

Singing Poems

The awareness of poetry involves an awakening to the personalities of vowels and consonants. Once the vowels and consonants stand out, once we are really awake to them, we begin to notice poetic brilliance that would be otherwise invisible. Making technique audible is what makes it visible. One way to awaken students' minds to the sounds of words is to split the vowels and consonants, and to let the students sing the words, with the teacher acting as conductor and pointing to the groups in turn, with symphonic flair. For example, divide the left side of the class from the right side of the class. The left will sing the consonants, and the right sing the vowels. With the line in question written on the board in a vowel/consonant split, let the students sing:

R m R m wh r f r rt th R m ?
 o eo o eo e e o e a ou o eo?

First, let the consonants sing by themselves. They will sing rrrrr, mmmm, rrrrr, mmmm, whwh, rrrr, ffff, rrrr, rt, th, rrrr, mmmm. Then the vowels by themselves: oooo, eeee, oooo, oooo, eeee, oooo, eh, (silent), oooo, (silent), ah, owww, oooo, eeee, oooo. The realization should be dramatic: the consonants are so nice: rrr, mmm, and the vowels are so consistent: oo, ee. It is a beautiful line. We begin to realize why the dialogues in *Romeo and Juliet* are regarded as among the greatest poetry in English. Now, having let each side sing alone, let them sing through the sounds in correct order:

Consonants: RRRR

Vowels: OOOO

Consonants: MMMM

A variation is to sing all the vowels at once, and then all the consonants at once, and then combine. For example, if we are examining Sylvia Plath's line, "Fumy, spiritous mists inhabit this place," here is what would happen:

F m , sp r t s m sts nh b t th s pl c .
 u y, i i ou i i a i i a e.

Divide the consonant side of the room into smaller groups and tell them, "You three sing ffff," you four sing ssss," "You three sing th..." and then tell the vowel side of the room to all sing the lower *ih* sound of the *i*: "You sing ihhhhh." In a case like this, it is not necessary to