

# Literature and the Moral Imagination

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## Author's Note:

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## Introduction

### Smelly People

Uncle Oswell smells of tobacco.  
    Aunt Agatha smells of rope.  
Cousin Darren smells of airplane glue.

My mum smells of garlic and cabbage.  
    My dad smells of cups of tea.  
    My baby sister smells of sick.  
    And my brother of scabby knee.

Our classroom smells of stink socks.  
    Our teacher smells of Old Spice.  
        I wonder what I smell of?  
    I'll just have a sniff...hmmm...quite nice.

The poem seems straight-forward, right? An adult can easily comprehend that smelly doesn't often mean a bad odor, especially after reading this poem. Odors or smells remind the author of certain people in their lives. But, what about for a second-grade student? What about a second grader student whose experience is limited to the Navajo Reservation? The first question that was asked by one of my students was, what is tobacco? Automatically, I went into panic mode. I assumed the students were familiar with the word "tobacco", but since I was asked, the next thing was oh, how do I explain tobacco without mentioning cigarettes. How many parents want me to talk about cigarettes to their children? What was the ethical implication of mentioning cigars, cigarettes, or chewing tobacco here? Would my parents understand that I was not introducing them to smoking or chewing tobacco?

When the students read a poem called Smelly People, they read the poem with ease, however, they had no idea what it was about. The poem was about recalling childhood memories based on scents. However, the students had a hard time making sense of the poem and making connections to it. For one, the vocabulary words used in the poem were not familiar to the students. The students interpreted the word smelly as something that stinks or has an unpleasant odor. I had to explain, that in this poem, smelly referred to scents that were both pleasant and unpleasant to the nose. Secondly, we went line by line, describing the scents of items mentioned in the poem: rope, airplane glue, soap, garlic and cabbage, tea, sick, scabby knee, stinky socks, and Old Spice. The only scents that made sense to the students were the scents of soap, and stinky socks. The extension of the lesson was to have a discussion on what scents brought back memories for them and for students to write a short poem about which scents triggered memories. The students did not have prior experiences with any of the scents mentioned in the poem, and could not comprehend the context of the poem. This whole explanation took time away from the lesson on poems. Furthermore, the poem was not culturally relevant because not of the students are not exposed to the scents mentioned in the poem and the scents mentioned are something that could be found on the Navajo reservation.

Upon reflection, a simple poem that became more complicated than necessary was because of two reasons; vocabulary and experience. The content of the poem used scents that the students were not familiar with. What does airplane glue smell like, what is garlic, what does cabbage smell like, who smells scabby knees or sick? The content of the poems was “foreign” to the world they lived in on the Navajo Reservation.

### *Demographics*

The school is in Kayenta, one of the larger communities in Northeastern Arizona, approximately 30 miles from the Utah Border. The population of Kayenta is about 5,189 people, according to the 2010 Census. In that same Census, 92.3% of the population were identified as Native American, the rest were other nationalities. In addition, a majority of the population were under 18 years old (38.9%), and between 35-64 years old (33.2%). Furthermore, there are churches that represent several religious groups in the community.

The community has several sit-down and fast-food restaurants, mostly located at the junction of Highway 160 and Highway 163. Kayenta also has a Bashas’ Diné Market, and Ace Hardware Store, Video Plus, and Navajo Arts and Crafts stores. Other amenities include three hotels: Wetherill Inn, Kayenta Monument Valley Inn, and Hampton Inn. There is also a Wells Fargo Bank, the one and only bank, a Western Union, and H&R Block, and U.S. Post Office. In addition, there is Kayenta Indian Health Service available for the community.

The community of Kayenta is served by two schools: Kayenta Community School and Kayenta Unified School District. Kayenta Community School also known as Kayenta Boarding School is operated by Bureau of Indian Education and serves K-8 students. Kayenta Unified School District is a K-12 school that serves about 1,500 students, which included students from surrounding communities such as Dennehotso, Chilchinbeto, Black Mesa, Shonto, and parts of Monument Valley, the part that is in Arizona. KUSD is one of the few public schools located on the Navajo Reservation. The school population is 98% Native American students, most of them Navajo students. KUSD is divided into four schools: Kayenta Early Childhood Education, Kayenta Elementary School, Kayenta Middle School, and Monument Valley High School.

