

# Adventures in Poetry: Writing Poems with Students

A handbook for teachers  
to start students writing  
in elementary to high school

by

Hilary Tham

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**Art & poetry workshops**

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**FOREWORD**

Introducing and including the writing of poems into the classroom has many benefits:

- reinforcing student learning of content material not only in language but also in math, science, social studies
- broadening student appreciation of poetry and its ability to communicate ideas as well as feelings,
- unlocking student creative abilities and freeing their imagination
- developing a deeper student understanding of the cultural heritage of others, and
- giving teachers tools for teaching content areas using poetry.

Many students (and teachers) feel more comfortable with the step-by-step method of writing a poem -- This works well if the main goal is to reinforce learning, so the students think about a subject, recall specifics, come to some conclusions, and review what they've already learned. The following sample poem templates can be used for reviewing grammar, science, social studies.

<b>Template 1:</b> (noun)	<b>ice</b>
(2-syllable adjectives)	shiny, stoic
(3 participles describing noun)	freezing, killing, protecting
(4 nouns)	glaciers, silence, brightness, penguins
(3 participles)	warming, melting, flowing
(2 -er adjectives)	noisier, happier
(noun)	water

	<b>Cold-blooded</b>
<b>Template 2:</b> I am (adjective)	I am scaly
I am ( adjective)	I am cold-blooded
I am (participle)	I am hissing
You are (verb)	You are covered with a shell
They are (participle)	They are crawling
We are (noun)	We are reptiles

Another approach is to have students write litany /list poems on subject matter they wish to review. Review of math. percentages is fun when students brainstorm wishes, then write about how they would spend a million dollars (suppose you won the lottery) using percentages.

Money - 11,000,000 by Taylor Chamberlin  
 When I won 11 million,  
 I bought a brand new house  
 20% went to furniture,  
 and buying brand new cars  
 5% of it went to a new bed,  
 75% went to others  
 like a stereo system, and CD.

The above approaches are rather like having students paint by numbers and limited in their usefulness. My preferred approach is to have students use their five senses to view ordinary things with new focus, with time for brain-storming ideas. We often write group poems before students tackle a poem on their own.

My main goal in teaching students is to enable them to discover the pleasure and the power of clear

expression of their thoughts and to learn to see the world creatively as well as functionally. I try to teach the building blocks of good poetry, also the basics of good writing. My workshop exercises are intended to give them practice in observation skills, thinking and the use of imagery, simile and metaphor, to enrich their writing, skills that will stay with them hopefully all their lives.

Children are natural poets. The secret to unlocking their creativity is to create a space for them to speak up, a receptivity to what they think and feel, an opportunity for them to articulate the process of learning about life, a caring and respect for individual truths so they can share who they are, what they see and feel and dream. Sharing is the key: sharing of ideas, responses, associations, phrases, words, meanings — personal and public. The free discussion before writing is vital to the workshops: it is the striking of sparks and sparks and sparks until each student forgets her/his fear of being laughed at and accepts the condition that it is very much okay to be truly themselves and see that individual responses and words make up different poems. And that each poem is meaningful in its own right. Then, and only then, do we work on editing, revising, making the poem the best it can be. Which includes correct spelling and good language usage.

The other key part of a successful workshop is having students read aloud their poems in an atmosphere of respect and receptivity. Students learn in my classes to listen as well as to speak up. They learn respect for each other's thoughts and for the individualistic expression of those thoughts and feelings. They learn to critique the writing, not the writer! — to focus on offering suggestions for more effective use of language to express the thought and feeling.

Adventures in Poetry: Writing Poems with Students is a collection of easy-to-follow poetry writing activities complete with sample poems that are intended to work as a box of matches for lighting the imaginations of students, to give students the vision and tools to reach for wider possibilities as writers. It is also a work in progress. I am continually in the process of writing up the workshops I have found worked successfully with my students and the enclosed represent some of these workshops. Some are variations on the approach: for example, the Air Workshop approach is equally successful using the three other elements — Water, Fire, and Earth.

I am grateful to the hundreds, thousands of children I have had the pleasure of teaching these twenty years. They have given me the gift of their poetry. I want to thank also poets Christopher Bursk (Water Magic/Air Workshop), Elaine Magarrell (Memories Workshop), teachers Mrs. Anita Scott and others for sharing their teaching approaches with me.

*Hilary Tham*  
May 2001

**SUGGESTIONS FOR MAKING WRITING A POSITIVE EXPERIENCE:**

The danger of teaching poetry writing is that the students get so bogged down in the mechanics of poetry writing, they lose the sense of wonder and enthusiasm that should be in the forefront in enjoying poetry.

Poetry should be experienced at three different levels. When introducing poetry to children, do not destroy the joy of poetry by going right to step 3:

Step One: Introduce students to "user friendly poems", such as humorous poems by Shel Silverstein or Jack Prelutsky.

Step Two: Have students pick a poem that means something to them: Some aspects of their lives are expressed in the poem.

Step Three: Discuss what the poem says to the student, how it does this, what the poet intended, and analyze the poem.

**ACTIVITIES:**

Hearing the poem: Read a poem every week, or even every day. Have the students pick and present the poems.

**Poetry House:**

Designate one area a poetry house with designated areas: Kitchen, Living Room, Garden as an activity Center. Have students post a favorite poem in the area of the house that is appropriate: e.g. poems about food in the Kitchen, outdoor/nature poems in the garden, etc. Have students find or write poems for the unfilled areas.

Magnetic Poetry Center--Color code parts of speech, and place on magnets. Each person using the Center gets a package of color coded parts of speech, and must create sentences from them, posting the sentences on a magnetic surfaces.

Illustration Center--Have students post their favorite poems copied from a favorite poet. Have students divide up sentences, and make picture books of poem. Students could make picture books of their own poems.

Listening Center--Students can record their favorite poems. Other students can listen to them.

Reading Center--Display baskets of favorite poems for the students to read.

Revision/ Editing Center--Students take an original poem they are working on and post the poem in its various stages -- from idea to first draft to final edited poem.

**SAMPLE LESSON PLAN**

Unit: the Wish Poem

Primary Subject - Language Arts

Secondary Subjects – Social Studies

Grade Level – 3 – adult.

Objectives:

- learn to write using particulars instead of general statements e.g. “I wish for \$100,000” vs. “I wish to be rich.”
- learn to select the significant detail to make their writing vivid and interesting.
- learn to rank their wishes in order of interest to lead up to a strong ending wish.
- identify definitive features of the litany form or list form.

School Objectives:

- The students will analyze, evaluate, and assess their wishes.
- The students will work cooperatively to write an original poem.

Materials:

- Overhead on sample wish poems
- sheets of construction paper (any color)

Procedure:

1. The teacher will introduce the lesson by telling the students the fairy tale of the Three Wishes. There will be a question-answer discussion what students would wish for themselves, for their families, for their country, for the world, if they were given three magical wishes.
2. Students will write a group wish poem by brainstorming for ideas and using the formulas to create a poem.
3. The group poems will be transferred on construction paper for display in the classroom.
4. Students will write individual wish poems.
5. Students will read their poems to the class.
6. Question and answer discussion on how the poems could be improved.

Assessment:

Students will be assessed by the poems they create and their participation in presenting their poems. They will also be viewed during the lesson by how well they respond to questions during discussion.

## **BUILDING BLOCKS FOR POETS**

(1) **OBSERVATION** - Use all the senses, think beyond the surface of things. For example, you see a squirrel digging in the grass, think about why it may be doing this. Other information could affect this conclusion -- what season is it. If the season is spring, it could be digging up an acorn it had buried. If fall, it could be burying an acorn.

(2) **CLUSTERING & EXTENDING** - What other thoughts come to your mind as you think about “digging”. what other animals, including man, dig. Why? How? “Squirrels”; “grass”; “earth”; “burying”. What does a squirrel digging remind you of? Put down everything (words, phrases, sentences that come to mind, brainstorm ideas with your friends, etc. You’ll be amazed at how much you know and have to say about any word, subject.

(3) **IMAGES - WORD PICTURES** - Show your reader what you “see in your own mind”. , Don’t tell that a squirrel is digging in the grass - is it “intent? uneasy? furtive? happy? Is the grass short, long, unmowed, gray? green? pale yellow? Is it a blue sky day? North wind day? Is it evening with a sleepy sun going to bed?

(4) **USING SIMILES & METAPHORS TO ACHIEVE (3)** Instead of an adjective, “alone”, say “alone like a ship on a frozen sea = an image; or say “he was alone, he was a ship on a frozen sea” = metaphor.

(5) **LISTENING TO THE HEART OF THINGS** - Using (3) and (4) to communicate and share the results, your thoughts from (1) and (2). A squirrel digging is just a squirrel digging; it is not a poem. What does it make you think about, feel. Example: could be secrets, survival, friends, loneliness, winter coming and how one prepares for it, etc. Robert Frost said: “Poetry is the clear expression of confused emotions”. Make sure your poem does this.

(6) **EDITING (FANCY WORD FOR REVISION)** Whenever you write a poem, consider it as “pre-writing”. Then come the revisions. And a final version. A poem goes through many drafts before it is perfect. Some people think that a poem must be spontaneous and totally inspired—and hesitate to revise it. A poem is one part inspiration and many parts perspiration. After putting lots of thoughts and images, read aloud the poem again and again (to a friend, a dog, cat, goldfish, and revise it so that the thought and feeling you want to share comes through like a hot knife through butter. (This simile is a cliché - overused. But it still works, no? You see the knife and the butter melting around it’s a hot blade. That’s an example of an effective image. Effective is the key word in critiquing poems - does it work as it should? If not, replace it with a better word, image, or cut it out. Editing or revision is making sure you’ve used the best words for the right impact for the poem. Cut, cut, cut out excess words (usually adjectives and adverbs) that are just taking up space and making the poem predictable and uninteresting to the reader. The acid test for whether a poem is working is to ask yourself this question: Is the poem interesting and fresh to you, its writer after the 99<sup>th</sup> time you read it to an audience? Do you like to read it out aloud to a friend?

**CRITERIA FOR EFFECTIVE LEARNING ACTIVITIES****(from The Virginia Commission for the Arts Artist-in-Education guidelines)****EDUCATIONAL**

Residency activities should:

- Develop better critical thinking skills
- Make interdisciplinary connections
- Include aspects of the literacy: listening, viewing, reading, writing, speaking
- Move from the known to the unknown
- Develop paralleling technique
- Develop sequencing technique: appropriate scope and sequencing
- Stimulate as many senses and ways of knowing as possible (multiple intelligences)
- May teach through story
- May include historical/social continuum
- Build vocabulary in the art form
- Be related to every day life: be authentic and related

As a result of participation students will:

- Learn how to brainstorm
- Build/improve concentration skills
- Have enhanced curiosity
- Improve decision making skills
- Demonstrate (kinesthetic/verbal) what they have learned
- Develop a passion that will extend to the art of learning & exploring
- Become more disciplined and motivated
- Develop a keener interest in research and exploration
- Ask more (and better) questions (the “Big Why?”)
- Improve speaking and analyzing skills
- Demonstrate the ability to transfer new skills to other areas
- Learn the value of doing something a certain way
- Learn the vocabulary of the art form and relate that knowledge to every day life (transference of skills), known to unknown

**ARTISTIC****Residency activities should teach students to:**

- Make connections between the artistic disciplines.
- Learn the creative aspect of art form — no right or wrong way (aesthetic effectiveness).
- Have fun while learning.
- Become knowledgeable of the technique of the art form.
- Learn the vocabulary of the art form (vernacular to foreign language).

As a result of participation students will:

- Develop an appreciation of the art form.
- Develop curiosity and a sense of wonderment about the world and the artistic discipline.
- Explore their imagination.
- Develop physical coordination.

Residency activities should:

- Be age and gender appropriate.
- Be culturally diverse (literature, vocabulary resources also audio/video tapes).
  - Engage student’s spirit of personal challenge and life skills (e.g. being prepared):
- Provide language for social communication.

## **SOCIAL**

### **As a result of participation students will have:**

- Improved cooperation and team work skills (sharing of ideas).
- Improved self-esteem (how the art form enhances the self-worth of the child/student).
- Improved ability to understand non-verbal messages (communication, how you present yourself to the world).

## FREEING THE IMAGINATION --THE BASICS OF POETRY

**MAKING WORD PICTURES:–THE SIMILE WORKSHOP**

The first basic rule of good writing is “SHOW, don’t tell.” The simile is the main tool for making images (word pictures) and makes writing vivid and lively. Poems show by using similes and metaphors. This is the most basic tool upon which we build poems.

**DEFINITION: A simile is a figure of speech in which one thing is likened to another with the use of “as” or “like”.** Example: “a heart big as a whale”, “her heart is like a house with lots of room for people”, “her tears flowed like a river in flood.”

For younger children, it is best to do a group poem with a list (based on the senses, of things we see, smell, hear, taste, touch) such as

red like an apple  
 green as grass  
 small like a crumb  
 sweet like  
 sour as  
 smells like  
 sounds like  
 soft as cotton  
 cold like  
 slippery as  
 happy as  
 sad as  
 angry as a bear who’s had no dinner.

I like to ask the students to add more information so we can see a picture from the words. e.g. Angry as a bear ... when? show us when the bear may be angry.

I like to ask older students to compare the adjective word to a feeling or an emotion or state of mind. E.G. red as anger, slow as tomorrow. Once students can grasp the “what and how of a simile”, they should practice it to learn to use it appropriately, with ease and style. This helps develop their skills in metaphoric logic and in making connections.

adjectives to an object,

Stubborn as \_\_\_\_\_ buttons, rocks, a mule, sorrow [use an object, nature, animal, emotion ]  
 Angry as \_\_\_\_\_ [object, nature, animal/insect, emotion]  
 Hungry as \_\_\_\_\_ [as above categories]  
 Sad as \_\_\_\_\_  
 Big as \_\_\_\_\_  
 He felt small as \_\_\_\_\_

**SAMPLE SIMILE POEMS (K-1)**

As hard as lava rock  
 As hard as my dog's teeth  
 As hard as bones  
 Steel is hard.

As soft as pillows  
 As soft as my pink blanket  
 As soft as a cushion  
 As soft as mashed potatoes  
 As soft as marshmallows  
 And marshmallow fluff.

As bumpy as a rock  
 As bumpy as hills  
 As bumpy as a rhinoceros  
 A lizard is bumpy.

As dry as a lizard's skin  
 Or an iguana.  
 As dry as an earring  
 As dry as my skin in winter  
 As dry as the desert.

As good as avocados in my tummy  
 As good as candy and macaroni and cheese  
 As good as rainbows  
 As good as American Girl dolls  
 As good as chocolate.  
 -- Mrs. Hansen's Kindergarten class

**FUN THINGS**

Blue is water  
 Blue as the sky.  
 Blue is in the rainbow –  
 Blue as a bluebird,  
 Blue as a rainy day.

Strong as ice in winter,  
 Strong as a wolf,  
 Strong as a shark,  
 Strong as an elephant.  
 Strong as a bear,  
 Strong as a lion,  
 Strong as an alligator,  
 Strong as a leopard.  
 Strong as a crab,  
 Strong as the ocean,  
 Strong as the earth,  
 Strong as lightning.

Slippery as ice,  
 Slippery as frozen snow and  
 we skate on it.  
 Slippery as rain or hail,  
 Slippery as a banana peel.

Slippery as Jell-O,  
 Slippery as goo.  
 Slippery as pain when you  
 fall on ice.

Warm as a fire in the fireplace  
 in winter on a ski trip.  
 Warm as the sun,  
 Warm as an oven baking turkey,  
 Warm as an oven baking apple pie.  
 Was as holding hands,  
 Warm as hot chocolate,  
 Warm as hugging your mom and dad.

Fun as playing with your friends,  
 Fun as playing on the playground.  
 Fun as hugging your friend  
 when the sun is shining.  
 --- Ms. Darrigo's and Mrs Davison's  
 Kindergarten class 2000

\*\*\*\*

Blank as a blanket,  
 Blank as a piece of paper,  
 Blank as a cloud,  
 Blank as new snow.  
 Blank as socks or a white wall.  
 Blank as boredom.  
 Big as a dinosaur,  
 Big as a dragon,  
 Big as a castle,  
 Big as a giant.  
 Big as the sky.  
 Big as the sun.  
 Big as air.  
 Big as the world.  
 Big as hope.

Fast as a cheetah.  
 Fast as a race car,  
 Fast as an erupting volcano.  
 Fast as a butterfly in summer.  
 Fast as a snap of your fingers,  
 Fast as happiness.  
 Fast as light,  
 Fast as your ideas.

Slow as a turtle,  
 Slow as a bear.  
 Slow as a snail.  
 Slow as snow,  
 Slow as the clouds move,  
 Slow as a daydream with my horse.  
 ■ Mrs. Fisher's Grade I class  
 ■ Jamestown 2001

\*\*\*

Peace is like a picture, quiet and still.

Peace is like a stuffed animal, cute  
 And cuddly.  
 A stuffed animal opens the door  
 to Imagination.  
 Imagination is like your own world,  
 A world where anything can happen  
 If you believe.

■ Nicole Fortin, Gr. 6

Stars are like the eyes of people  
 who have died.  
 They are always watching you  
 making sure you are okay.  
 -- from Star Eyes by Stephanie Beacon, Gr. 7

People stalk  
 Just like animals.  
 Peering around  
 Looking for prey  
 So helpless, innocent.  
 Must people kill  
 For reward as animals  
 Kill for food?

People stalk just as animals.  
 By Kimberly Binns

Dating is like getting a pair of new shoes  
 When you first get them, you want to  
 Wear them all the time. And  
 When you see another pair  
 Of shoes you like, you slowly mistreat the old.  
 by Latia Adams

Something Beautiful by Hilary Tham

You can erase the mark  
 But the paper is thinner  
 And the surface scarred,  
 No longer smooth as before.  
 The same with a hurt,  
 Perhaps a heedless word  
 And though you apologize,  
 Something beautiful dies.

**ROLLING SIMILES POEM**

The whole group sits in a circle and each participant writes a simile with a second line that makes the connection for the two, however wild. Or the class is divided into groups of 2, 3 or 4 and each group comes up with and writes a couple with a simile in the first line and the connecting statement in the second line. e.g.:

Justice is like Ray Charles,  
both are blind.

The whole point is to play with images and language and have fun. Usually a concrete thing is compared to an abstract noun like emotion or homework. Then pass the paper to the person to the right (or left) and keep going. The next person writes another simile using one of the two compared nouns in the first simile, adding a line as the *raison d'être*. Everyone should be writing on a paper at all times. After each paper has about 6 similes, they should write a wrap-up or concluding simile and then have each read aloud the paper in hand. The fun part is the reading aloud of the poems of course.

**Rolling simile poems by some of my Yorktown High School students**

Writing poetry is like bungee jumping  
In both, you take a risk.  
Bungee jumping is like a child in the womb,  
both are dependent on the strength of the cord.  
A child in the womb is like an unborn egg,  
both are fragile.

--~

Justice is like Ray Charles  
both are blind and ohh! so funky.  
Talent is like being born with blue eyes, you either  
have 'em or you don't.  
Talent is like a headache,  
you can't see it but you can feel it.  
A headache is like a bagpipe,  
shrilly irritating.  
A bagpipe is like a car, something I don't have.

--

A dancer is like water, both are  
free and flowing, and can go  
wherever they choose.  
Water is like spring, arousing joy in sparrows  
and sprites alike.  
Spring is like fire,  
radiant and bursting with life.  
Fire is like inspiration - both can spark  
a priceless possibility.  
Inspiration is like a shooting star, both come and go..

**ROLLING SIMILE POEMS BY PIMMIT HILLS HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS**

Cars are like bikes;  
they both take you places.  
Cars are like bikes, they  
both have wheels.  
Cars are like roller-skates;  
both have 4 wheels.  
Roller-skates are like shoes;

they both get you somewhere.  
Shoes are like old friends; they fit well  
and have walked many roads with me.

Leaves are like money;  
both are green.  
Leaves are like old people,  
both are always falling.  
Old people are like raisins;  
they're both wrinkled  
Old people are like vegetables;  
they never move.  
Vegetables are like medicines;  
both taste yucky.

