For over 130 years Regions has been proud to be a part of the Middle Tennessee community, growing and thriving as our area has. From the opening of our doors on September 1, 1883, we have committed to this community and our customers.

One area that we are strongly committed to is the education of our students. We are proud to support TPAC’s Humanities Outreach in Tennessee Program. What an important sponsorship this is — reaching over 25,000 students and teachers — some students would never see a performing arts production without this program. Regions continues to reinforce its commitment to the communities it serves and in addition to supporting programs such as HOT, we have close to 200 associates teaching financial literacy in classrooms this year.

Thank you, teachers, for giving your students this wonderful opportunity. They will certainly enjoy the experience. You are creating memories of a lifetime, and Regions is proud to be able to help make this opportunity possible.

Jim Schmitz
Executive Vice President, Area Executive
Middle Tennessee Area
Dear Teachers,

Thank you for joining us for *Love That Dog*! This show centers around a young man named Jack and his journey from reluctant writer to finding his voice through poetry. We hope your students will see a bit of themselves in Jack and that his story will encourage them in their own journeys of self-discovery.

As you prepare your students for this experience, we hope that this study guide helps you connect the performance to your classroom curriculum. In the following pages, you will find contextual information about the performance and a variety of lessons and activity ideas.

See you in the theater!

TPAC Education

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Compiled and edited by Cassie LaFevor.
Synopsis
Jack hates poetry. Only girls write it and every time he tries to, his brain feels empty. But his teacher, Ms. Stretchberry, won’t stop giving her class poetry assignments – and Jack can’t avoid them. But then something amazing happens. The more he writes, the more he learns he does have something to say.

With a fresh and deceptively simple style, acclaimed author Sharon Creech tells a story with enormous heart. Written as a series of free-verse poems from Jack’s point of view, *Love That Dog* shows how one boy finds his own voice with the help of a teacher, a writer, a pencil, some yellow paper, and of course, a dog.

The Production
Based on the novel by Sharon Creech, Theaertegroep Kwatta takes a creative approach in their staging of the events in Miss Stretchberry’s classroom over the course of a year. Using projections on a large screen, we are able to see Jack’s poems, and innovative recreations of events in Jack’s life and his neighborhood, using miniatures manipulated by the actors. *Love that Dog* has 4 actors, two primarily playing Jack and Miss Stretchberry, while the other two move through various creative responsibilities to invent the world of the play – including live music, puppetry, visual effects and lots of humor!

The Company – Theatergroep Kwatta
Based in Theater Het Badhuis in the Netherlands, Theatergroep Kwatta has been producing professional youth theatre since 2002.

Kwatta’s mission is to create room for amazement and admiration. By asking simple questions about difficult issues and difficult questions about things that appear to be simple. By making no assumptions and always searching for the unknown and the absurd. By tilting reality to create a different perspective.

As Kwatta creates their plays, they strive towards these goals – Be Accessible, Be Quirky, and Create connections.

A Different Kind of Novel
The author, Sharon Creech, chose to title her book *Love That Dog: a Novel*, but the entire book is actually written in free verse. The ideas are complex, but are written in distilled, minimal, poetic language. The words are arranged on the page in such a way that they guide the reader’s eye to what is important, what is connected, or to take time to visualize what’s going on. The difference between how the work looks on the page and what we usually think of as a “novel” is striking.

To turn this series of free verse poems into a conventionally written novel, we would need to add descriptions of setting, characters, and action within the story.

In the performance at TPAC, Theatergroep Kwatta fills in the missing sensory and informational ideas by adding clear acting choices, puppetry, visual effects, live music, and multimedia projections.
Lesson – What is a Poem?

**Materials:** Paper and pencil; Prepare a large selection of poems, at least 2-3 poems for each student, being sure to select a variety of styles for a broader look at the genre. For example, some poems rhyme, others don’t rhyme, some tell stories, some are about feelings, people, objects, experiences, etc. Some poem suggestions can be found at the end of the lesson.

**Set** - Post the following pieces of writing where the entire class can see them. Discuss as a class which one they think is a poem and why. (The answer is – they both are!) Read the poems aloud to students and ask that they note what is different about the two poems. Students should be able to recognize that one poem rhymes and one does not.

Tiger! Tiger! burning bright    I have eaten
In the forests of the night    the plums
    that were in
    the icebox

**Discuss:** Today’s activity will help us answer a lot of questions, but begin by asking students what they think about the following ideas, taking notes on the board of their answers: (Try not to give away any answers yourself, as this is just an initial discussion and students should be able to answer them more clearly after the activity.)

- What is a poem?
- Why do poems look different from other kinds of writing?
- What kinds of poems are there?
- What are poems about? Do poems have special meanings?