Kayenta Elementary School is a Title 1 school that serves about 500 students from Kindergarten through Fourth Grade. Currently, there are 5-6 classes at each grade level with each class serving approximately 19 students. This past school year, there were 6 second-grade classrooms with 18-21 students in each classroom. Each class is an inclusive classroom that serves a mixture of students including English Learners, students with special needs, nonreaders, gifted students, Native and non-Native students.

The teachers at the elementary school have been struggling to find a curriculum that meets the needs of the students. The school has gone through several curriculum, sometimes using multiple curriculums within the last few school years. For the 2022/2023 school year, the school district adopted Beyond Textbook. Beyond Textbook is not necessarily a curriculum, but rather a framework. When it was first announced that we adopted Beyond Textbook, there was some excitement because it meant that the teachers had a chance to develop their own curriculum plans to teach in accordance to the framework. All other curriculums previously adopted by the school

district became resources. One of the main reasons this was great news was because the students needed a curriculum that is designed especially for their level of experience.

Kayenta Elementary School has been identified as a failing school according to Arizona department of Education's State Accountability A-F Letter grades. According to Arizona Revised Statutes 15-241, which requires Arizona Department of Education to develop an annual achievement profile for every public school in Arizona. The components and the weight for grading at the elementary school (K-8) include 30% for proficiency in both English Language Arts and Math, 50% for student growth percentile, 10% for English Learner Proficiency on AZELLA (Arizona English Language Learner Assessment). In addition, 10% for Acceleration/Readiness, which include improvement of chronic absenteeism, inclusion of Special Education Students into in General Education, and improvement in proficiency of subgroups. The school may gain bonus points in science by testing 95% of their students and Special Education by maintaining enrollment of students for the full academic year. Kayenta Elementary School received a grade of F during the 2017-2018 school year. The following school year (2018-2019), the school improved to a letter grade of D, but it was not enough. We did not improve the following school year (2019 -2020) but the school maintained the letter grade D. No letter grades were given for school year 2020-2021 due to COVID 19. Unfortunately, Navajo Nation Elementary Schools did not receive any letter scores for 2021-2022 school year, but the state treats that as D/F grade. This school year, 2022/2023, was the final year for to our school to improve to a Letter Grade of C or better, otherwise "the school will be forced into a partnership with an Achievement District School, a Fresh Start School Operations, or be shutdown, at the Arizona Achievement District Board's discretion."

Within the last few years, the school has adopted several curriculum units for English Language Arts (ELA), including some computer-based learning. We have had Wit & Wisdom, Wilson's Foundation, I-Read, McGraw-Hill's Wonders, and so on. Within the last five years, we have gone through so many curriculums.

I chose this topic because Kayenta Unified School District recently adopted Beyond Textbook. Beyond Textbook is a framework for teaching essential standards. Beyond Textbook's philosophy of teaching and learning goes "beyond" textbooks and state standards to strengthen support for communities of teachers, facilitate teaching and learning, and improve student growth and achievement. Basically, the content of the lessons and curriculum are designed by the teacher themselves.

This unit is intended for students in my second-grade students at Kayenta Elementary School and could be modified for first-grade and second grade students.

## **Rationale**

This spring, one of the core standards that was covered has students Describe how words and phrases supply rhythm and meaning in a story, poem, or song. In the Moral Imagination Seminar, I will create a curriculum intended for second grade students who attend school in Kayenta, AZ. This year, I taught introduction to poems using poems from the school's resources and curriculums. However, as soon as I taught it and tested the students, they failed to recall the

concepts I taught. When I reflected, one of the questions I asked was why the lessons were so easily forgotten? One of the answers was that the content of the poems was “foreign” to the world they live in. I want to create a curriculum that will implement Navajo culture to teach comprehension, poems, and vocabulary to expand phenomenal concepts. I believe that using Navajo culture, the culture that children from the reservation are exposed to daily, will help students retain the main concepts of poems and comprehensions of poems.

