Style: Making It Your Own
Activity One: Worth Being Familiar With

Note
This lesson lends itself to a deeper understanding of elements of poetic style within the English III classroom. Prior to completing this activity, students should have read and discussed a number of selections of Wheatley’s poetry and have a working knowledge of other poets/authors, studied inside and outside of the classroom.

Essential Questions
What is the role and significance of style in creating literature?
How does an author’s/poet’s style influence the interpretation of literature?

North Carolina Standard Course of Study
Goal 1: The learner will demonstrate increasing insight and reflection to print and non-print text through personal expression.
Goal 4: The learner will critically analyze text to gain meaning, develop thematic connections, and synthesize ideas.
Goal 5: The learner will interpret and evaluate representative texts to deepen understanding of literature of the United States.
Goal 6: The learner will apply conventions of grammar and language usage.

Objectives
The student should be able to:
1. Identify and define literary style.
2. Explain the use and significance of style in poetry.
3. Examine the style of various authors/poets and connect to writer’s purpose.
4. Compose writing that demonstrates comprehension of stylistic influence.

Materials
- Style Handout * attached
- Writing Assignment
- Alexander Pope’s “The Rape of the Lock”, published 1712
- Ernest Hemingway’s “Hills Like White Elephants”, published 1927
- Emily Dickinson’s “Nature”, published 1891

Time Required
Day 1: 90 minutes
Day 2: 20-30 minutes

Procedures
1. Read and discuss several of Wheatley’s poems. Focus on poems that can be easily identified as being stylistically influenced by other poets.
2. Class discussion should center on analyzing and deciphering the meaning of Wheatley’s “Niobe in Distress.”

Students should be aware that poets like Alexander Pope and others of the 18th century heavily influenced Wheatley. Discussion should highlight the manner in which Wheatley modeled the mastery of format based on pre-existing examples.

3. Divide students into small groups and provide copies of Alexander Pope’s “Rape of the Lock” for comparison and contrast of each poet’s linguistic appeal. Explain that Wheatley utilized Pope’s piece as an example of what constitutes an epyllia, or short epic poem. Have groups point out places in “Niobe in Distress” that seem particularly similar to Pope’s work and create a graphic organizer that showcases each poet’s similarities and differences. (Note: This is not a lesson designed to teach “Rape of the Lock”, it should be used to compare style with limited attention to the poem’s content.)

Have each group report findings out to the class.

4. After each group reports their findings and opinions to the class, open class discussion to a broader topic of style. Provide students with a handout of the definition of literary style and discuss its role in the works of some of the most successful writers (i.e. Hemmingway, Dickinson, etc.).

Explain that Wheatley was skillful in being influenced by Pope’s style, yet she was able to make her work more personal by adding her own tone and voice. In essence, she was able to take his model and make it her own, as evident in the differences that student’s noted in the two works.

5. To further emphasize the idea of creating style, provide students with examples of works from Dickinson and Hemingway. Explain that these two artists have very distinct styles.

Again, group students so that they can read each piece and analyze the author’s/poet’s style. On the same paper, used above, students should write 2-3 sentences that describes the overall style of each piece.

6. As an assessment that will begin as classwork and be completed as homework, students are to write a one-page piece that borrows the style of Hemingway, Dickinson, Wheatley, or a combination of the three.

Assignment: Write a one-page narrative that describes a mundane incident, such as getting ready for school or talking with someone. In this narrative, you are to borrow the creative style of another artist, yet remain true to yourself as a writer. References to the style of Wheatley, Hemingway or Dickinson should be obvious, but your own personal interjections are what should allow your work to stand out as inherently “yours”. Remember the role of style in establishing the author’s purpose, showcasing literary knowledge and admiration for other artists.
You will be graded on your ability to effectively transform the description of an ordinary event into an eloquent narrative that is full of style and literary authority.

7. The next day in class, students will use their own narratives to write a brief reflection of how they were able to write with the influence of another writer, yet remain true to themselves and their intended audience and purpose.
Style is the essential characteristic of every piece of writing, the outcome of the writer's personality and his emotions at the moment, and no single paragraph can be put together without revealing to some degree the personality of its author.

It is universally acknowledged that every writer has a literary style and that his style is reflected in his writing.

WAYS THAT WRITERS DEVELOP THEIR PERSONAL STYLE INCLUDE:

- Sentence Structure: are the sentences long or short? Is the word order straightforward or unconventionally crafted?

- Vocabulary: Are the words simple or fancy?

- Figures of speech: Are there metaphors, similes, symbols or any other use of figurative language?


- Allusions: How often and how does the author refer to other texts, myths, symbols, history, and so on?

- Experimentation in Language: Are there any unusual techniques, such as stream-of-consciousness, mixing styles, genres, unusual layout, breaking rules of grammar and form, etc.?

- Diction: Is the writing tight and efficient, or elaborate and long-winded? When does the writer use one or the other and why?

There are a number of other criteria that a writer uses to develop and characterize style. As you read, pay attention, not only to what a writer says, but how he/she says it. Often time, understanding style is the first step in understanding a piece of literature.