

Suggested Lesson Procedure — Kobe Bryant’s “Dear Basketball” Poem

1. Pass out the anticipation guide worksheets. Tell students to independently complete the anticipation guide. Go over the statements/answers with students to generate conversation.
2. Pass out the poem “Dear Basketball” and the poem analysis questions. Brief students on the poem and author by reading the background information aloud with the class.
3. Tell students to look at the “Dear Basketball” poem by Kobe Bryant. Direct students to silently read the poem to themselves at least one time through.
4. Play the video linked below—it is an animated short of Kobe’s poem “Dear Basketball.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IUcdx4W8Xes>

The entire video is 5.5 minutes, but the poem is only read in the first 4 minutes. If this link is not working for some reason, just enter “Kobe Bryant Dear Basketball Animated Short” into any search engine to find the video.

5. Have students work in pairs to complete the poem analysis questions. Review answers as an entire class.
6. Read aloud the excerpt of Michael Jordan’s retirement letter.
7. Ask students to compare and contrast both texts by answering the questions that follow.
8. Assign students to write their own “Dear _____” poem.

Name:

Date:

Anticipation Guide

Part A: Read the following statements. If you agree, circle AGREE; if you disagree, circle DISAGREE.

- | | | |
|--|-------|----------|
| 1. Hard work beats talent when talent doesn't work hard. | AGREE | DISAGREE |
| 2. Obsessions can be healthy. | AGREE | DISAGREE |
| 3. Everyone has an individual purpose in the world. | AGREE | DISAGREE |
| 4. You can't fail if you never give up. | AGREE | DISAGREE |
| 5. All good things must end. | AGREE | DISAGREE |
| 6. It's important not to forget the hardships you go through. | AGREE | DISAGREE |
| 7. The moment you give up, is the moment you let someone else win. | AGREE | DISAGREE |
| 8. Everyone is in charge of their own destiny. | AGREE | DISAGREE |
| 9. Motivation and discipline are the same thing. | AGREE | DISAGREE |
| 10. Failure is an opportunity to be better. | AGREE | DISAGREE |
| 11. There are no excuses for giving up. | AGREE | DISAGREE |
| 12. If you do not believe in yourself, no one else will. | AGREE | DISAGREE |
| 13. Haters are a good problem to have. | AGREE | DISAGREE |
| 14. You are responsible for how people remember you. | AGREE | DISAGREE |

Part B: Pick one of the statements from above. Clarify the meaning of the statement and explain in a few sentences why you agree or disagree.

“Dear Basketball” by Kobe Bryant

Dear Basketball,

From the moment
I started rolling my dad’s tube socks
And shooting imaginary
Game-winning shots
In the Great Western Forum
I knew one thing was real:

I fell in love with you.
A love so deep I gave you my all —
From my mind & body
To my spirit & soul.
As a six-year-old boy
Deeply in love with you
I never saw the end of the tunnel.
I only saw myself
Running out of one.
And so I ran.
I ran up and down every court
After every loose ball for you.
You asked for my hustle
I gave you my heart
Because it came with so much more.
I played through the sweat and hurt
Not because challenge called me
But because YOU called me.

I did everything for YOU
Because that’s what you do

When someone makes you feel as
Alive as you’ve made me feel.
You gave a six-year-old boy his Laker
dream
And I’ll always love you for it.
But I can’t love you obsessively for much
longer.
This season is all I have left to give.
My heart can take the pounding

My mind can handle the grind
But my body knows it’s time to say goodbye.
And that’s OK.
I’m ready to let you go.
I want you to know now
So we both can savor every moment we
have left together.
The good and the bad.
We have given each other
All that we have.
And we both know, no matter what I do next
I’ll always be that kid
With the rolled up socks
Garbage can in the corner
:05 seconds on the clock
Ball in my hands.

5 ... 4 ... 3 ... 2 ... 1

Love you always,
Kobe

Name:

Date:

“Dear Basketball” by Kobe Bryant
Poem Analysis Questions

Kobe Bryant was an American professional basketball player and NBA legend, most remembered for his incredible career with the Los Angeles Lakers. Bryant also earned gold medals in the 2008 and 2012 Olympic Games for the US Men’s Basketball team. Bryant was one of the few NBA players who were drafted directly from high school.

