 Resource 15a – Teacher Resource - William Street

Learning Activity ‘William Street’

Introduction- Watch [Slessor – William Street analysis and discussion](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wEt_o--Qn9s) (Duration 13:07)

Focus Questions to Address

1. How does this poem invite the responder to see the world differently, to challenge assumptions, ignite new ideas or reflect personally?
2. Does reading and understanding the poem provide a catalyst for students to make connections with their own landscapes and how they experience them?

Discussion Ideas

Slessor offers us a challenging idea- he loves William Street and he believes we don’t. He dares us to like it somehow, that by telling us we won’t like it we will dare to look deeper, to see what is loveable about it. Slessor is not a romantic poet showing us the beauty of nature, he wants his readers to see the anomalies of the world, to see through the darkness, the faded light, the lost hours and look for what we can connect with. This poem dares the responder to look at what he loves, his poetry-his storytelling form- reflects his life, his context and the issues that plagued him. The poem asks us not to discount something because it is ugly or from a darker side of town and this is admirable. His view of the city is non-judgemental but rather a realistic view and he dares us to see it that way.

* What do you love or admire that is not perfect, that is not beautiful and perfectly formed?
* Why do you think Slessor defends this street in this manner, why does he react so strongly to this dark, wet street of prostitutes and drunks with its unattractive smells and sights? Is it the reality of it, the in your face drama of it?
* How does he tell us this story of a now iconic street? What textual features allow the audience to experience the street as he does?
* What connections can you make to your world?

Annotation of poem

* Teacher and students annotate the poem's structure using questions such as "How many stanzas make up this poem? How many lines in each stanza? How might you describe the form of this poem? Is there a pattern or rhyme?
* Teacher defines "free verse" form and instructs students to annotate the use of a refrain (repeated line) "you find this ugly, I find this lovely".
* Students annotate use of first person "I" and second person "you" and discuss the way Slessor juxtaposes his persona's view of William St with the way he assumes the reader ("you") views William St.
* Define ‘ugly’ and discuss its connotations.
* Students annotate alliteration ("rich" and "rasping", "fat" and "fish", "puffs" and "paraffin", "hunger" and "heels"). Students discuss how these repeated, harsh sounds add to the vivid, but dissonant, feel of William St. They annotate all the alliteration in this poem, using their preferred method of annotation
* Students also annotate Slessor's use of colours, visual images and olfactory images (smells). Teacher reiterates the importance of annotating features in a way that explains HOW these features shape specific meaning; specifically, here in this poem how Slessor draws out a reaction from the poems audience as well as showing us his connection to this place.

‘William Street’ – Teacher Notes

Composer – Kenneth Slessor

Context

William Street is set during 1935 in Sydney, Australia. At this point in time Australia was going through the great depression after the Wall Street crash and the repercussions of that internationally. Much like the rest of the world poverty was a major factor affecting many people who then had to sell off their possessions in order to gain dinner for the night or pay the rent.

The poem offers an alternate image of Australia to that offered by earlier poets like Lawson, Paterson and Mackellar – ‘William Street’ provides several images of Australia during the 1930’s.

Some of the images presented by Slessor in the poem include:

* A sleazy Australia
* An urbanised Australia
* An Australia that is very low class and poverty stricken

How these images are presented/portrayed in William Street

* The image of a sleazy Australia is portrayed in William Street by Kenneth Slessor by using colloquialism. The line “The dips and molls with flip and shiny gaze” refers to the prostitutes and alcoholics on William Street during the depression, selling themselves for whatever little money they can get. Molls was often a word used to describe prostitutes, and dips being short for dipsomaniac, or alcoholics. As prostitutes and alcoholics are often associated with sleaziness, it can be considered that these colloquial terms are representing the whole of Australia.
* The image of an urbanised Australia is shown in William Street in the first stanza when it mentions “The red globes of light, the liquor green, the pulsing arrows and the running fire”. The use of personification in these two lines helps to emphasise the brightness and size of these neon lights. As these lights are said to be “pulsing” and “running” it gives the idea that these lights are spread out throughout the whole city, lighting everything up. These bright neon signs are generally found in large urbanised cities; thus the image of an urbanised Australia being presented in William Street.

Thinking and Composing Tasks

Critical Composing

Do you find Slessor's representation of William St to be "ugly" or "lovely"? Students write a one minute persuasive speech, using evidence from the poem to support their point of view. In small groups students share their short speeches and discuss their responses to the poem.

Creative Composing – Descriptive Writing

‘You find this ugly, I think it’s lovely’.

* My suburb is:
* Complete the following table with words you would use to describe your suburb. They can describe both positive and negative aspects of your suburb.

| Questions | Answers |
| --- | --- |
| What can you see? |  |
| What can you touch? |  |
| What can you taste? |  |
| What can you smell? |  |
| What can you hear? |  |
| What colours do you see? |  |

Discuss

What emotional reactions do you have to your suburb and the words above?

Is there a place that others don’t like but you do? Describe it.

Creative Micro Writing –using the words and ideas gathered above write a 100-word micro story describing your suburb, or an element of it, and your connection to it. Your feelings toward it must be clear- try to use show not tell!

Extension writing task- Create a poem using Slessor’s beginning and ending lines. Using words from your brainstorm create a poem about your suburb. The poem will start and end with the line: You find this ugly, I think it's lovely from the Kenneth Slessor poem, “William Street”.

You find this ugly, I think it’s lovely

Alternatively, students may change/ adapt/ subvert the poem’s representation so that “ugly” is replaced with “lovely”, or vice versa.

Related material – Reaction to disasters and connections to place – How to reform a community devastated?

[Five years on: Fukushima residents share their stories](http://ideas.ted.com/five-years-on-fukushima-residents-share-their-stories/):

The effects of the Fukushima Nuclear station disaster and tsunami that devastated parts of Japan are still being felt, read the attached article and view the images and discuss the following questions:

1. Why do people want to return to their villages?
2. Discuss the connections two of the people have with their town and why returning seems important to them.
3. Would you return to such a place or would you find it too scary or ugly?
4. Why is community important and how does to affect an individual’s connection to place and how they experience their environment?
5. Why do you think the author feel it was important add photos to his story and use short quotes/interviews with people to tell this story (textual forms and features)? What effect does this form and style have?