished, organise them into groups of four to discuss their likes and dislikes, and any questions that puzzled them. Share responses with the class.

- **Finding rhyme patterns and rhythmical patterns**

Children could use different colours to identify the rhyme scheme and to differentiate spellings. They could use highlighting to mark the strong rhythmical pattern of the poem, demonstrating how one verse is structured by highlighting stressed syllables.

- **How mood is conveyed**

Children could explore how mood is conveyed by highlighting words or phrases about eg colour and light, water, or movement, and thinking about how Tennyson uses them to contribute to the atmosphere of the poem.

Session 5: Talk, roleplay and writing in role

Parts one and two: The river, the tower, and what the lady sees through her mirror

Discuss as a class why The Lady of Shalott might be shut up in the tower, what the curse might be about, and what part the mirror plays in her story. In role play, the children could work in groups of three, either to enact possible scenarios explaining how the curse arose, or to explore the dramatic tensions in this situation. After this children could write in their mini-journals, in role as the Lady of Shalott, composing extracts from her diary.

Parts three and four: Lancelot rides by, and the Lady of Shalott dies

Sessions 6 and 7: Reading aloud, visualising and drawing

Read part three aloud to the class again, and ask them to close their eyes and visualise Sir Lancelot riding along by the river. What does he look like? What is he wearing? What is his horse like? What else do they see in this scene? Ask children to describe their visualisations to each other, working in pairs. Write some of these descriptions on the flipchart/interactive whiteboard, highlighting the language that the children use. Talk about how Tennyson forms our picture of Lancelot, and how he uses language to build up this impression.

Drawing

Look at one Charles Keeping picture and discuss how he uses line to give a strong picture of a character. Suggest that the class draw Lancelot as they pictured him, using charcoal or pen and ink. Some children might annotate their pictures, describing why they have included certain features.

Session 8: Reading journals

Part four: The Lady in her boat

Read to the end of the poem and discuss the outcome of the story with the class. What might have been going on in the Lady's head as she drifted down the river? Look at and talk about the [painting](#) of The Lady of Shalott by Alfred Waterhouse.

Give the children time to record their individual responses to the picture in their reading journals and share some of these with the class.

Sessions 9 and 10: Shared writing and individual poems

Begin writing a shared poem about Sir Lancelot. First, discuss what the poem could be about – it could tell the story from his point of view, or it could briefly recount one of his adventures. Write just the first verse of this shared poem, drawing on some of the ideas gathered from the visualising done earlier. Remind the children of what they noticed about the rhythm and rhyme scheme of the original poem.

Using shared writing to begin a class poem. This process will give children an accessible model for writing their own poem.

Individual poems

Children go on to write individual poems, working with response partners. Some children may choose to use the shared writing verse as a starting point. Others may want to write a new beginning and follow it up with two or three verses of their own. The poems can be collected and published in a class anthology for the book area. If there's time, children could record their poems on a cassette to accompany the book.

Session 11: Choral reading in groups

Put the children into six groups to read aloud, allotting one verse from the poem to each group. Give them time to discuss how the verse will be read and to rehearse the reading. They should decide how to express the feelings in the text through the use of voice, other sounds or visual methods such as movement or gesture. Once each group has performed their verse, ask the class to think about their response to the reading:

How did this reading make us feel? How do we think this group managed that?
Finally, work with the groups to put the verses together, using a few musical instruments.

Sessions 12, 13 and 14: Dance

Play Tchaikovsky's *Pathetique Symphony* and think together about whether this music evokes similar feelings to that of the poem.

Devise a dance, telling part of the story of the Lady of Shalott. If possible, take some photographs of the children at work on their dance.

Session 15: Performance

In this last session, the children will perform the poem for other classes, combining choral reading, and some role play. This could be followed by a performance of some of their own poetry and songs, their dance and a presentation of their artwork.