OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES:

Students will be able to:

* Identify with characters
* Write persona poems.
* Write about literature in the present tense.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

Copies of *Backpack Blues: Ignite the Fire Within.*

ANTICIPATORY SET/OPENING OF LESSON:

Teacher/parent will define personification and persona poem. Teacher or student will read a few sample poems.

Teacher/parent will tell students the anthology is about a group of seniors in a rural high school in New York State’s Adirondack Mountains or allow students to read a few of the poems and determine the setting for themselves.

GUIDED PRACTICE:

Students will read the selected poems and discuss whether they can identify with any of the characters, and why they identify with or see the character in a friend. Teacher/parent will ask if students in cities could relate to any of the same issues.

INDEPENDENT WRITING:

Students will write one or more persona poems about themselves, a friend, or someone living through the pandemic, giving voice to the character.

INDEPENDENT READING:

Students will read *Spoon River Anthology* by Edgar Lee Masters, note the similarity in the persona poems to *Backpack Blues*poems, and discuss similarity of themes and issues to current issues. When was it written? Is it a classic? Do they think *Backpack Blues: Ignite the Fire Within*has classic themes?

Teacher/Parent Procedure:

1. Begin by asking students if they have heard of the term *personification*.

If needed, define *personification*as a type of figurative language that gives human characteristics to non-human objects. For example, the wind whistled my name. Ask students if they can see the word *person* in *personification*.

1. Ask students if they’ve ever read a persona poem.

See the word person in persona? That’s the key to the meaning. Persona poems are about people. They can be written from the first (I, We) or third person (he, she, or the person’s name) point of view.

Melody Dean Dimick’s poems in *Backpack Blues: Ignite the Fire Within*are written from the first person point of view. Notice the word *I.*She used the word*I*to give voice to the teenage characters. Each young person tells his/her own story. As an actor pretends to be a character, the poet pretends to be the subject of the poem, taking on that voice.

1. Note to the teacher/parent/mentor: Mention that the song “Eleanor Rigby” by the Beatles is an example of a persona poem put to music. Lyrics are poems. Songwriters are poets. (If you can download the music and want to, play the song.
2. Ask students if they’ve ever heard of Edgar Lee Masters. Tell them he wrote *Spoon River Anthology*as a collection of persona poems. Masters gives voice to the people of the fictional valley of the Spoon in his collection. Melody Dean Dimick gives voice to a composite of the teenagers she taught in *Backpack Blues: Ignite the Fire Within.*
3. Note: Tell students to always talk about literature in the present tense. If we go back to examine a book a second time, it will be the same.
4. Direct students to put themselves in the place of the homeless man on the street or the elderly man or woman in the nursing home or the teen being bullied. What do they think the person would want to say to the world? Ask them to share what it’s like to be you or one of your friends stuck in your house during the time of the Coronavirus. How are you feeling about not being able to go to the prom or graduation?
5. What do you think doctors, nurses, health care workers, teachers, grocers, old people set apart from their families, or small business people in your community would like to say about their lives? Say it for the person’s point of view. Give the character voice. Life’s a matter of perspective. Capture the voice of the people you know or have met.

Assignment:

Challenge yourself. Write a persona poem. Use *personification* someplace in the poem.

NOTE/SUGGESTION:

Parent or teacher, if you wish, you may choose to omit poems you do not feel are about a theme or subject matter appropriate for your tween or teen. A very few of the poems may be about edgy topics, but they are handled in a manner which will enable you to discuss the theme as you would like to address it. They are for students in grades 9 through 12.