**Instructional Procedures:**

- Give each student three poems (you may wish to adjust the number depending on the length of the poems and your students). Give students about 15 minutes to read the poems, reminding them to read the poems more than once if they have time.

- Ask students to write 1 sentence describing each poem. Write down these sentences with the poem title on a piece of paper to help them later in the lesson.

- Now ask students again to answer the question “What is a poem?” based on their reading of the poems. Do they have a clearer answer than they did at the start of class? Would they add or remove anything from their earlier answers?

- Next, students should be placed into groups or pairs so that each group/pair has 5-10 poems. Each group will read their poems as a group, and then categorize them based on their similarities, choosing their own categories based on what they find similar in the poems they have. For example, they can categorize poems according to those that rhyme versus those that do not rhyme, they can categorize based on how the poem is written- stanza versus paragraph, they can choose to categorize based on a similar theme or topic, etc.

**Closure** - Student groups share their category choices and explain their decisions. Teacher challenges students to write a definition that answers the question: “What is a poem?”

Lesson – Writing with Emotion
By: Carol Ponder

Materials Needed: Journals and blank paper; copies of the groups’ written stories from Part One for each student; Pencils, Assorted crayons, colored pencils, markers; A copy of the book, Love That Dog
OR copies of the opening pages from the book

Part One
Set: Begin by standing in a circle. Take three deep breaths together to focus.

- Remind students that an important part of narratives or stories – whether writing or reading them – is the emotions of the characters. Explain to students that we will be exploring some emotions inspired by Love That Dog by creating frozen statues that embody the emotion.

- Demonstrate a frozen statue that embodies an emotion (start simple, showing them sad or happy), helping students see the full body representation of the feeling. Ask students to name the emotion you are embodying and describe how they know what it is. What are you doing that expresses that emotion? What choices are you making? No detail is too small.

- Now prepare students to create their own frozen statues when you call out the emotions from Love That Dog. Move from easier to more difficult emotions in the book/play – sad, happy, mad, angry, frustrated, stubborn, surprised, frightened, excited, embarrassed, despair, grief, triumphant, satisfied. Ask them to focus on body language, facial expressions, and gestures with arms, hands, feet, and head. NO SOUND OR WORDS.

- One at a time, call out emotions. Remind students to freeze. While they stay frozen, help them notice the choices they are making – body language, facial expression, gestures with arms, hands, feet, and head – what else?

- Divide the group in half so they can share. One half will perform while the other acts as an audience. Audience members should examine the statues. What are their classmates doing to create that emotion? What choices are they making?

Instructional Procedures:
- Students return to their seats and get out journals and pencils.

- Share with students - Jack has a painful story in his heart that he doesn’t know how to talk about. Art in the form of poetry gives him the freedom to work through his own sadness about his dog’s death. Art gives him a voice. Are there any hard or sad stories in your own heart that you find it hard to talk about? Ask students to think of something they have learned in their daily lives that was hard and that they didn’t want to learn. The lesson may even have been sad or painful; BUT, what they learned also made them stronger, wiser, happier, or more able to cope with the difficulties of life.

- Ask students to jot down the “who, what, when, where, why, and how” of that experience or event. They will use these notes as prompts when they tell a brief version of the story to others. Note: Students should choose something that they will not mind sharing.

- Divide students into groups of three to five. Ask them to tell their stories, one at a time, around the group. Ask them to listen for and jot down anything they find to be particularly interesting or that catches their attention in a classmate’s story.

- Ask each group to choose one story OR to combine details from more than one story to create and write down a complete story. Note: It will be helpful to choose one student to act as the “scribe,” one person to write the group’s story down.
  - Be sure the story has a clear beginning, middle, and end.
  - Remember to include the who, what, when, where, why, and how details.
  - Include figurative language or good describing words and active verbs.
• When stories are finished, one student will read their group’s story aloud with appropriate
expression for the rest of the class.
• After each story, ask students not in that group to comment on aspects of the story that they
particularly noticed – e.g. a character, an action, or an interaction between characters. It could be
something they like, something that affected them deeply, or something that is similar to an
experience of their own.

Closure:
• Ask students to reflect (aloud and/or in their journals) about:
  o What surprised them about another group’s story?
  o What was different, and what was similar, among the groups’ different stories?