\*\*\*

Life is like a rocky road; both  
have their ups and downs.  
Rocky Road is like coffee;  
both are ice-cream flavors.  
Life is like ice-cream; both  
are sweet.  
Ice-cream is like TV; both  
make you hungry.  
TV is like a concert;  
people are always around them.

## **MAKING WORD PICTURES – THE METAPHORS WORKSHOP**

Our everyday language is woven of metaphors. Note the verb woven implies our language is a cloth, and thus this sentence has a hidden metaphor in it. The despised cliché is colorful metaphor that keeps on living and becomes overused and hackneyed: e.g.: the hands of a clock, tied to his mother's apron strings, a check that bounces, an election won by a landslide, how fast time flies, mad as a hatter (chemicals in the hat maker's trade often made them crazy).

I usually start off with a request for similes that come to mind (after establishing students know the difference between a simile and a metaphor.)

Simile -e.g.: happiness is like a butterfly, it only lasts a while.

Metaphor —e.g.: happiness is a butterfly.

School is like a circus → school is a circus.

After the students have grasped the difference between a simile and a metaphor, I have them write similes and turn them into metaphors.

Feelings are particularly inarticulate, wordless and almost always best expressed in metaphor or simile. We have general words for emotions like love, hate, awe, compassion, pity, but they are abstract words, not specific enough. You could say you love your mother, your dog, pepperoni pizza and Hawaii. To verbalize the exact feeling, you could say “my love is like a red, red rose” or a yellow rose, a violet, or even pistachio ice—cream. In such cases, the speaker/writer borrows the vocabulary that belong to something else and uses it to say what s/he wants to convey.

Metaphors work in a bewildering number of ways and do a bewildering variety of jobs, sometimes so complexly that a conscious analysis would need three pages of prose to follow and describe how their effect is achieved. They may illustrate or explain (the body is a plumber's nightmare); they can emphasize, heighten, shock, communicate information or ideas (see Sylvia Plath's poem “Mirror”).

Metaphors can carry a tone, a feeling or attitude, they can act as a language of associations as they do in the poem “Sir, Say No More” by Trumbull Stickney (1874 - 1904) .

Sir, say no more,  
Within me 'tis as if  
The green and climbing eyesight of a cat  
Crawled near my mind's poor birds.

Exercise 1: Speak in the voice of a thing or person other than yourself. Tell how it sees and feels about its life. Use “Mirror” as an example.

Exercise 2: Write a poem about yourself, the way you seem to others and the way you see yourself, using metaphor in place of adjective e.g.

“I am a rock  
I am hard, outside and in.  
Nobody can hurt me  
If I am a rock.

Or: My head is baseball, my head is homework,  
My head is Madonna strutting on a stage.

## MIRROR by Sylvia Plath

I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions.  
Whatever I see I swallow immediately  
Just as it is, unmisted by love or dislike.  
I am not cruel, only truthful—  
    The eye of a little god, four-cornered.  
Most of the time I meditate on the opposite wall.  
It is pink, with speckles. I have looked at it so long  
I think it is a part of my heart. But it flickers.  
Faces and darkness separate us over and over.  
    Now I am a lake. A woman bends over me,  
Searching my reaches for what she really is.  
Then she turns to those liars, the candles or the moon.  
I see her back, and reflect it faithfully.  
She rewards me with tears and an agitation of hands.  
    I am important to her. She comes and goes.  
Each morning it is her face that replaces the darkness.  
In me she has drowned a young girl, and in me an old woman  
Rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish.

**SELF-PORTRAIT WORKSHOP**

Children love to think and write about themselves. I begin this workshop with an Art Activity: I have students draw a self-portrait using hand mirror and markers, crayons / pen/ pencils. It can be a serious self-portrait or a modernistic, “wacky” portrait.

I tell them after they have drawn their portrait, I’ll like them to look at the face in the mirror and the face in the picture. Things to think about:

- What do you notice first, any distinguishing mark that stands out?
- What do you like best about your face/ hair etc.
- What do other people usually compliment you on?
- What aspect of you would you wish different?

Jot down thoughts, phrases, words.

I tell students they can write in the third person or personify the feature—e.g.

This face gets up in the middle of the night

This face goes to bed in the morning.

This face goes boldly where feet don’t want to go..” **and so on.**

Or Write a poem about something triggered by looking at your drawing. It can be a physical feature.

**My Nose**

My nose is like a hook  
In the center of my face  
Catching smells.

By Anna J, Copetanalos,  
Drew Elem. School 1998

This face is big  
This face likes pizza with lots of cheese  
This face does not like school  
This face rather be at home sometimes.  
This face likes football  
This face is smart  
This face is plain.

■ Raymond Johnson

I like chocolate  
the color of my eyes.  
I'm pretty like the  
flowers and my lips  
are like the fire.  
I'm smart and  
nice and I like

the way my face  
is.

■ Ana Acevedo

"How pleasant to know Mr. Lear!"  
Who has written such volumes of stuff!  
Some think him ill-tempered and Queer,  
But a few think him pleasant enough."  
-- Edward Lear

Self-Portrait by Jason Sher, Gr. 3, Jamestown

My hair is like mud in the pond.  
My eyes are like brown markers.  
My teeth are white as cotton.  
My ears can hear anything.  
My heart holds happiness.  
I live in garbage  
and eat stinky socks.

**SOUND WORKSHOP**

I find sounds a wonderful springboard for the imagination and for making images. I bring in noise makers – paper for crumpling, two pieces of wood to tap, aluminum foil to “rattle”, a bottle of water (half-empty) to slosh, bell to ring, etc. I ask the students to close their eyes and listen and then write down what it sounds like. They can write down the phonetic spelling of the sound itself, then make a word picture so someone reading/hearing their words would also be able to “picture” the sound and the situation. E.g. someone tapping is not enough. Who is doing it, where, perhaps even why. Some one knocking on a door in a hurry, or quietly trying not to be heard. After 5 or 6 sounds, I ask students to make up a story or write a poem about a specific time or event or occasion using those sounds, or other sounds.

**APPLICATIONS:** This workshop can be used to review history, geography or social studies. Have students write a poem focusing on the sounds as if she or he lived at the time of the historical period or in the place or culture being studied.

I hear cows are screaming at my aunt's house  
And I hear dogs screaming. I hear frogs  
croaking. And I hear my cousin giving food  
to cows, and cows are eating, umpf, umpf.  
And I hear a cicada, it is whirring. And I hear  
someone is walking through the grass.  
- Ann Y. Elder

In my country,  
the dog says wek wek wek shoo wag.  
The frog says bigik, bigik, bigik, bigik.  
The rooster says Ko ko koo ooooo.  
- Safa-Alhusahi

When I wake up, I hear s,s,s,s,s, - my mother  
is cooking. When I eat my breakfast,  
I hear ks, ks, ks, ks, my dad is washing  
his face. When I brush my teeth, I hear  
brm, brm, brm, brm – my dad is going  
to work in his car. When I'm going to the bus stop,  
I hear kui kui, a bus has stopped for me.

## SOUNDS IN MY COUNTRY

In my country, Philippines, people love pig.  
 Because every time they have wedding and other  
 parties, they love to eat pig, different kinds of pig.  
 Pigs are cute in my country.  
 When pigs are hungry, they say oirk oirk.  
 Chickens say chick chick  
 Rooster says cock co rok kok.  
 Dogs say aw aw.  
 Cats go miawng miawng  
 and ducks go gwuek gwuek.  
 - Alba Yabut

## SOUNDS IN KOREA

In Korea many animals make different sounds.  
 Pigs go "Koor-koor"  
 Dogs go "Mung-mung"  
  
 Birds go "Chak-chak"  
 Cats go "Ya-ong".  
 Frogs go "Ga goor, ga-goor".

In Korea, many things make different sounds.  
 Cars go "Bang-bang".  
 Telephones go "Thaloo-roong"  
 Bells go "Ding-ding"  
 Clocks go "Thock-tak, thock-tak."  
 The bells in church go "DONG DONG."

It's weird that each country has different sounds.  
 I guess that's because we can't copy the sounds  
 and different people hear things differently.  
 - Sunyoung Kim

-----  
 Sounds in Jamestown

On Sunday morning I hear the church bells ring. Horse hooves clatter on the cobblestone paths and children are playing games like marbles. We cook bacons and eggs for breakfast. I hear the eggs sizzling in the pan and the crunch of the bacon.

In the afternoon an Indian war cry echoes in the distance. Later I hear guns shooting and the "swish" of the bows and arrows.

In the evening I hear deer in the forest and squirrels running up trees. As darkness comes, I hear wolves howling and owls hooting. The wind whistles through the pine trees. I fall asleep to their quiet lullaby.

-- Douglas Wackerle, Mrs. Simmons 4<sup>th</sup> grade.

## **PHOTOGRAPHS INTO POEMS**

For this exercise, I bring in photographs cut from magazines like National Geographic or Art/Photography magazines, each mounted on cardboard. I ask students to pick a photograph that snags and holds their eye, that something in them answers to with interest and resonance. For additional poems, they can pick a photo from their family albums. The family album photograph need not be a “good” photograph—in fact, sometimes, the botched one will have more resonance. You might choose a photograph that someone has taken of you or of someone you know. Judith McCombs has a wonderful poem on a photograph of her father and his ex-girlfriend who was not her mother, on what might have been but did not happen. Or you can use a photograph from an artistic or journalistic magazine (DoubleTake and National Geographic are good sources.) Or a photograph that documents a historical event. Miles David Moore’s fabulous poem “Dead Boy in the Road to Fredericksburg” is written on Matthew Bradley’s photograph of a casualty of the Civil War.

“...to see something in the form of a photograph is to encounter a potential object of fascination.

Photographs, which cannot themselves explain anything, are inexhaustible invitations to deduction, speculation, and fantasy.”

With the photograph in hand, I ask students to “spend some time writing out just what you see in it: objects, landscape, people, clothes, trees, architecture, light, and shadow. In a sense, you will have to narrate the photograph, or at least make images so that we can, literally, see what you are talking about without seeing the photograph.” Then, using the same photograph, I have students write different poems from it, from some of the following perspectives or points-of-view:

1. what you see and think is happening, what is the person(s) in the photograph feeling.
2. Speak in the voice of the photographer and give the imagined story of the moment captured.
3. Speak in the voice of someone or something in the photograph.
4. For family album photos, speak as yourself addressing the poem to someone in the photograph.

An additional shift in perspective can be uncovered by writing poems in which you manipulate time.

1. Write what happened just before the photograph was taken.
2. Write what happened as the photograph was being taken, outside the range of the camera.
3. Write the poem as if you have found the photograph years after it was taken.
4. Write exactly the same poem in three versions: in the present tense, the past tense, and the future tense.

John Szarkowski writes, “Photography is a system of visual editing. At bottom, it is a matter of surrounding with a frame a portion of one’s cone of vision, while standing in the right place at the right time. Like chess, or writing, it is a matter of choosing from among given possibilities.”

One way of revising poems is to shake up the original poem, to see it from different perspectives, to re-see it. Sudden shifts in perspective open a poem up to us again and help us to surpass our resistances to revision: stubbornness, attachment to predictability, and the touching, understandable love of our own first seeing. One way of “practicing” revision is to work a poem that has the same focus of attention through several different points of view. While the focus of the poem remains the same, we can see how we speak it, revising by generating new poems. Photos provide a stable focus and seem to be especially suited to writing with these kinds of shifts.

Maggie Anderson says, “Any photograph is a record made by a person who was shifting around something shifting that they saw.” When we look at a photograph, we shift around what the photographer has made to stand still. Imagine the lives that came to that point of time in the photograph, imagine the “what might happen and did not”, imagine the lives after that point in their timelines and you will find your poems.

DEAD BOY IN THE ROAD AT FREDERICKSBURG  
(Photographed by Mathew Brady, May 1863)

You're pictured blankly, in all-neutral tones.  
Flung like a starfish on the trampled sod,  
You lie still as Virginia takes your bones  
And yields them up to Brady and to God.  
At least your family was spared the horror  
Brought to our time at six in living color,

But not the anguish of the empty chair  
At supper, or the lash of each cross word,  
Or half-dreamed listening to hear your bare  
Feet on the stairs. A century has blurred  
HOW you lost both the Christmases and quarrels  
When those Yanks let you have it with both barrels.

It's old as Caesar. You were starry-eyed  
Over a star-crossed flag of bonnie blue  
Till that rough monster which no flag can hide  
Rose on its haunches and devoured you.  
God knows that every cause and every hurt  
Arc ashes in the equalizing dirt,

So that the men who died on Sparta's slopes  
Were dung to fertilize the olive's fruit  
And now some living mother's brightest hopes  
Lie dying on the tarmac in Beirut.  
We turn on our TVs, and hear the cry  
Of Belfast and Soweto as they die;

Through the millennia the murdered march  
To someone else's tune and memory  
And through some other guy's triumphal arch.  
You and they are no one. You're history.  
Repeating rifles always bear repeating.  
The silent beast that ate you keeps on eating.

-- Miles David Moore

## **COLOR YOUR POEMS SATURDAY**

We all love color – we make color decisions often in our day --- from what to wear, what to eat, drink, et cetera. Children love thinking and talking about colors. I often begin this workshop with a taste test for my students. Each student is given a handful of M & M chocolate candies and asked which color tastes best. Even though some children know and will point out that the taste is technically the same, they agree that all prefer one or another color to eat first or to save for last. We then engage in a brief discussion of how their choices relate to their favorite colors, in clothes, in walls, ink, etc. and how we associate colors with emotion: - having the blues, feeling browned off, a test day being a black day.

Lesson: Students develop thinking skills and make interdisciplinary connections. This exercise stimulates as many senses and ways of knowing as possible (multiple intelligences) and enhances curiosity

We explore further with the following questions:

What color is Saturday? Monday?  
 What is the color of a headache?  
 What color is the sound of drums? a horse running? in grass? in the desert?  
 What color is the sound of a lost kitten? puppy?  
 What color is Africa? Washington? your home town?  
 What color is the taste of a taco?

How do certain colors make you feel?

Bronze makes me feel like a dead statue.  
 Red makes me feel hot. Blue makes me feel quiet.

The following are sections from a color spectrum poem written by my second daughter, Shoshana Goldberg in Grade 6.:-

Gray is sorrow, like rain and tears.  
 Like death or failure, of a job done poorly.  
 Gray is sadness, needing help.

Black is horror.  
 Shadows on a wall, an eerie noise,  
 A creaky door, an endless hole.  
 Black is unknown.

It is important at this stage to stress to students the need to write concretely, to make word pictures instead of explaining only what a color means. As illustrated by the above, black is horror is not as interesting or vivid to us as ‘shadows on a wall. etc.’” The concrete things that are scary to the writer makes us relate to it emotionally and makes the piece a poem.

Exercise 1:— Use one of the following forms to make up a poem with your favorite or least favorite color or a spectrum of colors.

## Form A -

(color) is \_\_\_\_\_ (animal or part of an animal e.g. pink is the nose on a bunny rabbit.)  
 (color) is the smell of \_\_\_\_\_ ( e.g. green is the smell of pancakes on St. Patrick's day)  
 (color) is the sound of \_\_\_\_\_ (noun & sentence)  
 (color) likes to be with \_\_\_\_\_ (color) They ---- dance/melt/sing\_ (action verb) together.  
 (color) makes me feel \_\_\_\_\_

FORM B:-- I love ----- (color) of the fur on a \_\_\_\_\_  
 I love \_\_\_\_\_ (color), the \_\_\_\_\_ (adjective) \_\_\_\_\_  
 of the fur on a \_\_\_\_\_ (animal)  
 I love \_\_\_\_\_ (color), the \_\_\_\_\_ (adjective) \_\_\_\_\_ (color)  
 of \_\_\_\_\_

## Form C -

Pick a color and use it wherever (color appears below.) If writing about a least favorite color, substitute "I do not like" or I hate" for "I love"

I love \_\_\_\_\_ (color) things  
 I like \_\_\_\_\_ (plural noun), \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_

I love big \_\_\_\_\_ (color) \_\_\_\_\_ (noun)  
 that \_\_\_\_\_

I love small \_\_\_\_\_ (color) \_\_\_\_\_  
 that \_\_\_\_\_ (verb sentence)

## Exercise 2 (Advanced):-

Here are some questions to have the class discuss and freely associate with things they know. What are the colors you associate with your family? Your house? – think of clothes, walls, curtains, roof, street.

With your culture? The Chinese love red - you see a lot of red pillars and walls in Chinese architecture. Chinese brides wore red embroidered jackets until 1942. The brides switched to pink and then white. White only became accepted with Western tradition and was resisted by the older generations because traditionally, white is the color of mourning and funerals. Ask students write a poem or story about a childhood experience involving an aspect of color traditions in their culture:

**Superstition** by Hilary Tham

The Chinese believe our dead return  
 as white butterflies on happy occasions,  
 to shed a blessing on the birth of sons,  
 to drink the moist scents of bridal teas.

White butterflies never appear at funerals  
 or at the pitch of familial battles  
 when Father smashed chairs and china  
 and Mother wielded words with equal violence.

Sister died young. I grew and left home.  
 The first time I returned, with m~ 'children,  
 Father was proud, Mother jubilant  
 A white butterfly flew into the house.

**INSIDES/OUTSIDES POEMS**

“the star in the apple  
the nest in the pomegranate,  
the maze in the onion.”

from the poem “Wonders of the World”  
by Richard Shelton

This workshop is wonderful with elementary school children. I bring in some fruits and vegetables (such as apples, oranges, pomegranates, bananas, kiwi, onions, potatoes, cabbage, red peppers). I slice the apple in half around the waist so that there is “a star” apparent. I carry the two halves around the classroom so that the students can see the “star.” Then I slice the onion and the cabbage in turn and let the children see the “maze” in each. We then cut some of the other fruits in half and let the children tell me what they see.

The lesson in this workshop gives students practice in creative seeing and creative thinking, pushes them to look and think beyond the surface appearance of things. It also teaches them to make connections to life situations and relationships.

For a group exercise: The students are seated in groups and each group is given a sampling of a certain fruit or vegetable. One person in the group is assigned to write what the fruit looks like before and after cutting, how it grows, how they usually prepare it for eating. Also what it smells like, and finally, what it tastes like.

Students are asked to compare their foods to objects that are basically different. E.g.. “A banana tastes like banana” is not acceptable. After the writing, students can share the leftover cut-up food.

Additional Exercises:

A:- Students write a poem about their family preparing and eating a traditional or favorite dish and his/her feelings on the occasion.

B:- Students write a poem about their favorite or most disliked food, the first time they tasted it and his/her feelings about it.

C: Insides/Outsides. This is my favorite writing exercise with this workshop. Discuss exterior appearance versus interior e.g.. apples, onion, and compare with impressions of people e.g.. their best friend on first meeting and later when they got to know them. Ask students to write a poem about how they seem to others and how they know they actually are. Students can use one of the following motifs to start up their poems. This is also a good exercise in reviewing “Opposites”.

Sample 1: On the outside, I’m \_\_\_\_\_ (e.g. noisy as a seagull)  
On the inside, I’m \_\_\_\_\_ (e.g. quiet as a mouse in a hole.)

Sample 2: People think I’m .

but \_\_\_\_\_

Sample 3: I seem to be  
but really I am

Inside/outside motif poems

I seem to be like a bird  
soaring through the air  
But on the inside.  
I'm a grizzly bear.  
-- Robert Ingram, Grade 6, Parkview School

On the outside I seem to be  
the wind blowing the leaves  
off the trees. But I'm really  
a blossoming tulip.

I am a locked closet when  
I don't want to say anything  
But I am really an open door  
when I'm excited.

On the outside I am like  
the moon saying goodnight.  
But on the inside. I am really  
the sun smiling on the world.  
Jennifer Tate Grade 6  
Parkview School

I seem to be a rough lion  
but really I am a small white sheep.  
I seem to be the sound of a drum  
but really I am a small bell.  
I seem to be broccoli  
but really I am delicious candy.  
I seem to be a brown bear  
but really I am a white snowflake,  
I seem to be a broken flag  
but really I am a soft chair.  
I seem to be lava falling from the volcano  
but really I am a colorful rainbow.  
I seem to be a bulldog  
but really I am a calm rabbit.  
I seem to be a building on fire  
but really I am a small calm sea at night.

