

## **Imagining a House** by Rachel Mindell

### **Objectives:**

Students will read “If I Lived in That House” by Joseph McGeschick and write about a house where they don’t actually live using their five senses. Before writing their poem, they will brainstorm the people and objects inside the house, as well as the environment outside the house, to help them develop ideas.

### **Education Level:**

Grades 3-6

### **Format:**

Lesson Plan

### **Time Frame:**

60 minutes

### **Prior Knowledge:**

None

### **Requirements:**

Paper and pencil  
Either handouts of the poem or a projector to display it  
An image of a house to handout or display via projector (optional)

### **Literary Model:**

“If I Lived in That House” by Joseph McGeschick (in handout attachment)

### **Sequence of Activities:**

#### **Discuss Poem (10 minutes)**

Pass out or display the poem and before reading it, ask students what they notice about how it looks on the page. Write their ideas on the board. This is a great intro lesson for a first or second poetry class because student observations will allow you to share some ways that poetry is different from other kinds of writing.

Here’s what they might notice (or you can guide them to notice):

- There is no punctuation (poems don't require it!)
- There is repetition of the "A" (poems often use repetition, like music)
- The words don't go all the way across the page (poems use lines rather than sentences)
- The lines slant (you can make shapes with poems – have fun!)

You might linger on this last point to see if the students have any ideas why the poem might slant that way. We don't know if this was the author's intention but most students, when you point it out or draw a slant on the board with a house below it, will then see a roof.

Next, read the poem. Depending on the class level, students can take turns reading lines or you can read it for them.

Discuss the poem with students. What do they notice? Does this seem like a happy house? A scary house? Both? Why?

(Note: this is a fun lesson around Halloween if you want to encourage students to imagine a spooky house).

Who is the man at the end of the poem? Why doesn't he want to think too hard?

### **Talk about Five Senses (5 minutes)**

Back at the board, have students help you create a list of the five senses. I like to tell them they can remember them using 3 S's and 2 T's. Sound, smell, sight, taste, touch.

Go back through a couple of lines in the poem and ask them which sense is being activated by the words:

Examples:

A man would throw a ball to a boy (sight, touch – maybe also sound)

A shiny faucet would drip in a white sink (sight, sound – maybe also smell, taste, touch)

A family would sit and eat a meal (sight, sound, touch, taste, smell)

### **Student Brainstorms (15 minutes)**

This lesson can be taught either with a picture of specific house you share and ask students to imagine they live inside, or based completely on imagination. Doing the exercise with a specific image encourages students to really imagine being inside a house that isn't their family home. That said, it also limits students who want to describe a house very different from the one you display.

If students have received a handout of the poem, have them use the back of the page. Otherwise, have them use paper.

Students will do three quick brainstorms. Tell them they can take notes - no need for complete sentences! Remind them this isn't their real house – they can include anyone and anything they want.

1. Who is in their imaginary house?

Have students make a list of people and animals they want in their imaginary house.

If students are more advanced, you could have them make that list on the left and to the right of each person/animal, have them include a verb for what that person/animal is doing. For example: sister – playing, dad – cooking, cat – scratching.

2. What are the objects inside their house?

Have students list things inside the house. If they need help, ask is there a lamp? Is there a window? List appliances, furniture etc.

If students are more advanced, have them incorporate the five senses with their objects. For example, rather than listing “table,” encourage them to list “squeaky table” or “smooth brown table.”

3. If they step outside the house, what is happening in the natural world?

In the example poem, outside the house there is a black winter night, a rain storm, and a field. What is outside their imaginary house?

If they struggle, have them imagine stepping outside and looking up. What do they see? Clouds, sun? Look down. What's there? Grass, mud, dirt? Look out. What is in the distance? Encourage them to use the five senses. Are there any smells or sounds?

**Writing (15 minutes)**

Give students a fresh sheet of paper and have them use their brainstorming materials to write a poem.

If they struggle with where to begin, you could ask everyone to start with the same first line:

“If I lived in that house”

or

“In the house in my mind”

or

“In my imaginary house”

Students may struggle with the first if they don't know how to use the conditional form yet (If I \_\_\_\_\_, then I would see \_\_\_\_\_).

If they don't know where to go next, remind them of their brainstorm. They can use what they've written in any order they want to – they don't have to do people, then objects, then nature. But also, they can!

Either display the poem while they are writing or remind them to look at the example.

For more advanced students, you could ask them to work on any of the following:

- making a shape with their words
- including all five senses
- writing in the conditional
- bringing themselves in at the end the way the poet does

Examples:

And a student would take a picture.

And a young man would never forget

### **Sharing (15 minutes)**

Leave time for students to share in small groups, with partners, or individually.