Peeling Back the Layers – “Blueflag”
Grade Eight

Skill Focus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels of Thinking</th>
<th>Close Reading</th>
<th>Grammar</th>
<th>Composition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Remember</td>
<td>Understand</td>
<td>Apply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Strategies</td>
<td>Annotation</td>
<td>确定作者的意图</td>
<td>确定主要内容</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>确定作者的意图</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Generalization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inference</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paraphrase</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seminar/Discussion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary Elements</td>
<td>Detail</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>connotation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Imagery</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rhetorical Shift (9)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tone</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figures of Speech</td>
<td>Metaphor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personification</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Simile</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sound Devices</td>
<td>Alliteration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assonance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consonance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rhyme</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary Forms</td>
<td>Verse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parts of Speech</td>
<td>Appositive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gerund</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Infinitive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participial</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prepositional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clauses</td>
<td>Dependent/Subordinate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syntax Techniques</td>
<td>Repetition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types (modes)</td>
<td>Expository</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>classification</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>illustration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Materials and Resources
- “Blueflag” by Elizabeth Brewster
- Close Reading Lesson: “Multiple Choice – ‘Blueflag’”

Lesson Introduction
Many teachers learned poetry by studying it in a holistic manner. That is, they learned to discuss elements that involved the whole poem such as theme, tone, speaker, etc. Often they felt that they either “got it” or didn’t “get it.” And often they did not know how to analyze a poem systematically and “get at” the meaning. Many English teachers who use Pre-AP strategies have taught themselves what they did not learn in school – how to study the different rhetorical elements of the poem (figurative language, diction, imagery, syntax, etc.) and construct meaning from patterns found in those elements. Because of what these teachers have learned, their students can greatly benefit from making sense of a poem – any poem, no matter what the structure, the rhyme and meter, the language, the time period in which it was written. As students learn to “peel back the layers” of a poem, they will come to embrace the genre rather than dread it. Any poem will yield its treasure when students look carefully at each layer and then connect that layer to meaning.
What follows is a list of activities for “peeling back the layers” of the eighth grade annotated poem, Elizabeth Brewster’s “Blueflag.” The student activity that follows may be done with any richly layered poem. A list of questions with teacher notes is provided in the teacher’s overview. Clean and annotated copies of the passage follow the teacher directions.

**Time needed:** several class days

1. The teacher will read the poem to the students. A student volunteer will read the poem again.

2. Students will paraphrase the poem. A child’s mother, trying to warn the child of the dangers of the water, warns her not to pick the blueflag irises in the middle of the pond. The child compares the blueflag to the other flowers growing in safe places. She is allowed to pick these flowers – the roses and the daisies. The child notices that the insects of the pond are not poisoned by the blueflag and decides that they are not harmed because they possess a different kind of life from hers. Even after the child has grown up, she is still afraid of the blueflags.

3. Students will peel back the first layer – **sound devices**. On a clean copy of the poem, as a class, mark all the sound devices by underlining and labeling: alliteration, assonance, consonance, and rhyme. Obtain a soft ball such as a koosh ball. Call out the lines of the poem. Then call out “alliteration” after “line 1.” A student who can identify alliteration raises his or her hand, and the teacher throws the koosh ball to him or her. Holding the ball, the student identifies that particular sound device in the poem. The student then throws the ball back to the teacher. Repeat for all the sound devices and all the lines of the poem. Students annotate their copy of the poem as the class works through the sound devices.

   - **Stanza 1** – no sound devices
   - **Line 5** – “frightening flower” – alliteration
   - **Lines 5-6** – “flower,” “water” – consonance
   - **Lines 6-7** – “growing,” “green” – alliteration
   - **Line 7** – “green reeds” – assonance
   - **Lines 8-9** – “washed,” “wanted” – alliteration
   - **Line 11** – “smooth as soap” – alliteration
   - **“roses,” “soap” – assonance**
   - **Line 12** – “milk-thin” – assonance
   - **Lines 12-13** – “daisies,” “center” – consonance
   - **Line 13** – “butterblob” – alliteration
   - **Line 14** – “noticed,” “midges” – assonance
   - **Lines 17-18** – “I,” “kind,” “life,” “mine” – assonance
   - **Line 21** – “expect,” “dead” – assonance
   - **Line 23** – “potency seeping” – assonance
Lines 24-25 – “skin,” “centre” – alliteration
“dangerous,” “veined” – assonance
Free verse – no regular meter or rhyme

4. Students will peel back the second layer – **figures of speech.**
Using the same copy of the poem, use the koosh ball again to identify the figures of speech in the poem. This time students should circle the figures of speech as they annotate their copy. Write literal by each line that contains no figurative language.

