

High School – Science and Poetry Together Day One

A Jelly-Fish

by Marianne Moore - 1887-1972 From the [Poetry Foundation](#): “One of American literature’s foremost poets, Marianne Moore’s poetry is characterized by linguistic precision, keen and probing descriptions, and acute observations of people, places, animals, and art.”

Visible, invisible,
A fluctuating charm,
An amber-colored amethyst
Inhabits it; your arm
Approaches, and
It opens and
It closes;
You have meant
To catch it,
And it shrivels;
You abandon
Your intent—
It opens, and it
Closes and you
Reach for it—
The blue
Surrounding it
Grows cloudy, and
It floats away
From you.

The Science

List the facts about a jellyfish in this poem. Can the poem can be read as a description of a jellyfish structure, its habitat, and the way it moves?

What structure is the “amber-colored amethyst” a reference to?

Does the poem suggest that a jellyfish has intent? Do you think a jellyfish can have intent?

The Poetry

Remember that a poem can be interpreted in many ways. No way is THE way. What you take from a poem is yours. You can look at it quickly and get one feeling or thought. Then if you read it a few times, or have someone read it aloud to you, it can suggest other meanings.

1. Look at the structure of the poem:
 - a) short lines. Is that for emphasis? For interest? Because the incident itself is very short?
 - b) the long-look of the poem. Would you have written the poem in that way? How else might you write it?
 - c) observe the punctuation; does it work for you? Why/why not?

2. Why does the poet suggest that the “amethyst” **inhabits** the jellyfish?

3. Reading more closely: When you read the words “*your arm/ Approaches, and/ It opens and/ It closes*” did you think the **it** was the jellyfish? Grammatically, could **it** also have reference back to “*your arm*”? If the **it** is “*your arm*,” does this suggest the poem is a metaphor.

NOTE: some classes may like to distinguish between the concepts of ambiguity vs uncertainty, for this part of the poem and those meanings in scientific discussion, such as the part “*Your intent— /It opens, and it / Closes and you/ Reach for it—*”

4. Metaphor. There have been several thoughts about this poem as metaphor. Here are a couple. See if they can work for you. Why or why not.

- a) It is about people, and their unpredictability or changeability.
- b) The jellyfish is a woman.

5. Think about other metaphors

- a) Could the arm be a woman, the jellyfish a man?
- b) Could it describe a police-community relationship?

Homework

Look at the poem “Fox” by Alice Oswald.

Science

List the areas of science – think of the poem describing a fox to someone who has never seen one...

The Poem

- 1) Does the shape of the poem illustrate the animal subject?
- 2) Why does the poets use the word “gloves”?
- 3) What gender is the fox? Why?
- 4) What do these words mean? “*it’s midnight / and my life / is laid beneath my children / like a gold leaf.*” How are they related to the fox, or the actions of the fox?
- 5) How would you interpret “*the way she went / hungrily asking / in the heart’s thick accent*”?

Fox

by Alice Oswald (b. 1966). From the [Poetry Foundation](#): Oswald often works in book-length projects and is known for her interests in gardening, ecology, and music. [She had formal training as a gardener and has conducted] years of primary and secondary research into the history, environment, and community along the River Dart in Devon, England.

I heard a cough
as if a thief was there
outside my sleep
a sharp intake of air

a fox in her fox-fur
stepping across
the grass in her black gloves
barked at my house

just so abrupt and odd
the way she went
hungrily asking
in the heart's thick accent

as if to say: it's midnight
and my life
is laid beneath my children
like a gold leaf