-- Pedro Vides Grade 6, Parkview School

Outside. I'm as well—behaved as an owl  
Inside, I'm like a wolf ready to howl.  
Outside. I seem as big as an ox.  
Inside, I'm smaller than a fox.  
-- Ryan Pearson Grade 4, Oakview School  
\*\*\*\*

I may seem to be as hard as a rock  
but on the inside I'm as soft as a cotton sock.  
I may seem to be wild and uncontrollable

but on the inside. I'm mild and consolable.  
I may seem to be a Mean Joe Green  
but on the inside. I'm as harmless as a dream.  
I may seem to be very knowledgeable,  
but on the inside, my wisdom is fallible.  
I may seem to be ever so self—assured  
but on the inside, it's confidence - I need more.  
I may seem to be lacking in grace  
but on the inside. I'm lined with lace.

Why shouldn't I let my insides be reflected?  
Sorry, I can't, I must be protected.  
Mrs. Shirley Powe, Teacher  
Parkview School

**CATERPILLARS & BUTTERFLIES: PERSPECTIVE POEMS**

I begin this workshop with a leading question: How many students have touched a butterfly? a caterpillar? How did they feel? How does the caterpillar see the world? What is important to the caterpillar? What is important to the butterfly? Are they the same?

Lesson: This workshop teaches students to include the senses in their writing and to use different points of view in looking at the world around them.

Leading Question: If you were a puppy, what would you want? What would you fear? If a duck? a mouse? the sun? the moon? a star? A bed? A dandelion? Pick the point of view of something other than human and write a poem, speak for it. Use repetitions of “If I were a \_\_\_\_\_” if you like.

**WINDOW**

by Amy McDowell, Grade 7,  
Williamsburg School

As a window, I am beckoning:  
Come see the new-fallen snow.  
Look at the beautiful sunset.  
You are always looking through me,  
never at me.  
See how sleek I am,  
how I glimmer when it rains.  
I am always there, never  
noticed.

**The Eagle**

Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809-1892)

He clasps the crag with crooked hands;  
Close to the sun in lonely lands,  
Ring'd with the azure world, he stands.

The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;  
He watches from his mountain walls,  
And like a thunderbolt he falls.

From The Unicorn

by Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926)

Oh this is the animal that never was.  
They hadn't seen one; but just the same, they  
loved  
its graceful movements, and the way it stood  
looking at them calmly with clear eyes.  
\*\*

Little Fish by D. H. Lawrence

The tiny fish enjoy themselves  
in the sea.  
Quick little splinters of life,  
their little lives are fun to them  
in the sea.

The Black Snake

by Mary Oliver (b. 1935)

When the black snake  
flashed onto the morning road,  
and the truck could not swerve- -  
death, that is how it happens.

Now he lies looped and useless  
as an old bicycle tire.  
I stop the car  
and carry him into the bushes.

He is as cool and gleaming  
as a braided whip, he is as beautiful and quiet  
as a dead brother.  
I leave him under the leaves

and drive on, thinking  
about death: its suddenness,  
its terrible weight,  
its certain coming. Yet under

reason burns a brighter fire, which the bones  
have always preferred.  
It is the story of endless good fortune.  
It says to oblivion: not me!

It is the light at the center of every cell.  
It is what sent the snake coiling and flowing  
forward  
happily all spring through the green leaves  
before  
he came to the road.

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How doth the little Crocodile

by Lewis Carroll (1832-1898)

How doth the little crocodile  
Improve his shining tail,  
And pour the waters of the Nile  
On every golden scale!  
How cheerfully he seems to grin,  
How neatly spreads his claws,  
And welcomes little fishes in  
With gently smiling jaws!

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The Bat by Theodore Roethke

By day the bat is cousin to the mouse.  
He likes the attic of an aging house.

His fingers make a hat about his head.  
His pulse beat is so slow we think him dead.

He loops in crazy figures half the night  
Among the trees that face the corner light.

But when he brushes up against a screen,  
We are afraid of what our eyes have seen.

For something is amiss or out of place  
When mice with wings can wear a human face.  
\*\*

SEA CREATURE by Alyson Wise, Grade 6

Humans fear me though I wish no harm  
Humans hunt me though I think no need  
Killing me is just out of greed.

**IF** by Johnny Lee, Gr. 6

If I was a street, I'd be driven over. They would  
go  
up and down on my back When they reach my  
head,  
I wish they w they poke my eyes and my nose  
gets knocked.  
But they don't care, just as long as they get  
where they are going.

**IF** by Johnny Lee, Gr. 6

If I was a pencil, my feet would be rubbed,  
they would be sharpened and worn.  
But that's not bad unless they mess up;  
then my head gets rubbed on the paper  
to correct the mistakes.

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I'd like to be a puppy to get all the love.  
I could sleep all day and bark at the birds.  
I'd howl at the wind, pee on the tree.  
A puppy is what I'd like to be.

**THEN & NOW: TIME PERSPECTIVE POEMS**

Lesson: Perspective - We change as we grow older; the way we see and feel about things also changes. This exercise challenges students to reexamine the way they viewed things in the past and now.

Poem for Discussion: I read aloud this poem and use it as a springboard for discussion on time and change in our lives, our world. I ask students to think about whether they have changed in the way they look at the world and how the world has changed since they were small.

I remember

I remember when I had a babysitter;  
but now I am in charge.

I remember when monsters didn't like perfume,  
but now I know there are no monsters.

I remember when multiplication was impossible,  
but now I'm in algebra.

I remember when stairs were dangerous,  
but now I know of guns and drugs.  
by Megan O'Neill, Grade 4, Drew Elementary School

***Ample time should be allowed for students to discuss***

1: how they viewed things when they were small: like where they thought money came from, night time, what things were they afraid of when small, etc.

2: how things have changed in the world since they were small, or since their parents were kids, or since an earlier period in history.

Students are asked to complete the following incomplete lines with statements, using images, word pictures. Students are not to explain — the series of statements should lead the reader to a conclusion of why. The word "BECAUSE" is not allowed in the poem.

I used to think \_\_\_\_\_  
but now I know \_\_\_\_\_

I used to think \_\_\_\_\_  
but now I know \_\_\_\_\_

I used to love \_\_\_\_\_  
but now I love \_\_\_\_\_

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When I was small,  
I thought the moon  
and the stars were stickers  
on the ceiling of the world.  
-- Monique Hayes, Gr. 3, Drew Elementary School.

**Growing Up** by Wong May

When I was a child I thought  
 The new moon was a cradle  
 The full moon was granny's round face.

The new moon was a banana  
 The full moon was a big cake.

When I was a child  
 I never saw the moon.  
 I only saw what I wanted to see.

And now I see the moon  
 It's the moon,  
 Only the moon, and nothing but the moon.

**The Ocean**

Once the ocean was a clear crystal blue  
 Now it is dark, a polluted gray-blue.  
 Once it was "Welcome, come swim,"  
 Now it is warning, "Chemicals found."  
 Once I had freedom to run on the beach,  
 Now there is litter, deep in the sand.  
 Once the waves crashed on the beach,  
 Now they are silent, mild and meek.  
 Once the beach was a great place to go,  
 Now it is empty and amusement parks full.  
 -- Stephanie Kuldell, Gr. 5, Drew School.

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**I Remember**

by Jack Strabo

I remember when I didn't know what  $1 + 1$  was. (2).  
 Now I know what  $89 \times 32$  is. 2,848.  
 I remember when I thought everything was mine.  
 Now I know I have to share.  
 I remember when being alone could be dangerous.  
 Now I know that wars are dangerous.  
 I remember when I couldn't say my name.  
 No I can say Algebra.  
 I remember when I thought walking was hard.  
 Now I know schoolwork is hard.  
 I remember when I thought everything was dangerous.  
 Now I know about drugs, cigarettes and cigars.  
 I remember when I thought five dollars was a lot of money.  
 Now I know \$1,000 is a lot of money.

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## THE POEM ON AIR

This is a wonderful exercise for freeing the imagination and inducing a sense of being free to play with words, language.

I focus students by giving them balloons to inflate, soap bubbles to play with. We talk about air in balloons, soap bubbles, air bubbles in water, helium balloons that rise, hot air balloons. We'd discuss- what is air? How do we know air is there? When can we see air? bubbles in ice, when there are particles in air e.g. dust motes in a shaft of sunlight, fog, steam, smog.

### **Brainstorming exercises:**

Name the forms of air - breeze, wind, flutter, currents, gusts, tornado, hurricanes, twisters, cyclones, typhoon (big wind in Chinese), monsoon.

If I were air, I'd be \_\_\_\_\_ (name a form of air with an action verb to show why it appeals)

Using simile, metaphor, explore the following

Air feels like \_\_\_\_\_ e.g. someone lifting my hair, a giant leaning on me

sounds like \_\_\_\_\_

moves like \_\_\_\_\_

smells like \_\_\_\_\_

looks like \_\_\_\_\_

If air were an animal, it would be a \_\_\_\_\_ (e.g. tiger chasing a rabbit)

If music, air would sound like \_\_\_\_\_ wind chimes, temple bells, drums

What historic events are connected with air \_\_\_\_\_

What does air fear? - \_\_\_\_\_

What does air want? \_\_\_\_\_

What can air teach us? \_\_\_\_\_

What feelings /emotions are like air? \_\_\_\_\_

### **Writing exercises:-**

Write a poem on air the everyday air we take for granted or one of the forms of air... stories the wind tells the leaves, scents/smells and sounds that flow from a Italian kitchen, someone cooking hot dogs & sauerkraut? curry? Write a poem starting with a memory of a smell.

**AIR-** Group poem by Mrs. Vetter's 4th/5th grade Class, Drew Model School

If I were air,  
 I'll be helium and make people  
 talk funny all the time.  
 I'll be smoke from a fire and go outside  
 and have fun.  
 I'll be a tornado because I'd get to destroy  
 things.  
 I'll be hurricane. I'll knock down houses  
 and trees,  
 I'll be a planet filled with carbon dioxide  
 so anyone who lands on me will die.  
 I'll be Raid and kill all the cockroaches.  
 I'll be carbon dioxide in a fire-extinguisher  
 and blow out all the fires.  
 I'll be weather so I can control heat and  
 weather.  
 I'll be a flurry and make the snow melt  
 before it touches the ground. I'll blow  
 the snow around.  
 I'll be crisp clean cool air for a CPR nurse  
 to breathe life into people.  
 I'll be a whisper -- I'll keep secrets  
 with me.  
 I'll be the smell of a rose.  
 When you're the smell of a rose,  
 people like you  
 and give you to someone else.  
 I'll never die, I'll be reborn  
 each summer, I'll come back  
 each summer, I'll be  
 the smell of a rose.

**AIR POEM Part 2** by Mrs. Vetter's 4/5 grade Class

If air were an animal, it'll be a bird  
 it'll be a pigeon, small and light. And it will  
 soar.  
 No, air would be a tiger because it destroys  
 things.

Air would be a horse, quiet and tame.  
 Horses are soft, usually. They flow  
 easily as the wind.

Air would be a dolphin, quiet at times,  
 yet if mad, it can be destructive.

Air would be a big fat blue whale and make  
 BIG SPLASHES.

Air would be a rhino -- he can move through  
 anything.  
 It'd be a cheetah. It can go a long way  
 and not get tired.

I'd like air to be a ladybug -- it can give luck  
 and  
 make wishes come true.

If I were air, I'd be afraid of fighting  
 with myself, and hurting people.  
 I'd be playful and cool people on hot days.

If I were air, I'd be afraid of fire  
 and pollution, of building machines and dust,  
 afraid of going into outer space  
 and dying there.

**WATER MAGIC**

Students often need help in starting to write freely and to give their imaginations free rein, this is more true of older students who feel their dignity/image may suffer if they say something far-fetched or not usual. Many of my workshops start out as play, to loosen up my students and get them into a spirit of play and let them know it is all right to have fun and take risks with their ideas.

I got this workshop from a Pennsylvania poet, Christopher Bursk with whom I taught a free evening writing class for the homeless at the Washington, D.C. Center for Creative on-Violence in 1989. For this class, I bring in water balloons filled with water and hand them out. Students are encouraged to hold the water balloons, feel their heft, weight, texture, and brainstorm along the following guidelines:- Teacher records what is said on large sheet of paper or the blackboard. Then we review these and edit and arrange into a group poem.

I were water, I'd be \_\_\_\_\_

(Each student names a kind of water and what it's doing and why it appeals)

Using metaphor, similes, describe the properties of water:

Water feels like \_\_\_\_\_

sounds like \_\_\_\_\_

smells like \_\_\_\_\_

looks like \_\_\_\_\_

If water were an animal, it'd be \_\_\_\_\_

If water were music, it'd be \_\_\_\_\_ (a harp? a drum? )

What is water's history? \_\_\_\_\_

What does water want? \_\_\_\_\_

What does water fear? \_\_\_\_\_

What can water teach us? \_\_\_\_\_ -

If water were magical, what would you have it do? \_\_\_\_\_ (Ask students to think about myths like the fountain of youth, the uses of water in religions, etc.)

**Exercise:**

Write a poem about your favorite form of water and how it makes you feel.

Write a poem about a dream or a person (relative, friend) in which water is involved.

**SAMPLE POEMS:**

Water shows no mercy if it is a mighty river.  
It rages on and on and on.  
When it rains, the river grows and becomes  
stronger.  
Then the burning sun comes out and weakens  
the river.  
The river roars and grabs, fights and pulls.  
It has no feelings, no sympathy.  
Its victim is anyone in the river.  
-- Nat Parry Grade 8  
Thomas Jefferson School

Water feels like a smooth, slow-motion dream  
that goes on  
and on forever. It feels heavy and swift, it goes  
on like a dream.  
■ Austin Hawkins, Gr. 8,  
■ Thomas Jefferson School

Water

Water is beautiful,  
Water is fun,  
Water flows nicely,  
Water glistens in the sun.  
Water is nice,  
Water neither cold or hot  
And when you make spaghetti, it  
boils in the pot.  
by Katherine A. Whatmore  
Grade 4

Water

Water flows like a Dove's beak glows.  
A person needs water to live their life.  
The things that live need water because  
almost everything needs a drink, even plants.  
Even when it's raining, you can have fun  
because you can pretend that the drops are you  
tiptoeing,  
trying to scare someone.  
Red is nice, green is great, but if we didn't have  
blue,  
I would probably invent it myself.

by Sarah Staab GR. 4

If I were water

If I were water, I'd be Ocean. No, too salty..  
. I'll have sharks in me.  
I'd a river without pollution ——  
I don't want to discovered, especially  
not by my brother.  
I'd be a fabled river on an undiscovered island.  
I'd be waterfall Snowman, Ice on a lake  
that people skate on.  
I'd be cascade of icicles on a roof,  
a fountain that people throw pennies in.  
I'd be water in a bottle waiting  
for my mother to drink me.

Water feels... heavy, splashy, wet.  
It moves around  
when you squeeze, it wants to pop out.

Water sounds like a hungry man's stomach,  
fish kicking, soda fizzing, a. boat,  
a ball rolling on the floor.

Water smells.. the Potomac River smells,  
like flour, seawater, seaweed, swimming  
pool chlorine,  
like dead fish, pollution.

Water fears nothing, water fears man, fears  
death  
by evaporation.

If water were an animal, it'd be an eagle that  
glides,  
a pterodactyl dinosaur, a dog,  
a clear slug.  
It would be a dove riding through the air.

by Grade 4, Oakview School.  
Ryan N. Pearson, Maggie Pancost, Valerie Mayworm,  
Katherine A. Whatmore, Yoon Kyung Mm, Diana  
Veiga, Sarah Staab & Lynda Modesto

**SNOW**

Snow is cold.  
 Snow is slippery.  
 Snow tastes like water.  
 Snow is white  
 like a cloud.  
 Snow is silent  
 when it falls.  
 Ice is slippery.  
 Ice crackles  
 when you step on it.  
 Ice feels hard.  
 When it snows,  
 me and my dad go sledding.  
 I do snowball fights with my friends.  
 We make a snowman.  
 I make igloos.

Snow is fun!  
 But snow melts in the sun.  
 -- by Ms. Darrigo's Kindergarten class  
 Jamestown Elementary School 2001  
 The rivers start to freeze  
 Everything is quiet again.  
 Nothing moves but the tumbling of snow.  
 Animals searching for food as they wonder  
 Where does the green go?  
 -- Steve Nelson, Gr. 8, T.J. School.

**SNOW**

If I were snow, I'll be  
 on a tree branch.  
 If I were snow, I'll be  
 falling.  
 If I were snow, I'll be a big blizzard.  
 If I were snow, I'll fall  
 on someone's house.  
 If I were snow, I would not want  
 to be stepped on.  
 If I were snow, I would wish  
 Never to melt.

By Ms. Fisher's Grade One class

**WATER**

If I were water, I'd be  
 in a cloud.  
 If I were water, I'd be  
 falling.  
 If I were water, I'd  
 join my friends and wave.  
 If I were water, I wouldn't want  
 to be polluted.  
 If I were water, I would wish for  
 oil to stay away.  
 If I were water, I'd change  
 with the temperature.  
 If I were water, I'd be  
 everywhere.

Mrs. Fisher's First Grade

**EARLY MEMORIES POEMS**

Memories are a rich resource for poems. The earliest thing you remember or any incident that has vividness means that it had made an impact for a reason, usually emotional, on you at the time. First comes the remembering, making notes as the memory unfolds and then, selecting details, arranging them in the best order for the poem and then checking for clarity. Often, students omit the most important bit of information e.g.: one student recalled being in a bath as a 2 year old, the lovely bubbles, being rushed to hospital and everyone being most anxious for her life. She omitted one small but needed detail — that she had drunk the bubble bath liquid — because she knew it and assumed it was obvious. I got this exercise from my friend Elaine Maggarell and it is one of my favorites. This reinforces the basics of good writing and coherent think, organization and presentation through practice in selecting details, and arranging the poem in the best order.

**Presentation:** I'm going to take you back in time. Use a sheet of paper to make notes. Write one note on each line. Then you'll turn these notes into a poem.

Go back in time to your earliest memory of a place. How old are you? What place are you in? What is around you? What is on the floor? What is hanging on the wall? What sounds do you hear - radio, TV, people speaking - what do they say? What smells are in the air? How do they make you feel? What is the last thing you put in your mouth? - thumb, pacifier? How did it taste? What is rubbing on your skin? Who is there with you? Write down what is said. How do you feel in this memory?"

In this time and place, what were you afraid of? What did you think might happen? What might happen to you?

What is confusing in this place and time? What always happens? What do you wish would happen that never happens? that sometimes happens

Why does this memory/incident have significance? What meaning do you see in it?  
I had a high school student whose earliest memory was sitting quietly in his mother's lap when he was three. Nothing happened in this memory. He just remember the peace of the memory. When he got to this final question, he thought about it and realized that was the last time he was an "only" child – his mother was pregnant with his brother. And was able to turn his memory notes into a beautiful poem.

Taking the notes you made, underline the interesting parts. Now number them in the order you plan to use them. Cross out the unimportant words or lines and add anything interesting that you can think of. Circle the interesting words, the ones with nice sounds and images.

If you like, you can find some words to repeat.

Add a metaphor or simile if it will make the notes more interesting, vivid E.g.: the big kitchen knife lay on the table like a threat. Her words came at me like thrown swords.

Now choose words and phrases from your notes to make a poem. You can add or change things to make the poem better. it need not be true; it must only feel true and right to you. DON'T TRY TO SHOCK. You are trying to share an experience.

Find a title for your poem - it can be a word or a phrase from the poem itself. Everyone will want to title their poem "My Earliest memory." Please don't state the obvious. Make your title work for the poem. Your title should be interesting and give a hint to what the poem is about or give some additional information that is not in the poem. Every word, phrase of the poem should be a necessary part of the poem. Cut out superfluous words that don't add to the poem.

