

9.2.1

Lesson 9

Introduction

In this lesson, students will encounter Emily Dickinson’s poem “I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,” for the first time. Students will experience two masterful readings of “I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,” in which they will explore the overall meaning of the poetic speaker’s funeral metaphor by analyzing the language Dickinson uses. A sequence of questions orients students to the poem and scaffolds comprehension by focusing on particular words and phrases in the poem. The questions also ask students to consider specific lines from the poem that begin to address central idea and Dickinson’s structural choices, concepts upon which Lessons 10 and 11 will continue to build.

The assessment for Lesson 9, a Quick Write, asks students to consider the cumulative impact of five specific lines from the poem—one from each stanza—on the meaning of the poem. For homework, students will consider what might be inside the “Box” in line 9. This homework draws attention to the burial phase of the funeral service and serves as an entry point into Lesson 10’s focus on central idea. Additionally, students will continue their Accountable Independent Reading (AIR).

Standards

Assessed Standard	
RL.9-10.4	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone).
Addressed Standard	
L.9-10.5.a, b	Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings. a. Interpret figures of speech (e.g. euphemism, oxymoron) in context and analyze their role in the text.

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| b. Analyze nuances in the meaning of words with similar denotations. |
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Assessment

Assessment(s)

The learning in this lesson will be captured through a Quick Write at the end of the lesson. Students will answer the following prompt based on the close reading (citing text evidence and analyzing key words and phrases) completed in the lesson:

- How do the following phrases contribute to the overall meaning of the poem?
 - “I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,”
 - “My mind was going numb –”
 - “And creak across my Soul”
 - “Wrecked, solitary, here –”
 - “And I dropped down, and down –”

High Performance Response(s)

A High Performance Response may include the following:

- Student responses should include an understanding that the funeral is not real. The speaker is imagining the funeral, but she feels it. It affects her "mind" and "Soul."
- Student responses may include:
 - “I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,”: The speaker feels the funeral. It is happening in his/her brain, not in real life.
 - “My mind was going numb –”: The speaker’s mind feels numb because of the loud and continued beating of the drum during the service.
 - “And creak across my Soul”: The speaker’s soul is also affected by the funeral in his/her brain; Mourners wearing boots of lead tread on her soul.
 - “Wrecked, solitary, here –”: The speaker feels alone and damaged because of the beating of the drum and the treading of the mourners.
 - “And I dropped down, and down –”: The speaker is falling down into an unknown space, away from reason.

Vocabulary

Vocabulary to provide directly (will not include extended instruction)

- mourners (n.) – people expressing grief or sorrow for the dead
- service (n.) – a form followed in worship or in a religious ceremony

Vocabulary to teach (may include direct word work and/or questions)

- to and fro (idiom) – back and forth
- sense (n.) – perception or awareness of the mind often produced through the senses: touch, sight, smell, taste, hearing. Can also refer to moral sense or awareness.
- treading (v.) – stepping, walking, or trampling so as to press, crush, or injure something
- solitary (adj.) – alone; without companions
- plank (n.) – a long, flat piece of timber, thicker than a board
- reason (n.) – the mental powers concerned with forming conclusions, judgments, or inferences; sound judgment; normal or sound powers of mind; sanity

Lesson Agenda/Overview

Student-Facing Agenda	% of Lesson
<p>Standards & Text:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standards: RL.9-10.4, L.9-10.5.a, b • Text: “I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,” <p>Learning Sequence:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduction Lesson Agenda 2. Homework Accountability 3. Masterful Reading 4. Reading and Discussion 5. Quick Write 6. Closing 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 5% 2. 10% 3. 15% 4. 50% 5. 15% 6. 5%

Materials

- YouTube clip for masterful reading of “I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,”
- Short Response Checklist and Rubric (refer to 9.2.1 Lesson 1)

Learning Sequence

How to Use the Learning Sequence	
Symbol	Type of Text & Interpretation of the Symbol
10%	Percentage indicates the percentage of lesson time each activity should take.
	Plain text (no symbol) indicates teacher action.
	Bold text (no symbol) indicates questions for the teacher to ask students.
	<i>Italicized text (no symbol) indicates a vocabulary word.</i>
▶	Indicates student action(s).
☞	Indicates possible student response(s) to teacher questions.
ⓘ	Indicates instructional notes for the teacher.

Activity 1: Introduction to Lesson Agenda

5%

Begin by reviewing the agenda and the assessed standard for this lesson: RL.9-10.4.

Instruct students to take out the 9.2 Common Core Learning Standards Tool. Ask students to individually read standard L.9-10.5.a, b on the 9.2 Common Core Learning Standards Tool and assess their familiarity with and mastery of this standard.

