

The List Poem: Anomaly, Paradox, Irony & "Cigar Box Banjo"

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Time: 50 minutes

OBJECTIVES

In this lesson, students will:

1. Consider "Cigar Box Banjo" as a "list poem."
2. Learn about the related ideas of *anomaly*, *paradox* and *irony*.
3. Analyze these ideas in "Cigar Box Banjo."
4. Consider how the ideas in the poem are illustrated or enhanced in the film.
5. Draft a list poem based on an anomaly, paradox or irony of their own devising.

MATERIALS

- "Cigar Box Banjo," poem & film: motionpoems.org/episode/cigar-box-banjo/
- pen/paper or other writing implements

ACTIVITIES

Usually students are told to write as clearly and unambiguously as possible. But as Donald Hall observes, saying two things at once is "...almost what poetry is for, to be able to embody contrary feelings in the same motion." So in order to *mean* more than the words *say*, poets often employ the closely related ideas of *anomaly*, *paradox*, and *irony*. *Anomaly* refers to something that is peculiar, weird, not what you'd expect: *The star is famously likeable on screen but is said to treat his fellow actors horribly*. A *paradox* is a statement that seems true although it contains a contradiction: *She is conceited because of her extreme lack of self-confidence*. An *irony* is a statement that means the opposite of what the words say: *He endeared himself to his school principal with a nipple ring and a nose ring*. *Irony* can also refer to a different result than intended: *Ironically, the pesticide that killed the mosquitoes poisoned the water as well*.

Have students discuss these questions in small groups or as a whole class:

1. The Poem (20-25 mins): All of these rhetorical devices can help the poet express a complex idea. "Cigar Box Banjo" is a *list poem* that expresses its complex idea through pairs of images presented one after the other.

- Identify each of these pairs.
- What is the relationship of one image to another in each pair?
- What do these pairs have in common?
- How do they differ?
- Where do you see anomaly, paradox, or irony in the images or their relationship to each other?

2. The Film (20-25 mins): Watch the motionpoem version of "Cigar Box Banjo". Then show the students the questions below, give them a chance to read them, and have them watch the film again with the questions in mind:

- Where do the film images illustrate the poem?
- Where do they differ from the poem's images? How?
- Why do you think the artist chose images for the montage that stay so close to the images of the poem?

Writing Prompt

- Make a list of anomalies, paradoxes and ironies that you have observed. Perhaps you yourself comprise some contradictions. Or make them up.
- Pick the one you find most interesting.
- Draft a list poem using several images to express the idea you have picked.