



College  
of  
Humanities

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA,  
Arizona's First University.

Spacing and the Cliché: Using One, Reinventing the Other  
The University of Arizona Poetry Center  
Poetry Center Reading Series  
By Cameron Conaway  
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**Grade Level:** 9-12

**Time Frame:** 2-4 class periods (50 minute periods)

**Material Requirements:**

To teach this lesson, you will need:

- ~ Old, unused magazines and newspapers
  - ~ Glue sticks, construction paper
  - ~ Excerpts from *Hymns & Qualms* by Peter Cole included at the end of this lesson.
  - ~ 20-30 (depending on number of students) cliché's pulled from [www.clichesite.com](http://www.clichesite.com).
- Fold two pieces of paper into 16 squares and write a cliché on each one.

**Prior Knowledge:** It may be helpful if students already have a working knowledge of simile, metaphor, and personification, though, the lesson can easily be adapted to introduce or refresh students' understanding of these concepts.

**Learning Objectives:**

In this lesson, students will have opportunities to write a poem that contains one cliché they've modified using figurative language and use the full space on the page to arrange words in ways that physically illustrate their meaning. The concepts of cliché and figurative language will be reviewed and practiced through the writing of their own poems.

## Sequence of Activities:

(1) Begin by writing the excerpt from NEWS THAT STAYS and ATTITUDE on the board.

(2) Read the excerpt of NEWS THAT STAYS aloud.

(3) Use the following questions to initiate a guided discussion: **What kind of vocabulary is the speaker of this poem using? Where else have you heard similar words used? What does this kind of language typically describe?** Explain how the opening several lines of the poem resemble news headlines during a time of war. The poem could also represent the headlines during a CNN-type news program, with some of the lines coming from the host and a guest. **How does the language we use effect the way war and other news worthy events are portrayed? How does the vocabulary in Peter Cole’s poem contribute to the overall tone or mood of the poem?** Discuss how war can often be portrayed as one-sided and that news sources can have a significant amount of control over what we believe is happening. Paying attention to language can give you clues about how those biases affect the coverage you receive. Then delve into the structure of the poem, ask: **How does the spacing make you feel? Why do you think Peter Cole is using such spread-out spacing that leaves white space between words? What are the benefits to this strategy?** Peter Cole’s poetry can span across the page and is a skill that provides the poet with control over the eyes of the reader. Using the entire page and using words to create physical structures can also serve to imitate the action and meaning of the word’s themselves.

(4) Read Peter Cole’s ATTITUDE.

(5) Discuss cliché’s. Talk about how they can loosely be defined as “trite, overused expressions” and ask the students to brainstorm and share some cliché’s if time allows. Notice how Peter Cole flipped his cliché from “Put your money where your mouth is.” Ask students how the meaning of this well known expression changes based on the way Cole has rearranged the words.

(6) Discuss figurative language. Cite several examples of how figurative language can be used to revive a cliché. Some examples could be:

### ORIGINAL CLICHÉ:

I have butterflies in my stomach.

Clear as a bell.

Apple of my eye.

### MODIFIED CLICHÉ:

Butterflies wearing horseshoes are stampeding through my stomach.

Clear as a coronary bypass.

Apple of my Adam. OR Apple of my red eye. OR Apple of my pink eye.

(7) Have the students select a cliché out of a hat.

(8) Distribute the newspapers, magazines, glue, and paper.

(9) Allow the students to play with language, play with spacing, and create their own artistic vision. When everyone is finished, ask the students to stand and present their poem (both visually and verbally) to the class. **Student's poems should contain a modified version of the cliché they chose from the hat and use the full space on the page to arrange words in ways that physically illustrate their meaning. The poem may also use phrases cut out of the newspaper/magazines, their own original language, or a mixture of both.**



*prose poem excerpt from "One to Bet: A Jerusalem Pamphlet" by Peter Cole*

**ATTITUDE**

“Put your mouth where your money is.”

*from Hymns & Qualms (The Sheep Meadow Press, 1998)*  
*Copyright © 1998 by Peter Cole.*

*full version of "News That Stays" by Peter Cole*

NEWS THAT STAYS

"It's a multiday process...

Under stress,  
officially MIA, with a mission. Friendly fire.  
That's not your question?  
I have a good *answer* for it.

Sorry, but we just can't discuss that,  
and I can't even discuss why we can't discuss it.

Let me walk you through that decision. Unhindered:

Elite

Republican

Guard.

Cut it off and then kill it. In my mind's eye ... a thousand  
points of light. If you've  
*got* a hammer, *find* a nail.

What the vulnerabilities are.

I'm not trying to  
gaff the question. That's a service prerogative.

To classify these folks as prisoners of war.

...

Could you tell us, Pete, if the slick will spread  
and poison all the waters in the region? I  
don't think we have a good feeling for that.

Something has happened to his country  
that he doesn't want us to see.

A daisy cutter, to soften-up the troops.  
Just ripple off ... into infinity!  
A new order. Tel Aviv ... a  
crematorium. We haven't yet reached, I think,  
a point of diminishing

returns. By popular demand. Mr. Ambassador,  
thank you very much for your time. My pleasure."

-The Gulf War

*from Hymns & Qualms (The Sheep Meadow Press, 1998)*  
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