Bryant played shooting guard for the LA Lakers for 20 years, and he was no stranger to injury. Throughout his athletic career, Bryant suffered from a torn Achilles tendon, a torn rotator cuff, and a fracture of his kneecap. On November 29, 2015, Bryant announced his retirement through “Player’s Tribune” in a poem titled “Dear Basketball.” In the poem, Bryant shares his love for the sport with the world. Bryant earned an Academy Award for Best Animated Short Film for “Dear Basketball” in 2018.

Although he is regarded as one of the greatest basketball players of all time, Bryant was more than a professional athlete; he was an author, an entrepreneur, a coach, a husband, and a father of four daughters. In 2020, at the age of 41, Kobe Bryant, along with his 13-year-old daughter, Gianna Bryant, died in a tragic helicopter crash.

Directions: Read the poem “Dear Basketball” and then answer the questions that follow using complete sentences.

1. Throughout the poem, what does Kobe personify? Provide an example from the text.

2. What is the tone of the poem? How do you know?

3. What does it mean to see “the end of the tunnel”? Why does Kobe say he only sees himself “running out of one?”

4. What do you think Kobe is referring to when he says that he wants to savor “the good and the bad”?

5. How does Kobe know it is time to say goodbye? What ALL is he saying goodbye to?

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6. Why do you think Bryant ends the poem with a countdown?

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7. Why did Kobe write this poem? Who was the poem written for?

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8. What is the theme or message behind Bryant's poem?

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9. Do you think this poem connects more with readers since Kobe's tragic passing? Why or why not?

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10. In what ways, can the things we are passionate about *save us*?

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Name:

Date:

Paired Texts

Kobe Bryant was not the first athlete to say farewell to basketball in such an expressive way. On April 20, 2003, Nike published Michael Jordan's retirement letter—titled "Dear Basketball"—in the Sunday newspapers. Michael Jordan is a former American basketball player who led the Chicago Bulls to six NBA championships and won the Most Valuable Player Award five times.

Read the following excerpt from Michael Jordan's retirement letter:

If someone would have told me then, what would become of us, I'm not sure I would have believed them. I barely remembered your name.

Then I started seeing you around the neighborhood and watching you on television. I used to see you with guys down at the playground. But when my older brother started paying more attention to you, I started to wonder. Maybe you were different.

We hung out a few times. The more I got to know you, the more I liked you. And as life would have it, when I finally got really interested in you, when I was finally ready to get serious, you left me off the varsity. You told me I wasn't good enough.

I was crushed. I was hurt. I think I even cried.

Then I wanted you more than ever. So I practiced. I hustled. I worked on my game. Passing. Dribbling. Shooting. Thinking. I ran. I did sit-ups. I did push-ups. I did pull-ups. I lifted weights. I studied you. I began to fall in love and you noticed. At least that's what Coach Smith said.

At the time, I wasn't sure exactly what was going on. But now I know. Coach Smith was teaching me how to love you, how to listen to you, how to understand you, how to respect you and how to appreciate you.

Then it happened. That night, at the Louisiana Superdome in the final seconds of the championship game against Georgetown, you found me in the corner and we danced.

Since then, you've become much more than just a ball to me. You've become more than just a court. More than just a hoop. More than just a pair of sneakers. More than just a game.

In some respects, you've become my life. My passion. My motivation. My inspiration.

You're my biggest fan and my harshest critic. You're my dearest friend and my strongest ally. You're my most challenging teacher and my most endearing student. You're my ultimate teammate and my toughest competitor. You're my passport around the world and my visa into the hearts of millions.

So much has changed since the first day we met, and to a large degree, I have you to thank. So if you haven't heard me say it before, let me say it now for the world to hear. Thank you. Thank you, Basketball. Thank you for everything.

1. What similarities do you notice about how Bryant and Jordan define their relationship with basketball?

2. What difference is there between how basketball treated Bryant and how basketball treated Jordan?

3. Was Jordan's love for basketball immediate? How is his love for basketball different from Bryant's?

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4. What does Jordan mean when he says, "You're my passport around the world and my visa into the hearts of millions."?

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5. Why do you think Bryant chose to write his retirement poem with a similar structure and point of view as Jordan did?

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6. What other similarities or differences stand out to you as significant?

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Name:

Date:

Poem Assignment

Write a poem titled "Dear _____." Write about a sport, activity, hobby, or obsession that has been important and meaningful to you. Your poem does not have to have a rhyme scheme, but it should be a minimum of 10 lines in length.

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