

Melons in Prose and Poetry

Grades 6-10

English Language Arts



Objectives

Students will compare and contrast a passage about watermelons written by Mark Twain and a poem about melons by Sylvia Plath.

Vocabulary

cucurbit—any of various mostly climbing or trailing plants of the family Cucurbitaceae, which includes the squash, pumpkin, cucumber and melons

melon—the round edible fruit of vines belonging to the gourd family, with a tough rind and sweet juicy flesh ranging in color from pale yellow to deep orange

potassium—a silver-white soft light low-melting monovalent metallic element of the alkali metal group that occurs abundantly in nature especially combined in minerals

rind—a tough outer covering such as bark, the skin of some fruits, or the coating on cheese or bacon

Background

Watermelon has long been thought of as an American fruit. Thomas Jefferson grew watermelon at Monticello. He and his peers used every part of the watermelon. Mark Twain once said, “when one has tasted watermelon, he knows what the angels eat.” Besides eating the refreshing flesh of the watermelon, early Americans toasted the seeds for snacks, pickled the **rind** and drank the juice. The first cookbook printed in the U.S. included a recipe for pickled watermelon rind. The United States now ranks third in worldwide production of watermelon.

Oklahomans began growing watermelon before statehood. At the St. Louis World’s Fair in 1904, Oklahoma exhibited three watermelons with a combined weight of 334 pounds. One, the largest of the exposition, weighed 117 pounds. Forty-four states in the nation produce watermelon. Acreage for watermelon has been the second largest for a vegetable crop, after southern pea, in Oklahoma for many years. Production is concentrated in the central and south-central areas, but watermelon can be grown in most areas of the state.

The rind of a watermelon looks tough but is actually quite fragile. For that reason watermelons are still picked by hand and passed hand-to-hand from the field to trucks, which take the **melons** to packing sheds. There they are sorted and hand-packed into trucks, crated into bins or placed in cartons for shipment to their destinations.

Although watermelons are sweet and usually eaten as dessert, they are classified in U.S. Department of Agriculture statistics as a vegetable rather than fruit. They are members of the **cucurbit** family, along with squash, cucumbers and pumpkins. In 2006 the Oklahoma Legislature declared watermelon Oklahoma’s state vegetable.

Watermelon is 92 percent water, fat free, nutritionally low in calories and high in energy. A two-cup serving of watermelon contains excellent levels of vitamins A, B6 and C. It is also a source of **potassium**.

Melons in Prose and Poetry (continued)

According to the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), watermelon is one of the traditional dishes enjoyed at most July 4th festivities—along with hamburgers, hot dogs, baked beans, corn on the cob, potato salad and potato chips.

How to Pick a Melon

Harvesting melons is labor-intensive. Conveyors and other harvesting aids can speed up the harvest process, but there are no mechanical harvesters that can decide which melons are ripe. That remains a human skill dependent upon experience and careful observation. To select your own ripe melons from the grocery or farmer's market, use the following hints:

- For most melons, the blossom end should be fragrant and give slightly to pressure.
- Muskmelons or cantaloupes should be tan or gold under their netting.
- Honeydews should be velvety and creamy yellow.
- Crenshaw melons should be golden yellow and green.
- Casabas are ready when the skin turns golden and the flesh white.
- Honeydews, casabas and watermelons should feel heavy for their size and sound hollow when tapped on the rind.
- Avoid melons with shriveled, punctured or cracked rinds.
- Watermelons should have a waxy look and a yellow patch on the belly.
- Thumping an unripe melon will produce a metallic sound while the sound emanating from a ripe melon will be duller.

Additional Reading

Twain, Mark, *Autobiography of Mark Twain. Vol 1*, University of California Press, 2010.

Websites

<http://www.twainquotes.com/Watermelon.html>

Melons in Prose and Poetry

Activity 1: Mark Twain on Watermelons, (ELA) 1 50 minute class period

Students will read a passage about watermelons written by Mark Twain and answer questions about the passage.

