

ELA: Grade 8, Lesson 10, *A.E. Housman*

Lesson Focus: The focus of today’s lesson will be on A.E. Housman and one of his poems, “To an Athlete Dying Young.”

Practice Focus: Students will analyze an informational text to determine the main ideas; students will also analyze one of Housman’s poems using a strategy for unlocking its meaning.

Objective: Students will use “A.E. Housman, 1859-1936” and “To an Athlete Dying Young” to learn about A.E. Housman and one of his important poems with a focus on determining the main ideas in the texts as well as author’s craft for creating meaning.

Academic Vocabulary: rigorous, academia, betimes, laurel, renown, connotation, personification, symbolism

TN Standards: 8.RI.KID.1, 8.RI.KID.2, 8.RI.KID.3, 8.RI.CS.4, 8.RL.KID.1, 8.RL.KID.2, 8.RL.KID.3, 8.RL.CS.5, 8.RL.CS.6

Teacher Materials:

- Lesson script
- Chart paper
 - Will need to write out the TPCASTT template onto chart paper; you only need to include the headings for each section as the commentary will be covered in the script
 - Will need to write the independent practice questions on chart paper so students can see them and copy them onto their own paper

Student Materials:

- Paper, a pencil, and a surface to write on

Teacher Do	Students Do
<p>Opening (1 min)</p> <p>Hello! Welcome to Tennessee’s At Home Learning Series for literacy! Today’s lesson is for all our 8th graders out there, though everyone is welcome to tune in. This lesson is the fifth in this series.</p> <p>My name is ____ and I’m a ____ grade teacher in Tennessee schools. I’m so excited to be your teacher for this lesson! Welcome to my virtual classroom!</p> <p>If you didn’t see our previous lesson, you can find it at www.tn.gov/education. You can still tune in to today’s lesson if you haven’t seen any of our others. But it might be more fun if you first go back and watch our other lessons, since today we’ll be talking about things we learned previously.</p> <p>As a reminder, in this lesson set, we are studying some very well-regarded and widely studied poets. We have already learned about the English poet William Blake and his poetry and we have also studied the American poet Emily Dickinson. Poetry has been a powerful mode of writing in American and</p>	<p>Students gather materials for the lesson and prepare to engage with the lesson’s content.</p>

<p>British history and our goal is to gain a deeper understanding of some of the most successful poets and how they impacted their respective societies.</p> <p>We will begin today by learning about the English poet A.E. Housman and his poetry! Before we get started, to participate fully in our lesson today, you will need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper, a pencil, and a surface to write on <p>Ok, let's begin!</p>	
<p>Intro (1 minute)</p> <p>Today our goal is to read an informational text, "A.E. Housman, 1859-1936" in order to understand important details about A.E. Housman that will assist us in understanding his poetry. We will also review the TPCASTT tool for understanding poetry that we used in previous lessons. I will guide you in using this tool and you will practice with one of Housman's poems, "To an Athlete Dying Young."</p> <p>We will begin with me reading the short informational text as a whole and then we will reread it and pause along the way for deeper understanding.</p> <p>At the end of the lesson, I will assign you independent work you can complete after the video ends.</p>	<p>Students listen to the teacher's introduction.</p>
<p>Teacher Model/Read-Aloud (10 minutes)</p> <p>Now, let's dig in to the first text we will be studying, which is a brief introduction to A.E. Housman's life and work. The title of the informational text is "A.E. Housman, 1859-1936" which indicates his life span and that he lived to be approximately 77 years of age. The author is not listed for this text so we will simply refer to him or her as "the author." Let's read the text:</p> <p>"Born and raised in England, Alfred Edward Housman was primarily an academic scholar and a professor, but he also published two works of poetry during his lifetime. During his college years, Housman established himself as a scholar of the classic texts of early Greek and Roman culture. After college, he went on to become a professor of Latin, first at University College, London, and later at Trinity College, Cambridge.</p> <p>In his academic career, Housman worked tirelessly to create accurate translations of the classic works he studied. His</p>	<p>Students follow along, comprehending the text. They use teacher think-alouds and tips (e.g., definitions of words) to support their comprehension, and they think or write as directed in response to prompts and questions.</p>

rigorous, or extremely thorough, work focused on uncovering the words as they were written. Housman took this work extremely seriously and criticized other scholars he viewed as lazy.

When Housman published his first work of poetry, *A Shropshire Lad*, in 1896, he revealed another side of himself, altogether different from his strict views of academia, or academic studies. He wrote most of the sixty-three poems in the collection after the death of a beloved friend. This likely explains why many of the poems focus on the short span of a person's youth and the concept of death.