Line 1 – literal
Line 2 – literal
Line 3 – literal
Line 4 – literal
Line 5 – literal
Line 6 – literal
Line 7 – literal
Line 8 – “sunveined” – personification
Line 9 – literal
Line 10 – literal
Line 11 – “pink and smooth as soap” – simile
Line 12 – “milk-thin daisies” – metaphor
Line 13 – “butterblob centers” – metaphor
Line 14 – literal
Line 15 – literal
Line 16 – literal
Line 17 – literal
Line 18 – literal
Line 19 – literal
Line 20 – literal
Line 21 – literal
Line 22 – literal

5. Students will peel back the third layer – **imagery.**
Using a second clean copy of the poem and the overhead or the board, write headings of the five senses. Students will tell the teacher which images belong under which heading as they complete the chart.

Touch – lines 3, 11, 20, 23
Sight – lines 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 15, 24, 25
Taste – lines 4, 12, 13, 16
Hearing – none
Smell – lines 11, 12, 13
Help the students to identify patterns or strands of imagery.

**Color images** – blue, green, pink, white (“milk-thin daisies”), yellow (“sunveined,” “butterblob”)

**Images of the body** – “sunveined,” “trembling,” “struck dead,” “potency,” “skin,” “veined centre”

**Images of the forbidden and danger** – “poison,” “frightening,” “fear,” “trembling,” “struck dead,” “magic,” “potency seeping,” “dangerous”

**Images of safe, tame, everyday substances** – “soap,” “milk-thin,” “daisies,” “butterblob”

**Images of water** – “the midst of the pond,” “growing up from the water,” “washed blue,” “milk-thin,” “surface of the water”

6. Students will peel back the fourth layer – **contrast**.

Help students to determine what two ideas are being contrasted in the poem. Then make a list of the two sides.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Danger, Forbidden Things</th>
<th>Safety, Familiar Things</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“poison”</td>
<td>“clothes”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“frightening”</td>
<td>“wild roses”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“poisoned”</td>
<td>“pink and smooth as soap”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“fear”</td>
<td>“milk-thin daisies”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“trembling”</td>
<td>“butterblob centers”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“struck dead”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“flower’s magic”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“potency seeping”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“dangerous blue skin”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“veined centre”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students should be able to articulate a connection between the preponderance of words of danger and the meaning and tone of the poem. Have them complete this sentence after compiling the list.

Brewster contrasts danger and forbidden things with safety and familiar things in this poem because she is trying to show the distinction between ____________________________ and ____________________________.

With help, most students should be able to see that Brewster contrasts the two because, at its heart, the poem is about two contrasts; these contrasts may be worded in different ways.

- The safety and innocence of childhood vs. the pain of growing up
- The thrill of the unknown vs. the blandness of everyday items
- The life of the natural world vs. human life
- The caution of the adult world vs. the natural curiosity of a child
- Physical safety vs. physical danger
- The past vs. the present
Of course, as students consider the contrast, they will be articulating theme. To state these contrasts as a theme, students should write in complete sentences. For example, a student may write, “Children are naturally curious, yet adults sometimes blunt this curiosity by their warnings.”