Oklahoma Academic Standards

Activity 1: Melons in Prose and Poetry (ELA)

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|----------|--|
| 6.2.R.3 | Students will paraphrase main ideas with supporting details in a text. |
| 7.2.R.3 | |
| 8.2.R.3 | |
| 9.2.R.3 | |
| 10.2.R.3 | |
| 6.3.R.1 | Students will compare and contrast stated or implied purposes of authors writing on the same topic in grade-level literary and/or informational texts. |
| 7.3.R.1 | |
| 8.3.R.1 | |
| 9.3.R.1 | |
| 10.3.R.1 | |
| 6.3.R.4 | Students will evaluate literary devices to support interpretations of literary texts: simile, metaphor, personification, onomatopoeia, hyperbole, imagery, symbolism, tone |
| 7.3.R.4 | |
| 8.3.R.4 | |
| 9.3.R.4 | |
| 10.3.R.4 | |
| 6.4.R.3 | Students will use context clues to determine or clarify the meaning of words or distinguish among multiple-meaning words. |
| 7.4.R.3 | |
| 8.4.R.3 | |
| 9.4.R.3 | |
| 10.4.R.3 | |

Materials

- Activity 1 Worksheet 1 “**Mark Twain on Watermelon**”
- Watermelon, knife

Procedures:

1. Students will read the passage on Activity 1 Worksheet 1 “**Mark Twain on Watermelon,**” and answer the discussion questions individually.
 - Discuss the background information as a class, including unfamiliar vocabulary.
 - Let students watch as you cut into a watermelon and tell them to observe to see if they can see and hear what Twain was describing. Discuss.
 - Students will write their own descriptions of watermelon.

Melons in Prose and Poetry

Activity 1 Worksheet 1: Mark Twain on Watermelon



Name: _____ Date: _____

Read the passage below. Circle words you don't understand. Write what you think they mean and discuss in a group. Then look the words up in a dictionary to find the meaning.

"When one has tasted watermelon, he knows what the angels eat." -Mark Twain

I know how a prize watermelon looks when it is sunning its fat rotundity among pumpkin vines and "simblins;" I know how to tell when it's ripe without "plugging"*** it; I know how inviting it looks when it is cooling itself in a tub of water under the bed, waiting; I know how it looks when it lies on the table in the sheltered great floor-space between house and kitchen, and the children gathered for the sacrifice and their mouths watering; I know the crackling sound it makes when the carving knife enters its end, and I can see the split fly along in front of the blade as the knife cleaves its way to the other end; I can see the halves fall apart and display the rich red meat and the black seeds, and the heart standing up, a luxury fit for the elect; I know how a boy looks, behind a yard long slice of that melon, and I know how he feels for I have been there. I know the watermelon which has been honestly come by and I know the taste of the watermelon which has been acquired by art. Both taste good, but the experienced know which tastes best. (from his Autobiography, Vol. 1)*

*a type of squash

**cutting into a watermelon to test for taste

1. How does Mark Twain feel about watermelon?

2. What is his purpose in writing this passage?

3. What is the effect of his repetition of the words "I know" at the beginning of the passage?

4. Does the passage make you want to taste watermelon? Explain your answer.

5. What is the central idea of this passage?

6. What supporting details did Mark Twain include?

7. What words does he use to let us know he is remembering?

8. What are some of his memories of watermelon?

9. Identify at least one use of metaphor in this passage.

10. How is the word “sacrifice” used in this passage?

11. Explain Twain’s use of the phrase “a luxury fit for the elect.”

12. Explain the last two sentences.

13. Write your own description of watermelon.

Melons in Prose and Poetry

Activity 2- Fiesta Melons by Sylvia Plath

Grades 6-10 Teacher Resources and Standards

Activity 2: Fiesta Melons by Sylvia Plath, (ELA) 1 50 minute class period

Students will read a poem about watermelons written by Sylvia Plath.