Although the collection did not receive much attention at first, it became more popular during World War I because many of the poems depicted brave soldiers. *Last Poems*, his second book of poems, on the other hand, quickly achieved success upon its publication in 1922. With this volume, Housman addressed a greater diversity of subjects. It is widely considered superior to his first publication."

Now that you have a big picture view of the text, let's revisit the text paragraph by paragraph so we can analyze it at a deeper level.

"Born and raised in England, Alfred Edward Housman was primarily an academic scholar and a professor, but he also published two works of poetry during his lifetime. During his college years, Housman established himself as a scholar of the classic texts of early Greek and Roman culture. After college, he went on to become a professor of Latin, first at University College, London, and later at Trinity College, Cambridge."

Based on what you hear in this paragraph, what are some inferences you can make about A.E. Housman and his work? Take a moment and write your answer on your paper.

[Pause 30 seconds]

Here is what I inferred from this paragraph. It says Housman was primarily an academic scholar and a professor, which means he spent a lot of time studying and was likely well informed in his writing. The paragraph also tells me he deeply studied classic texts of early Greek and Roman culture and he went on to become a professor of Latin. With that in mind, I would think Housman might draw from a lot of cultural sources to inform his poetry.

Let's take a look at the 2nd paragraph of the text:

"In his academic career, Housman worked tirelessly to create accurate translations of the classic works he studied. His rigorous, or extremely thorough, work focused on uncovering the words as they were written. Housman took this work extremely seriously and criticized other scholars he viewed as lazy."

What does this paragraph tell us about Housman and how might it help us understand his work better? Write your answer on your paper.

[pause for 30 seconds]

Well, it seems clear Housman had a really intense work ethic. He also seemed to be very particular about his translation work and making sure everything was translated very literally. We also learned he was critical of others whom he viewed as lazy. It is likely his work ethic is what enabled him to produce so much poetry alongside his other studies. But I'm personally curious to see if his judgmental attitude carries over into his poetry!

Let's continue reading about him:

"When Housman published his first work of poetry, *A Shropshire Lad*, in 1896, he revealed another side of himself, altogether different from his strict views of academia, or academic studies. He wrote most of the sixty-three poems in the collection after the death of a beloved friend. This likely explains why many of the poems focus on the short span of a person's youth and the concept of death."

Ok, interesting. Let's take a moment to think about how *this* new information might help us understand his work better. Write your response on your paper.

[pause for 30 seconds]

So he might be judgmental but he is also clearly sympathetic and is able to communicate his emotions in his poetry. I wonder if this experience changed him in ways that made him less judgmental.

Let's read the next paragraph:

<p>“Although the collection did not receive much attention at first, it became more popular during World War I because many of the poems depicted brave soldiers. <i>Last Poems</i>, his second book of poems, on the other hand, quickly achieved success upon its publication in 1922. With this volume, Housman addressed a greater diversity of subjects. It is widely considered superior to his first publication.”</p> <p>What inferences can we make about Housman based on this new information?</p> <p>[pause 30 seconds]</p> <p>Well, first, in learning that he wrote poems depicting brave soldiers, we have more evidence he was able to be empathetic and understand the challenges others face. We also learn that he seemed to improve his poetry skills over the course of his lifetime. It only makes sense the more you practice a skill, the better you will get.</p> <p>This completes the informational article describing A.E. Housman’s life and work. Now that we have a solid understanding of his life and work, let’s analyze one of his poems to see if it reflects what we know about him.</p>	
<p><u>Guided Practice</u> (15 minutes)</p> <p>The title of the poem we will study today by Housman is called “To an Athlete Dying Young.” We are only going to do an initial read of Housman’s poem right now, and then we will take a deeper look into it shortly after.</p> <p>A helpful note to start - the speaker of this poem is addressing a young athlete who has recently died. The poem compares how the town once carried the athlete on its shoulders after he won a race, with how they now carry him to his final resting place.</p> <p>Now, let’s read the poem:</p> <p>To an Athlete Dying Young</p> <p>The time you won your town the race We chaired you through the market-place; Man and boy stood cheering by, And home we brought you shoulder-high.</p> <p>To-day, the road all runners come, Shoulder-high we bring you home,</p>	<p>Students follow along and think and act as instructed, gradually gaining confidence and competence.</p> <p>Students will be able to use the TPCASTT tool to analyze poetry.</p>

And set you at your threshold down,
Townsmen of a stiller town.

Smart lad, to slip betimes, which means early, away
From fields where glory does not stay,
And early though the laurel, which is a leaf used to make a
wreath, placed on someone's head after victory, grows
It withers quicker than the rose.

Eyes the shady night has shut
Cannot see the record cut, which means broken,
And silence sounds no worse than cheers
After earth has stopped the ears:

Now you will not swell the rout
Of lads that wore their honours out,
Runners whom renown, or fame, outtran
And the name died before the man.