For this unit, I will explore phenomenal concepts which are basically memories acquired based on personal experiences. The memories are triggered involuntary through scents, songs, and stories. The curriculum will use Navajo poets and authors who have written poems and stories about the Navajo experiences, something that the students can relate to. The types of poetry I want to explore include poems that are rhythmic and semiotic complexities. My second-grade students including the English Learners, special needs students, and all the other students require gestures, images, or objects to help them retain content.

In addition, I want students to create poems that uses their senses, similar to the poem Smelly People. The class will have a discussion on some smells that they are familiar with like the smell of coffee brewing, the smell of firewood or coal burning, the smell of roasting mutton, and the scent of mutton stew, which are all scents that most of the students are familiar with. Then talk about what reminds scents remind them of families, or what scents triggers memories.

Furthermore, I will implement literature from other cultures and compare it with literature from Navajo authors. It will also help them with comprehension. The idea is to help student realize that other cultures have similar cultures and similar stories. This will help the students gain more background knowledge.

Lastly, this unit will include vocabulary lessons. Vocabulary is one of the most important aspects of English Language Arts. Comprehension, reading, and writing improve overall when students have more vocabulary. One of the ways I want to teach vocabulary is using ekphrastic poems. Ekphrastic poems require students to write poems about art work. Artwork by Native American artists, specifically Navajo artist would help students learn to describe art with vivid details.

## **Content Objective**

### *Ekphrastic poetry*

Ekphrastic poetry is poems written about art. “However, in ancient Greece, the term ekphrasis was applied to the skill of describing things with vivid details” (Ekphrastic Poetry, getty.edu, p.1). In addition, ekphrastic poems include how the speaker is impacted by the artwork whether the experience was transformative, inspired by a beautiful scenery, or influence a political change. “Through the imaginative act of narrating and reflecting on the “action” of a painting or sculpture, the poet may amplify and expand its meaning.” (Ekphrasis, Poetry Foundation). One of the earliest examples of ekphrasis poem is “The Iliad” by Homer. It nearly took 150 poetic lines to for Homer to elaborately describes the shield of Achilles.

In My Mother’s Kitchen

By Shonto Begay

Fragrance of fresh tortillas and corn stew  
Fills my mother's kitchen  
Sparsely furnished  
Crowded with warmth  
Soot-grayed walls, secretive and blank  
She moves gently in and out of light  
Like a dream just out of reach  
The morning light gives her a halo  
That plays upon her crown of dark hair  
Strong brown hands caress soft mounds of dough  
She gazes out into the warming day  
Past sagebrush hills, out towards the foot of Black Mesa...  
How far would she let the goats wonder today  
Before it rains  
Childhood dreams and warmth  
Tight in my throat, tears in my eyes  
The radio softly tuned to a local AM station  
News of ceremonies and chapter meetings  
And funerals  
Flows into the peaceful kitchen  
Lines upon her face, features carved of hard times  
Lines around her eyes, creases of happy times  
Bittersweet tears and ringing silver laughter  
I ache in my heart  
My mother's gentle movements light up dark corners  
Her gentle smiles recall childhood dreams still so alive  
My mother moves in and out of light  
Like clouds on days of promising rain

Navajo Poet Shonto Begay wrote an ekphrastic poem about his own painting, "My Mother's Kitchen." In the poem, he describes the painting about the subject, which happens to be a portrait of his mother. Shonto's poem expresses so much emotion and recalls feelings about his mother. His deep love and respect for his mother resonates throughout the poem. In addition, he portrays the warmth in the home and abundance of love projected by his mother and appeal to most students on the reservation. The familial relationship with his mother, whether with their mother, grandmother, aunt or sister is something that every child understands.

Another aspect of the poem that resonant with most students, since Shonto grew up in similar environment as the students, is the dough and the different types of bread that can be made from dough. A student may not be familiar with the word fragrant, but they are familiar with the scent of tortillas and stew. Once they figure out what fragrant means, I suspect that the discussion of

bread will flow easily. For example, whenever I cook at home, my nephew can distinguish between fried bread, tortillas, biscuit, and rolls. When I cook mutton stew, he often asks if I am going to make soup bread (fried bread), or asks if I am making soup bread, whenever, gets a whiff of what I am cook. When he smells bacon, he requests that I either make circle bread (tortilla), or biscuits, which are his favorite types of bread for each meal. The different types of bread, especially tortilla and fried bread are familiar staples with each meal, especially a meal that includes mutton.