### SAMPLE MEMORY POEMS

**WHEN** by Shirley Geok-lin Lim

When I was a child, I would watch the spray  
Break phosphorescence at my feet then run away.  
There was so much sea, always rhythmically  
And gently pulling to the horizon.  
There was the enormous starry clarity  
Of sky and, sharply carried up  
The breeze, the smells of pines and salty sea.  
It was a child's preoccupation  
To stare at the yellow coin of moon,  
To crumble pine needles between thumb and finger,  
Not thinking anything particular, to linger,  
Watching the trees bend in the wind, sea dance,  
Till you knew it was time to be home soon,  
And straightaway left with no backward glance.

**FAMILY FIGHT** by Hilary Tham

When I was nine, Father  
and Mother walked out on us,  
each swearing never to return.  
The neighbors flapped about,  
laying words in their path.  
In their anger, we were not their children  
but weapons to use against the other.  
All five of us ran after them  
casting their names like nets  
and stopped by the gate, unable  
to choose the parent to pursue.

Once in a happier time,  
when they were pleasant together,  
we visited a ruined temple.  
Its once-white walls were charred,  
their blood-red bricks exposed,  
the courtyard littered with roof tiles,  
pieces of broken gods.

Our parents returned the next day.  
They continued, unhappy with each other  
while I gathered fractured gods  
in dreams of broken temples.

Growing up in a dirt lane of shacks,  
far from the brick mansions of rich  
relatives, I did not feel poor.  
After all, our house had a zinc  
roof and a real cement floor.  
We had a father who worked, a mother  
who managed to feed us a little  
vegetable with rice  
even at month's end  
when neighbors' children  
ate gruel.

The nuns at school asked for help  
with the fair to raise money  
For The Poor. In a glow of goodwill  
I volunteered (it would only cost a dollar)  
a gallon of black sea-grass jelly  
to make drinks to sell.

Mother cried when I told her.  
It was the end of the month  
and her last dollar was for food.  
She gave me the dollar and we ate gruel  
that week, the first time I knew  
mothers can cry.

**THE LAST DOLLAR** by Hilary Tham**MEMORY POEMS**

At three, waiting to be led somewhere  
standing in bright grass, the smell filling  
my nose.  
There is silence, my parents in the background.  
A stone, perhaps a tombstone, perhaps  
a sign, it clouds only my vision.  
I have no fear as I feel the breeze sweep  
across me.  
Everything is crystal clear.  
My father takes my hand and I go.  
- David Bloomberg

My Memory

by Jamal Sanders, Gr. 7, Paul Jr., High

I was 11.  
I was in the hospital.  
My grandmother, uncle and mother

Surrounded me.  
I heard the radio and TV.  
They were talking about my education.  
I hugged my mom.  
I was afraid of her dying.  
I wish she was still here.  
My mom was sweet as a rose.  
She lives in my memory.  
\*\*

***My Memory***

by Casey Smith, Gr. 7, Paul Jr. High

I ate a bottle, actually I ate  
Two bottles of Flintstones vitamins.  
I was 4 years old.  
I am in my living room on my chair  
Reaching for the bottle on top of the fridge  
in the kitchen. I remember  
My shoes are on the floor and  
the top of the bottle is on the floor too.  
I hear the TV, it is on.  
There is no one talking, just me  
and my brother chowing down.  
My mom is sleeping.  
I smelled the vitamins in the bottle.  
It smelled wonderful.  
I had vitamins in my mouth.  
They tasted extraordinary.  
I feel good at first.  
People's hands at the hospital  
Pumping me like a person pumping gas.  
This memory came to me because  
It was appalling and surprising  
And an important lesson that night.  
\*\*

**THE DOLL** by Hilary Tham

Mother said:  
"I cannot afford to buy one but I will make you  
a doll."

2 Popsicle sticks  
crossed and tied with string.  
2 eyes with brows pencilled in.  
A quick stroke of another pen  
made a scarlet smiling mouth. Then  
a dab of glue and cotton wool.  
2 scraps of cloth from the sewing  
basket, with lace tacked on.

And Doll was fully formed, with  
a change of clothes to hand.

Doll lived under my pillow for years.  
She did not meet the porcelain doll,  
the plastic dolls on our street.  
They had real hair, hands with fingers  
and toes on their feet.

**TOUCH/ SENSES**

One of the most important tools of good writing is using words that bring images (word pictures) to the reader's mind. I tell my students: When you write a poem, you are making word pictures in the mind of your reader. Word choice is important. The word "daisy" or "hibiscus" will evoke a sharper and clear image than the word "flower". Frangipani or coconut palm is better than "tree".

Lesson: Making word pictures, using words with precision.

**WHAT'S IN A WORD** by Siv Cedering

Say "bird,"  
and a sparrow appears  
Inside you and ruffles  
its feathers.  
Say "cardinal"  
and the bird turns red.  
Suddenly it is winter,  
With a lot of snow. And look!  
There are sunflower seeds  
in the feeder.

**Leading Question:** What are the five senses? Have students name them: sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch.

What can touch tell you - e.g. feel your hand, your hair. Paper, sneakers, floor, carpet.

What are some words that give us "touch sensing"?

Have students feel wood, bark, paper, onion., plastic, etc. and name sensory words.

Rough, smooth, hard, soft, silky, thin, thick, tough, bumpy, sticky, fuzzy, dry wet, spongy, soapy, springy, wooly, heavy, boggy, cool, hot, cold, warm, sharp, blunt, solid, squishy.

Does a dog feel the same all over? What touch sense words might one use to describe your dog?

Use a simile to make it more interesting. Example: the tongue of my dog is rough as sandpaper.

Nest, think of an abstraction – something you cannot touch or handle, like emotions, ideas.

Happiness is my puppy licking my face with its wet tongue.

Friendship can be smooth as water or bumpy as tree bark.

Do a practice run on the black board with feelings suggested by the students.:

Anger feels like \_\_\_\_\_ ,

Sadness is like \_\_\_\_\_

Joy is like \_\_\_\_\_

Exercise: Write a poem about things you like and show the reader how they feel — sample:

I like rabbits — they're smooth.

I like cats — they're smooth

I like ice-cream, sold, soft and sweet.

I like a rabbit's nose — cold and slippery.  
I like plastic toys that are usually hard.  
I like sunflowers — they're smooth and bright yellow.  
I like honey flowers -- their insides feel weird.  
I like horses — they're big and hairy.  
I like a pony — it has a soft tail.  
When I'm sad, I feel wet and cold, like crying tears.  
When I feel mad, I feel hard as a rock.

By Mrs. Sistrunk's Kindergarten Class, Jamestown School

Rawan Alhhusami, Shah Azad, Paul Cavanaugh, Jordan Chiang, Kellie Cornwell, Raris El-Mi, Jonathan Howick, Giedre Kazragyte, James Kurael, Hannah Mayberry, Alexander McAuliffe, Xavier Palaathingal, David Romero, Shreya Sharma, Nader Sobhani, Muhammed Tanoli, Caitlin Thomas, Linda Tran, Reyna Umanzor, Jose Villatoro and Michael Webster

Exercise 2: Write an action poem: about things you like to do and how it feels to the 5 senses-- taste, smell, touch, hearing, sight. Pick interesting verbs, adverbs and adjectives and onomatopoeic words—words that sound like their meaning e.g. crunch, boom.

I like to catch new snow as it falls -  
Dry and white as paper.  
I like to walk in squishy snow  
When it melts.  
I like to walk when the snow is old and  
Hard as ice — it goes scrunch scrunch  
Under my boots like a giant eating popcorn.  
I like snow.

— Hilary Tham 3/3/99

**HOW TO... POEMS OR THE IMPERATIVE VOICE**

Telling someone how to do something that the student knows well—e.g. “How to dress like a COOL Kid”, “To make a terrific peanut butter sandwich”, “Making the walk to school shorter.” Using the imperative voice, speaking as an authority on a subject, can be very releasing to a poet. It also generates conditions for direct speech, terse and cogent language, the poet stays very concrete dealing with directions or instructions and can bring out very powerful poems. And there is always energy from the empowering position of “pointing out something that is clear, real and true to you!” The trick is to convince the reader in the poem. Scott Cairns does this in his poem “Imperative.”

***Imperative***

by Scott Cairns

The thing to remember  
is how tentative all of this  
really is. You could wake up dead.

Or the woman you love  
could decide you're ugly.  
Maybe she'll finally give up  
trying to ignore the way you  
floss your teeth when  
you watch television.  
All I'm saying is that  
there are no sure things here.

I mean, you'll probably wake up alive,  
and she'll probably keep putting off  
any actual decision about your looks.  
Could be she'll be glad your teeth  
are so clean. The morning could be  
full of all the love and kindness  
you need. Just don't go thinking  
you deserve any of it.

Exercise 1.: Write a poem telling a specific someone about something definite: e.g. the weather, how to make a bird-house, how to skin a cat, anything that you know or can fake a convincing tone and information on. Wearing the mask of “Teacher”, your tone can be playful, serious, sarcastic, ironic, as long as it is imperative (commanding), i.e. “I know what I’m talking about.”

Additional Exercises: Write a poem in the voice of someone who knows like a science teacher, Einstein, or a grandmother, giving directions on how to perform a science experiment to prove something or how to cook an egg, etc. Remember to make it interesting and add word pictures and use similes.

Or write a poem in the imperative voice explaining a law of physics like what causes potholes and what happens when your car drives over one

smashing pennies by James Hopkins

fish out your best one, put it on the tracks.  
sacrifice something but make it small.  
inhale diesel or creosote while you can.  
if the lineman comes, hit the dust.

remember what you can of ryegrass, rust,  
slag heaps. think of grease and smokestacks.  
the changes are small, but criminal.  
hopper-car skeletons, tankers, piggybacks.

an ear and steel are a tender match –  
listen and you'll hear the wheels.  
things like this you won't spend later,  
and that thrumming is the coming of autumn.

if you think of value, spit it out.  
consider ozone or the compression of air.  
don't worry, you've got plenty of dimes,  
rainbows in the oil by your boots.

it's ok now, we're a good ways back –  
is this what you had in mind?  
just kneel down here at the edge of the tracks.  
relax. she's right on time.

\*\*\*

Advice to Travelers  
by Hilary Tham

If you go  
into wayside woods.  
make noise, crush bracken,  
whistle a noisy tune.  
Do not step  
on the nose  
of an earth godling  
asleep in the ground.  
Give the tree spirit a chance  
to move before  
you piss on his foot.

If you offend  
a petty god with  
a human indignity,  
he could pluck a hair  
from his scalp and stick it  
in your rib  
to canker and spread  
till you are dead,  
or wish you were.

## **THE WISH POEM WORKSHOP**

Children love fairy tales and are enriched by the belief that the world is full of possibility and wonder. **I start this workshop by retelling an old fairy tale. The fisherman and the magical fish. Do not read the story. Tell it with your own appropriate details.**

Once upon a long time ago, there was a fisherman. He was a poor man. He had a little boat that he rowed out every day to catch fish. Then he took the fish he caught to market, sold the fish and with the money, bought food and took it home to his wife. One week he had little luck in his fishing. He did not catch any fish all week. Soon there was no more food in the house. He was worried but hopeful that he would catch some fish that day. All day long he sat and laid out his lines. But no fish nibbled on his hooks. Just when the sun was setting, he caught a fish. It was a big fish, a big beautiful fish. Its scales shone rainbow colors in the setting sun. The fisherman was happy. This fish would fetch him a good price and he would be able to buy lots of food with the money. He began rowing back to shore.

As he rowed, he heard a voice. “Let me go,” it said. Then he heard it again. “Let me go, and I will make you happy.” The fisherman thought he was getting dizzy and a little crazy from hunger and too much sun. He was hearing voices in the middle of the empty ocean. Never mind, he would soon have food and rest, after he sold his fish. He looked at his catch and couldn’t believe his eyes. Its mouth was opening and closing and words came from it. “I am a magic fish. Let me go, Fisherman, and I will give you three wishes.” And it said it again and again. Finally, the fisherman felt sorry for the fish. With a sigh, he stopped rowing. He took the hook out of the fish and put the fish over the side of his boat. The fish dove into the salt water. Then its head broke the surface of the dark water. It said, “Remember now, the first three things you wish for will come true. And you cannot use one of the three to wish for more wishes.”

By the time the fisherman reached the beach, he was wondering if it had all been a dream. Since he had no fish to sell, he went straight home. His wife too had been hungry all day and looking forward to his coming back with food. When she saw he had brought nothing, she remembered all the things he had done wrong in the past. And she scolded him for them again. He said, “Calm down, Wife. I had a strange thing happen to me today.” He told her about the fish and the three wishes. She got excited. “Oh, there are so many things we could wish for. A grand house with lots of servants. We could wish to own a supermarket – we’ll never be hungry again if we did...” She went on and on until the fisherman got impatient and said, “That’s all in the future. I wish we had a huge sausage right now. I’m so hungry.”

**Bing! There was a foot long kielbasa sausage on the kitchen table in front of him.**

“Look what you’ve done! You’ve wasted one of our three wishes!” screeched his wife. “You stupid man, I wish that sausage was on the end of your stupid nose!”

**Bing! The sausage leapt into the air and one end glued itself to his nose.**

The fisherman stared down at the end of his nose. The sausage was heavy, his nose began to ache from the weight of it. “Ow! Dnoo. Dnow see what you’ve done.” He groaned. His wife was horrified. They had only one wish left. They could wish for millions of dollars but there was no way they could be sure that a surgeon could remove the sausage from his nose. His wife often got mad at him but she loved him and did not want him to be unhappy. So finally, they agreed to use their last wish to wish the sausage off his nose. Bing! The sausage fell off his nose back on to the table. So they had sausage for their dinner. And they went to bed

wishing they had been smarter with their three wishes.

**Students usually have heard** a version of the THREE WISHES. It may be a magic tree and a poor woodcutter. That's fine. I usually allow time for them to share their version. Then I ask students what they would wish for if they were granted 3 wishes. If they want to write more wishes, that's fine as long as their wishes are interesting and imaginative. I tell them "Think about wishing more than just for money – think about being magical even... such as (see below)"

- if you could change form . . . be animal, plant etc , what would you wish for and why. to do what?
- what would you wish for yourself,(why) and your family?
- what would you wish for the world?
- OR inversion of wish, write a poem of what they fear e.g. A very very bad dream.

### **Who Knows?** By Pete Seeger

I wish this loving would never end.  
But when at last we go to sleep,  
Who knows, who knows?  
Some day, some night, we'll meet again.

I wish this summer would never end.  
But when at last I got to go back to town,  
Who knows, who knows?  
Someday we'll have another season in the sun.

I wish this life would never end.  
But when at last I got to go,  
Who knows, who knows?  
I think my human race will carry on.

I wish this race of ours would never end.  
But when at last we join the dinosaurs,  
Who knows, who knows?  
I think the good green earth will keep a-rolling on!

I wish this good green earth would never end.  
But when at last it burns or freezes cold,  
Who knows, who knows?  
I think our sparkling galaxy will keep a-glowing on!

I wish this milky way of stars would never end.  
But when & last it shrinks once more,  
Who knows, who knows?  
Someday it may explode anew.

I wish this loving world would never end.  
But when at last we go to sleep,  
Who knows, who knows?  
Some day, some night, we'll meet again!  
Then who knows, who knows?  
Our star might glow again.

Who knows, who knows?

Our earth might form again.  
Who knows, who knows?  
It might turn green again.  
Who knows, who knows?

\*\* \*\*

### ***If I could have***

by Ian Gale, Grade 3, Jamestown School

If I could have anything,  
I'd sail the seas.  
I'd sail a ship  
To Paris and Greece.  
My last trip would be to Africa.  
I'd get a lot of souvenirs  
To remember all the trips  
I'd taken all through the years.  
\*\*

**I wish** by RBF

I wish someday that the sun will rise listening to babies' cries, That day peace will grow and form even during a terrible thunderstorm. I wish I had a lot of money even enough to stop world hunger. With at! the money I wilt also provide for my future.

I would wish for more, I want to feel safe In this world I call home.

-----

**I wish** by Esme Morris

I wish I was the sun because I'd get to rotate around the earth.

People would be happy to see me.

I would get to see the moon. I would be bright yellow. People would draw me on their paper and I'd make people happy.

-----

**I wish** by Jonathan Cox

I wish there were no drugs and no fighting. I wish everything was good. I wish there would be a good chance for me to be in the NFL my sport is football. I wish I owned my own pet store. It would be called John's Exotic Pet Store.

**I wish** by Robert Baum

I wish I were a cat,  
they eat mice.

I wish to be a bird  
cause they soar high.

I wish I were a cheetah  
cause they run fast  
and eat other animals.

**I wish** by Dana Southard

I wish to play in the NFL because I will prove my dad wrong. I would play at any position that they wanted me to!

I wish that I could have all the money in the world. Why I would is because I would help people out like helping homeless, poor people and get people a car when they need one.

I wish that I will get my life straight so I will be good to all of my friends and family

\*\*

I wish Bill Gates would give me all his money and annual income so that I could spend it on a home and have all the video games systems that were ever built.

I wish that people were off the earth so that no animals or habitats would ever be in danger of extinction.

I wish my teachers wouldn't give me homework.

by Eric Zimmerman

\*\*

I wish I was a dog. I wish I was A cat. I wish I was Nature's king Because then I would be all that. I wish I was a dog because I would bark and run. I would be my master's soulmate as his life went on. I wish I was a cat - I would purr and curl. My master's lap's would be my place for he would rub my tail.

by Michael Yates

\*\*

**I wish** by Ben Gavares, Gr. 7, Williamsburg

I wish I were a big blob of mercury. So I would never die and I would go through things.

I wish I were a bald eagle so people would become concerned and people would look up to me. Also so people would hear what I have to say.

I wish I were a Biohazard sign so I could warn people of danger.

I wish I were a flower so I could shine happiness all over the world.

I wish I were a pencil so I could draw smiles on every sad person's face.

I wish I were summer. 'Cuz there's no school!

I wish I could go back in time so I could change mistakes.

\*\*

**Wishes** by Brian Carte

I want to be Sadness  
 Because Every Body is sad  
 some point in their Life.  
 It's not just a feeling, it's a  
 state of mind,  
 an idea,  
 a Problem  
 a Burden  
 Sadness  
 Depressed like The Dark  
 Side of the Moon.

\*\*

**I wish** by Jose Centeno

I wish to be Fire because I could kill  
 people that I don't like. Fire is big or  
 small. It is helpful and terrible.  
 When it gets out of control, it makes  
 a lot of trouble, but when it is small,  
 it can be helpful to you all.

\*\*

**I would not wish** by Eric Gardner

I would not want to be money  
 because people put it in their shoe  
 or their sock. If you are not  
 in those places, you are in a cash register  
 waiting for the next person to own you.

\*\*

Black Dream

I had a dream last night. I dreamed about a  
 world. A world filled with hurt and sorrow. It  
 was dirty and bulging with greed. Nobody ever  
 said "Hello, how are you today?" or  
 "Do you need help?" None ever thought of  
 anyone else but  
 themselves. It was awful. Now that I think  
 about it, it was more of a nightmare. And it's  
 becoming a reality.

By Iman Jackson

**I would not want** by Abel Guerra

I would not want to be a baseball  
 because you get hit by a bat.  
 I would not want to be a piece of  
 wood because they will put a nail in you.

-----

**Wishes, etc.** by Brad Baker

I wish I could make and set the laws in  
 America. I'm not sure yet; I think there  
 shouldn't be age limits on most things.

I don't want to be a cop, because they get shot  
 at.

I don't want to be a cow, pig or any other  
 animal because they get killed and eaten.

I don't want to be a student, because they get  
 bossed around by teachers.

I don't want to be a masseuse because I would  
 feel men.

\*\*

**My Wishes**

by Kase Suyderhoud,, Gr. 1, Jamestown

I wish I had 2 golden retriever puppies.  
 I wish I had a magic set with spells to make  
 my brother disappear.  
 I wish I had a mansion with servants.

\*\*

**I Wish** by Lauren Wackerle, Gr. 1

I wish that dogs in the pound weren't put to  
 sleep.  
 I wish panda bears weren't almost extinct.  
 I wish Martin Luther King, Jr. wasn't shot.  
 I wish I was a billionaire.

\*\*

**A Wish** by Abbey Hodges, Gr. 1

I wish I had a swimming pool.  
 My second wish is a big house.  
 My third wish is that the world is upside-down  
 So people would walk on the sky.  
 My fourth wish is that I had a bird.

