



Lesson: “Ox Cart Man”

(To follow Amplify CKLA 4, Unit 3, Lesson 7)

At a Glance

In this lesson, students examine Donald Hall’s poem “Ox Cart Man” (which he later adapted into an illustrated children’s book) to identify features of life in New Hampshire during the early 19th century. Students examine the poem’s use of the calendar year to provide rhythm and movement and then create their own “year-round” poems. This lesson is a bridge to [Moose on the Loose, Lesson 8.1: Evolution of Farming](#).

Primary Focus Objectives

- Students will identify details in the poem that describe self-sufficient farming life.
- Students will identify the structural device that creates the rhythm and movement of the poem.

Formative Assessment

- Year-Round Poem

Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.1

Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.4

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Materials

- Focus Text: “[Ox Cart Man](#)” by Donald Hall
- Vocabulary Cards for printing or projection
- Year-Round Poem Planner

Time Needed

Two to three 30-40 minute class sessions

Learning Activity

1. **Read the poem.** Remind students of key facts learned about Donald Hall in “Prizewinning New Hampshire Poets” (from MxA Lesson 4.3.1: Prize-Winning New Hampshire Poets) and then read the poem aloud. Give students time to read the poem independently. *(10 minutes)*
2. **Discuss the poem.** Talk about the big ideas of the poem: what the speaker describes, how the poet uses the months of the year to move the poem along, and what the poet is trying to say about farm work long ago. Compare this poem to Walt Whitman’s “I Hear America Singing.” What do they have in common? What makes them different? *(15 minutes)*
3. **Review the vocabulary.** Project the Vocabulary Cards and review the definitions together. Ask students which type of farming describes the activity of the “Ox Cart Man.” Which details in the poem support their answer? *(10 minutes)*
4. **Plan and write a “year-round” poem.** Ask students to think about something they work on throughout the year. Direct them to use the planning worksheet to describe at least five things they do as part of that year-round activity at different points during the year and write a free-verse poem that moves a reader through their year of work. *(30 minutes)*



5. **Plan and write a “year-round” poem.** Ask students to think about something they work on throughout the year. Direct them to use the planning worksheet to describe at least five things they do as part of that year-round activity at different points during the year and write a free-verse poem that moves a reader through their year of work. *(30 minutes)*
6. **Read poems aloud.** Give students time to read their poems aloud to a partner or small group. *(10 minutes)*



Educator Rationale and Answer Guide

Connection to Amplify

This lesson builds on the skills students developed while reading and analyzing Walt Whitman's "I Hear America Singing" in Amplify, Grade 4, Unit 3, Lesson 7. Donald Hall's poem "Ox Cart Man" is also a free-verse poem that depends on a repeated structure in the text to give the poem its rhythm and movement. Students examine Hall's use of months to frame the work of a New Hampshire farmer in the early 19th century and apply that structure to the creation of a short "year-round" poem about important work they do in their own lives. In addition to further development of ELA skills, students, through study of "Ox Cart Man," are introduced to an important topic in New Hampshire history. This brief lesson is an ideal bridge between the Amplify poetry unit and Moose on the Loose Unit 8, Lesson 1: Evolution of Farming.

Read the poem

"Ox Cart Man" is on the following page and can also be accessed at <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43020/ox-cart-man>

Discuss the poem

The poem "Ox Cart Man" (which preceded the version that became the illustrated children's book *Ox-Cart Man*) is a succinct trip through the year in the life of a 19th-century New Hampshire farmer. Be sure that students identify the months of the year and the seasonal connection to the work being done. Students should observe that the farmer has to make or grow as many different products as he can to meet his own needs and to have something of value for trade in the market, including the cart he used to transport everything and the ox that pulled the cart. Students should observe that the cycle does not stop: the end of the poem is the beginning of another year of the process for the farmer.

This is a good place to pause if dividing the lesson across multiple class sessions.

Review vocabulary

The vocabulary words for this lesson are connected to the social studies topic of the evolution of farming in New Hampshire. The poem describes a self-sufficient farm that produced a wide variety of products in quantities that met the family's needs ("counting the seed, counting/the cellar's portion out,/and bags the rest on the cart's floor") with just enough left over to trade at market. At least sixteen different items are listed that the farmer has made or grown that he sells or trades at market: potatoes, wool, honey, linen, leather, vinegar, barrels, flaxseed, birch brooms, maple sugar, goose feathers, yarn, harness, yoke, cart, and ox.

Plan and write a "year-round" poem

Ask students to think about something they do all year round. Brainstorm ideas as a class. Students may suggest going to school, learning an instrument, being part of a faith community, helping with a family business, or being part of a different activity or club. Ask them to think like Donald Hall and use the planner to note things they do at different times of the year for that one activity. Then, challenge them to link these parts of the year into a single poem that takes the reader through a year of that activity and ends with the beginning of another cycle of the activity. Encourage the use of literary devices already explored in Amplify Grade 4, Unit 3: Poetry. Students could use the reverse side of the planner or a poetry notebook to draft their poems.

You may wish to divide these steps across two class sessions.



“Ox Cart Man,” by Donald Hall

In October of the year,
he counts potatoes dug from the brown field,
counting the seed, counting
the cellar’s portion out,
and bags the rest on the cart’s floor.

He packs wool sheared in April, honey
in combs, linen, leather
tanned from deerhide,
and vinegar in a barrel
hooped by hand at the forge’s fire.

He walks by his ox’s head, ten days
to Portsmouth Market, and sells potatoes,
and the bag that carried potatoes,
flaxseed, birch brooms, maple sugar, goose
feathers, yarn.

When the cart is empty he sells the cart.
When the cart is sold he sells the ox,
harness and yoke, and walks
home, his pockets heavy
with the year’s coin for salt and taxes,

and at home by fire’s light in November cold
stitches new harness
for next year’s ox in the barn,
and carves the yoke, and saws planks
building the cart again.



SELF-SUFFICIENT

Part of speech: adjective

Definition: capable of providing for one's needs

How to use it: A **self-sufficient** farm produces all or nearly all of the products it needs to function.



SPECIALIZED

Part of speech: adjective

Definition: Focused on a particular task or product

How to use it: A **specialized** farm produces and sells one or just a few products and uses the profits to buy what is needed.



YEAR-ROUND POEM PLANNER

Write your activity in the center of the circle. Describe what you do at different times of the year for that activity in the boxes.

