

# Melons in Prose and Poetry

## Objective

Students will compare and contrast a passage about watermelons written by Mark Twain and a poem about melons by Sylvia Plath.

## Procedures

1. Students will read the passage “Mark Twain on Watermelon,” included with this lesson, and answer the discussion questions individually.
  - Discuss as a class, including unfamiliar vocabulary.
  - Let students watch as you cut into a watermelon and tell them to observe to see if they can see and hear what Twain was describing. Discuss.
  - Students will write their own descriptions of watermelon.

## Oklahoma Academic Standards

### GRADE 6

Speaking and Listening: R.1,2,3.  
Reading and Writing Process:  
R.1,2,3. Critical Reading and  
Writing: R.1,2,3,4,7; W.1.  
Vocabulary: R.1,3,5

### GRADE 7

Speaking and Listening: R.1,2,3.  
Reading and Writing Process:  
R.1,2,3. Critical Reading and  
Writing: 1,2,3,4,7; W.1. Vocabulary:  
R.1,3,5

### GRADE 8

Speaking and Listening: R.1,2,3.  
Reading and Writing Process:  
R.1,2,3. Critical Reading and  
Writing: R.1,2,3,4,7; W.1.  
Vocabulary: R.1,3,5

### GRADE 9

Speaking and Listening: R.1,2,3.  
Reading and Writing Process:  
R.1,2,3. Critical Reading and  
Writing: R.1,2,3,4,7; W.1.  
Vocabulary: R.1,3,5

### GRADE 10

Speaking and Listening: R.1,2,3.  
Reading and Writing Process:  
R.1,2,3. Critical Reading and  
Writing: R.2,4,7; W.1. Vocabulary:  
R.1,3,5

Name \_\_\_\_\_

# Mark Twain on Watermelon

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“When one has tasted watermelon, he knows what the angels eat.” -Mark Twain

I know how a prize watermelon looks when it is sunning its fat rotundity among pumpkin vines and “simblins;” \* I know how to tell when it’s ripe without “plugging” \*\* it; I know how inviting it looks when it is cooling itself in a tub of water under the bed, waiting; I know how it looks when it lies on the table in the sheltered great floor-space between house and kitchen, and the children gathered for the sacrifice and their mouths watering; I know the crackling sound it makes when the carving knife enters its end, and I can see the split fly along in front of the blade as the knife cleaves its way to the other end; I can see the halves fall apart and display the rich red meat and the black seeds, and the heart standing up, a luxury fit for the elect; I know how a boy looks, behind a yard long slice of that melon, and I know how he feels for I have been there. I know the watermelon which has been honestly come by and I know the taste of the watermelon which has been acquired by art. Both taste good, but the experienced know which tastes best. (from his *Autobiography, Vol. 1*)

\*a type of squash

\*\*cutting into a watermelon to test for taste

1. How does Mark Twain feel about watermelon? What is his purpose in writing this passage? Does the passage make you want to taste watermelon? Why or why not?
2. What is the central idea of this passage? List the supporting details.
3. What is the effect of his repetition of the words “I know” at the beginning of the passage?
4. What words does he use to let us know he is remembering? What are some of his memories of watermelon?
5. Circle words you don’t understand. Write what you think they mean and discuss in a group. Then look the words up in a dictionary.
6. Identify at least one use of metaphor in this passage.
7. How is the word “sacrifice” used in this passage?
8. Explain Twain’s use of the phrase “a luxury fit for the elect.”
9. Explain the last two sentences.
10. Draw a picture based on the passage.
11. Write your own description of watermelon.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

# Fiesta Melons, Sylvia Plath

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In Benidorm there are melons,  
Whole donkey-carts full

Of innumerable melons,  
Ovals and balls,

Bright green and thumpable  
Laced over with stripes

Of turtle-dark green.  
Choose an egg-shape, a world-shape,

Bowl one homeward to taste  
In the whitehot noon:

Cream-smooth honeydews,  
Pink-pulped whoppers,

Bump-rinded cantaloupes  
With orange cores.

Each wedge wears a studding  
Of blanched seeds or black seeds

To strew like confetti  
Under the feet of

This market of melon-eating  
Fiesta-goers.

1. Use online or library resources to find the location of "Benidorm."
2. What do the details in the poem tell you about the place the poet is describing? How do you know it is probably not a modern scene in the US?
3. What is familiar? What is unfamiliar?
4. What kind of melon is egg-shape? What kind of melon is world shape. Why does she suggest bowling one homeward?
5. How are the seeds like confetti?
6. How many kinds of melon can you identify from the descriptions? List them.
7. List all the adjectives used to describe the melons.
8. Find examples of personification in the poem. Find examples of metaphor, simile and alliteration
9. What is the mood of the poem? Find two words that helps set the mood.
10. Draw a picture of the scene she is describing.
11. Compare and contrast this depiction of melons by Sylvia Plath with the passage written by Mark Twain.