7. Students will peel back the fifth layer – syntax.
   a. Identify the complete sentences in the poem. Stanzas 1, 2, 3, 4-5
   b. Identify the dependent clauses in each complete sentence.
      Stanza #1: “So that I would not pick the blueflag” and “that it was poison”
      Stanza #2: “than all the flowers” “[that] I was allowed to pick,” “as soap [is]”
      Stanza #3: “that covered the surface of the water,” “[that] they must have a different kind of life from mine”
      Stanzas 4-5: “if I pick one”
   c. Identify and label the phrases.
      “in the midst of the pond” – prepositional phrase (line 2)
      “growing up” – gerund phrase; “from the water” – prepositional phrase (line 6)
      “from its green reeds” – prepositional phrase (line 7)
      “washed blue” – participial phrase (line 8)
      “to pick” – infinitive (line 10)
      “with butterblob centers” – prepositional phrase (line 13)
      “of the water” – prepositional phrase (line 15)
      “by the blueflag” – prepositional phrase (line 16)
      “of life,” “from mine” – prepositional phrases (line 18)
      “over me” – prepositional phrase; “a trembling” – appositive phrase (line 20)
      “to be struck dead” – infinitive phrase (line 21)
      “by the flower’s magic” – prepositional phrase (line 22)
      “a potency seeping/from its dangerous blue skin/its veined centre” – appositive phrase (lines 23-25)
      “seeping from its dangerous blue skin” – participial phrase (lines 23-24)
   d. Identify the parts of speech of words used in unusual ways.
      “sunveined” – adjective (line 8)
      “milk-thin” – adjective (line 12)
      “butterblob” – adjective (line 13)
   e. Identify examples of repetition.
      “pick” – lines 1 and 19
      “poison” – lines 4 and 16
      “frightening” – line 5; “fear” – line 20
      “wet” – line 3; “water” – lines 6 and 15
      “flower(s)” – lines 5 and 10
      “sunveined” – line 8; “veined” – line 25
      “blueflag” – title, lines 1 and 16
Note: Rhetorical Shift does not appear in the Skill Progression charts until ninth grade.

8. After peeling back all the layers of rhetorical devices used in the poem, students should be able to determine the shift in this poem. They should see the division between the past (the mother’s warning) and the present. Students should write the exact line where the shift occurs: “Even now, if I pick one.”

Have students write out what is happening in the poem before and after the shift and the word(s) that signal a shift.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Before shift</th>
<th>Signaling word(s)</th>
<th>After shift</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The mother warns the daughter of the blueflag.</td>
<td>“Even now”</td>
<td>Even in adulthood the speaker continues to fear the flower.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9. After peeling back the layers and determining the shift, students should be able to determine the tone of the poem (the speaker’s or author’s attitude toward the subject). Does the tone change after the shift? One way students can determine the tone is to write out the words with positive connotations and those with negative connotations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive connotations</th>
<th>Negative connotations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What kind of words end the poem? Have students write out the tone in a sentence.
Example:
The tone of “Blueflag” is both regretful that the speaker never got to appreciate the blueflag’s beauty and also fearful as she still believes in the flower’s poisonous power.

10. Students have already worked on theme when they peeled back the layer of contrast. You may decide, though, to wait until the end of the layers to consider theme. After students have peeled back all the layers and determined the shift and the tone, they should be able to write out the theme(s). A theme in literature should be expressed in a complete declarative sentence. Thus, “childhood fears” is not a suitable theme; neither is “Do we ever recover from the fears our parents instill in us?”

Have students write out two or three one-sentence themes that express a universal truth about human motivation and behavior as expressed in this poem.
Examples:
Irrational fears often begin in childhood.
Physical maturity does not always mean the development of emotional and psychological maturity.
Parents sometimes tell their children untruths to protect them.
Blueflag

So that I would not pick the blueflag
in the midst of the pond
(and get my clothes wet)
my mother told me that it was poison.

(5) I watched this beautiful, frightening flower
growing up from the water
from its green reeds,
washed blue, sunveined,
and wanted it more
(10) than all the flowers I was allowed to pick,
wild roses, pink and smooth as soap,
or the milk-thin daisies
with butterblob centers.

I noticed that the midges
(15) that covered the surface of the water
were not poisoned by the blueflag,
but I thought they must have
a different kind of life from mine.

Even now, if I pick one,
(20) fear comes over me, a trembling.
I half expect to be struck dead
by the flower’s magic

A potency seeping
from its dangerous blue skin
(25) its veined centre.

by Elizabeth Brewster
Annotated Passage
Grade Eight

Blueflag
by Elizabeth Brewster

So that I would not pick the blueflag
in the midst of the pond
(and get my clothes wet)
(my mother told me that it was poison.)

