

Using Word Clouds to Analyze Poetry and Prose

Grade Level: 8-10

Introduction

To thrive in today's technology-driven and visual world, students need to learn 21st-century skills including competencies such as creativity and communication. Word clouds are excellent examples of using both creativity and communication skills. Plus, word clouds are easy and fun to do!

A word cloud (or text cloud or tag cloud) is a visual or graphical image composed of words used in a particular text or subject whereby the size of each word indicates its frequency or importance. The word cloud is created by counting words in the text. Students can get creative by changing the font, color and shape. There are several free online word cloud generators such as WordArt.com, WordClouds.com, Word Cloud Maker, WordItOut, MonkeyLearn, TagCrowd and more. This lesson plan integrates EBSCO's Poetry & Short Story Reference Source database.

Using the introductory text above, here is an example of a word cloud:



Common Core State Standards

- Language Standards 2-12.1, 2.3, 3.2.f, 3.3, 5.2, 5.3
- Writing Standards 2-12.6

Objectives

- Engage students in predicting the main points or representation in a poem or passage based on review of a word cloud (a pre-reading strategy and interactive engagement)
- Conversely, engage students in predicting what the word cloud would look like after reading a poem or passage.
- Engage students in critical thinking
- Develop students' vocabulary

Materials

- Computers/laptops/tablets
- Access to Poetry & Short Story Reference Source
- Word Cloud generator app

Procedure

1. Instruct students on how to search Poetry & Short Story Reference Source. Consider using this [scavenger hunt](#) as a warm-up activity.

2. **Pre-reading activity:**

Teacher creates word cloud(s) using one or more of the following suggested poems:

- "A Poison Tree" by William Blake
- "America" by Richard Blanco
- "Chicago" by Carl Sandburg
- "Every Cat Has a Story" by Naomi Shihab Nye
- "Grass" by Carl Sandburg
- "Harlem" by Langston Hughes
- "How Did You Die?" by Edmund Vance Cooke
- "Sunset and Sunrise; or A Day" by Emily Dickinson

Distribute word cloud(s) to students to review (individually or in groups) and ask them:

- Who they think the main character(s) will be?
- Where and when does this poem or passage take place?
- Who or what is this about?
- Who is narrating?
- Can they write a poem or story using the words in the word cloud?

3. Students will then choose their own poem or passage to research. (Teacher may provide a list of recommendations.) There are three main tasks. Students may print each component or save to Google Drive:
 - Find your poem in Poetry & Short Story Reference Source.
 - Find an article of literary criticism about your chosen poem in Poetry & Short Story Reference Source.
 - Create a word cloud for your chosen poem using a word cloud generator.

4. When students have completed their word clouds, ask them to respond to the following questions (verbally or in writing):
 - Which words are the biggest? Which words are the smallest?
 - What do the words tell you about the poem or passage? Which words surprise you?
 - Which words describe the poem's setting, theme, mood or narrator?
 - Do the words convey the meaning of the poem or passage the poet intended? Why or why not?

Assessment

Formative Assessment

The formative assessment will help students identify their strengths and weaknesses as well as help educators recognize where students are struggling. After students complete their word clouds, educators can conduct formative assessments including observations, questioning, discussions, practice presentations, think-pair-share, and constructive quizzes. For educators, using a word cloud could be helpful when assessing student survey data. What stands out? What doesn't? How can this help inform your lessons?

Summative Assessment

The summative assessment is designed to measure student achievement at the end of instruction. After students complete their word clouds, educators can conduct summative assessments including quizzes/tests with items such as multiple choice, true/false, matching, fill in the blank, and/or one- or two-sentence response to assess students' understanding of the chosen poems or passages.