

LESSON PLAN

Lesson: **When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer,**

by Walt Whitman

Type: **phenomenon-based learning**

Level: **intermediate, upper-intermediate**

Teacher: **Florina Anghela**



ACTIVITY 1

Topic: **Introducing the American poet Walt Whitman**

Skill aim: **Developing speaking**

Interaction: **Frontal**

Procedure: **T** gives essential information in order to stimulate Ss' curiosity.

Walt Whitman (1819-1892) is considered to be one of the most important poets in American history. Whitman had a preference for a more intuitive form of learning as opposed to the traditional, lecture based education, beautifully illustrated in the poem *When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer*. This poem first appeared in "Leaves of Grass." It was a collection of Whitman's work considered to be one the most important volumes of poetry in American literature.

ACTIVITY 2

Topic: **Introducing new vocabulary**

Skill aim: **Developing speaking and writing**

Interaction: **Frontal and GW**

Procedure: **T** asks Ss to match the words with their meanings and the pictures.

- Match the words in the first column with their meanings in the second column:

1. learned	a) a scientist who studies the objects in the sky (planets, stars, etc.)
2. gliding out	b) mysterious; spiritual
3. astronomer	c) getting out smoothly and effortlessly
4. mystical	d) highly-educated; a person with profound knowledge of some kind
5. unaccountable	e) difficult to determine or to explain; not responsible

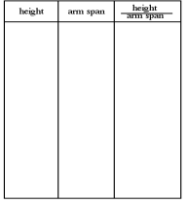
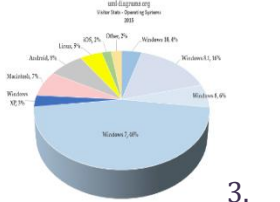
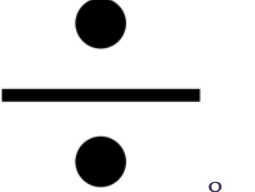
Proiect Erasmus+

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2. Match the science-related words with the pictures:

- figures, charts, diagrams, columns, proofs
- add, divide, measure

 1.	 2.	 3.	$a = b$ $a^2 = ab$ $a^2 - b^2 = ab - b^2$ $(a + b)(a - b) = b(a - b)$ $a + b = b$ $2b = b$ $2 = 1$ 4.
 5.	 6.	 7.	 8.

ACTIVITY 3

Topic: *When I heard the Learn'd Astronomer*

Skill aim: **Developing reading, listening and speaking**

Interaction: **Frontal**

Procedure: **The teacher reads the poem and asks Ss to rephrase it and do the summary.**

When I heard the Learn'd Astronomer

WHEN I heard the learn'd astronomer;
When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me;
When I was shown the charts and the diagrams, to add, divide, and measure them;
When I, sitting, heard the astronomer, where he lectured with much applause in the lecture-room,
How soon, unaccountable, I became tired and sick;
Till rising and gliding out, I wander'd off by myself,
In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,
Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.

Rephrase the poem:

1. When he listened to the lecture of an educated astronomer
2. When the numbers (proofs and figures) were presented,
3. When "the charts and the diagrams" were shown,
4. When he heard the audience's cheer the "learn'd astronomer."
5. Soon he became extremely bored and uninterested in a way he couldn't explain
6. Until rising and getting out, he walked alone with no specific purpose
7. In the mysterious humid night-air, and occasionally,
8. He watched the stars in perfect silence.

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Summary

The speaker of this poem describes listening to a learned astronomer lecture. He sees proofs and figures in columns before him, as well as charts and diagrams that he is supposed to analyze mathematically. At the end of the the lecture, everyone else applauds the astronomer. Meanwhile, the speaker sits in the lecture room, feeling sick and tired. When he wanders away, he looks up into the sky and finally recognizes the magic.

ACTIVITY 3

Topic: *Understanding the meanings*

Skill aim: **Developing reading, writing and speaking**

Interaction: **Frontal, GW**

Procedure: **The teacher asks Ss to choose and argue the correct answers and to draw a conclusion.**

Choose the correct answer:

Use "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer" to answer the following questions.

