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April 2015

LESSON PLAN

## Mighty Casey



### CLASS DISCUSSION

With Opening Day right around the corner, we thought we'd celebrate National Poetry Month with the ode to America's national pastime.

Ernest Thayer was a new edition to William Randolph Hearst's San Francisco *Examiner*, having shared an editor's desk with Hearst at the Harvard *Lampoon*. He began publishing satirical rhymes in the paper under the pen name "Phin," including one on June 3, 1888 called "Casey at the Bat."

"Casey at the Bat" told the story of Mighty Casey, star of the Mudville Nine, and was an ode to the new and fashionable sport of baseball. It was republished many times, and finally put in the hands of vaudeville star De Wolf Hopper. In August of that year, Hopper orated the poem with gusto and enthusiasm at Wallack's Theater on 30<sup>th</sup> and Broadway in Manhattan. In the audience were players from the New York Giants and Chicago White Sox, and with Hopper's performance, an instant classic was born.

The author lets us know right up front that the poetry form he employed in "Casey at the Bat" is a ballad. A ballad is a popular narrative song, orally passed down from generation to generation. A ballad relates a central dramatic event in four-line rhyming stanzas known as quatrains.

"Casey at the Bat" is transcribed in its entirety on supplement sheet to this lesson plan.

### ACTIVITY

With your students, identify the mood and tone of this poem. How did the author mean to come across? Is the poem happy? Sad? Is it trying to tell us anything? Is it satire?

Identify how many stanzas this poem has. A stanza is a group of lines in a poem that are separated from other stanzas by lines or breaks. In this poem's case, the stanzas are four lines each.

*Lesson Plan Continued*

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Next, identify the rhyme scheme of “Casey at the Bat.” Identify which lines in the stanza rhyme with which other lines. In this poem, lines 1 and 2, and lines 3 and 4, of each stanza rhyme. In other words, the stanzas are made up of two rhyming couplets each: AABB. How does this symmetry affect the poem?

Finally, identify some common literary devices in this poem, and how they add to the poem’s overall effect. Explain why poets may choose to use literary devices like the following tools we’ve identified in “Casey at the Bat” (can you and your class find them?):

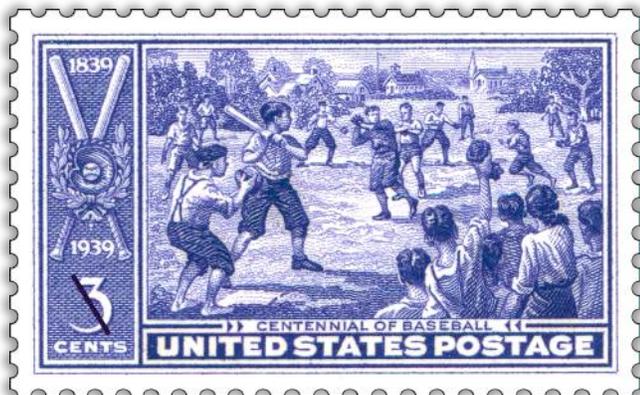
- Alliteration: a brief, quick series of words starting with the same sound group (i.e.: “the Chattanooga choo-choo chugs into the station”)
- Amplification: adding more content to a line or sentence to strengthen its meaning (i.e.: “The bull was mad,” becomes “The bull was mad: he stamped his feet, huffed through his nose, and thrashed his horns.”)
- Cacophony: words and phrases that imply harsh sounds or moments (i.e.: “He pounded against the door, stamping in anger and frustration.”)
- Caesura: two seemingly unrelated words or phrases broken apart to convey one expression (i.e. “Shakespeare – oh how your words move me!”)
- Hubris: arrogance; an overwhelming amount of pride that leads to a character’s downfall
- Hyperbole: emphasizing meaning through exaggeration and overly stressing some points (i.e.: “so hungry I could eat an elephant!”)
- Imagery: words and phrases that create a more vivid setting for the reader, strongly invoking visual, olfactory, tactile, and auditory sensations
- Onomatopoeia: words whose sound is nearly identical to their spelling (i.e.: “buzz, click, snap, hiss”)
- Simile: a metaphor (comparison between two unlike things) using “like” or “as” (i.e.: “Those friends were like two peas in a pod.”)

**DESIRED OUTCOME**

Poetry represents some of the most essential works in American literature. Like important essays, novels, and speeches, poetry conveys integral thoughts and statements on our society at large, so it is a pivotal part of your students’ English and language arts education. Through this exercise, your students will be introduced to some of the most basic components of poetry and challenged to state *how* these literary devices enhance the poem – why the author may have thought these devices would enhance the reader’s experience. Dissecting literature this way is a key skill required in literature analysis, and one that will be imperative to your students as they advance to more meaningful material.