\*\*

**On the Outside and Inside**

by Louis Pepe, Grade 5, Jamestown School, 2001

On the  
Outside  
I'm an  
Eagle,  
Proud  
And  
Showing off.  
But—  
On The Inside  
I'm  
A  
Clam concealed  
In  
The shadows.

On the  
Outside  
I'm a  
Dog  
Friendly  
And Social  
But—  
On  
The  
Inside  
I'm  
A  
Mouse  
Timid  
And  
Meek.

On  
The  
Outside  
I'm  
The  
Sun  
Glistening  
And Giving  
Light  
But—  
On  
The  
Inside  
I'm  
Pluto  
Tiny  
And  
Unnoticed.

I wish I had feathers, soft  
 as silk they would be.  
 A ebony black swan  
 I wish I could be. And I'd fly,  
 and soar high above the sea.  
 Where would I go? To Japan  
 with the Japanese and learn  
 what they know.  
 But I wouldn't stay there for  
 I'd be free, free to do anything,  
 free to be me.

by Iman Jackson, Grade 6  
 Parkview School

I wish I were  
 an angel in heaven because  
 they are so beautiful and wear white  
 long gowns and fly  
 on a big white cloud in the sky.  
 by Rochelle Beckham, Gr. 6

I wish I were a comedian to make  
 people laugh.  
 I wish I had ten trillion dollars  
 so I can spend it. I wish for the world  
 the drugs were gone.

By Maurice Lee, Gr. 6

I wish I had wings.  
 I wish I had feathers.  
 I wish I were a mocking bird so  
 I can fly high in the sky and go  
 where I want to go and change  
 back into a human when I want to.  
 by Courtney Bailey, Gr. 6

\*\*

I wish I were a mocking bird  
 I wish I were a king.  
 I wish I were a prince  
 who'd walk around and sing.

I wish I could stop the world and change

the things that are bad and make all  
 little children never ever be sad.

by Taneal Wilson, Gr. 6

\*\*

I wish I were a teacher that can help  
 children with their work. I wish I had  
 a lot of money so that I can build houses  
 for the homeless, so that people will not  
 be sleeping on the street. I wish for the world  
 to be peaceful with loving and caring people.  
 I wish for the world to be without drugs  
 because of the killing and death. And I wish  
 for the world to stop fighting.

By Allison Henderson, Gr. 6

\*\*

I wish I was grownup.  
 I wish I were a lawyer  
 who helps mothers get child support  
 from their runaway husbands.

I wish I had a big house with a big yard  
 and lots of money and lived in Harlem, New  
 York.

I wish I had a pathfinder car.  
 by LaJonya Whittaker, Gr. 6

\*\*

I wish I were a baby so that I would not  
 have to go to school, and all day long  
 I'll just sit and look up at you. I wish  
 I were a baby so that I would be spoiled  
 and everything I cry for would come to me.  
 I wish I were a baby so I can re-live my  
 mistakes  
 and take each day slowly as I grow up again.  
 I wish I were a mosquito so I can bite  
 people who don't like me and  
 I would be healthy by drinking their blood.

By Michelle Dealer

## FOCUS ON FORM

## LIMERICKS

### **Purpose 1:**

To use the limerick form to create original humorous rhymes.

### **Introduction:**

Most students will find limerick writing an enjoyable activity, because limericks can be just as ridiculous as each author wishes. Once they have a solid introduction to the limerick, writing a limerick is easy. The teaching value lies in two areas:

Disciplined expression.

Self-expression.

**Disciplined Expression:** Limerick writing requires strict adherence to the patterns of rhyme, rhythm, and the number of syllables per line. This will make students more acutely aware of these elements, will increase their respect for poetry as a discipline, and will guide their attitudes toward a healthy acceptance of personal orderliness and self-control.

**Self-Expression:** Encourage all students to be active participants - they are capable of writing and reciting their own original limericks. One of the chief underlying facts recognized as sound teaching is that a student must generate his own thoughts and apply new skills himself, if the values of these skills are to be lasting. The memorization of rules and the mute acceptance of someone else's efforts cannot alone develop a student's potential

### **Purpose 2:** After following this unit, the student will:

be familiar with the limerick form;  
 experience listening to poetry for enjoyment;  
 be introduced to interpretive reading;  
 recognize the rhyme patterns in poetry;  
 recognize the rhythm pattern of limericks;  
 recognize that limericks are humorous;  
 appreciate limericks as a form of creative expression;  
 have attempted writing a limerick;

### **Ages/Grades**

Most students ages 10 and up will be able to successfully complete all of the suggested activities.

### **Materials**

A number of books containing limericks, other compositions, and the art of Edward Lear and others such as Lewis Carroll, Dr. Seuss, and Shel Silverstein. A rhyming dictionary is helpful.

### **LESSON:**

--The limerick got its name from the place where it began--Limerick, England. Children love rhyme and rhythm. Limericks satisfy these and hone their enjoyment of poetry.

The Limerick is still a most popular nonsense verse form today. The poem consists of 5 lines rhyming AABBA. Lines 3 and 4 are some times written as a single line with an internal rhyme.

-- / -- / -- / (a)	-- / -- / -- / (a)
-- / -- / -- / (a)	-- / -- / -- / (a)
-- / -- / -- / (a)	-- / -- / (b) -- / -- / (b)
-- / -- / (b)	-- / -- / -- / (a)
-- / -- / -- / (a)	

To help students get started, here's some helpful information about writing limericks. The last words of the first, second, and fifth lines rhyme with each other (A), and the last words of the third and fourth lines rhyme with each other (B). Here's an example:

There was an old man from Peru, (A)  
 da DUM da da DUM da da DUM  
 who dreamed he was eating his shoe. (A)  
 da DUM da da DUM da da DUM

He awoke in the night (B)  
da DUM da da DUM  
with a terrible fright, (B)  
da da DUM da da DUM  
and found out that it was quite true. (A)  
da DUM da da DUM da da DUM

I ask students to write a limerick, and remind them to make sure that it has the AABBA rhyme pattern. And to make sure it also has the same Da DUM da da DUM da da DUM rhythm pattern. Students can recite their limerick, substituting "da" for all unaccented or unstressed syllables and "DUM" for all the accented or stressed syllables.

Ideas for new limericks can come from almost anywhere. For example, your students could write about their city, state, country, or name or about political or social conditions of any historical period they are studying.

There once was a man named Paul  
 He wanted to go to a costume ball  
 He decided to risk it  
 And go as a biscuit  
 But a dog ate him up in the hall.  
 -- Anonymous

\*\*

**The Boy** by Jake Ward, Gr. 4

There once was a boy with a grin  
 Who had very sensitive skin.  
 He got a bruise  
 Tripping over his shoes  
 And never did it again.

\*\*

There once was a dog named Bob  
 Who wanted to eat a frog  
 But the frog was quite fat  
 So they both just sat  
 So there they sit, the dog and the frog.  
 -- Chris Kaas, Gr. 6, Williamsburg

\*\*

There once was a president named Bill,  
 White water drove him up a hill,  
 All the lawyers were talking,  
 About sending him walking,  
 But he managed to escape without frill.  
 -- Thomas Woo

\*\*

There once was an artist named Huddy,  
 Whose neighbors all said was quite nutty.  
 He modeled, they say,  
 In real sculptor's clay,  
 But really he used silly putty.

\*\*

There once was a lady named Pat,  
 Who always wore the same blue hat.  
 Until one fall day,  
 To her great dismay,  
 It blew far away just like that!  
 -Jessica Beckwith '91

#### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON THE LIMERICK

The Elements Of Limericks: There are five lines.

Rhyming scheme (a a b b a):

Lines 1, 2, and 5 rhyme

Lines 3 and 4 rhyme.

Note: Lines 3 and 4 are sometimes printed on the same physical line.

Alternately, you can count syllables. Some of the examples in textbooks vary, but the number of syllables usually follow this pattern:

Line 1-- 8 syllables.

Line 2 -- 8 syllables.

Line 3 -- 5 syllables.

Line 4 -- 5 syllables.

Line 5 -- 8 syllables.

Rhythm:

Lines 1, 2, and 5 contain 3 accented syllables.

Lines 3 and 4 contain 2 accented syllables.

Meter:

There is no required metrical scheme, but each line usually has a masculine ending — that is that each phrase is always stressed, or emphasized, on the last syllable.

Humor:

Limericks thrive on the lack of harmonious agreement between parts. They contain a broad humor that

most students over 8 to 10 years old appreciate. Junior High age students seem to really appreciate the limerick form. Younger students, preschool to eight, really enjoy the rhythm and rhyme of the limerick.

EXERCISE: Using one of these suggested lines (or one of your own), write a limerick:

1. There was a young lady who said,
2. There once was a boy with a grin,
3. An agile young gymnast named Mary

### **Hillary and Bill**

Hillary and Bill went up the hill  
to fetch a pail of whitewater,  
when Congress found out,  
Bill suffered a drought,  
and all of his respect was slaughtered.

-- Yohan Ferdinando

---

There once was a bald man named Tom  
He smelled just like a stink bomb  
His teeth was all yellow  
T'was an ugly young fellow  
And he got all his looks from his mom.

- Jesse Knipling

There once was a girl named Jill,  
She married a guy named Bill.  
They had a lot of years Without any tears  
And their favorite food is krill.

- Newton Graca

Pres. Bill Clinton felt quite blue,  
He dreamed pretty Paula said she'd sue.  
He woke in a fright  
On a white house night  
And found his dream girl had spoken true.

- Hilary Tham

**CLERIHIEWS**

**The Clerihew** is a comparatively new form of verse. It got its name from its inventor, a writer of detective stories, E. C. Bentley, whose middle name was Clerihew. Clerihews are short; they are never more than four lines and they always begin with the name of a famous character, but the facts about him/her don't always have to be true. Often, these are exaggerated and purposely wrong.

Edward the Confessor  
Slept under the dresser.  
When that began to pall,  
He slept in the hall.  
■ E. C. Bentley

Said Sir Christopher Wren,  
"I'm having lunch with some men.  
If anyone calls,  
Say I'm designing Saint Paul's."  
■ E. C. Bentley

When Alexander Pope  
Accidentally trod on the soap,  
And came down on the back of his head  
Never mind what he said.  
■ E. C. Bentley

Edgar Allan Poe  
Was passionately fond of roe.  
He always liked to chew some  
When writing something gruesome.  
■ E. C. Bentley

That famous lady Mona Lisa,  
Whose smile has been a real teaser,  
Will never tell this world we're in  
What's behind her fabled grin.  
■ Anonymous

Basketball ace, Dr. J  
Is seven foot tall, so they say.  
His only problem is buying shoes,  
But that's why they invented canoes.  
■ Hilary Tham

Alfred, Lord Tennyson  
Lived upon venison;  
Not cheap, I fear,  
Because venison's deer.  
■ Louis Untermeyer

Francesca de Rimini  
Lived in a chiminey,  
Full of ghouls in the gloam.  
But still, home is home.  
■ Louis Untermeyer

Although the Borgias  
Were rather gorgeous,  
They liked the absurder  
Kind of murder.  
■ Louis Untermeyer

Albert Einstein's crooked nose  
Never seemed a curse.  
While gazing down in repose,  
He found the Universe!  
■ Tara Farr

Timothy Viegh says, "I am not the bomber,"  
America thinks, - "He's a goner,"  
His sister says, "He's the guy,"  
If they believe her, no more will he be able to  
lie  
by Geoff Roulil, Grade 8

Lisa Gnugnoli wrote a poem,  
The poem made no sense.  
She crumpled it up and threw it away  
And then jumped over a fence.  
- Lisa Gnugnoli, Grade 7

Bill Clinton had a dream  
That he was punching a door.  
When he woke up,  
He was punching Al Gore.  
-- William Mendoza, Grade 6

**POLITICAL NURSERY RHYMES**

**Nursery Rhymes make wonderful templates/ structures for political or social satires.** Before asking the students to write nursery rhyme template poems, have them recite their favorite nursery rhymes. Then have them write a poem to the beat /rhythm of the nursery rhyme they decide to use as their model.

Mayor Marion Barry,  
His wife so contrary,  
How does D.C. grow?  
With bullet shells, and deep drug wells  
and pretty policemen all in a row.

- Rebecca Miller Gr. 7

**The following sample poems are from CECIL RAJENDRA's Papa Moose's Nursery Rhymes For our Times.**

What are little boys made of?  
MacDonalds and Coca Cola  
Lucky Strike and a Honda,  
That's what little boys are made of.  
\*\*

What are little girls made of?  
Cartier, Ricci and Coco Chanel,  
Heavy eye-shadow and lots of gel,  
That's what little girls are made of.  
\*\*

File my case, file my case  
Lawyer man!  
Win me my case  
As fast as you can.

Inflate it and pad it  
And mark it up forty  
Per cent for that commission  
You're squeezing from me.  
\*\*

If all the world were a garbage pile  
and all our sea was slime,  
And all our trees in paper mills,  
Where would we live in ten years' time.  
\*\*

Ring a ring o' soldiers  
A silo full of bombs.  
Achtung! Achtung!  
We all fall down.

\*\*  
Simple Shi Mun was in Tiananmen  
walking around the square.  
Asked a guard of Simple Shi Mun,  
"What's this noisy affair?"

\*\*  
Said Simple Shi Mun to the guardsman,  
"We're singing for democracy."  
Said the guardsman shooting Simple Shi Mun,  
"Indeed! You won't get any!"

\*\*  
Ali, Ali, farmer extraordinary  
How does your garden grow?  
With herbicides  
And pesticides  
And mutant broccoli all in a row.

\*\*  
Dalai Lama  
A lama in Tibet  
sat in his turret  
Quietly meditating away.

Along came a soldier  
Sent down from China  
And now the lama's an émigré.  
\*\*

## CONCRETE OR SHAPE POEMS

Poets use the concrete poem to explore how a poem's look affects its impact. Students can have fun making poems that also look like the subject of the poem. Have students write down words that they think could be made into concrete poems. Here are a couple of examples.

This poem by Roger McGough makes a pun in the title so that it means middle-aged love and also a tennis score. The reader's eye moves back and forth across the net, imitating the tug of war between the two people in the tennis game and the relationship.

40-----Love

middle	aged
couple	playing
ten	nis
when	the
game	ends
and	they
go	home
the	net
will	still
be	be-
tween	them

Life  
 is like a tree  
 living like you and me.  
 It starts with the seed  
 that grows like a weed  
 Up to the sky,  
 way up high.  
 Breathing the air  
 (there's plenty to spare).  
 They grow into saplings, competing for light.  
 They struggle to live in a very hard fight.  
 Finally the weak are weeded out,  
 leaving room to the others, no doubt,  
 that stayed alive  
 and continued to thrive.  
 Your own life is always at risk  
 but the tree will live, though the weather is brisk.  
 When your life is ending, it withers away,  
 caving in and breaking while the branches sway.  
 Solid and sturdy.  
 Life is like a tree.  
 ■ by Ashley Seitz, Gr. 7



## **ACROSTIC POEMS**

An acrostic is a poem that has a visual dimension in that the letters of the subject word is written in bold print and form the beginning letters of the lines. Even very young children can write or patch together simple acrostics. The very young write only one related word or phrase next to each letter of a word listed downward on their page.

Acrostic poems are easy and fun to do. Several of the Psalms and many pre-19<sup>th</sup>. century Hebrew poems are acrostics. In an acrostic poem, the first letters of the lines spell out a word or some words, such as the student's name, part of the alphabet (or the whole alphabet), or a word that has something to do with the poem. For example, the poem below spells out the word Apple.

**A**nbody can  
**P**ick one up at the store  
**P**luck a juicy red off the tree  
**L**icking good  
**E**ating.

It is helpful to discuss the power of verbs here: how action words, active verbs help to energize a poem or sentence and conjure up word pictures. Verbs for movement: “stroll, amble, pace, run, skip, plod.” Remind students to put in appropriate action verbs in their poem to make it come alive.

**EXERCISE:** Choose a place or person and spell the word(s) vertically down the left side of the page so that they form a column. Choose a word, name or thing that really interests you. Try to reach deep into your feelings when you write. As you write the poem, start each line with a word that begins with the letter you've already written on the line.

After the poems are written, identify the verbs and see if they are the best and most appropriate verbs you can think of. Make the poem almost jump off the page because you have such good verbs.

Acrostic poems do not have to rhyme. Students may rhyme them if they wish. Since these poems are meant to be visual as well as oral, the class should be given copies of the sample poems.

**NOTE:** This form is good for review of Science, geography, history material. e.g.: OXYGEN, NEWTON, COLUMBIA, ZAMBIA, NAPOLEON, ANCIENT GREEKS, etc.

**M**aybe it was something about the soft  
**E**arth, or maybe it was something about the  
**A**ir's sweet freshness. Maybe the way the wind cooled us  
**D**own. Or the way the wind blew the leaves around.  
**O**r it could have been the way everything seemed full of peace, the way the  
**W**ind seemed to love this place.

■ by Rebecca SuYing Goldberg

**R**acial prejudice  
**O**f the past: white people lording it  
**O**ver anyone with darker skin.  
**T**heir grandchildren say they're sorry and  
**S**till clutch their wallets nervously when we are near.  
 -- by Hilary Tham

The following is a fine acrostic poem by Lewis Carroll remembering the day when he started telling the “Alice” story to the three Lidell girls. Alice Pleasance Lidell was the inspiration for his books: Alice in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass.

A boat, beneath a summer sky  
Lingering onward dreamily  
In an evening of July --

Children three that nestle near,  
Eager eye and willing ear,  
Pleased a simple tale to hear ——

Long has paled that sunny day:  
Echoes fade and memories die:  
Autumn frosts have slain July.

Still she haunts me, phantomwise,  
Alice moving under skies  
Never seen by waking eyes.

Children yet, the tale to hear,  
Eager eye and willing ear,  
Lovingly shall nestle near.

In a Wonderland they lie  
Dreaming as the days go by,  
Dreaming as the summers die:

Ever drifting down the stream —  
Lingering in the golden gleam---  
Life, what is it but a dream?

## ALLITERATION POEMS

Alliteration is the literary device where beginning consonants are repeated for musical effect. Children enjoy tongue twisters such as the following:

Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.  
 Did Peter Piper pick a peck of pickled peppers?  
 If Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers,  
 Where is the peck of pickled peppers Peter Piper picked?

OR:

How much wood could a woodchuck chuck  
 if a woodchuck could chuck wood?  
 As much wood as a woodchuck would chuck  
 if a woodchuck could chuck wood.

OR: She sells seashells on the sea shore.

APPLICATION: This is good for reinforcing the learning of alphabets as well as to induce play and enjoyment of the music of language. I read aloud the above poems and invite the students to recite other "TONGUE\_TWISTER" poems they know. We discuss what these poems have in common. (1. They all have many words that begin with the same letter. 2. They don't make sense. 3. They are humorous or downright silly, but lots of fun to say.)

Have children practice orally, then write alliterative lines using the first letters of their names. Then have them do an Acrostic poem using their own first names.

Or they can do a Alphabet Acrostic or a numeric. Numeric alliteration example follows.

One old ox opening oysters with onions.  
 Two toads riding tame tigers and drinking tea.  
 Three turtles totally tired, trotting to Turkey.  
 Four frazzled frogs frying French fries.  
 Five feathered flamingos flying fast to Florida.  
 Six simple Simons sweeping snow.  
 Seven stubborn snakes slithering up a sky-scraper.  
 Eight elegant elephants eating eggs with eggplant.  
 Nine neat nieces nibbling nougats.  
 Ten tipsy tomcats tap-dancing on a typewriter.

