**Trio House Press**

**Poetry Now**

**Lesson Plan**

**Topic:** Crafting a poem with special attention to alliteration, rhyming, and the sound of words

**Lesson Title:** On David Groff’s, *Clay*

**Level:** College

**Lesson Duration:** 2-3 hours

**Lesson Objectives:** Learn how David Groff uses the sound of words in his poems to add to his intention and then incorporate these techniques into one’s own poems.

**Summary of Tasks/Actions:**

* Watch and/or read the interview with David Groff conducted by Hadley Hendrix and Sarah Dumitrascu: <https://www.facebook.com/196092110453260/videos/4082868835168690>
* Read David Groff’s poem, “Muscalure” or listen to him read this poem at 26:48 in the interview
* Read the “Analysis” of the poem, “Muscalure”
* Write your own poem in correspondence to the “Prompt” at the end

**Muscalure (p. 67 in *Clay*)**

Fat fly, ripe as a grape,

your eyes a thousand spies,

you cruise me, you grope,

you hone your fecal nails,

you rub your palms—sleek

villain, me roped to your rails—

too sly to be a bullseye as I

slap myself silly to still you, you

with your eye for the faux-blasé

clandestine caress, your

bait & twitch of insinuation,

the spark of my shivering, your

kiss like a silk of his hair

that stealths the pillow to my throat,

the eyelash triggered on my ear,

*(continued)*

*(Groff, Muscalure, Page 2, new stanza)*

his breath a stiletto in my eye.

**Analysis of “Muscalure”**

Stanza 1:

* This poem immerses its readers immediately with the presence of the alliteration, “Fat fly,” following it up with the simile, “ripe as a grape.” Grapes are also used throughout his book and seem to tie the stories strung together like different grapes hanging from the same vine.
* Line 2, “your eyes a thousand spies” not only rhymes, but its metaphor also points to the intention of the poem to make one feel the invasiveness and self-consciousness that the speaker feels in this situation.
* In line 3, “you grope” also sheds light on this intention, while slightly rhyming with “grape” in line 1.

Stanza 2:

* Lines 4-5 slide in language that makes one feel uncomfortable, like the speaker is being watched by this grotesque thing that’s almost mocking them: “you hone your fecal nails, / you rub your palms—sleek.” The word, “hone” gives the connotation that this being is “honing” in on its prey. Matched with the word, “fecal,” this description of the fly becomes even more disturbing. Additionally, “you rub your palms—sleek” connects to this sort of mocking that I mentioned. With David using the word “palms” instead of “bug hands” or something that’s more genuine to the fly’s make-up, it compares the fly to the human in an effortlessly invasive way.
* Finally, the line break in line 5: “you rub your palms—sleek” is excellent because it can stand by itself or be read with the line following: “villain, me roped to your rails.” Again, it conveys the intrusive nature of this fly and the hold it has on the speaker, while also rhyming “rails” with “nails” used in line 4.

Stanza 3:

* Line 7, “too sly to be a bullseye” rhymes “sly” and “bullseye” together. This rhyme draws attention to this line, just like how the fly draws the attention of the speaker.
* The following line, “slap myself silly to still you” is an alliteration, which again, draws the attention of the audience, while giving the reader a bit of imagery they can latch onto and visualize the scenario taking place. It also gives way to the frustration the speaker is feeling.

Stanza 4:

* Line 10, “clandestine caress” throws us into another alliteration, while pointing towards this secretive and “sly” caress of the fly and the speaker. This is where the poem seems to point towards the relationship between the two.
* Line 11, “bait & twitch of insinuation” shows an image of the fly twitching and baiting the speaker to come after it. The words “bait” and “twitch” also have harsh consonant sounds, which draw a contrast to the secretive and sly “s” sounds the readers have been hearing throughout the beginning of the poem. I think these sounds give rise to a new tension of trying to kill the fly rather than tip-toeing around it. The speaker begins to acknowledge this growing frustration and self-consciousness that the fly is making them feel.
* The final line in this stanza, “the spark of my shivering” returns to the “s” sounds in an alliterative form, while still including the sharp “k” sound in “spark.”

Stanza 5:

* The previous stanza leaves us with the last word of “your” then breaks into stanza five: “your // kiss like a silk of his hair.” Because of the stanza break here, the fly seems to be abandoned for what is truly getting under the speaker’s skin. The speaker begins taking a look inward to find that the fly is really only a metaphor for the self-consciousness they feel around this person, who seems to be too close to them.
* Line 14, “that stealths the pillow to my throat” again, shows the closeness of this individual to the speaker. It also reminds me of a “soft kill” by mentioning a “pillow to my throat” rather than something harsh like a knife, for example.
* The final line in this stanza, “the eyelash triggered on my ear” is again pointing to the intrusive nature of this individual on the speaker. David also plays with the sounds in this line as well. The word “eyelash” seems very soft in comparison to “triggered,” which again points to this idea of something soft, and maybe even harmless, having this incredible pervasiveness about it that it makes one uncomfortable being under their scrutiny. Not only that, but “ear” also slightly rhymes with “hair” in line 13.

Stanza 6:

* And, finally, the last line of the entire poem is separated into its own stanza. This draws a sharp contrast to the rest of the poem, which is told in stanzas of three lines (a tercet). By standing alone, it acts as the final realization of the speaker that this is not, in fact, about a fly. Rather, it is about an individual who is far too close for comfort: “his breath a stiletto in my eye.” Breath is rather harmless, but it is compared to something very harsh: “stiletto.” The diction here gives weight to this idea that even though harmless, certain beings have a way of making one turn inward, becoming frustrated and embarrassed, almost, by their closeness.

**Poetry Prompt**

Write about a mundane object that causes some emotion to rise up. It could be the frustration of a lawnmower outside your window at eight o’clock in the morning. It could be the sound of dishes clanking about downstairs or trees being torn down so the light shines through a different way when you drive past them on your way to work. It could be a number of things.

While you are writing about this object or thing, pay attention to the way your words sound, perhaps incorporating alliteration or a rhyme scheme or simply purposefully choosing when to use harsh sounding words and softer sounding ones. See where the poem takes you. Try not to have an “end point” or encompassing metaphor in mind when you start writing. David Groff didn’t know what his poem about a fly would turn into until he began writing it.