So set, before its echoes fade,
The fleet foot on the sill of shade,
And hold to the low lintel up
The still-defended challenge-cup.

And round that early-laurelled, which means covered with a
laurel wreath after victory, head
Will flock to gaze the strengthless dead,
And find unwithered on its curls
The garland, or wreath, briefer than a girl's.

This is a really challenging poem that contains layers of meaning. Remember poetry is communicating meaning both directly and indirectly. It is a difficult genre of literature to analyze, which is why we are going to use the TPCASTT tool to help us do it. Let's refresh our memory of this tool before we dig into the poem deeper.

Let's get started. The tool is called TPCASTT.

[display TPCASTT template for students to see]

Notice each of the sections begins with the respective letter in the acronym:

T = Title
P = Paraphrase
C = Connotation
A = Attitude/Tone

S = Shift(s)

T = Title (Revisiting the Title)

T = Theme

Let's create a fresh template so you can practice on it. On a clean sheet of paper, sketch 7 sections going down your paper like the one I'm showing you. Don't worry about labeling yet as I will go over each section individually. Your template does not need to look fancy or perfect. Just give yourself enough room in each section to take notes. It is important to take notes on what goes in each section so you will know how to complete them.

[Pause for 30 seconds]

Now, let's talk about each section. Each of these sections should be completed in sequential order. Label your first section "Title." You may want to make a note in this section, your goal is to consider the title of the poem and to make a prediction about what the poem is about. Poets are very intentional, or purposeful, about how they label their poems. There are always very important clues to the poem's meaning in the title, which is why it is a great place to start. For what reasons might the author have chosen the title, "To an Athlete Dying Young"? Take a moment to jot down your thoughts about the title of this poem.

[Pause for 30 seconds]

Good thinking. In my notes, I wrote down the title "To an Athlete Dying Young" seems to indicate the poem is written to someone the speaker knows, someone who died too young. I'm also sort of curious why he wrote a poem and not a letter in this type of situation. That seems more common but people express their emotions in different ways.

Now, let's read the poem again before we begin the next section. Pay close attention as you will be paraphrasing the poem after we read it.

[reread the poem]

To an Athlete Dying Young

**The time you won your town the race
We chaired you through the market-place;
Man and boy stood cheering by, And
home we brought you shoulder-high.**

Students sketch a template of the tool on their paper. They will complete each section of the tool as directed in the following parts of the lesson.

To-day, the road all runners come,
Shoulder-high we bring you home,
And set you at your threshold down,
Townsmen of a stiller town.

Smart lad, to slip betimes, which means early, away
From fields where glory does not stay,
And early though the laurel, which is a leaf used to make a
wreath, placed on someone's head after victory, grows
It withers quicker than the rose.

Eyes the shady night has shut
Cannot see the record cut, which means broken,
And silence sounds no worse than cheers
After earth has stopped the ears:

Now you will not swell the rout
Of lads that wore their honours out,
Runners whom renown, or fame, outran
And the name died before the man.

So set, before its echoes fade,
The fleet foot on the sill of shade,
And hold to the low lintel up
The still-defended challenge-cup.

And round that early-laurelled, which means covered with a
laurel wreath after victory, head
Will flock to gaze the strengthless dead,
And find unwithered on its curls
The garland, or wreath, briefer than a girl's.

Ok, let's try the next section in TPCASTT, "Paraphrase." Here
the goal is to write *in your own words* exactly what happens
in the poem. You are trying to write down what the poem
says literally, on the surface, not its many layers of meaning.
This is really a simple paraphrase. I know this is a lengthier
poem with challenging language but do your best to capture
the gist of what you understand. Take a few moments to
paraphrase what you remember in the poem.

[pause for 1 minute]

In my notes, I have the following as a brief paraphrase:

Remember that time you won the race and everyone
celebrated your victory by bringing you home shoulder-high?

Well now, today, we're carrying you shoulder-high to place you in your permanent home in the ground. You were smart in leaving early, while you were still on top. Now you won't see those who broke your record and you'll be remembered for what you accomplished.

Can you see I kept my paraphrase casual and simple? I am simply trying to capture the literal ideas I find in the poem.

Let's try the next section, "Connotation." Remember "connotation" means "an idea or feeling a word invokes in addition to its literal meaning." Here is where we start to dig a bit deeper. We're looking for meaning beyond the literal. Poets use a lot of tools to do this, including figurative language, or non-literal language, imagery, sound devices, word choice, etc. Some of the most common figurative language devices are simile, metaphor, personification, which is when a thing such as an idea or animal is given human characteristics, and symbolism, which is the use of symbols to represent ideas. Did you notice any of these present in this poem on the first or second reads? Let's read through the poem again. Look for any of these elements and take notes on your paper. You are not trying to capture every single one - only the ones you think are the most important to understanding the meaning of the poem.

