

The Moon

by Emily Dickinson

photograph by John Drummond

Overview

This short lyrical poem evokes images of the changing moon. There is an audio version on the Ready to Read CD *Readalong 2008*.

Suggested purposes

This text supports the comprehension strategies of making connections, visualising, and analysing and synthesising. It provides opportunities for expressive reading and for comparing ideas about the moon across texts. For example, there is a big contrast between the portrayal of the moon in this text and in “*The Story of Rona*”.

Text features

(This information is intended as a prompt for teachers rather than as a list of teaching points.)

- the personification of the moon (“her perfect face”, “she”) which is supported by the poet’s use of metaphors related to personal appearance (“chin of gold”, “perfect face”)
- the contrast between these two phases of the moon
- the simple abcb rhyme scheme
- the idea of time passing, with the first couplet describing the moon “a night or two ago” and the second one describing it “now”
- the poetic use of “was but” rather than “was only”.

Introducing the text

Encourage the children to make connections to their knowledge of the moon. *What have you noticed about the moon on different nights?*

Reading and discussing the poem

Give the children paper folded in half and a pen. Ask the children to close their eyes and listen to you read the poem. *As I read, I want you to make a picture in your head, just like a photograph.*

Read the first two lines of the poem again. If necessary, clarify that “was but” is a poetic way of saying “was only”. Ask the children to draw the picture they have in their heads on the first half of their paper. *What words in the poem helped you make that picture?* Check that the children have understood the idea of the moon as a face. If necessary, shine a torch on a ball to demonstrate the “chin of gold”.

Repeat the process for the next two lines. *Is your moon going to look the same or different in your next picture?* Draw attention to the words “was” and “a night or two

ago” in the first couplet and establish that there has been a time change – the poet is looking at the moon “now” and recalling what it looked like a few days before.

Have the children talk about their pictures with a partner, explaining what supported their thinking. Discuss how the poet helps to create images in the mind of the reader through the personification of the moon and the idea of the moon as a face. Focus on the adjectives “gold” and “perfect” and the ideas associated with them (for example, yellow, precious metal or something valuable for “gold”; round like a circle or just right for “perfect”).

Explore the rhyme scheme of the poem. Ask the students to read it, paying attention to the two end rhymes. Draw out the idea that the rhymes act like “markers” for the end of each idea.

Listen to the children reread the poem with a partner, observing their fluency and use of expression.

Suggestions for further tasks

Listen to the audio version on the CD *Readalong 2008*.

Start a class chart of metaphors or examples of personification to describe the moon. Add examples from other poems and stories, including “The Story of Rona”.

Rehearse the poem and read it to the class or a group.

Draw a Venn diagram to chart the differences and similarities between the moon in this text and “The Story of Rona”.

Research information about Emily Dickinson and read other poems written by her.

Consider the phrase “phases of the moon” and look at a calendar or photos to further explore this idea.