Part Two

Set:
• Repeat the process from Part 1 to create frozen statues of emotions. Ask students to embody
each emotion twice this time.
  o First time: As big as possible in every way – huge gestures, exaggerated facial
    expressions, obvious body language, and intense energy.
  o Second time: Discuss the definition of “distill” and what that meant to their movement.
    What would it mean when referring to written text? Distill the frozen statue movement by
    making choices that are as small or as refined as possible, while keeping the same
    emotional intensity as in the huge movement.
• Divide the group in half, with one half performing and the other half acting as an audience. Ask
the audience to compare the two frozen statues – huge and then distilled. What do they see in
their classmates’ choices? What did the performing students do differently from large to small?
Look for details in body language, facial expressions, and gestures. Swap and repeat – audience
becomes performers, performers become audience.

Instructional Procedures:
• Have students gather back into the same small groups from Part One. Pass out copies of their
story so that every student has a copy and a pencil. Tell students they are going to distill the
stories into a free verse poem today!
• First, ask students to read their stories out loud within their groups. Take time to make
adjustments to the stories, if needed (reflecting, editing).
• Then, working individually, ask each student to look at their copy of the story and to underline the
most important words or phrases - the ones that catch their attention, that are written “just right,”
that are strongly descriptive, that spark emotions, that are the most effective. Resist the urge to
underline whole sentences!
• When all are finished, bring out the copy of Love That Dog (or photocopies of the opening pages).
Look at the layout of the pages in the book – how the words are arranged on the page. Notice
how the arrangement of words on the page guides the reader in how to make meaning of the
words when reading aloud with expression – or quietly on their own. Would it differ if the words
were just written across the page normally?
• Discuss – What is Love That Dog? The title says it’s a novel. What do you think it is? Explain that
this book is written in a series of free verse poems, even though it tells a story and the author
chose to label it as a “novel.” Share and briefly discuss the definitions of “free verse” and “novel.”
Why do students think Creech chose to label her book as a novel even though it is written in free
verse? Briefly discuss the definition of a “play.” Explain that they will be seeing a play adapted from the free verse book *Love That Dog: a Novel*. Ask students to look at their own group’s written stories. Which do they most resemble – a play, a novel, or a free verse poem? Why?

- Revisit definition of “distill.” Ask students to distill their stories into a free verse poem using the following instructions to guide them.
  - Start by looking at the words and phrases that your group underlined. Using those underlined words and phrases, choose which ones to write on your paper in an order that implies a story.
  - Each group should get a blank piece of paper, and fold it in half lengthwise. They will only use one half of the paper to write their words, writing large enough to fill the space.
  - Focus on arranging the words on the page to guide the reader through interpreting and reading the poem/story they are creating. Write big enough to fill the paper vertically. You do not have to fill the margin horizontally – a single line can be as few as one or two words as long as it guides the reader to the next line, visually shaping the poem. (See example photo for a visual representation.)
  - When the poems are written, share them around the room. Allow brief observations, questions, and discussions of each poem.
  - If time allows, ask each group to add visual elements to the free verse poem, as seen in the photo to the right, adding aspects of visual art – drawing pictures (e.g. backgrounds and characters), maps of the action, abstract symbols – anything that works. Use different colors to indicate emotions or mood as the implied story unfolds. Ask all students in each group to work together, at the same time. All participants should make visual additions to their piece. All hands on the paper!

- When all poems are finished, arrange pieces so that students can move around the room from one to another with their journals and pencils. Ask them to view and analyze all poetry/visual pieces, jotting down notes about the following ideas:
  - Overall effect of this poem (and art work if applicable)
  - What does the poem say to you?
  - What do the visual elements add to the total meaning of this multimedia work of art?

- Sit again to discuss similarities and differences among these new works of art.

**Closure -**

- Ask students to close their eyes and to imagine seeing their own group’s poem turned into a play on stage. Imagine stage scenery, lights, sound, costumes, and props (things actors handle). Consider how the visual elements of their works of art would be translated into aspects of a play performed on stage.

- Ask for a few volunteers to describe what they imagine their own group’s story would look, sound, and feel like as a play on stage.
Materials: White envelopes for each student in your class; A selection of four to six poems

Preparation: Prepare the envelopes by inserting one poem into each envelope; write the first line of the poem on the outside, then seal the envelope. You should have the same poem in several envelopes for group work in the lesson. Number each envelope so that you know which poem is inside each envelope.

Instructional Procedures:

- On the board, write the words “Inspired By”. What does it mean to be “Inspired By” something? In Love That Dog, Jack is inspired by poems he reads in class and creates his own poems in similar styles. Today, students will use the first line of a classic poem to inspire their own poetry writing.

- Give each student a sealed envelope containing a poem. Ask the students to first take a few minutes to study the first line that is written on the outside of the envelope. Is it short or long? Does it contain big words or small words? What images does it evoke? What do they think the poem is about? Who do they imagine speaking the words? Who are the characters in the story?

- Ask the students to take on the voice of the first line, to pretend they are the person writing this poem. What does the rest of the poem say? Ask students to keep the first line, and now finish writing the poem. Give the students 10-15 minutes to complete their poems.

