LESSON PLAN
Comparing Written and Visual Poetry

OVERVIEW
Students are typically exposed to historical or current events by reading expository or narrative texts written by journalists, historians or textbook authors. This lesson adds poetry, and the new dimensions of image and emotion that poetry evokes, to that list.

After reading a standard description of Mexico’s National Pyrotechnic Festival and viewing clips from Brimstone & Glory, a documentary/visual poem about the event, students will write poems to describe the festival’s main attractions. Because the event takes place in Mexico, this is an excellent lesson for multilingual classes or classes with Spanish speakers who are learning English.

OBJECTIVES
In this lesson, students will:
- Write poems
- Learn about Mexico’s National Pyrotechnic Festival
- Compare and contrast the effects of different media forms describing the same event

GRADE LEVELS: 9-10

SUBJECT AREAS
English/Language Arts
Global Studies
Media Literacy

MATERIALS
- Handout of the description of the National Pyrotechnic Festival or online access so students can read it in class
- Film clips and equipment to screen them in class

ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED
45 minutes plus homework

FILM CLIPS
Film clips provided in this lesson are from Brimstone & Glory. Access the streaming clips for free on POV’s website by visiting www.pbs.org/pov/educators. Borrow the full film from our DVD Lending Library by joining the POV Community Network: communitynetwork.amdoc.org.

Clip 1: Introduction (3:40 min.)
The clip is the first 3:40 minutes of the film. It ends just before the film title is shown on screen. The National Pyrotechnic Festival is explained.

Clip 2: Castillos: Castles of Fire (4:45 min.)
The clip begins at approximately 27:25 with a boy looking skyward at fireworks. It ends at approximately 32:10 with men putting out a yard fire ignited by the fireworks. The clip is a visual poem capturing the essence of one of the festival's two main displays, the castillos, or castles.

Clip 3: Pamplonada: The Running of the Bulls (8:00 min.)
The clip begins at 42:15 with one of the lit bulls being paraded through the crowd. It ends at 50:15, when the scene at the festival ends. The clip is a visual poem capturing the essence of the crowd's interaction with the bulls. It also includes more traditional documentary-style footage when the boy ends up in a medical tent with shrapnel from the fireworks in his eye.

ACTIVITY

Introduce students to the activity by letting them know that they are going to look at the same event in different ways. The first way is to read a straightforward (expository) description. Give them several minutes to read the Wikipedia description of Mexico's National Pyrotechnic Festival: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Pyrotechnic_Festival

Reading can be done either online or via a hardcopy handout of the entry that you distribute.

Adaptations: If you prefer a different source, you might have them read this description from a website on various festivals: everfest.com/e/la-feria-nacional-de-la-pirotecnia-tultepec-mexico.

You might give the assignment ahead of time to students with reading issues so that they can prepare to participate in the activity.

Optional: If time allows, you might want to engage students in a discussion of the entry's sources and content. Do the sources seem credible? How could students find out? Did the entry omit any important information? Did it answer all their questions or are there other things they want to know? Where could they look for additional information?

Step 2: Second Source: Brimstone & Glory
Invite students to learn about the National Pyrotechnic Festival from a very different source: a documentary film. Give a brief overview of Brimstone & Glory, explaining that it depicts the festival described in the Wikipedia entry.

Screen Clip 1. Follow the clip with a brief class discussion comparing the way information about the festival comes across in the film with how they experienced it reading the Wikipedia entry.

Screen Clips 2 and 3, inviting students to notice how the filmmaker conveys both information and emotion to capture the spirit of the event.

As time allows, invite students to share their reactions to what they've viewed.

Step 3: Poetry Writing
Now that students have learned about the facts and the spirit of the National Pyrotechnic Festival, assign students to write poems that capture the essence of the event.

You might give them some time to get started in class, or use class time to discuss whether students want or need to do further research in order to understand the history and culture that they are attempting to reflect upon in their work.

EXTENSIONS/ADAPTATIONS

Arrange for students to share their poetry with one another and also with classmates or community members outside the classroom.

Prior to beginning the lesson, have students analyze a poem depicting an actual event related to your history curriculum. Examples might include Alfred, Lord Tennyson’s “The Charge of the Light Brigade” or Countee Cullen’s “Incident.” After the lesson, invite students to compare and contrast these classics to their own work. What elements do they share? What did these famous poets do that students did not?

View the entire Brimstone & Glory documentary as a springboard to examining working conditions for economically vulnerable laborers who hold hazardous jobs. As a follow-up, you might want to have them view the 2006 film Maquilapolis.

Encourage students to create their own visual poems about an important event or festival in their own community.

RESOURCES

POV: Brimstone & Glory
http://www.pbs.org/pov/brimstoneandglory
This site includes a general discussion guide with additional activity ideas.

The New York Times: “Despite Blast in Mexico, a Clamor to Rebuild Fireworks Market”
nytimes.com/2016/12/21/world/americas/despite-fatal-blast-mexicans-clamor-to-rebuild-fireworks-market.html
Reporting by Paulina Villegas and Azam Ahmed on a recent Tultepec explosion gives background and underscores the danger of residents’ work.

Power Poetry
powerpoetry.org/actions/making-multimedia-poetry
This website offers advice for creating poems with multimedia. Also see:
http://creativeeducator.tech4learning.com/v02/lessons/Create_a_Video_Poem, or search YouTube for “visual poetry” to find examples.

POV: Media Literacy Questions for Analyzing POV Films
http://www.pbs.org/pov/educators/media-literacy.php
This list of questions provides a useful starting point for leading rich discussions that challenge students to think critically about documentaries.

STANDARDS
RI.9-10.2
Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

RI.9-10.7
Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums (e.g., a person's life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account.

L.9-10.5
Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships and nuances in word meanings.

SL.9-10.1
Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

SL.9-10.2
Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source.

SL.9-10.6
Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

Content Knowledge: (https://www2.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp) a compilation of content standards and benchmarks for K-12 curriculum by McREL (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning).

Language Arts, Standard 1: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process.
Language Arts, Standard 2: Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing.
Language Arts, Standard 8: Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes.
Language Arts, Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Faith Rogow, Ph.D., is the co-author of The Teacher’s Guide to Media Literacy: Critical Thinking in a Multimedia World (Corwin, 2012) and past president of the National Association for Media Literacy Education. She has written discussion guides and lesson plans for more than 250 independent films.