In addition, most students at one time or another had observed or had been entranced by a mom or a grandmother making dough. I remember watching my mom making dough, moving with such grace, fluidity, and speed, making it look so easy, but also wondering if I would ever make dough as easily as she makes it. At the same time, she would inspire me to try and make the dough just as easily as she does.

Furthermore, the central source of heat in most homes are wood stoves, and often the smoke escapes from the stove, leaving behind “Soot-grayed walls”. A Navajo child will tell you why the wall is gray, and the scent of the wood burning in the stove invoke a memory of winter, and how the stove gave off heat. The heat itself gave warmth not only to the family, but also reminds them of the warmth of familial relationships.

What does it mean when Shonto states “sparsely furnished, crowded with warmth”? These two lines from the poem explain so much that a child could easily understand, however, it still requires explanation because they still need to understand the figurative language the author used to convey the feelings in his memory about how a room can be full of love, even if the family had few possessions.

Finally, “Lines upon her face, features carved of hard times, lines around her eyes, creases of happy times” is worth discussing because it describes the wrinkles on a mother’s face. Lines or creases on a mother, or grandmother’s face represent both good and bad emotions. Every mother is worried about something, and go through hard times, which may cause creases on her face like the frown lines or creases between the eyes. What about the wrinkles around her eyes? Sometimes wrinkles appear around the eyes due to someone smiling so much from happiness.

### *Phenomenal Concepts*

This research will help me I like the idea of exploring phenomenal concepts which are basically memories acquired based on personal experiences that trigger involuntary memories such as scents, songs, and stories. I want to create a curriculum that will use Navajo poets who write about the Navajo experience, something that the students can relate to. Third grade students, especially those who are English Learners require gestures, images, or objects to help them retain content.

Students in my third-grade classroom believe that they have limited experience because the text or content of lessons are beyond their comprehension. It’s not that they know less than other second graders across the United States, it is just because the texts and contents used in

curriculums do not activate prior knowledge or often about subjects that students have limited or no prior experiences with.

Poems by Navajo poets use their background as the tool for writing. Most of the students in my classroom have similar background, and especially come from the same culture as the poets. The words used the poet resonant with the students in one way or another. "My Mother's Kitchen" is a good example of a poem that uses the sense of smell, sense of touch, the sense of sight, the sense of hearing, and sense of taste to give the experience of what it is like to be a Navajo child, growing up on the Navajo reservation. The students in my classroom have similar experience as Shonto. Some of the students grow up in the same household as their grandparents or being raised by their parents. They know what a dough is, they know what it is like to watch a person cooking, they know what KTNN is, even though sometimes, students might wake up to grandparents watching the news on TV, rather than waking up to the grandparents listening to KTNN. They do know KTNN is what families listen to on long drives across the reservation. Despite all the bad things that happen in the world, it's their mom's smile, or grandmother's smile that provide reassurance that they are safe.

### *Semiotic Complexity*

Semiotic Complexity is as clear as mud. "The morass of meanings that our culture creates" (Hall, 2014, p.5) can be "explored through a variety of objects, images, and texts" (Hall, 2014, p.5). According to Sean Hall (2014), semiotic is defined as a theory of signs. Interestingly, semiotic derives from the Greek word *semeiotikos* meaning an interpretation of signs. Signing is necessary because it is significant for all forms of communications which may include "gestures, expressions, speech disorders, slogans, graffiti, road signs, commercials, medical symptoms, marketing, music, body language, drawings, paintings, photography, poetry, design, architecture, food, heraldry, rituals, and primitive symbols" (Hall, 2014, p. 5).

But how do signs really work? Consider the word stop. Stop could basically mean stop, but what does it really mean? A sign could easily be misunderstood. Considering the word stop, it might mean that there is danger ahead, or it could mean a place to stop as in stop sign at an intersection, or it could mean a place a bus stop, in which case it is a place to go to catch the bus stop. There are so many meanings for stop. In other words, "signs are important because they can mean something other than themselves" (Hall, 2014, p.5).

