

## **A LESSON IN HYPERBOLE**

Based on “Sublime Moments on Hold” by Amy Gerstler, page 74, Poetry International Journal #17.

### **Goals of this lesson:**

- \* Students learn the definitions of a hyperbole
- \* Understand how and why hyperboles are used
- \* Write an effective poem using hyperboles

**1. Introductory activities:** Ask a student to read aloud the following definition of hyperboles:

A hyperbole is a figure of speech and a form of irony that uses extreme exaggeration for effect or emphasis or to make a point. It is the opposite of “understatement.” It comes from a Greek word meaning “excess.” Hyperboles would not be used in nonfiction works, like medical journals or research papers, but are perfect for fictional works, especially to add color to a character or humor to a poem or story. Hyperboles are comparisons, like similes and metaphors, but are extravagant and even ridiculous.

**2. Ask another student to read aloud the following three examples:**

- a. This example comes from "As I Walked Out One Evening" by W.H. Auden:

I'll love you, dear, I'll love you / Till China and Africa meet, /And the river jumps  
over the mountain /And the salmon sing in the street,  
I'll love you till the ocean / Is folded and hung up to dry /And the seven stars go  
squawking / Like geese about the sky.

- b. The following is a short hyperbole from literature:

The skin on her face was as thin and drawn as tight as the skin of onion and her  
eyes were gray and sharp like the points of two picks.

c. Another great example of hyperbole in literature comes from Paul Bunyan's opening remarks in the American folktale Babe, the Blue Ox:

“Well now, one winter it was so cold that all the geese flew backward and all the fish moved south and even the snow turned blue. Late at night, it got so frigid that all spoken words froze solid afore they could be heard. People had to wait until sunup to find out what folks were talking about the night before.”

- 3. Lead a discussion by asking the students what is exaggerated in each of the three examples and what impact it has on the poem.**
- 4. Call on a student to read “Sublime Moments on Hold” by Amy Gerstler, page 74.**
- 5. Ask the class to identify lines in the poem where they find a good use of hyperbole and why they think it is working to enhance the poem.**
- 6. Ask students to write a poem using Amy's poem as an inspirational pattern.**

**Directions for writing a poem using hyperboles:** Think of a situation and characters where hyperbole would be effective. Use at least three hyperboles in your poem. Address the reader directly with commands as Amy does when she uses “Press one, Press two...” In her poem, “Direct Address” on page 72 she is also giving directions: “Listen, Do as I say, You go on ahead.” Make the poem dramatic and humorous. Consider using dialogue to bring your characters to life. But the real task is to write a moving poem. Your job is to keep us interested and entertained. Make us believe the story and move us! Keep it brief—no more than 16 lines.