- ▶ Students listen and read standard L.9-10.5 on the 9.2 Common Core Learning Standards Tool and assess their familiarity with and mastery of this standard.
- ⓘ Students may struggle to understand the words *nuances* and *denotations*. Tell students that nuances are slight differences and denotations are the literal meanings of words.
- ⓘ **Differentiation Consideration:** If students struggle with L.9-10.5.b, offer an example such as *house* and *home*, words that have the same meaning or denotation (a place to live), but have nuanced connotations (an inanimate structure versus a warm, inviting space).

Instruct students to complete a Turn-and-Talk in pairs about the meaning of *figurative language*.

- Figurative language includes words that don't mean what they seem to mean, or that words are used to make the reader feel a certain way.

Ask students to offer examples of figurative language.

- Student responses may include:
 - Simile, metaphor, personification, onomatopoeia

Instruct students to discuss in pairs what the big ideas of this standard are.

- Student responses should indicate an understanding that this standard asks for particular attention to word choice, particularly for words that are not meant literally or those that have only slightly different meanings.

Lead a brief full class discussion of student responses. Tell students that they will practice applying standard L.9-10.5.a-b in Unit 1.

- ① Students may notice the common threads of figurative language and word meanings in RL.9-10.4 and L.9-10.5.
- ① **Differentiation Consideration:** Consider engaging students in a discussion of the nuances in these standards if questions arise.

Activity 2: Homework Accountability

10%

Instruct students to talk in pairs about how they can apply their focus standard (RL.9-10.4) to their text. Lead a brief share out on the previous lesson's AIR homework assignment. Select several students (or student pairs) to explain how they applied their focus standard to their AIR text.

- ▶ Students (or student pairs) discuss and share how they applied their focus standard to their AIR text from the previous lesson's homework.

Activity 3: Masterful Reading

15%

Introduce the Quick Write assessment: (How do the following phrases contribute to the overall meaning of the poem?: "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain," "My mind was going numb –," "And creak across my Soul," "Wrecked, solitary, here –," "And I dropped down, and down –" Include specific details from the text in your responses.) Explain to students that this is the lesson assessment and the focus for today's reading.

- ▶ Students read the assessment and listen.

① Display the Quick Write assessment for students to see.

Instruct students to keep this assessment in mind as they analyze the text in the evidence-based discussion. Explain to students that throughout the discussion, they will stop and take notes about what has been discussed in preparation for this Quick Write assessment.

Inform students that they will listen to “I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,” twice. For the first reading, instruct students to listen, reading silently, and then record their initial reactions and questions. Students will discuss initial reactions and questions in pairs. Then students will listen to a second masterful reading. (See instructional notes below.)

Have students listen to an initial masterful reading of “I felt a Funeral, in my Brain.”

- ▶ Students follow along, reading silently. Then they record initial reactions and questions and discuss them in pairs.

Have students listen to a second masterful reading. (See the instructional notes below.)

- ▶ Students follow along, reading silently.

① Poetry Out Loud is a national poetry recitation competition for high school students. In 2012 the third place winner recited “I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,”:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l7v1Rq35BGY>

This recitation is an excellent example of a masterful reading, particularly the clarity of the diction and the attention to the en dash pauses that are so iconic in Dickinson’s work. It may be helpful for students to listen to the poem read aloud once in class and then follow up by listening to this recitation.

① If students listen to the recitation, consider asking students to share how the recitation shapes their response to the initial masterful reading of the poem.

Activity 4: Reading and Discussion

50%

Group students into pairs for the purpose of discussing the text in more depth and recording insights. During activities and discussions allow time for pairs to share their collaborative work with the class. This paired work will enable students to build the skills necessary to navigate and derive meaning from

Dickinson’s figurative language and nuanced structure. Remind students to record their observations in their class notes.

Instruct students to read the first stanza aloud in their pairs.

① It may be helpful to briefly define *stanza* (an arrangement of lines within a poem) and *line break* (the end of a line in the poem) in order to allow students to use this vocabulary in their discussion.

- ▶ Students read the first stanza of “I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,” in their pairs.

Pose the following questions for students to discuss in their pairs:

Who is this poem about? How do you know?

- ☞ Student responses should indicate an understanding that the poem is about the speaker: the speaker of the poem refers to him/herself as “I” in line 1.

What event is the speaker describing?

- ☞ Student responses should indicate an understanding that the speaker is describing a “Funeral” (1) “Service” (6).

How can your understanding of the event help you to make meaning of *mourners* (2)?

- ☞ Student responses should indicate an understanding that *mourners* is a word for people who are at a funeral. Some students may recognize the familiar word *mourn* to support the understanding that these people are grieving over a death at a funeral.

Ask students to volunteer a definition of *treading* (3). If students struggle, provide students with the definition: “stepping, walking, or trampling so as to press, crush, or injure something.”

What are the “Mourners” doing?

- ☞ Students responses should indicate an understanding that the “Mourners” are walking “to and fro” (2); they are pacing (*treading*), walking back (*to*) and forth (*fro*) heavily, stomping.
- ① **Differentiation Consideration:** It may be helpful to remind students to read the lines aloud in order to hear what is happening in the poem as well as read it and see it on the page.