To better understand and explain semiotics, the author organized the meaning into three categories: natural life, artificial life, and supernatural life. Natural life is further divided into biological life and nonbiological life. Biological life explains human being (anthroposemiotics), animals (zoosemiotics), plants (phytosemiotics), and microorganisms (microsemiotics.). Nonbiological Life (Phyiosemiotics) include the universe, galaxies, planets, and minerals/ rocks. Artificial Life include cybernetic organisms, synthetic organisms, intelligent machines, smart objects, and appliances, and nanotechnology. Supernatural Life include Benevolent Beings (Gods and Angels), Malevolent Beings (Devils/ Evils Spirits, ghosts), Quasi-humans (Zombies/ Vampires/ Mermaids/ Fairies/ Goblins/ Elves), and quasi-animals (Unicorns/ Dragons/ Griffins).



Furthermore, there must be a distinction between things that have a life, live a life, and lead a life. Things that have a life are “things that have a life come into existence, persist for a certain amount of time, and then cease to be” (Hall, 2014, p.8), in other words things that conform to a pattern of birth, life, and death. Things that live a life have a distinct class. “They may engage in reproduction, grow, and development, undertake autonomous activity, have a certain degree of complexity, engage in adaptive behavior, and be able to process chemicals so as to gain energy” just like humans and animals. Leading a life is about “making plans and having projects; it is about decision-making and development, fitting means to ends, conducting oneself according to certain moral codes, being part of system of value, and trying to make sense of the world in complex ways” (Hall, 2014, p.8)

When discussing semiotic complexities related to Navajo language, it is often associated with Navajo Literacy or the lack of interest from readers of Navajos. On the Navajo Nation, writing in Navajo is visible in the public. Although, the Navajo Nation is making an effort to revitalize the Navajo Language, and some Navajo authors are using Navajo Literacy in their writing, and communities on the Navajo reservations are making an effort to use Navajo Literacy, “writing in Navajo is a visible part of the public semiotic world of the Navajo Nation(Compare with Mclaughlin 1992)” (Webster, 2014, p. 376) but “it is also noted in the scholarly literature that Navajo literacy has not caught on (Spolsky, 2002)” (Webster, 2014, p. 376). One of the main points, I want to make to the students is that their language is important, because it is present in community names, some of their peers last names, and some communities are trying to use the Navajo Language in their signs. Bashas Diné Market even use Navajo words and spelling inside their stores.

Communities such as Chilchinbeto, Kaibeto, Shonto, Dennehotso, and Kayenta have names that derived from Navajo culture, yet the pronunciations are Anglicized. Recently, shopping centers and stores are beginning to use more Navajo words written in Navajo language with Navajo pronunciations. Some examples include: Tsé Bit’a’í Shopping Center, Tó Dínééhzee’ Shopping Center, and Tsé’ghá’hoodzá’ní’ Shopping Center. Bashas Dine Markets have also started using Navajo Language to describe sections of the stores: abe’ ch’iiyáán (Dairy), chiyáán Hasht’eelyaagí (Delicatessen) and so on.

### *The Names*

Laura Tohe

Lou Hon, Suzie, Cherry, Doughnut, Woody, Wabbit, Jackie,

Rena Mae, Zonnie, Sena, Verna, Grace, Seline, Carilene

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Roanhorse, Fasthorse, Bluehorse, Yellowhorse, Begay, Deswood, Niilwood,

Chee, Atsidi, Tapahonso, Haabaah, Hastiin Nez

Although the poem “The Names” has lexical rhythms of poetic and ordinary language, Laura Tohe reminds us there is great meaning. It gives indigenous voice to the experiences of Dine

children in the generations of boarding schools run by the Bureau of Indian Affairs and various churches, largely committed to the westernization (and negligibly to the education) of Indian children” (Brill de Ramirez, 2011, p. 184). In this poem, the author guides her readers through the colonization and westernization of her tribal language which is the Navajo language. The poem begins with the westernized first names of children, followed by the mispronunciation of the student’s last name. The mispronunciation is especially personal to the author because of the constant mispronunciation of her own last name. Laura Tohe, whose last name, stems from Tóhii, which means towards water, was westernized and often mispronounced.