Oklahoma Academic Standards

Activity 2: Melons in Prose and Poetry (ELA)

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|----------|--|
| 6.2.R.2 | Students will analyze details in literary and nonfiction/informational texts to distinguish genres. |
| 7.2.R.2 | |
| 8.2.R.2 | |
| 9.2.R.2 | |
| 10.2.R.2 | |
| 6.3.R.2 | Students will evaluate how the point of view and perspective affect grade-level literary and/or informational text. |
| 7.3.R.2 | |
| 8.3.R.2 | |
| 9.3.R.2 | |
| 10.3.R.2 | |
| 6.3.R.4 | Students will evaluate literary devices to support interpretations of literary texts: simile, metaphor, personification, onomatopoeia, hyperbole, imagery, symbolism, tone |
| 7.3.R.4 | |
| 8.3.R.4 | |
| 9.3.R.4 | |
| 10.3.R.4 | |
| 6.4.R.3 | Students will use context clues to determine or clarify the meaning of words or distinguish among multiple-meaning words. |
| 7.4.R.3 | |
| 8.4.R.3 | |
| 9.4.R.3 | |
| 10.4.R.3 | |

Materials

- Activity 2 Worksheet 1 “**Fiesta Melons by Sylvia Plath**”

Procedures:

1. Students will read the passage on Activity 2 Worksheet 1 “**Fiesta Melons by Sylvia Plath**,” included with this lesson and answer the discussion questions individually.
—Discuss the background information as a class, including unfamiliar vocabulary.

Melons in Prose and Poetry

Activity 2 Worksheet 1: Fiesta Melons by Sylvia Plath



Name: _____ Date: _____

**In Benidorm there are melons,
Whole donkey-carts full

Of innumerable melons,
Ovals and balls,

Bright green and thumpable
Laced over with stripes

Of turtle-dark green.
Choose an egg-shape, a world-shape,

Bowl one homeward to taste
In the whitehot noon:

Cream-smooth honeydews,
Pink-pulped whoppers,

Bump-rinded cantaloupes
With orange cores.

Each wedge wears a studding
Of blanched seeds or black seeds

To strew like confetti
Under the feet of

This market of melon-eating
Fiesta-goers.**

1. What do the details in the poem tell you about the place the poet is describing?
2. How do you know it is probably not a modern scene in the U.S.?
3. List all the adjectives used to describe the melons.
4. Why do you think she suggest bowling one homeward?
5. How are the seeds like confetti?

6. How many kinds of melon can you identify from the descriptions? List them.

7. What kind of melon is egg-shape? Research to find the answer if needed.

8. What kind of melon is world shape? Research to find the answer if needed.

9. Find examples of personification in the poem and write them.

10. Find examples of metaphor in the poem and write them.

11. Find examples of simile in the poem and write them.

12. Find examples of alliteration in the poem and write them.

13. What is the mood of the poem? Find two words that helps set the mood.

Melons in Prose and Poetry

Activity 3: Compare and Contrast, (ELA) 1 50 minute class period

Students will compare and contrast a passage about watermelons written by Mark Twain and a poem about melons by Sylvia Plath.

Oklahoma Academic Standards

Activity 3: Compare and Contrast (ELA)

6.3.R.1 Students will compare and contrast stated or implied purposes of
7.3.R.1 authors writing on the same topic in grade-level literary and/or informational
8.3.R.1 texts.
9.3.R.1
10.3.R.1

6.3.R.2 Students will evaluate how the point of view and perspective affect grade-level
7.3.R.2 literary and/or informational text.
8.3.R.2
9.3.R.2
10.3.R.2

Materials

- Activity 1 Worksheet 1 “**Mark Twain on Watermelon**”
- Activity 2 Worksheet 1 “**Fiesta Melons by Sylvia Plath**”

Procedures:

1. Students will read the passage on Activity 1 Worksheet 1 “**Mark Twain on Watermelon**” and the poem on Activity 2 Worksheet 1 “**Fiesta Melons by Sylvia Plath**,” included with this lesson.
2. Students will complete a quick write on a piece of notebook paper to compare and contrast the stated or implied purposes of the authors.
3. Students will evaluate how the point of view and perspective of the author affects their writings.
4. Allow time for a class discussion about the authors purposes, points of view, and how their writings affect students perceptions of melons.