### SAMPLE poems

Mary met monkeys, made monkeys marshmallows.  
 Justine just jang-jing genie.  
 ■ Mary Dodson, Gr. 4

Mary made many marshmallow monkeys.  
 Maria helped make Mary's marshmallow monkeys.  
 Mary and Maria made money making marshmallow monkeys.  
 Marsha bought Mary's marshmallow monkeys.  
 ■ Shannon Briggs, Gr. 4

Patty picked a perfect pumpkin on a peaceful plain.  
 Sally saw a skiing sailor.  
 Nick never needs to nip at nuts.  
 Hippos have huge hiccups.  
 Zicky like zany zebras.  
 Caroline caught a cold.  
 ■ Justine Sequeira

Alec asked alligators for an apple at a auditorium.  
Justine just jingled a jingle bell in January.  
Harry had a hairy hat.  
Douglas dreamed about dogs in December.  
    ■ Sam Easley, Gr. 4

Douglas dug up dumb dogs in the daytime.  
Harry hopped huge hippos after having hiccups.  
John jumped jagwories while being Joker John.  
Betty bought big bright blue bubbles at Best  
    Buy for the Best Buy in Bubbleland.  
Charlie caught catfish with chalk in the core of the computer.  
Mary made marshmallows for monkeys in Montana.  
Alec fed alligators apples and apricots in Alabama.  
-- Douglas Wackerle

## HAIKU OR MAKING EVERY WORD COUNT

Winter is snow on  
trees, ground. Freeze in the cold snow  
Anybody can...  
-- Makara Berry, Grade 3, Oakview School

Branches reaching out  
Reaching for the pale blue moon  
Reaching on and on.  
-- Donna Xiao, Grade 6, Williamsburg School

The above are examples of haiku. Haiku don't rhyme but they are supposed to have seventeen sounds (syllables)—five in the first line, seven in the second line and five in the third line.

This Japanese form is like a telegram. So you have to cut what you want to say to the bone. Haiku means no unnecessary words and is good practice in editing and language economy. One definition of poetry is “Saying something the best way in the fewest possible words.”

There are six simple rules for writing haiku:

1. A haiku has seventeen sounds /syllables in a sequence of 5 - 7 - 5
2. It must contain something of nature in it e. season. a bird. insect etc.
3. It is always specific, a particular event or observation, not a generalization.
- 4 It is usually in the present tense
5. Its aim is to convey emotion by describing an aspect of nature.
6. The title can be any length - use it to add to the poem.

Any poem must convey emotion but haiku is a special way of communicating emotion by linking human emotion with a observed aspect of nature happening. The haiku works by suggestion. Sentences can be left unfinished: the use of three dots at the end is common

Exercise 1: Write a group haiku - brainstorm a nature image. plus the emotion you want to convey, then pare it down to the 17 syllabic count into lines of 5,7,5 syllables.

Exercise 2: Write a linked haiku or a group of haiku to make a cumulative poem about a connected theme.

Women by Hilary Tham from Bad Names For Women

Down among ants, one  
forgets how slow a tree leans  
against changing sky.

The silence of eyes  
is the silence of old oak  
holding ant cities.

Go watch the wild geese  
fly past the tethered moon.  
Write our names in water.

To get the true feeling of Japanese haiku, translators do not always observe the syllabic count. The following three haiku in Japanese are translated by Robert Haas.

The crane's legs  
have gotten shorter  
in the spring rain

■ Basho

As for the hibiscus  
on the roadside—  
my horse ate it.

■ Basho

Autumn moonlight—  
a worm digs silently  
into the chestnut.

■ Basho

Garden butterfly:  
baby crawls, it flies,  
she crawls, it flies.

■ Issa

Don't worry, spiders,  
I keep house  
casually.  
-- Issa

---

**Colonial Times-- A Haiku Sequence**  
by Hilary Tham

1700's Toothbrushes

Twigs are hard on teeth.  
No wonder George Washington  
got wooden dentures.

Pioneer Hygiene

Colonials disliked  
water; bathed once in summer,  
never in winter.

---

Outhouse

Too far in winter,  
too near in summer. Always  
an inconvenience!

Electricity

Ben Franklin seeking  
lightning with a kite and key,  
finds and cries, "Ouchie!"

1776

The Brits liked us fine  
taxing our doors, stamps, tea, till  
Revolution time!

You may also wish to introduce the student to The Senryu. The senryu is a Japanese poem structurally similar to the haiku but concentrates on human rather than physical nature. Many students, especially boys, will find this more pleasing as they often prefer to write about topics such as playing basketball, soccer and so on.

**ROLLING HAIKU**

After my students have gained familiarity with writing haiku, I have them play a game I call Rolling Haiku. Actually, a favorite party game of Japanese poets called the Renga is a form of rolling haiku.

Exercise 1: Renga: Here, participants take turns making up a haiku on the spot by a daisy chain i.e. participant #2 writes a haiku spinning off participant #1's haiku and so on.

[Optionally, participant #2 can take the last line of haiku #1 and make another haiku using that as the first line. Participant #3 takes last line of #2's haiku to begin another haiku with line3 of the preceding haiku.]

EXERCISE 2. Another form of rolling haiku is to connect each haiku by a couple: two seven syllable lines. This introduces another disciplined form of Japanese poetry -- the Tanka. The Tanka, like the Haiku, focuses on nature and seasons but is a bit longer. It is also an older form of poetry, dating to the fourth century. It consists of five lines and 31 syllables distributed according to the pattern 5 - 7 - 5- 7- 7.

Every one takes a paper and writes a haiku on it. Pass the paper. The next person writes 2 lines of seven syllables below the haiku, that connects one thing or word from the preceding stanza and turns the haiku into a tanka. Pass the paper. Next person writes a haiku related to something in the preceding tanka. So the order goes Haiku → tanka → haiku → tanka → haiku → tanka → haiku → tanka until about 6 - 10 people have had a say on each paper. Since everyone starts a paper, everyone should be working on a rolling haiku at any given moment during this exercise. Have students read aloud the group poem they wrote the last stanza for.

EXERCISE 3. Variation on this exercise is to have the group begin with a starter haiku -- the same one for all and you/they will be amazed at how many different directions each poem goes from the same starting point. After the completion of the rolling haiku, each student can write their chosen rolling haiku on a rice-paper scroll (one stanza per section) and draw a Chinese brush and ink image to complete the group work. See Sample rolling tanka below.

Cuckoo singing loud.  
I have nothing to do now,  
Neither does the weed.

Weeds in the field grow and grow  
Being old, I shrink and shrink

In the fields, weeds and  
a lone black crow crying out  
"There is nothing to eat".

Nothing is good to eat when  
you've the 'flu or mother scolds.

Listen to the child  
crying, abandoned in the  
backyard with dead grass.

The winds blow cold and white.  
We shall have snow by and by.

A snowy morning.  
Chewing dried salmon – alone.  
Happy by myself.

Happy sound of children's play  
in snow. I stay by the fire.

--- Hilary Tham 2/25/99

**CINQUAIN**

The Cinquain is not of Japanese origin as many imagine because of its similarity to haiku and tanka. As developed by Adelaide Crapsey, cinquains consist of 5 thought lines that follow a 2-4-6-8-2 syllable pattern for a total of 22 syllables.

Mother  
washing clothes for  
the family, wishes  
she was not aging, but a child  
again.

Some teachers have simplified this form so that the number of words rather than syllables per line is the major structural requirement of the cinquain:

first line = one word  
second line = two words  
third line = three words  
fourth line = four words  
fifth line = one word

Squirrel  
deftly scampers  
up Birch tree,  
hiding acorn treats from  
me.

**DIAMANTE**

The diamante, devised by Iris Tiedt, is a relatively structured form comprised of seven lines that contain a contrast. Not only highly disciplined this form is great for reviewing (even teaching) the parts of speech. The diamante is seven lines of poetry shaped like a diamond. It is about two things (nouns) that show a contrast. The diamante follows this pattern:

First Line: Noun (word that names an object or idea)

Second Line: two adjectives (that describe the noun in line 1)

Third Line: three participles (verbs with -ing or -ed endings) associated with the noun in line 1)

Fourth line: four words - two referring to the noun in line 1, two to the noun in line 7).

Fifth Line: three participles (that are associated with the noun in line 7).

Sixth Line: two adjectives (that describe the noun in line 7)

Seventh Line: Noun (which can be another word for the noun in line 1 [see Pattern A] or the opposite of the noun in line 1 [See pattern B])

**Here is an example of Pattern A: (using connected ideas)**

Love  
sunny, joyful,  
Caring, sharing, kissing,  
happy together, never apart,  
Lasting, smiling, warming,  
gentle, sweet,  
Happiness.

■ Hilary Tham

**Here are examples of Pattern B (using opposites)**

Cat  
Independent, lazy  
meowing, lying, sleeping,  
slow, relaxed, active, fast,  
running, jumping, barking,  
dependent, strong,  
Dog

■ Anthony Duff, Grade 8

School

Long, arduous,  
Studying, persisting, learning  
homework, anxiety...leisure, relief,  
traveling, exploring, relaxing,  
short, delightful

Vacation

■ Anonymous

Poem

short, picturesque,  
rhyming, singing, feeling,  
using words...using silence  
unmoving, shining, glowing  
silent, colorful

Painting

■ Hilary Tham

Some ideas for writing diamantes :

Babies/ School children

Mountains/ Beaches

Cassettes/ CDs

Moms/ Dads

Lakes/ Rivers

Houses/ Apartments

## THE LIST POEM OR RAINDROPS ON ROSES

Children love to think and talk about themselves — it’s all part of the necessary process of finding out who and what they are, part of the need to define their relation to others and the world and society. The LIST POEM is an excellent device to get them started on writing with a favorite subject in hand, “How things affect them” and focuses them on the concrete in their writing. Making a list is a very useful poetic device for generating the specific, tactile, sensuous substance of the poem. I would suggest students vary the pace or movement of the poem by putting in a statement sentence now and again. In order for it to work, the list must be concrete and specific, making word pictures in the reader’s mind.

Take the famous song/poem “My Favorite Things” from *The Sound of Music*: If it has just listed raindrops, roses, kittens, etc. it would not have worked. The listed items should invoke all the senses — color, taste, smell, sound, touch so that the cumulative images, effect communicate what you want to share with your reader. We read aloud the list poems on the sample pages before doing the exercises. The list must be substantial it must contain at least ten (10) items.

### My Favorite Things    by Oscar Hammerstein II

Raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens,  
Bright copper kettles and warm woolen  
mittens,  
Brown paper packages all tied up with string,  
These are a few of my favorite things.

Cream colored ponies and crisp apple strudels,  
Door bells and sleigh bells and schnitzel with  
noodles,  
Wild geese that flay with the moon on their  
wings,  
These are a few of my favorite things.

Girls in white dresses with blue satin sashes,  
Snow flakes that stay on my nose and  
eyelashes,  
Silver white winters that melt in the spring,  
These are a few of my favorite things.

When the dog bites, when the bee stings,  
When I’m feeling sad,  
I simply remember my favorite things  
And then I don’t feel so bad.

### IN THE JANITOR’S DUSTPAN

by Jessica Gallucci, Grade 7

Two bitten off erasers,  
One shoelace,  
Eleven chewed pencils,  
A progress report.  
Five bits of broken chalk,  
One juice box,  
Sixteen kernels of stale caramel popcorn,  
Three Band-Aids.  
One failed science exam,  
Three dirty notes,  
A cracked lipstick case,  
On slimy retainer,  
Six gum wrappers,  
Three dead cockroaches,  
One glue-stick,  
One cracked protractor,  
One green marble  
And...  
this list.

Exercise 1:— Students write a poem which is simply a list like “In the Janitor’s Dustpan” with the title as the springboard.

Students may do a list poem with titles like

- Under My Bed
- Things that make me smile
- Things to do when there's nothing to do
- People I want to invite to my birthday party
- Night noises or things that go "Bumpf" in the dark
- Things that begin with a letter of the alphabet
- e.g. "P" → Pitchers and pocketbooks, pennies and paint..

These may be related by a sensual link (color, sound, taste) or a place, even an imaginary place like the "Big Rock Candy Mountains" or "their own version of Nirvana or Never-Never-land."

### **The Big Rock Candy Mountains (American Folk Song)**

In the Big Rock Candy Mountains,  
There's a land that's fair and bright  
Where the handouts grow on bushes,  
And you sleep out every night.  
Where the boxcars are all empty  
And the sun shines every day  
On the birds and the bees  
And the cigarette trees,  
And the lemonade springs  
Where the bluebird sings  
In the Big Rock Candy Mountains.

### Birthday Party

by Kathleen Mallierah

For my party I'm going to invite:  
Susan—too snobby,  
Kate – hates Bobby,  
Becky – eats too much.  
Elizabeth – cries too much.  
Bobby – too immature,  
Dave – looks like a gerbil.  
Mike – hates Susan.  
Joseph – okay.  
Maybe a party isn't such a good idea.  
\*\*

Lists could be thematically linked like

- Things that make me angry
- Things that make me sad
- Things that make me hungry
  - Things that make me glad

The above are linked by an emotional response (how you feel about them). A list poem can be connected by anything that gives them a sense of rightness when they are assembled into one poem

Exercise 2:— Students write a poem about any subject and in whatever form which includes a substantial list or several small lists within it.

**FIVE WAYS TO KILL A MAN** by Edwin Brock

There are many cumbersome ways to kill a man:  
you can make him carry a plank of wood  
to the top of a hill and nail him to it.  
To do this properly you require a crowd of people  
wearing sandals, a cock that crows, a cloak  
to dissect, a sponge, some vinegar and one  
man to hammer the nails home.

Or you can take a length of steel,  
shaped and chased in a traditional way,  
and attempt to pierce the metal cage he wears.  
But for this you need white horses,  
English trees, men with bows and arrows,  
at least two flags, a prince and a  
castle to hold your banquet in.

Dispensing with nobility, you may, if the wind  
allows, blow gas at him. But then you need  
a mile of mud sliced through with ditches,  
not to mention black boots, bomb craters,  
more mud, a plague of rats, a dozen songs  
and some round hats made of steel.

In an age of aeroplanes, you may fly  
miles above your victim and dispose of him by  
pressing one small switch. All you then  
require is an ocean to separate you, two  
systems of government, a nation's scientists,  
several factories, a psychopath and  
land that no one needs for several years.

These are; as I began, cumbersome ways  
to kill a man. Simpler, direct, and much more neat  
is to see that he is living somewhere in the middle  
of the twentieth century, and leave him there.

**THE LITANY POEM**

The litany or motif poem repeats certain lines or phrases phrase throughout the poem. Famous examples are: “Old McDonald had a farm”, “This Old Man” and Bob Dylan’s song, “Where have all the flowers gone?”

The motif can be used for cumulative effect as in “This is the house that Jack built... this is the malt that lay in the house that Jack built... this is the rat that ate the malt that lay...”, etc. Or as is more usual, the motif is used to link a list of disparate things.

I Wonder...

I’ve always wondered  
Why birds fly,  
Or why little babies  
often cry.  
And how do people  
laugh and sing  
Or what goes on in  
the mind of a king.  
I’ve wondered why  
trees grow so tall  
And when lightning  
strikes, why do they  
fall?  
Why is the world  
circuitous and round,  
Not lumpy or bumpy like  
any old mound?  
Why do words mean  
what they do?  
And why are lions stuck  
in the zoo?  
Why do people steal  
and rob  
instead of getting a  
decent job?  
Who is my friend and  
who is my foe?  
That is what I’d like  
to know!

-- Shoshana MeiYing Goldberg, Grade 5, Taylor School

Here is a prayer litany poem by John McCartin, a sixth grad student who died a few months after writing this poem.

***RISING ABOVE***

I must rise above  
This disease that is holding me down.

I must rise above  
The fear of never walking again.

I must rise above  
The unsure thoughts of my upcoming surgery.

There are a lot of things to rise above.

If I take life one step at a time,  
I will rise above my worries and fears.

*(In memory of Mr. Bradford. He taught me that even though I am disabled, I should enjoy life and ignore people who make fun of you and to always be independent.)*

■ John McCartin, Grade 6, Williamsburg Middle School, 1996

**Fathers Dance**

by James McEuen

Fathers, dance with your sons: forever the child  
in the cradle swing of your arms; fathers grow  
into the trees your sons will clamber, up to see the sky,  
so blue, so closer; fathers swing your sons,  
your sons from your long and manly arms swinging,  
up higher, higher to the sun; fathers drop  
your pencils and briefcases, your calculators  
and notepads, your lunchpails, your uniform hats;  
fathers dance with your sons, around and around  
the rugs of your living rooms, the small triangular parks  
outside your offices;  
as in the marketplace with the other men,  
as in the hogan with the other men, the kiva, the elders' hut  
with the other men, as in the firelit circle of early day  
with the other men. as in the boardrooms, think tanks,  
and conference rooms with the other men, the tabernacles,  
the sanctuaries with the other men;  
fathers dance  
with your sons, your sons' hair flying, breath caught  
in joy, mouths wide in grinning awe; fathers drop  
your plans, your arms  
to your sons and be the dancing wind  
to drive away all wars, to lift us  
up squealing to the light.

**The Wildness Breaking In** by Patricia Gray

Within me,  
the settler's greed, the meanness  
of the moralist preacher,  
within me,  
the unlimited plow and furrows,  
the alfalfa growing in spring,  
within me,  
the pocked city streets, the tawdry expanse  
of clubs, the P Street Beaches,  
within me,  
the rock-ridden park, its foliage  
green down the city's throat,  
the frail jonquils on hillsides,  
the jay's sharp call,  
within me,  
the bureaucracy working, the cubicle partitions  
and PCs humming,  
within me,  
the murders with anger,  
and without anger—the cold seizing of life.

And within me, the rending shriek  
that today splits the dull hum of work, the terrible, wrenching  
gut-cry of the woman whose son was shot...  
the dropped phone,  
the stunned stillness and sympathy,  
the waves of anger and held pain cracking open...

And the rain  
smashing against glass—a wildness  
breaking in, its thundering masculinity—the taking  
without permission in the heat of day, with  
only a promise of cool.

And the slowing down,  
the whirring and clogging machinery  
chugging the District to a stop, the siren  
shooting through consciousness like a drug in  
the vein,

The rain beating down, setting the bloodroot  
throbbing in the vacant lot—  
our watching it from windows or street corners,  
with protection or without, the hunkering down,  
the new thrust to know ourselves all brothers, mysterious,  
frightening brothers, for the blood ties that hold us, bind us.

We are not safe.

THE PANTOUM

The pantoum (oan-TOOM) is an old Malayan verse form that first appeared around the fifteenth century. It existed orally before then. It uses repeating lines and rhyme weaving them into a sort of braid. The Western version of the pantoum is a poem of indeterminate length made up of four line stanzas whose lines are repeated in a fixed pattern. Lines 2 and 4 of each stanza are repeated as lines 1 and 3 of the next stanza and so on. The last stanza has a twist: the Lines 1 and 3 of the first stanza are used in reverse order as lines 4 and 2 of the last stanza so that the poem ends with the line that began it.

Here's the pattern:

Stanza 1:

\_\_\_\_\_ (Line 1)  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (Line 2)  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (Line 3)  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (Line 4)

Stanza 2:

\_\_\_\_\_ (Line 1—same as line 2 above)  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (Line 2)  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (Line 3—same as line 4 above)  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (Line 4)

Stanza 3:

\_\_\_\_\_ (Line 1—same as line 2 above)  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (Line 2)  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (Line 3—same as line 4 above)  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (Line 4)

And so on until  
 the Last Stanza:

\_\_\_\_\_ (Line 1—same as line 2 above)  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (Line 2—line 3 from Stanza 1)  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (Line 3—same as line 4 above)  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (Line 4—line 1 from Stanza 1)

## SAMPLE PANTOUMS

**ADVICE FOR MARRIED MEN**

-- by Hilary Tham

Sometimes we must say, "No,"  
 Slap down upstart desires.  
 Their price is high, we know  
 We can subdue the body's fires,

Slap down upstart desires.  
 Pass by sweet lures of lust;  
 We can subdue the body's fires,  
 We can master our impulsive dust,

Pass by sweet lures of lust,  
 The girls with bedroom eyes.  
 We can master our impulsive dust  
 To avoid the crippling of lies.

The girls with bedroom eyes,  
 Their price is high, we know.  
 To avoid the crippling of lies,  
 Sometimes we must say, "No."

\*   \* \*        \* \*        \*

**ARMCHAIR** by Hilary Tham

A chair is not simply a chair,  
 an accessory for a house --  
 taken for granted until not there  
 somewhat like a spouse.

An accessory for a house --  
 fine teak, leather or rattan weave.  
 Somewhat like a spouse,  
 First impressions can deceive.