In the poem, the familiar anglicized names personalize and humanizes the girls. “The final listing of last names indigenizes and tribalizes the girls firmly within the Dine landscape and history” (Brill de Ramirez, 2011, p. 184). The last names are recognizable of Navajo Nation and are found through traditional stories, derived from clan lineage, or come from specific names. In this poem, the semiotic complexity and diversity are presented in the concluding last names.

In this unit, I will use the Navajo last names of the students to rewrite the poem by Tohe. All the students’ names in my classroom do have Anglicized first names, but some have last names that derived from Navajo origins, just like in “The Name” poems. The names that derive from Navajo words, include as Benally, Tsinnijinnie, Denetsosie, Tsosie, Yazzie, Wauneka, and Peshlakai. These Navajo words have been anglicized and have been mispronounced yet have become the norm in spelling and pronunciation. Benally in Navajo is Bi Nálí, or paternal grandfather/grandmother in third person form. Tsosie in Navajo is ts’ósí, or describing someone as skinny/ lean, and the Navajo translation for Denetsosie is Diné ts’ósí, or skinny/lean man. The name Yazzie translates as Yázhí, which translates to someone with a small stature, or a term of endearment for my child. Tsinnijinnie have many alternative spellings including Tsinnajinnie, or Tsinajinnie, which derives from the clan, Tsi’naajíni, which translates to black streak wood people clan.

“The Names” poem has so many possibilities. There is a historical implication to mispronounced last names of certain students, and names of certain communities on the Navajo reservation. Do students know where their names come from, what is the historical significance of their last names, or do they know it? What about the significance of community names? Would they be able to say the names in Navajo or would they continue to use the Anglicized pronunciation?

The first point is that students will use the poems, names, names, especially last names, and community names explain that they came from their Navajo Language. These names in Navajo, although Anglicized and mispronounced, have originated from a personal characteristic of an ancestor, characteristics of a location, events, clans, or from family associations. The Navajo language is important and exists around them.

## **Teaching Strategies**

### *Text-to-Self*

Text-to-Self is a teaching strategy that help students connect ideas to a text, specifically a poem written by a Navajo poet, to their own lives, current events, and history to build comprehension. The main strategy in this unit is to increase text connections to poems written by Navajo poets like Shonto Begay. In his poems and art, he is constantly making connections to Navajo culture, something that students of all ages can relate to. In “The Names,” poem, students can explore where their last names come from, did it come from a clan, or a family history?

Once the students comprehend using senses using explored in poems by Navajo Poets, I want to use that momentum to transition to poets from other cultures. The idea is the transition will help with building comprehension. The Navajo culture a powerful tool to use to help students learn.

### *Pair it with a Picture*

Ekphrastic poems are poems written about art. Shonto Begay’s poem is about his artwork with the same name as his poem. Shonto Begay is artist known for writing poems about his own artwork. “In My Mother’s Kitchen” is a good example of a poem that is written about a painting by Shonto with the same name. With the aid of the poem and painting, students can make better connections to their culture and making connections to the text. Although the students are Navajo, not all aspect of the culture represent in the Shonto Begay poem, but pairing the poem with the painting will help students gets a better grasp of the poem. Again, pairing a poem with a text will be a great way to transition to poems used in school curriculums.

### *Read a Poem Aloud*

Reading a poem out loud lead to better understanding of the text. When a child reads with the poem with the sounds and rhythm, they start to make connections to the text. With this strategy, I would like to introduce a collection of poems from Navajo poets like Shonto Begay, Luci Tapahonso, and Laura Tohe. I especially like poems from these poets because they base their poetry from Navajo culture, a culture that is familiar to the students. Part of reading a poem is to teach students to also visualize what they are reading. Students must listen to themselves read a text in order to make sense of the text. The read aloud will be used often in the classroom for other text as well.

In addition, read aloud will also be used for reading fluency and reading prosody. Reading prosody is the ability for students to read with expression, and it leads to reading fluency. One of the main reasons students have trouble with comprehension is that a lot of students sound like robots when they read, or their reading is choppy. A lot of students still spend time reading words in isolation or spend too much time sounding our words, which unfortunately affects their reading skills. Reading fluency is part of developing reading skills. If the students read aloud, they will be practicing reading prosody and reading fluency.