I watched this beautiful, frightening flower
growing up from the water
from its green reeds,
(washed) blue, sunveined,
and wanted it more
than all the flowers I was allowed to pick,
wild roses, pink and smooth as soap,
or the milk-thin daisies
with butterblob centers.

I noticed that the [midge] tiny bugs
that covered the surface of the water
were not poisoned by the blueflag,
but I thought they must have
a different kind of life from mine.

Even now, if I pick one,
fear comes over me, a trembling.
I half expect to be struck dead
by the flower’s magic
but there’s no “scor”
A potency seeping
from its dangerous blue skin.

[strength, power]
its veined centre.

the flower has some kind of symbolic significance — that which is
forbidden, poisonous, magic, seductive?
Peeling Back the Layers – “Blueflag”  
Grade Eight

This activity will help you to understand how authors use sound devices, figurative language, imagery, contrast, and syntax to develop a certain tone or a certain theme in a poem.

Directions
1. Read the poem “Blueflag” by Elizabeth Brewster.
2. Paraphrase the poem. Explain, in prose, exactly what is happening in the poem.
3. Look at the sound devices in the poem. Highlight and label all the sound devices in the poem: alliteration, assonance, consonance, and rhyme.
4. Identify all the figures of speech in the poem. For lines that have a literal meaning (in other words, the line means exactly what it says: no more, no less), label with the word literal. In lines that have a figurative meaning, label personification, simile, or metaphor.
5. Look at the imagery in the poem. Write headings of the five senses. Go through the poem and write words or phrases that fit under those headings: touch, sight, taste, hearing, and smell. After you have identified the imagery in the poem, try to find a pattern or strand of imagery. For example, the poem contains lots of different colors. Write out the colors and the lines that contain the color words. Be creative. Color images – blue, green, pink, white (“milk-thin daisies”), yellow (“sunveined,” “butterblob”). Try to find at least two more patterns of imagery.
6. This poem is basically about two different, or contrasting, ideas. First, with a partner, look at the poem carefully and try to determine what two opposite ideas are being presented in this poem. After you determine the basic contrast in the poem, make a chart with your two headings being the two contrasting ideas you see. Fill in the chart with words or phrases from the poem. Your chart will look like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>One main idea in the poem</th>
<th>An opposite idea in the poem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>words or phrases that convey that idea</td>
<td>words or phrases that convey that idea</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After compiling this list, complete this sentence, filling in the blanks with the appropriate answer:
Brewster contrasts ______________________ with _______________________

in this poem because she is trying to show the distinction between____________
and__________________.

7. Look at the syntax, or sentence structure, of the poem. You will do this in several stages.
   a. Identify all the complete sentences in the poem by drawing brackets.
   b. Highlight all the dependent clauses in the poem. Some dependent clauses are lacking the
      introductory word or another word. For instance, “as soap” (line 11) is really a
      dependent clause if you add the word “is.”
   c. Highlight and label all the phrases: prepositional, gerund, participial, infinitive,
      appositive.
   d. Highlight and label the part of speech of all the words used in unusual ways. Poets often
      express their creativity by coining new words; this is called “poetic license.”
   e. Circle examples of repetition and connect similar words or phrases with lines and
      arrows.

8. With a partner, determine the shift, or change, in this poem. You should be able to find the
   exact line where the poem is moving in one direction and then abruptly changes direction.
   After you determine the shift, write out what is happening in the poem before and after the
   shift and the word(s) that signals a shift.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Before shift</th>
<th>Signaling word(s)</th>
<th>After shift</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9. Determine the tone of the poem, or the speaker’s (or author’s) attitude toward the subject.
   Does the tone change after the shift? Determine the tone by writing out the words in the
   poem with positive connotations and those with negative connotations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive connotations</th>
<th>Negative connotations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Then, in a complete sentence, write out the tone of the poem.

10. Determine several themes of the poem. A theme in literature is a truth about human
    behavior or motivation. Theme should be expressed in a complete declarative sentence.
    Thus, “childhood fears” is not a suitable theme; neither is “Do we ever recover from the
    fears our parents instilled in us?”

Write out two or three one-sentence themes that express a universal truth.