Fine teak, leather or rattan weave  
 with strong back and firm arms.  
 First impressions can deceive.  
 Time will test all charms

With strong back and firm arms.  
 Love can die and complicate  
 Time, will test all charms.  
 An empty chair calling for a mate.

Love can die and complicate  
 coping with the loss of a spouse.  
 An empty chair calling for a mate—  
 Memory tightens its grip in an empty house.

Coping with the loss of a spouse  
 Taken for granted until not there.  
 Memory tightens its grip in an empty house...  
 A chair is not simply a chair.

**5 A.M. IN SHAH ALAM, MALAYSIA**

When the muezzin's call to prayer spirals through mike and wire,  
Sound blooms from the minarets, stanzas of Quranic verse  
rise like smoke from a distant bonfire,  
up into the pre-dawn darkness of the universe.

Sound blooms from the minarets, stanzas of Quranic verse.  
A rooster reminded of duty must raise its wings and call  
up into the pre-dawn darkness of the universe.  
A thread of sound that invades the dreams of all.

A rooster reminded of duty must raise its wings and call.  
The sultan in his palace dreams of gunning his new Jaguar,  
A thread of sound that invades the dreams of all.  
Somewhere a child looks skyward for a falling star.

The sultan in his palace dreams of gunning his new Jaguar.  
Somewhere an old one dies, somewhere, a baby's cries.  
Somewhere a child looks skyward for a falling star.  
Others hug a pillow and pull darkness back over weary eyes.

Somewhere an old one dies, somewhere, a baby's cries  
rise like smoke from a distant bonfire.  
Others hug a pillow and pull darkness back over weary eyes  
When the muezzin's call to prayer spirals through mike and wire.  
-- Hilary Tham

## THE GHAZAL

The ghazal (gah Z AHL) takes its name from the Arabic word meaning “the talk of boys and girls” or love poetry. A poetry form that originated in Persia and became very popular also in Urdu. Famous ghazal poets are Hafiz, Rumi, Ghalib. Originally the main themes were love and drinking wine, but later poets, like the Urdu poet Ghalib used it mainly to express philosophical and mystical ideas.

The ghazal is made up of couplets (units of two lines). minimum of five couplets up to as many as the poet wishes. Each couplet is wholly independent of the others in meaning and complete in itself as a unit of thought, almost like a proverb. All the lines have to be equal to each other in length and follow this rhyme scheme:

AA BA CA DA EA FA and the last couplet must include the poet’s name.

Here’s a ghazal by Ghalib mourning the death of Arif, his wife’s nephew, who died young and whose children Ghalib then adopted.

### ***GHAZAL XI***

You should have waited for me a little longer.  
Gone on alone, alone you shall be a little longer.

Leaving, you said we shall meet on Doomsday,  
As if there could be another, any longer.

You were, for our family, the full moon;  
Why couldn’t things have stayed the same a little longer?

I know you hated me and did not get along with Nayyar.  
You could have stayed to watch your children grow a little longer.

Fools wonder why Ghalib is still living.  
It is his fate to remain, yearning for death a little longer.  
--trans. Hilary Tham (translated from literal version)

**EXERCISE:** Write a ghazal. Pick a word for your end word or a rhyme. Look around you and write down some thoughts on what you see and feel. Write two long lines (couplet), then a break. Think of something else, write another pair of lines (similar length). Repeat until you have 4 or 5 pairs. Now write the last couplet and include your name in the last couplet. Viola, you have written a modern ghazal.

Ghazals by Yorktown High School students
--

I hide this feeling inside of me  
In this empty place my voice reverberates.

I feel the rain falling on me.  
I hear how the wind reverberates.

The sound of a lonely voice  
Surrounds the place; that sound reverberates.

The sun will be bright after a rainy day  
But no matter what, the feeling reverberates.

And I, Gaby, I'm here again  
In the presence of people whose thoughts  
reverberate.

By Garbiela Velez, Grade 11

\*\* \*\*

I saw this girl one day and asked her out.  
She looked at me and laughed.

I talked to her for some time after.  
Soon we looked back on that day and laughed.

Then one day she reconsidered.  
I simply glanced at her and laughed.

I repudiated her desperate claim that she had  
made a huge mistake.  
She played it off real well, and once again, we  
both laughed.

One day we thought there was something  
missing,  
We both made eye contact and shyly laughed.

We started kissing on her couch;  
Her mom walked in, and laughed.

Since that day, I see her mom  
And all I can do is laugh.

She glances at me, we say nothing,  
But once again, we laugh.

■ by Alan Reiner, Grade 11

\*\* \*\*

Finding a parking space alone is a pain  
But it has to be done so what can be said?

I hate the days when we have to walk through  
the rain.

Sometimes I think that I'd rather be dead.

I'm never on time because I'm too vain  
Or maybe I just couldn't get out of bed.

I'd much rather be on a plane,  
One to Mexico or Jamaica or even Madrid.

I, Chris, look down on school with great  
disdain:  
When I'm there, I want to shoot myself in the  
head.

■ by Chris Palmiero

They knew for a long time  
But everybody knew it was an irrevocable  
decision.

Why did they do this?  
Marrying a person is a life decision.

The wind blows through her hair.  
Tears drop from her face – indecision.

Did she make a wrong decision?  
Time passes by.

The way she talked made me sad.  
I looked in her face and saw a person.. a sad  
person.

I have never seen her again since this time.  
Maybe she has children.

Who knows? I Rena  
Know that I will never have an irrevocable  
decision.

■ by Rena Lehmann



Your sweet hand zigzagged down my long hair,  
love,

That night full of stars for Karen, my love.  
That night full of stars, my love.

■ Karen Morales

\*\* \*\*

A little girl's face is tired, teary  
For nights on end, she's vigilant, leery.

Its black eyes, resilient to the dark of night  
Might have taken her away if not for her might.

She is powerful though small, tiny in fact,  
And in the end, she's alright, body and mind  
intact.

Her fields of flowers, her pastel sunsets, just  
memory,  
Vivid reminders of how things were, how  
things used to be.

The black eyes gazing now, deep inside her  
head.  
Weary is she, tired, teary and wishing she were  
dead.

But the battle is over now, she is victor, she has  
won.  
The beast is gone now, it has had all of its fun.

I, J. A. am here for you, little girl, today.  
It won't be back for you, or it will pay.

■ Juan Ahert

THE TEMPLATE POEM

Sometimes, using a poem as a template or model can be a challenge that starts the creative juices flowing. In my poem “The Male”, I used Marianne Moore’s poem “The Mind is an enchanting thing” as a model, piling on similes and followed the structure of the poem until the fourth stanza at which point my poem took off on it’s own.

Exercise 1: Take a poem you like and write a poem using the grammatical structure of that poem... substitute a different noun for a noun, adjective, verb, adverb etc. Have fun with it.

Exercise 2: Here is a model I made from Gwendolyn Brooks’ wonderful poem, “Ancient Civilizations”. I have used this with excellent results with my students for reviewing history curricula.

The men and women long ago  
in ancient \_\_\_\_\_, in ancient \_\_\_\_\_ (country)  
knew things to grow, things to know  
in ancient \_\_\_\_\_.

They \_\_\_\_\_ (saw? )  
They \_\_\_\_\_ (smelled, heard, tasted?)  
They \_\_\_\_\_ ( daily activities?)  
They worried about \_\_\_\_\_ (imagine their lives)  
They \_\_\_\_\_ (recreation, games?)

---

They \_\_\_\_\_  
Their gods wanted \_\_\_\_\_  
The ancient \_\_\_\_\_ believed \_\_\_\_\_  
They obeyed \_\_\_\_\_ (rulers? government?)

Old laughter \_\_\_\_\_ (verb), old music \_\_\_\_\_ (verb).  
In ancient \_\_\_\_\_, they lived their ways.  
The \_\_\_\_\_ (noun) and the \_\_\_\_\_ (noun) {USE THE SINGULAR NOUN}  
were happy long ago in ancient days.

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Template Poem by Antonio Robertson

The people and children long ago  
in ancient Greece, in ancient Greece  
knew things to know, things to grow  
in ancient Greece.  
They knew how to ride a horse  
in ancient Greece, in ancient Greece,  
The people didn’t have electricity at night  
in ancient Greece, In ancient Greece.  
Laughter and fun, old music done.  
In ancient Greece, the warriors  
and the sheep were happy back  
in ancient Greece.

The male is an easy loving thing  
is an easily loved thing  
    *like a new puppy*  
    eager to please, ardent in adoration  
like Ezekiel preaching in the valley of dry bones.

Like that same puppy  
new returned from obedience school,  
    or the kitten that smells on you  
    iridescent scales of fish, the male  
    feeling his way around your body, your heart,  
walks beside Woman leashing his gaze from others.

He has not Woman's memory  
that can remember without  
    invention.  
    Like a tree falling in the forest  
with no one to hear, her voice  
will become background music to his ears,  
    a fly's weak buzz between window panes.

Why are the women lying down like fields  
while the wintry sun shines thin and bleak  
    and the wind blows cold with the smell of snow?

His is the force of a storm,  
hard rain, the brevity of excess. His love  
    is like the peacock's tail  
    roused by genetic code, driving  
to propagate itself against extinction.

The male burrows, impelled  
    like the wasp that lays its eggs  
    in the flowering fruit of the fig,  
    and dies there in the fig.

The male struts his peacock walk,  
bows and dances to female rhythms, knows  
    his loins will dance against hers, and flesh  
    will form and come alive  
    on the mounds in Death's Valley.

So the women lie down like fields  
while the wintry sun shines thin and bleak  
    and the wind blows cold with the smell of snow?

The following workshops are more advanced forms for advanced students. The words villain and villanelle (“villa-N ELL”) come from the Latin (or Italian) word villa, which means “country house” or “farm.” Originally a villain wasn’t a bad character in a story, he was simply a farm servant, a country bumpkin. The villanelle was an old Italian folk song with an accompanying dance. Since the seventeenth century, the villanelle has had its current form, although it has moved, in the hands of contemporary poets, to themes other than love or the joys of country living.

A French poet, Jean Passerat (1534-1602), wrote a poem in the late 1500s which he entitled “Villanelle,” and the form of this poem came to be the strict form for all villanelles.

In the villanelle there are six stanzas; the first five are three line stanzas and the final stanza is four lines. The first line and third line of the poem take turns repeating as the final line of the next four stanzas, and then are rejoined as the last two lines of the poem. The poem has a rhyme scheme of a, b, a throughout, except in the last stanza which has abaa.

The structure isn’t as complicated as it sounds. Take this first villanelle by Passerat:

Villanelle

I have lost my dove: A1  
Is there nothing I can do? b  
I want to go after my love. A<sup>2</sup>

Do you miss the one you love? a  
Alas! I really do: b  
I have lost my dove.A1

If your love you prove a  
Then my faith is true; 6  
I want to go after my love. A<sup>2</sup>

Haven’t you cried enough? a  
I will never be through: 6  
I have lost my dove.A1

When I can’t see her above a  
Nothing else seems to do: 6  
I want to go after my love. A<sup>2</sup>

Death, I’ve called long enough, a  
Take what is given to you: 6  
I have lost my dove,At  
I want to go after my love. A<sup>2</sup>

The villanelle lends itself to seriousness, as well as to frivolity. It consists of nineteen lines: five three-lined stanzas, concluding with a quatrain. The refrain couplet, which terminates the form, consists of lines one and three of the first triplet. Only two rhyming sounds are used.

Theocritus

■ Oscar Wilde

O Singer of Persephone!  
In the dim meadows desolate,

Dost thou remember Sicily?

Still through the ivy flits the bee  
Where Amaryllis lies in state,  
O Singer of Persephone!

Simaetha calls on Hecate,  
And hears the wild dogs at the gate;  
Dost thou remember Sicily?

Still by the light and laughing sea  
Poor Polypheme bemoans his fate,  
O Singer of Persephone!

And still in boyish rivalry  
Young Daphnis challenges his mate:  
Dost thou remember Sicily?

Slim Lacon keeps a goat for thee;  
For thee the jocund shepherds wait,  
O Singer of Persephone!  
Dost thou remember Sicily?

You My Husband by Hilary Tham

Raise your eyes beyond the shiftings and  
scrimplings your account in the Savings &  
Loan,

for the living daylight fades in your hand.

The white mare paws at your gate, you stand  
juggling business deals upon black phones.  
Raise your eyes. Beyond, the shifting sand

buries starfish and mating eels. Look, man  
making land and securities your  
cornerstones  
for living, daylight fades in your hand.

You call three shirts ostentation, can't stand  
feminists, liberals, interest-free loans.  
Raise your eyes beyond the shifting sand.

Sea-lions call, dripping mermaids demand  
entry at your door, the swelling wave foams  
as the living daylight fades. In your hand

the money-counting years grimly span  
hard cash, bonds, they unflesh your bones.  
Raise your eyes beyond the shifting sand  
for the living day. Light fades in your hand.  
-- Hilary Tham

A form needs a formula, plain and simple. Without one, it will be hit-and-miss. You cannot always create a villanelle by sitting at your desk or computer and composing from the top down (as you would a free verse poem). Neither can you rely much on discovery, letting the muse dictate a villanelle from on high. The scheme is too fixed to do that.

Instead you have to plot out your villanelle the way a short story writer or novelist plots a manuscript—before writing it. When you do, you will decrease the chances of wrenching rhyme or forcing lines and increase the chances of composing a masterful villanelle.

Follow this method:

### Know the Pattern

The villanelle uses two rhymes (designated by a and b), five tercets and one ending quatrain (or five three-line stanzas and one four-line stanza), and two repeating lines (designated by A<sup>1</sup> and A<sup>2</sup>—the first and third lines of the first tercet, which repeat alternately as the third line of each following tercet and, finally, as the ending two lines).

Thus, the form: A1-b-A2 a-b-A2 a-b-A2 a-b-A1 a-b-A2 a-b-A1-A2. See template.

### BURIAL

by Michael Bugeja

A1 The stalks of wheat appear to writhe and bow

b As funnel clouds descend upon the plain.

A<sup>2</sup> The farmer ends his dreaming with a plow.

a The sirens in the village always blow,

b As if to synchronize his life of pain.

A1 The stalks of wheat appear to  
writhe and bow

a Then burst into a thunderclap of  
crow.

b They flap against sky but do not  
gain.

A<sup>2</sup> The farmer ends his dreaming with

Hilary Tham  
a plow.

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- a The funnel clouds increase, the shadows grow.  
b A gust of wind revolves the weathervane.  
A1 The stalks of wheat appear to writhe and bow.
- a His family beckons but he will not go  
b To shelter as the twister tills the grain.  
A<sup>2</sup> The farmer ends his dreaming with a plow
- a To meet his fate in fields. He does not know  
b The apparitions bobbing in the rain.  
A1 The stalks of wheat appear to writhe and bow.  
A2 The farmer ends his dreaming with a plow.

Lest we do our youth wrong,  
Gather them while we may:  
Wine and woman and song.

Three things render us strong,  
Vine leaves, kisses and bay:  
Yet is day over long.

Unto us they belong,  
Us the bitter and gay,  
Wine and woman and song.

We, as we pass along,  
Are sad that they will not stay;  
Yet is day over long.

Fruits and flowers among,  
'What is better than they:  
Wine and woman and song?  
Yet is day over long.

**Villanelle of the Poet's Road**  
by Ernest Dowson [1867—1900]

Wine and woman and song,  
Three things garnish our way:  
Yet is day over long.

There's something soothing or hypnotic about the sound of a villanelle, the way the lines come back, like waves at the ends of the stanzas. The form also carries a tone of conviction that reinforces its sentiments. In the nineteenth century, French writer, Leconte de Lisle, used the form of the villanelle but wrote more serious, philosophical poems. American poet Edwin Arlington Robinson wrote a somber villanelle ("House on the Hill") about a house that has been left empty, using short, simple sentences. "They are all gone away, / The house is shut and still, / There is nothing more to say." In 1935, Dylan Thomas wrote "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night." This very serious villanelle is about not giving in to death and it is written eloquently, with long, dramatic lines.

**Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night**

Do not go gentle into that good night,  
 Old age should burn and rave at close of day;  
 Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,  
 Because their words had forked no lightning they  
 Do not go gentle into that good night.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright  
 Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,  
 Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,  
 And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,  
 Do not go gentle into that good night.

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight  
 Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,  
 Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

And you, my father, there on the sad height,  
 Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.  
 Do not go gentle into that good night.  
 Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

***Combining Meter With Content***

The villanelle works best using a four-foot or five-foot line. (trimeter starts to call attention to the pattern instead of the poem's content because of shorter line lengths.) Serious villanelles usually employ iambs or a combination of iambs and trochees. Lighter ones use more anapests for a tripping meter or dactyls for a haunting, childlike or marching meter.

Before you pick a meter for your poem, be sure to align it with content. The villanelle is an ideal form to express a nagging or recurring thought or idea. You might use anapestic pentameter, say, for a light verse villanelle about rejection slips or dactylic tetrameter for a villanelle about marching to the mailbox awaiting a manuscript. Or iambic pentameter for a villanelle about the struggle to fulfill your dreams as an artist, questioning your sacrifices in the recurring lines

***The Method***

Because the first and third lines of the villanelle repeat according to a pattern and then must come together as ending lines in the final quatrain, **first compose the ending** (as you would a couplet). Many villanelles fail because the first and third lines of the first stanza are not strong enough to sustain the structure and then serve as a conclusion. By composing the last two lines first, you'll save yourself time and energy and virtually guarantee a first draft.

Compose your final lines carefully so that each reads as a unit of thought or speech. (This will make it easier to insert a line between them in the first stanza and to improvise in the middle stanzas.) Then **pick end words that generate many rhymes**.

It is possible to write all different sorts of poems using the basic, fairly complex structure of the villanelle. **Think of something you care strongly about. Then write two lines that are approximately the same length and that rhyme.** These two can be your repeating lines, in other words: lines A1 and A2. Once you have those two lines and you are happy with what they say, then let your head and heart dance around with the other lines of the poems. Writing a

villanelle is like working a jigsaw puzzle; you can move the lines around quite a bit until they finally seem to fit, to make a kind of poetic sense.

**Missing Dates** by William Empson [1906—]

Slowly the poison the whole blood stream fills.  
It is not the effort nor the failure tires.  
The waste remains, the waste remains and kills.

It is not your system or clear sight that mills  
Down small to the consequence a life requires;  
Slowly the poison the whole blood stream fills.

They bled an old dog dry yet the exchange rills  
Of young dog blood gave but a month's desires;  
The waste remains, the waste remains and kills.

It is the Chinese tombs and the slag hills  
Usurp the soil, and not the soil retires.  
Slowly the poison the whole blood stream fills.

Not to have fire is to be a skin that shrills.  
The complete fire is death. From partial fires  
The waste remains, the waste remains and kills.

It is the poems you have lost, the ills  
From missing dates, at which the heart expires.  
Slowly the poison the whole blood stream fills.  
The waste remains, the waste remains and kills.

Here is Elizabeth Bishop's poem "One Art," from her last book of poems, Geography III:

### ONE ART

The art of losing isn't hard to master;  
so many things seemed filled with the intent  
to be lost that their loss is no disaster.

Lose something every day. Accept the fluster  
of lost door keys, the hour badly spent.  
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

Then practice losing farther, losing faster  
places, and names, and where it was you meant  
to travel. None of these will bring disaster.

I lost my mother's watch. And look! my last, or  
next-to-last, of three loved houses went.  
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

I lost two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster,  
some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent.  
I miss them, but it wasn't a disaster.

—Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture  
I love) I shan't have lied. It's evident  
the art of losing's not too hard to master  
though it may look like (Write it!) like disaster.

### MIRANDA'S SONG—by W.H. Auden

My Dear One is mine as mirrors are lonely,  
As the poor and sad are real to the good king,  
And the high green hill sits always by the sea.

Up jumped the Black Man behind the elder tree,  
Turned a somersault and ran away waving;  
My Dear One is mine as mirrors are lonely.

The Witch gave a squawk; her venomous body  
Melted into light as water leaves a spring  
And the high green hill sits always by the sea.

At his crossroads, too, the Ancient prayed for me  
Down his wasted cheeks tears of joy were  
running:  
My Dear One is mine as mirrors are lonely.