## **Classroom Activities**

### *Summarizing Map*

Students will read a poem and analyze it as a team using summarizing map. Students will be given a prompt from a poem. For example, “Sparsely furnished, crowded with warmth.” mean

from the poem by Shonto Begay. The purpose of a summarizing map should be comprehensive, concise, coherent, and independent. What I mean by comprehensive is that the students should be able to isolate all the important points in a text, but in this case the poem. The students will come up with a list of the main points they interpret from the excerpt from the Begay poem. Once, each individual student has come up with a list of what they believe the author means by the contrast in the lines, they compare answers and eliminate any repetitions. They try to come up with one concise answer that is also coherent. The students will be encouraged to maintain their own voice, to express their understanding and interpretation.

### *Poetry Writing*

Students will write a poetry. To encourage poetry writing, students will start off using writing prompts, as well as sentence frame. Because students still need help, I will need to provide them with as much help as possible writing the first poem. Since the Begay poem is about his mother, the poem I want students to write is about their mother. When I say mother, I need to be careful here because some of my students are raised by grandparents. I must be clear that I am also including their grandmothers.

In this writing activity, we will start by drawing a picture of their grandmother. Then we will do a brainstorming activity, whether it is a list or a web, students will write down about what makes their “mothers” special. In addition, students will recall and write down their favorite memories, including the feelings the memories bring back. We will use all these ideas to write a poem.

### *Compare and Contrast*

There is another poem named “My Mother’s Kitchen’ by Choman Hardi. The author describes the items she will inherit from her mother’s kitchen. The item she inherits are items she has accumulated over time. The author describes the items lovingly. The poem also describes how her mother had to start over 9 times, refurbishing her kitchen, but at the same time not talking about the things she lost. This is a good compare poem for Begay’s poem. Both loving describe the kitchen at the heart of the poem.

## **Students Assessment Plan**

Students will take a pre and post poem test. In both assessments, students will read a poem and a picture to help open-ended questions. They will analyze the poem and interpret the feelings or the mood of the poem. With students who are still struggling, they will have a modified version using multiple choice questions to check for understanding. If a child prefers, I will allow students to verbally answer the questions. I know sometimes it is hard to write down what you are thinking.

## **Alignment of Standards**

3.RL.5 Refer to parts of stories, dramas, and poems when writing or speaking about a text, using terms such as chapter, scene, and stanza; describe how each successive part builds on earlier sections. The part of standards that I will heavily focus on is poems. The poems will be read in full, but parts of the poem will be explicitly analyzed to help students will comprehension.

3.RL.9 Compare and contrast the themes, settings, and plots of stories written by the same author about the same or similar characters (e.g., in books from a series). The students will compare two poems from different poets about the importance of their Mother's Kitchen. Both poets have different interpretations for the "heart" of the house, the kitchen, but how important it is to them.

PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> Diné Culture Standards – I will develop an understanding of Diné way of life.

Concept 3 – Iiná – I will implement and recognize the Diné Lifestyle. The standard will help students recognize that their lifestyle is like the description of the authors lifestyle in a poem.

## Resources

"My Mother's Kitchen" by Shonto Begay, both the painting and the poem. Both are great resources for introducing poetry for students. Since the poem is paired with a painting with by the same name, students can look at the painting to help them look for details they may not understand in written form.

"My Mother's Kitchen" by Choman Hardi as describes the love for a mother and her attachment to items in the kitchen as well as her excitement for furnishing a kitchen. This is a great poem for students to use to compare the two poems. <https://poetryarchive.org/poem/my-mothers-kitchen/>

The Read and Response Questions are great for interpreting the poem by Shonto Begay.

[https://cdnsm5-ss11.sharpschool.com/UserFiles/Servers/Server\\_981159/File/Read%20and%20Respond%20Year%201%201.21.19.pdf](https://cdnsm5-ss11.sharpschool.com/UserFiles/Servers/Server_981159/File/Read%20and%20Respond%20Year%201%201.21.19.pdf)

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