**CURRICULUM STANDARDS****Common Core State Standards: English & Language Arts**

- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.5](#)  
Explain how a series of chapters, scenes, or stanzas fits together to provide the overall structure of a particular story, drama, or poem.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.5](#)  
Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.5.A](#)  
Interpret figurative language, including similes and metaphors, in context.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.5.B](#)  
Recognize and explain the meaning of common idioms, adages, and proverbs.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.5.C](#)  
Use the relationship between particular words (e.g., synonyms, antonyms, homographs) to better understand each of the words.



# Casey at the Bat

## Ernest Lawrence Thayer

The outlook wasn't brilliant for the Mudville nine that day:  
The score stood four to two, with but one inning more to play,  
And then when Cooney died at first, and Barrows did the same,  
A pall-like silence fell upon the patrons of the game.

A straggling few got up to go in deep despair. The rest  
Clung to the hope which springs eternal in the human breast;  
They thought, "If only Casey could but get a whack at that —  
We'd put up even money now, with Casey at the bat."

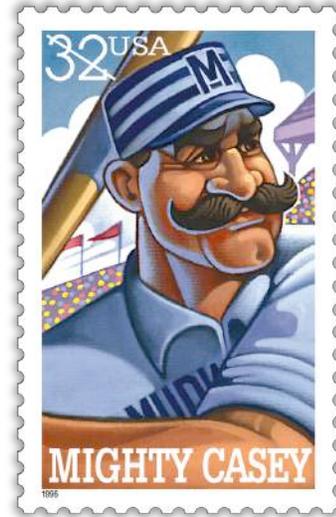
But Flynn preceded Casey, as did also Jimmy Blake,  
And the former was a hoodoo, while the latter was a cake;  
So upon that stricken multitude grim melancholy sat,  
For there seemed but little chance of Casey getting to the bat.

But Flynn let drive a single, to the wonderment of all,  
And Blake, the much despised, tore the cover off the ball;  
And when the dust had lifted, and men saw what had occurred,  
There was Jimmy safe at second and Flynn a-hugging third.

Then from five thousand throats and more there rose a lusty yell;  
It rumbled through the valley, it rattled in the dell;  
It pounded on the mountain and recoiled upon the flat,  
For Casey, mighty Casey, was advancing to the bat.

There was ease in Casey's manner as he stepped into his place;  
There was pride in Casey's bearing and a smile lit Casey's face.  
And when, responding to the cheers, he lightly doffed his hat,  
No stranger in the crowd could doubt 'twas Casey at the bat.

Ten thousand eyes were on him as he rubbed his hands with dirt;  
Five thousand tongues applauded when he wiped them on his  
shirt;  
Then while the writhing pitcher ground the ball into his hip,  
Defiance flashed in Casey's eye, a sneer curled Casey's lip.



And now the leather-covered sphere came hurtling through the  
air,  
And Casey stood a-watching it in haughty grandeur there.  
Close by the sturdy batsman the ball unheeded sped—  
"That ain't my style," said Casey. "Strike one!" the umpire said.

From the benches, black with people, there went up a muffled  
roar,  
Like the beating of the storm-waves on a stern and distant shore;  
"Kill him! Kill the umpire!" shouted someone on the stand;  
And it's likely they'd have killed him had not Casey raised his hand.

With a smile of Christian charity great Casey's visage shone;  
He stilled the rising tumult; he bade the game go on;  
He signaled to the pitcher, and once more the dun sphere flew;  
But Casey still ignored it and the umpire said, "Strike two!"

"Fraud!" cried the maddened thousands, and echo answered  
"Fraud!"  
But one scornful look from Casey and the audience was awed.  
They saw his face grow stern and cold, they saw his muscles  
strain,  
And they knew that Casey wouldn't let that ball go by again.

The sneer is gone from Casey's lip, his teeth are clenched in hate,  
He pounds with cruel violence his bat upon the plate;  
And now the pitcher holds the ball, and now he lets it go,  
And now the air is shattered by the force of Casey's blow.

Oh, somewhere in this favoured land the sun is shining bright,  
The band is playing somewhere, and somewhere hearts are light;  
And somewhere men are laughing, and somewhere children shout,  
But there is no joy in Mudville—mighty Casey has struck out.