

Portraits of the WKU WP
"You Chose Loneliness"

The Student:

A 17-year-old senior in English IV at Glasgow High School.

The Teacher:

Alysia Maysey has 10 years experience teaching Language Arts/Journalism. She participated in Project IX.

The Assignment:

A few years ago at the KCTE conference I attended a wonderful workshop taught by Dr. Charles Whitaker from ECU. Although I don't remember the title, the workshop's goal was to help teachers do a better job of teaching students to write poetry. Dr. Whitaker showed us some William Carlos Williams poems, and he had written prose explanations for the poems--sort of an explanation of the prewriting that might have happened in Williams' head before writing the poems. I took this back to my classroom, and over the years I have refined it.

This particular poem, "You Chose Loneliness," came as a result of my application of what Dr. Whitaker taught. Without explaining the purpose for it, I asked students to think about a time when they knew that they should apologize for something but they really didn't want to. Maybe they hurt somebody's feelings and thought that person was being overly sensitive about it, but nevertheless the relationship would not be right until at least a "fake" apology happened. The kids thought I was nuts, but they tried their best. For those who were having trouble, I suggested extreme sarcasm. One African-American student had recently confided to me someone had called him a "n-----," so he ended up "apologizing" for being black. A few days later, I showed them Williams' poem "This Is Just to Say," along with Dr. Whitaker's made-up letter from a husband to a wife, apologizing to her for eating all the plums, even though he knew she loved them. I then asked students to attempt to write an "almost apology" poem--the more sarcastic the better. Many students used their previous brainstorming, but the author of "You Chose Loneliness" started from scratch and attempted an apology to his father for the loneliness his father chose for himself by allowing alcohol to come before their family.

The Text:

You Chose Loneliness
I'm sorry you chose loneliness,
but I assure you my life will never be lonely.
It was your choice to make,
and you chose alcohol as the love of your life.
You had the opportunity to love and be loved,
but your hands always embraced what you truly loved.
There was never time to throw ball or wrestle around,
and you were never the role model I had always wanted.
The only time you gave me attention was with the single command,
"Go to the garage and get me another cold one."

Intimidated by your bold face and fierce tone,
I followed your orders.
The love of your life destroyed you and our family,
But we'd always forgive you and give you another chance.
Repetitively, you easily chose cold ones over loved ones,
And that choice left you lonely, lonely like the beach on a cold rainy day.
I shouldn't be apologizing,
instead I'd like to thank you.
Thank you for never being there,
because I've learned more from your absence than your presence.
Agonizing years of neglect and abuse poured on me like a heavy rainfall,
making my choice easier than yours.
You chose loneliness as your way of life
and I chose not to be like you as mine.

Student Commentary: What about this assignment helped me learn to write.

We looked at several poems and I realized writing is about expressing what you feel. It started out as an almost apology poem and developed into my feelings about my father. This subject is something I have tremendous amount of feelings for, so it came easy writing it after brainstorming on the topic. This assignment showed me to write good pieces you have to write what you feel. Using this technique I have also written a good personal piece.

Teacher Commentary: What I do to help students learn writing.