[read the poem]

To an Athlete Dying Young

The time you won your town the race
We chaired you through the market-place;
Man and boy stood cheering by, And
home we brought you shoulder-high.

To-day, the road all runners come,
Shoulder-high we bring you home,
And set you at your threshold down,
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I will pause a moment to allow you to finish your notes.

[pause 1 minute]

Here are some things I noticed. First, I noticed the use of metaphor in the line "To-day, the road all runners come." The road here would be the same as a cemetery. It is a fate all of us will face. I also noticed the use of metaphor in the phrase "eyes the shady night has shut cannot see the record cut." This helps the reader to visualize death as a dark night that shut's a person's eyes to the world before him. It basically says now that the athlete is dead, he won't have to endure seeing another athlete outperform him.

Let's take a look at the next section, "Attitude." In this section, we are trying to figure out the speaker's attitude or tone of the poem. Is it humorous? Sarcastic? In awe? Jot down on your paper some adjectives you think capture the speaker's tone in this poem.

[Pause for 30 seconds]

I wrote down in my notes, "somber," "affirmed," and "content," which means a feeling of being okay with the state of things. These words all capture elements of the author's attitude in the poem. The poem is obviously sad because it concerns the topic of an early death, but the speaker is also reflecting on the positive elements of the

situation, and realizes his friend left the world at a good time in his life.

Let's look at the next section, "Shift." Most poems have a shift, though it may be subtle. It is the moment there is a realization or a change in something. Look for key shift words like "but," "however," "though," or "although." There could also be punctual changes such as commas, periods, ellipses, semicolons, line breaks, etc.

Let's read the text once again to see where we can identify a shift.

[reread the poem]

To an Athlete Dying Young

The time you won your town the race
We chaired you through the market-place;
Man and boy stood cheering by, And
home we brought you shoulder-high.

To-day, the road all runners come,
Shoulder-high we bring you home,
And set you at your threshold down,
Townsmen of a stiller town.

Smart lad, to slip betimes, which means early, away
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And early though the laurel, which is a leaf used to make a
wreath, placed on someone's head after victory, grows
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Will flock to gaze the strengthless dead,
And find unwithered on its curls
The garland, or wreath, briefer than a girl's.

As you hear the text, where do you hear a shift? Take a few moments and write down on your paper where the shift happens and what you think it means.

[pause 1 minute]

In my read, the shift happens early, in the 2nd stanza, where the speaker says "To-day, the road all runners come, Shoulder-high we bring you home, And set you at your threshold down, Townsman of a stiller town." This is where we realize we are no longer celebrating the young man's victories; instead, we are carrying him to his grave. This sets the stage for the rest of the poem where the speaker reflects on the good side of a bad situation.

Let's consider the next section, "Title, revisited." Here, we are looking at the title again to see if it has taken on new meaning after our deeper analysis. Take a moment to write down on your paper any changes from your initial thoughts regarding the title.

[pause for 30 seconds]

Good work. After a deeper analysis, I think the title "To an Athlete Dying Young" really emphasizes the fact that the speaker is trying to send a message to others besides the young man.

We've reached the final section, "Theme." In this section, we are bringing everything together to determine the underlying message of the poem. What does it say about humanity or the world we live in? Take a moment and write down your thoughts on your paper.

[pause 1 minute]

I believe this poem is really emphasizing that life is short and we should embrace all the positive things while we are here because we do not know how long we will be here.

I hope you have found the TPCASTT tool to be useful in understanding the poem's meaning. Keep in mind that is all it

<p>is intended for - a helpful tool to assist you in uncovering a poem's meaning.</p>	
<p><u>Independent Work</u> (1 minute)</p> <p>[Teacher - will need to write the independent practice questions on chart paper so students can see them and copy them onto their own paper.]</p> <p>Let's reflect on today's lesson. Today we learned about A.E. Housman's life and work and used a handy tool to analyze one of his poems. For your independent work, please respond in writing to the following prompts:</p> <p>[teacher - display paper for students to read]</p> <p>Students, please write these questions down on your notebook paper so you will have them handy for when you are responding in writing.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What stood out to you the most regarding A.E. Housman's life and work? After reading his poem, does it change your opinion of what you learned about him? Why or why not?2. What did you learn the most in our analysis of Housman's poem, "To an Athlete Dying Young"?3. What are your thoughts about the poem? Is it too dark or something important to consider? Explain your answer.	<p>Students will respond to a writing prompt that synthesizes their knowledge from today's lesson.</p>
<p><u>Closing</u> (1 min)</p> <p>I enjoyed working on analyzing A.E. Housman and his poetry with you today! Thank you for inviting me into your home. I look forward to seeing you in our next lesson in Tennessee's At Home Learning Series! Bye!</p>	



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