Ask students to volunteer a definition of *sense* (4), based on its use in the first stanza. Tell students to use evidence from the text to support their response. Discuss student definitions.

🗨️ Student responses may include:

- a definition of *sense* as sight, smell, touch, hearing, or taste, using the phrase “treading – treading –” (3) as evidence that the speaker is using the sense of hearing or sight when describing the movement of the mourners (2). Students who offer this definition of *sense* may also suggest that the repetitive sound of the treading is getting through to the speaker’s mind (senses).
- Students may also define *sense* (4) as having good understanding or good judgment as in “common sense” or “that makes sense,” using the evidence of the speaker’s reference to his/her “Brain” (1). Students who define sense in this way might suggest that the “treading – treading –” is making the speaker feel as if understanding or logic judgment is “breaking through” (4) to the speaker.

- ① The definition of *sense* in the poem is nuanced. Either definition can offer relevant exploration into the speaker’s mental state, or the sensations he/she is describing. Consider drawing students’ attention to the possible meanings of *sense* as an example of L.9-10.5.
- ① Students will continue further analysis of the speaker’s state of mind, and how it is revealed through what he/she hears and experiences, in later lessons.

Lead a brief full class discussion of student pair observations.

Instruct students to reread the second stanza of “I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,” in their pairs and answer the following questions.

What is happening to the speaker’s mind?

🗨️ His/Her mind is going numb.

What is causing the speaker to feel this way?

🗨️ The repeated “beating – beating –” of the “Drum” in the “Service.”

Lead a brief full class discussion of student observations.

Instruct students to reread the third and fourth stanzas of “I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,” in their pairs.

- ▶ Students read the third and fourth stanzas in their pairs.

What does the speaker hear in Stanzas 3 and 4?

- 🗣 The speaker hears the mourners “lift a Box” (9) and “creak across my Soul” (10) with “Boots of Lead” (11). The speaker also hears a “Bell” (13).
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Instruct students to reread the fifth stanza in their pairs.

- ▶ Students read the fifth stanza.

Ask students to volunteer a definition of *plank* (17).

- 🗣 Some students may recall their vocabulary work with this word from “The Tell-Tale Heart” to define a *plank* as “a long, flat piece of timber, thicker than a board.”

What does this *plank* support?

- 🗣 Students should identify that this plank supports “Reason” (17).

Ask students to volunteer a definition of *Reason*. If students struggle, provide them with the definition: “the mental powers concerned with forming conclusions, judgments, or inferences; sound judgment, normal or sound powers of mind; sanity.”

- ① This understanding of *reason* is key to the development of a central idea of madness in the poem, which will be addressed in Lesson 10.
- ① Consider drawing students’ attention to the possible meanings of *reason* as an example of L.9-10.5.

What happens to the “Plank in Reason”?

- 🗣 It breaks.

What happens to the speaker when the plank breaks? How does this connect to the idea of the funeral?

- 🗣 He/She drops down and down. He/She is being buried. He/She is falling into the ground.

Activity 5: Quick Write

15%

Instruct students to respond briefly in writing to the following prompt:

How do the following phrases contribute to the overall meaning of the poem?:

“I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,”

“My mind was going numb –”

“And creak across my Soul”

“Wrecked, solitary, here –”

“And I dropped down, and down –”

Remind students to use the Short Response Checklist and Rubric to guide their written responses.

- ▶ Students listen and read the Quick Write prompt.

① Display the Quick Write prompt for students to see or provide the prompt in hard copy.

Transition students to independent Quick Write.

- 🗨 See the High Performance Response at the beginning of this lesson.

Activity 6: Closing

5%

Display and distribute the homework assignment. For homework, instruct students to reread today’s initial reactions/questions concerning the masterful reading of the poem and today’s reading of the poem, and briefly respond in writing to the following prompt: What might the “Box” (9) contain? What evidence from the poem supports your thinking? Remind students to use the Short Response Checklist and Rubric to guide their written responses.

Introduce standard RL.9-10.5 as a focus standard to guide students’ Accountable Independent Reading and model what applying a focus standard looks like. Tell students they should prepare for a brief 3–5 minute discussion that will ask them to apply the language of the standards to their reading.

For example, RL.9-10.5 asks students to “analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g. parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create

such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.” Students who read “I Felt a Funeral, in My Brain,” might write the following: “Dickinson orders the feelings in her mind like a funeral that progresses from one phase to another. Treating her thoughts like a series of events makes the impact of the narrator’s thoughts seem real.”

- ▶ Students listen.

Homework

Respond briefly in writing to the following prompt: What might the “Box” (9) contain? What evidence from the poem supports your thinking?

Continue reading your Accountable Independent Reading text through the lens of the assigned focus standard (RL.9-10.5) and prepare for a 3–5 minute discussion of your text based on that standard.