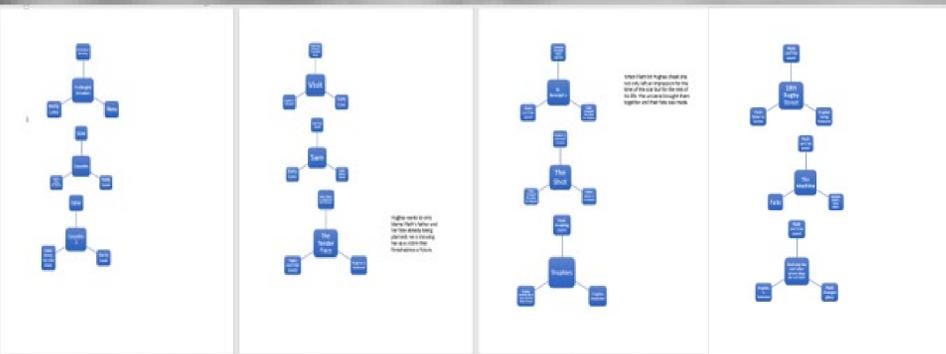


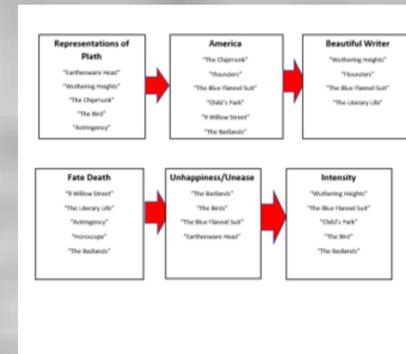
Concept Maps of Ted Hughes's Birthday Letters



Poems 1-12



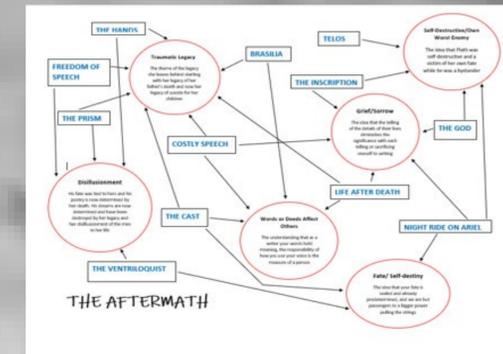
Poems 13-24



Poems 25-36



Poems 49-60



Poems 73-84

Introduction:

The purpose of concept mapping these poems is to help develop analytical and critical thinking skills; identify new concepts; generate new ideas; integrate information; visualize complex relationships; develop metacognitive skills; present interpretations; communicate ideas and information convincingly; and demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of *Birthday Letters* (1998) by Ted Hughes.

Procedure:

Map the themes and/or other important concepts such as mythic trajectories or stories (i.e., who is Sylvia Plath, and who is Ted Hughes in the world of the poems?) in *Birthday Letters*. Students worked with their professor and classmates in identifying important aspects of the poems and classifying them and grouping them together in concept maps.

Results:

Students learned how the 88 poems of *Birthday Letters* are interconnected. For instance, the beginning theme of young love would transform into ideas about innocence and America, a country perceived as young and new. Other students tracked how themes of unease morphed into anxiety and depression and, later, disillusionment and grief. The transformation of one thing into another is a major theme of *Birthday Letters*, the students concluded.

Conclusion:

Ted Hughes wrote *Birthday Letters* about his relationship with Sylvia Plath. He gives a first-hand account of the impact she had on his life and addresses many of her poems directly. *Birthday Letters* is a dense and difficult poetry collection, and the concept maps serve as aid in identifying themes. It also sketches an auto/biographical story from the beginning to the end of Plath and Hughes's relationship. The maps show the complex intricacy of their lives and relationship, while passionately engaging students in the rigorous work of literary study and scholarship.

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