1 Line 3 ("When I was shown the charts and diagrams, to add, divide, and measure them") is intended to make clear to a reader that —

- A the speaker is fascinated by mathematics
- B the speaker is not smart enough to understand the lecture
- C the speaker is able to see some errors in the lecturer's figures
- D the speaker is not all that interested in what the lecturer is presenting

Explanation: The speaker crams together this list of mathematical evidence and procedures in such a way that it all seems to run together. There is no indication that the speaker could not figure all of this out if he wanted to, but he sees nothing interesting about it.

2 The arrangement of the "proofs" and "figures" in line 2 into columns contrasts with —

- A the arrangement of the charts and diagrams
- B the arrangement of the numbers to be added or divided
- C the arrangement of the seating in the lecture hall
- D the arrangement of stars in the sky

Explanation: The astronomer is lecturing about stars, but his presentation of the information is dramatically different from the experience of actually viewing the stars in the night sky. Stars can be imagined to form constellations, but they are not arranged in columns.

3 In what way are lines 1–4 similar? Why does the poet do this?

- A All four lines start with the same word.
- B All four lines are about hearing.
- C All four lines are what the speaker sees.

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D All four lines are complete sentences.

Explanation: The first four lines establish the context of the action described in the last four lines. "When" everything in the first four lines has happened, then the speaker describes the result.

4 The poem's setting is significant because it helps to contrast —

- A city with country
- B indoors with outdoors
- C earth with sky
- D past with future

Explanation: The first half of the poem is not only about the lecture, but it is also about being inside the lecture hall. The second part is about being outside in the "mystical moist night-air."

5 The tone of the first 5 lines is different from the tone of lines 6, 7, 8, and 9. Which words best describe this change in the speaker's attitude toward his topic?

- A From dissatisfied to disappointed
- B From comfortable to anxious
- C From annoyed to peaceful
- D From interested to bored

Explanation: The poem starts with a description of the lecture. The speaker uses crammed-together lists of mathematical explanations. This way of presenting the lecturer's material makes clear that the speaker feels this material is annoying. In the final lines of the poem, the speaker uses words like "mystical," "perfect," "gliding," and "silence" to indicate a peaceful tone.

6 In line 6, the word "unaccountable" (which means "unable to be explained") indicates that —

- A the speaker is confused by all the mathematic explanations
- B the speaker doesn't know exactly why he feels "tired and sick"
- C the speaker wants to be able to explain astronomical concepts
- D the speaker thinks the lecturer is not explaining things clearly

Explanation: The sentence is arranged in an unusual order. The more natural order (but not necessarily better order) would be "Soon I unaccountably became tired and sick." The word "unaccountable" describes his uncertainty about why he became tired and sick.

It may seem strange that the speaker is confused about the reason for feeling tired and sick when the tone of the preceding lines makes clear that the lecture is bothering him. The reason for his confusion might be that he is not "reasoning" out his feelings in terms of cause and effect. He is simply feeling his feelings and following them where they lead. In this case, they lead him outside into the night air.

Through this powerful poem, Whitman suggests that the true way to understand Nature is not scientific and methodical, but intuitive and mystical.

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ACTIVITY 4

Topic: Reinforce knowledge on *When I heard the Learn'd Astronomer*

Language/Skill aim: Developing listening

Interaction: Frontal

Procedure: Ss listen to the poem watching the graphics for better reinforcement and translate it into Romanian.

Când am auzit astronomul învățat

Când am auzit astronomul învățat;

Când dovezile, cifrele au fost întinse în coloane înaintea mea;

Când mi s-au arătat hărți și diagrame, pentru a le aduna, împărți și măsura;

Când, stând, am auzit astronomul predând cu multe aplauze în amfiteatru,

În curând, inexplicabil, am devenit obosit și sătul;

Ridicându-mă, am alunecat afară și am hoinărit singur,

În aerul misterioasei, umedei nopți, și din când în când,

Am privit în liniște perfectă stelele.

Prin intermediul acestui poem vibrant, Whitman sugerează că modalitatea de înțelegere adevărată, profundă a Naturii nu este științifică și metodică, ci una intuitivă și mistică.

Sources:

<http://ontrack->

media.net/english_gateway/E1/g_E1RdM2P2_AnnoAnaPaired2/g_E1RdM2P2s5.html

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SVL72nm3A-4>



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