- Afterwards, break the students up into small groups according to the original poems they were given (All the students with envelopes marked # 1 meet together, as do students with envelopes labeled # 2, # 3, etc.)

- In their groups, each student will read their own poem aloud. Discuss the differences and similarities in each poem. Did any of them choose similar themes or characters? Are the styles the same?

- Let students open the envelopes and read the original poem, individually or aloud in the group.

- Ask each group about the experience - How did the original poem differ from their poem? What images came to mind? Did the voice of the first line sound the same throughout the poem? What surprised them? How does the first line of the envelope poem compare to the rest of the poem?

Closure - Assemble the whole class and ask for volunteers to read each of the envelope poems. Students can also talk about the experience of writing a poem using a first line written by someone else as inspiration. If time allows, some or all of the students may read their own poems aloud.

Extension – Research “Golden Shovel” poems created by Terrance Hayes with his poem “The Golden Shovel” – older students may wish to explore this way to be inspired by a favorite poem.
In *Love That Dog*, Jack’s poem “Love That Dog” is inspired by Walter Dean Myers’ poem “Love That Boy”

**Love That Boy**
By Walter Dean Myers

Love that boy,
like a rabbit loves to run
I said I love that boy
like a rabbit loves to run
Love to call him in the morning
love to call him
"Hey there, son!"

He walk like his Grandpa,
Grins like his Uncle Ben.
I said he walk like his Grandpa,
And grins like his Uncle Ben.
Grins when he’s happy,
When he sad, he grins again.

His mama like to hold him,
Like to feed him cherry pie.
I said his mama like to hold him.
Like to feed him that cherry pie.
She can have him now,
I’ll get him by and by

He got long roads to walk down
Before the setting sun.
I said he got a long, long road to walk down
Before the setting sun.
He’ll be a long stride walker,
And a good man before he done.

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**Who is Walter Dean Myers?**

In a career spanning over 45 years, Walter Dean Myers wrote more than 100 books for children of all ages. His impressive body of work includes two Newbery Honor Books, three National Book Award Finalists, and six Coretta Scott King Award/Honor-winning books, just to name a few!

Walter often wrote books about the most difficult time in his own life—his teenage years—for the reader he once was; these were the books that he wished were available when he was that age. Throughout his life, Walter worked to make sure young adults had the tools necessary to become hungry readers, thirsty learners, and, therefore, successful adults. He frequently met with incarcerated teens in juvenile detention centers and received countless letters thanking him for his inspirational words. Walter also worked with and mentored teenage fan and writer Ross Workman, and they published the novel *Kick* together. As the National Ambassador for Young People’s Literature from 2012-2013, Walter traveled around the United States promoting the slogan “Reading is not optional.” He strove to spread the message that a brighter future depends on reading proficiency and widespread literacy, not only during his two-year tenure as National Ambassador, but beyond. More than anything, Walter pushed for his stories to teach children and teenagers never to give up on life.

Find out more about Walter Dean Myers life and writing online - [http://walterdeanmyers.net/](http://walterdeanmyers.net/)
More Poetry Ideas!

Feel the Rhythm – Jack learns to tap out the rhythm of a poem, and your students will enjoy doing the same. Choose poems with a steady beat and read them aloud, emphasizing the stressed syllables. Allow students to “drum” along with you. As an extension, encourage students to investigate the connections between poetry and music. Do their favorite musical artists use meter in their lyrics? What about rhyme or alliteration?

Build a Wall of Fame – On a wall in your classroom, post pictures of the poets your students will be reading. Next to each photo, include an interesting or funny quote, anecdote or detail about something the author did when he or she was your students’ age.

Inspired By – Select your favorite poem that appears at the end of Love That Dog. Use that poem’s form to write one of your own. Not sure where to start? Jack gets his start with “The Red Wheelbarrow,” so give William Carlos Williams’ style a try.

News Worthy – Jack is excited to meet a famous author when Walter Dean Myers agreed to visit his school. Pretend you are a news reporter from his town. Write an article or write and record a news broadcast about the visit.

Apologies – In Love That Dog, Jack’s March 14th poem is an apology to Miss Stretchberry. Read the poem “This Is Just To Say” by William Carlos Williams. Write your own apology poem for something you have done.

Poem in Your Pocket Day – Each April the Poetry Society of America collaborates with people in New York City to present a city-wide program which encourages people to carry a poem with them throughout the day, attend a poetry reading, or read a poem aloud themselves. Create your own Poem in Your Pocket Day at your school!

Invite an Author – Write a letter inviting your favorite author to visit your school!
SPECIAL THANKS

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