He kissed me awake, and no one was sorry;  
The sun shone on sails, eyes, pebbles, anything,  
And the high green hill sits always by the sea

So, to remember our changing garden we  
Are linked as children in a circle dancing:

My Dear One is mine as mirrors are lonely,  
And the high green hill sits always by the sea.

\*\* \*\*

**Villanelle**

by Samantha Pimentel (Grade 7)

A little kiss when no one sees  
Where's the impropriety?  
A little kiss for you, my love.

A little kiss for you, my little bird  
Where's the impropriety?  
A little kiss when no one sees

A little kiss for you, my little bird  
Where's the impropriety?  
A little kiss for you, my love.

A little kiss for you, my little bird  
Where's the impropriety?  
A little kiss when no one sees

A little kiss for you, my little bird  
Where's the impropriety?  
A little kiss for you, my love.

A little kiss for you, my little bird  
Where's the impropriety?  
A little kiss when no one sees  
A little kiss for you, my love.

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THE TYRANNY OF CLOCKS  
by Hilary Tham

**Villanelle** by David Mayo (Grade 6)

Over a hill climbs a stumpy old troll,  
A breeze juggles his knotted hair,  
Scribbling down what he sees in his scroll.

He lowers himself onto a grassy knoll  
Staring out blankly, to see what is there  
Over a hill climbs a stumpy old troll,

Night, it comes swiftly, he lights a fire with coal,  
Using some flint, out emerges a flare,  
Scribbling down what he sees in his scroll.

We long to hold still as moss-grown rocks  
skin touching skin toward passion's encore.  
Then we curse the invention of clocks.

Old married passion is unorthodox.  
We have it, it's when we lift off and soar.  
We long to hold still as moss-grown rocks,

to sink into the sleep of pressed hemlocks,  
ignore the wants of others, put us before.  
Then we curse the invention of clocks,

clinging together like a pair of socks  
in the dryer till the world calls, or Bangor.  
We long to hold still as moss-grown rocks.

Keats, Plath, Thomas, Lorca - their dying mocks  
our hope as we type words of bone and gore.  
Then we curse the invention of clocks,

curse our clumsy netting of the mind's flocks.  
Words fly into the dark where death keeps score.  
Too soon we must hold still as moss-grown rocks;  
then, we'll bless the invention of clocks.

\*\* \*\*

Light brings him from sleep, he gets up with a roll.  
Wanting some food, he constructs a small snare.  
Over a hill climbs a stumpy old troll,

He packs up his belongings, a nugget of gold  
And some to use for the wooden bridge fare.  
Scribbling down what he sees in his scroll,

He turns to go home, his trip almost whole,  
He had a good time, he munches on a pear.  
Over a hill climbs a stumpy old troll,  
Scribbling down what he sees in his scroll.

\*\* \*\*

**VILLANELLE TEMPLATE** Start with two strong lines that rhyme. Write them below as:

a1 \_\_\_\_\_

a2 \_\_\_\_\_

Fill them in the appropriate lines marked a1 and a2. These lines repeat in a fixed order. Now complete the poem with lines that rhyme with “a” rhyme where marked or end in a different rhyme “b”. Or with the same rhyme (this is more difficult). Remember Poem title \_\_\_\_\_

a1 \_\_\_\_\_

b \_\_\_\_\_

a2 \_\_\_\_\_

a \_\_\_\_\_

b \_\_\_\_\_

a1 \_\_\_\_\_

a \_\_\_\_\_

b \_\_\_\_\_

a2 \_\_\_\_\_

a \_\_\_\_\_

b \_\_\_\_\_

a1 \_\_\_\_\_

a \_\_\_\_\_

b \_\_\_\_\_

a2 \_\_\_\_\_

a \_\_\_\_\_

b \_\_\_\_\_

a1 \_\_\_\_\_

a2 \_\_\_\_\_

SESTINA

Sestina is a French form. The word means “six”. The sestina contains six stanzas of six lines each and a final stanza of three lines. The six end words may or may not rhyme, but they repeat in a fixed pattern in 6 ½ stanzas. The end stanza uses all 6 words in 3 lines in a fixed order.

## CHOICES by Hilary Tham

For sins of negation and aborted chance  
 we toss and burn, sleepless in the dark  
 for lives we uprooted before they could take.  
 We could have been kind to the living  
 child with grandmother’s face, now dead,  
 plucked from seeds of other faces ready to fall.

Sooner or late, the speckling leaves fall  
 from the tree to lie until chance  
 winds stir them. They simulate the dead.  
 Blind worms find their pyres in the dark,  
 spin their veins and cells into living  
 threads the oak and sycamore will take.

The foxglove and maidenhair fern too will take  
 them to infuse leaves with green until fall,  
 tumbling them on a spoke of the living  
 wheel forever unless dislodged by chance  
 or deliberately raked into hot dark  
 incinerators to become truly dead.

Trees bend over their dead,  
 ghost roots follow them as they take  
 the spiraling path into the dark,  
 past dinosaur bones, Devonian ferns. They fall  
 until earth heaves, random chance,  
 and rolls them up toward the living,

spins them past the living  
 rooted in the planet’s skin. The dead  
 cannot know or care they chance  
 to rise. Insensate, they take  
 the ghost ride skyward, thin dark  
 motes borne forever in free fall.

We remember our lost futures in Fall  
 as beauty breaks from the living  
 and color vanishes into the dark  
 uncolor of Night. We smell the dead  
 on her black shield. Memories take  
 us by the throat. We wait for another chance.

Now we are ready. The chance will fall  
 to others to take into their arms living  
 children. Our dead open us in the dark.

Write a sentence that has meaning for you. Select 6 words from the sentence that are interesting to you and that may have more than one meaning or usage. Number the words 1 – 6. Now place the words at the end of the lines as shown.. word 1 on all the lines marked 1, word 2 on lines marked word 2 and so on.

1 \_\_\_\_\_ (word 1)  
 2 \_\_\_\_\_ (word 2)  
 3 \_\_\_\_\_ (word 3)  
 4 \_\_\_\_\_ (word 4)  
 5 \_\_\_\_\_ (word 5)  
 6 \_\_\_\_\_ (word 6)

6 \_\_\_\_\_ (word 6)  
 1 \_\_\_\_\_ (word 1)  
 5 \_\_\_\_\_ (word 5)  
 2 \_\_\_\_\_ (word 2)  
 4 \_\_\_\_\_ (word 4)  
 3 \_\_\_\_\_ (word 3)

3 \_\_\_\_\_ (word 3)  
 6 \_\_\_\_\_ (word 6)  
 4 \_\_\_\_\_ (word 4)  
 1 \_\_\_\_\_ (word 1)  
 2 \_\_\_\_\_ (word 2)  
 5 \_\_\_\_\_ (word 5)

5 \_\_\_\_\_ (word 5)  
 3 \_\_\_\_\_ (word 3)  
 2 \_\_\_\_\_ (word 2)  
 6 \_\_\_\_\_ (word 6)  
 1 \_\_\_\_\_ (word 1)  
 4 \_\_\_\_\_ (word 4)

4 \_\_\_\_\_ (word 4)  
 5 \_\_\_\_\_ (word 5)  
 1 \_\_\_\_\_ (word 1)  
 3 \_\_\_\_\_ (word 3)  
 6 \_\_\_\_\_ (word 6)  
 2 \_\_\_\_\_ (word 2)

2 \_\_\_\_\_ (word 2)  
 4 \_\_\_\_\_ (word 4)  
 6 \_\_\_\_\_ (word 6)  
 5 \_\_\_\_\_ (word 5)  
 3 \_\_\_\_\_ (word 3)  
 1 \_\_\_\_\_ (word 1)

1 \_\_\_\_\_ (word 1) \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ (word 2) \_\_\_\_\_  
 3 \_\_\_\_\_ (word 3) \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ (word 4) \_\_\_\_\_  
 5 \_\_\_\_\_ (word 5) \_\_\_\_\_ 6 \_\_\_\_\_ (word 6) \_\_\_\_\_

## NESTING RHYMES

Take a word (of three or more syllables) write it on the blackboard and have students brainstorm what other words come to mind or may be found as anagrams in the word, e.g. EMOTION, MOTION, OCEAN, SHUN. or AGGRAVATION, GRAVEL, RAVEL, RAVE, AVE in descending syllabic run. THEN write a poem using those words for a poem that is rich in assonance. The point of this exercise is to take the mind from normal patterns of thinking or following an idea along logical paths. This way, you make strange and fun leaps to other words that are nested inside the big word. They can reverse the order in the poem so they go from simple one syllable word to that big word. Like ask, raid, rude, mosque, made, quad, masquerade. Clincher is tell them the poem does not have to make sense for this exercise.

**Variation:** Challenge them to write a 12 line poem, 4 stanzas of 3 lines each. Each stanza uses a diminishing rhyme. e.g. stanza one, the first line would end with the word obtrude, the second line end with rude, and the third line end with ue. Stanza 2 would use another nesting rhyme set: its lines would end in 1)learn, 2)earn, 3)ear.

More ambitious students could use the same ONE nesting rhyme for all four stanzas.

**Example:** Nesting rhyme: - vagrant – grant – rant – ran - ant

Sample poem:

Walking without care, I saw this vagrant  
On the corner of Fourth and Grant  
and ran when he began to rant  
“Gimme an ant, gimme an ant!”

List these on board as examples of possible nesting rhymes to use and have them do a practice run on the blackboard of their own nesting rhymes.

### **Disappear –apple - pear – ear**

engine – nine – gin – in

quaver – aver- ave

gravel – ravel – rave – grave – lave

prayer – pray – pay –rare

seasoning – season – sea – son

reverberate – berate – revere – rate - ever – bear – be

kaleidoscope – scope – code – kale – slide – cope – cop

bramble – ramble – ram – ROM

charmer – harm – arm

engagement – gage – age – mage

scaffold – scoff – scold - fold – old

scatter – cater – scat sat – cat

intertwine – tine – twine – wine – wire – tire – inert

cockatrice – rice- ice

incandescent – descent – scent – cant – cane – Cain

## CLOSURES OR HOW DOES A POEM END?

Closure is a relative matter. A poem may be gently though firmly closed, or slammed shut, locked and bolted. As the metaphor suggests, the ending of a poem is a gesture of exit, and like all gestures, it has expressive value. The manner in which a poem concludes becomes, in effect, the last and frequently the most significant thing it says.

In most of Shakespeare's sonnets, the last couplet is both logical conclusion and mathematical sum. Also in its purity and absoluteness, it brings the poem to a point where any further development would be superfluous and anti-climatic.

A summary ending is also true of John Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn."

When old age shall this generation waste,  
 Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe  
 Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,  
 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty,' - that is all  
 Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

The above device is called a coda. Another device is hyperbole, where a passage, by the effect of unqualified assertion, of universals, absolutes and superlatives, can have a sort of dramatic validity - often a signal of emotional climax, or extremity, a point where the speaker is apparently striving for the ultimate, consummate and most comprehensive expression of the motives and emotions of the occasion of the poem. Ours is a society and time that is not comfortable with pronouncements of absolutes or "absolute truths." Hence we like closures without too much resolution.

T.S. Eliot was the master of the closure without resolution. In "Gerontion", the old man's fruitless ruminations concludes with this reflexive reference:

Tenants of the house.  
 Thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season.

The tenants of the brain will continue, presumably, to move aimlessly from room to room, unable to rest until they dry up and turn to dust. The poem and reader do rest, however, for in affirming the fact of irresolution, the last line separates itself from the structure of irresolution, and in acknowledging the affirmation that irresoluteness exists, the reader has drawn an appropriate "conclusion"

**POETRY FOLDER PROJECT****DATE ASSIGNED:** \_\_\_\_\_ **DUE DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_

Throughout the poetry unit, as students read, write and share poetry, you are expected to collect poems and journal entries you have written. Your collection of work will be put together into a folder to be turned in as a final project. During class you will be instructed in specific types of poetry and you will have some time to experience writing using specific styles. However, you will be expected to work at home as needed to keep up and create a collection of final products.

In addition, at the end of the unit, each student will be asked to submit one original piece of poetry to display during the week of \_\_\_\_\_.

**REQUIREMENTS FOR AN “A”**

- a very colorful, well-decorated cover including title and author name
- colorful illustrations throughout the book folder
- a neat, accurate Table of Contents including titles of all poems and page numbers
- 10 poems

**REQUIREMENTS FOR AN “B”**

- colorful, decorated cover including title and author name
- colorful illustrations throughout the book folder
- neat Table of Contents
- 8 poems

**REQUIREMENTS FOR AN “C”**

- cover includes title and author name
- some illustrations with color
- Table of Contents present
- 6 poems

**REQUIREMENTS FOR AN “D”**

- Partial completion of the requirements for a “C”

CRITERIA	TEACHER	STUDENT
Cover	_____	_____
Checklist	_____	_____
<b>Illustrations</b>	_____	_____
1. Simile Poem	_____	_____
2. Face Poem with face drawing (Motif poem)	_____	_____
3. Memory Poem (Free Verse)	_____	_____
4. Limerick	_____	_____
5. Sound poem (Free Verse)	_____	_____
6. Colors poem (Free Verse)	_____	_____
7. Nursery rhyme/ template poem	_____	_____
8. Then & Now/ perspective poem	_____	_____
9. Haiku	_____	_____
10. Poem (your choice)	_____	_____
<b>FINAL GRADE ON POETRY BOOK:</b>	_____	_____

**MINI-ANTHOLOGY OF POEMS TO ENJOY****Fog by Carl Sandburg, 1918**

The fog comes  
on little cat feet.  
It sits looking

over harbor and city  
on silent haunches  
and then moves on.

\*\*

**Who Has Seen The Wind?**

Christina Georgina Rossetti

Who has seen the wind?  
Neither I nor you:  
But when the leaves hang trembling,  
The wind is passing through.

Who has seen the wind?  
Neither you nor I:  
But when the trees bow down their heads,  
The wind is passing by.

In the morning the city  
Spreads its wings  
Making a song  
In stone that sings.

\*\*\*

**City**

Langston Hughes

In the evening the city  
Goes to bed  
Hanging lights  
About its head.

**The Purple Cow**

Gelett Burgess (1866-1951)

I never saw a Purple Cow,  
I never hope to see one,  
But I can tell you, anyhow,  
I'd rather see than be one!

**Way Down South**

Anonymous

Way down South where bananas grow,  
A grasshopper stepped on an elephant's toe.  
The elephant said, with tears in his eyes,  
'Pick on somebody your own size.'

**I'd Like to be a Lighthouse**

Rachel Lyman Field

I'd like to be a lighthouse  
All scrubbed and painted white.  
I'd like to be a lighthouse  
And stay awake all night  
To keep my eye on everything  
That sails my patch of sea;  
I'd like to be a lighthouse  
With the ships all watching me.

\*\*

**What Any Lover Learns**

by Archibald MacLeish

Water is heavy silver over stone,  
Water is heavy silver over stone'  
Refusal. It does not fall. It fills. It flows  
Every crevice, every fault of the stone,

Every hollow. River does not run.  
River presses its heavy silver self  
Down into stone and stone refuses.

What runs,  
Swirling and leaping into sun, is stone's  
Refusal of the river, not the river.

\*\*

**Ghost Prints by J. H. Beall**

Nothing vanishes  
As the kettle steams  
the water disappears  
yet  
on the windows  
interleaved between  
the cold outside  
and the vapors  
the condensation  
outlines  
the handprint  
that you made  
where you leaned too far  
to see the sky.



**A BALKAN DANCE**

by Vladimir Levchev

We are the Bulgarian soldiers  
 blinded by Basil,  
 the emperor of Constantinople.  
 We are 15,000 men.  
 One in every ten of us  
 has one eye to lead us.  
 We hold hands, walk and trip,  
 like a ring dance  
 from horizon to horizon  
 under the light of the sunset.

We were returning home  
 to our king Samuel.  
 The king saw us  
 and died of a heart attack.  
 But we didn't see him.  
 We continue our dance  
 barefooted in wild forests,  
 on the embers of camp fires,  
 sliding on frozen lakes  
 under the cold sharp constellations. . .

We are dancing towards a new millennium  
 and all we can see in our future  
 is our past.

**POURING**

by Hiram Larew

I know that  
 Wintery mountains are more important by far  
 Than this  
 They're meant to be  
 Our best brothers  
 But your eyes  
 For as far as land goes  
 Were more surprising by far  
 Like trees on pillows

I believe that anything is possible  
 And that excitement will always be followed  
 By calm  
 So really if nothing else gets settled  
 There's this at least -  
 I've been you forever

When birds land on edges they scatter some  
 snow  
 My hand made the same kind of mistake  
 It didn't know  
 That the best part is pouring

Others may disagree  
 But just once

Is the only because  
 I'll ever need  
 It's over all  
 The if and wonder  
 Where does it go as it goes ahead  
 Why does it always glisten.

**IF HE NEVER HEARS THIS**

by Hiram Larew

There's no pattern to what disappears  
 Nothing to make sure that our ideas are  
 everlasting  
 Or repeated  
 The puny overlap between us all  
 Is such that  
 We can't predict what stays or lingers  
 Or leaves  
 It may be that wishing wells  
 Especially their walls  
 Know the secret of this yearning to endure  
 Somehow fireworks do too coming down  
 But mostly we know that everyone we know  
 Is just water  
 And all we are are snaps

Never ask anyone anything directly  
 Be a swan's neck  
 So that you find out everything by guessing  
 And for balance  
 Imagine loving so much that it feels like  
 You are unscrewing the lid of a jar  
 Before going

The boring point is this  
 The best friend to make is chance -  
 Do whatever it takes  
 To wake up tangled in the arms of maybe  
 Start to trust what you've done  
 For as long as a blink  
 Mostly think like a windy corner.

**Epithet**

by Judy McCombs

The first man I called Sir  
 the wrong way, not meaning it, was the one  
 who stopped his black Chevy on the hill  
 near high school, Could I come over  
 & show him the route to West  
 Cherry Lane? I could, he didn't  
 look dirty or strange, just grown-up  
 but young, with a dark plaid shirt  
 & his sleeves turned up, & a road map  
 unfolded over the steering,  
 like my father, on trips. I was trying  
 to see where he pointed, when I couldn't  
 help seeing his other hand hefting  
 something below, it looked

alive but somehow skinned over,  
 like sausage. I knew he wanted  
 me to think it was really all him.  
 He wasn't ugly or anything  
 different, he had a regular nose,  
 his eyes were dark & real serious,  
 giving orders somehow. He was handsome  
 in fact. This was all broad daylight,  
 & houses I knew, my regular  
 route. So I called him Sir  
 & more Sir, pretending I thought  
 nothing was wrong, while I backed  
 away from his arm, which had hairs  
 like the minister's, & the closed car door,  
 & got back to the papers I'd been folding  
 on the storm drain corner. His car  
 drove off up the hill, getting smaller,  
 like a little black toy. The street  
 stayed empty. I looked down at my jeans,  
 which were brand-new from Penney's, with a  
 plaid,  
 red-&-white, lining the cuffs.

Next day, in the lunchroom, I started  
 to tell my best friends, at the end  
 of the table. They giggled a lot,  
 Was he handsome? Did he ask you to hold it?  
 Did he show you his money? I wanted  
 to ask was it really all him,  
 but didn't know how. Then Agnes,  
 who was bigger, said he was just a pervert,  
 they always came out in the spring  
 back home, why once there was one waiting  
 at the bus stop, with his fly wide open,  
 & she & her cousins just laughed  
 & pointed, till he cussed them out  
 & ran off in the woods. Just a pervert,  
 that's all. I felt better, & thirsty  
 & hungry. Agnes had finished  
 most of my lunch, which was chowder  
 with franks, so she gave me her pie,  
 which was cinnamon apple with topping,  
 & better than usual. So I had  
 two desserts, before the bell rang.

---

"I Love Barbie Taylor. T. Mc." by Miles  
 David Moore  
 --sign spray-painted on a since-demolished wall  
 in Arlington, Va.

It's official now. T. Mc. no longer  
 loves Barbie Taylor--not for the commuters  
 on I-395 who for eight thousand yesterdays  
 read passion in three-foot schoolboy script.  
 Today the bulldozers came, and romantic  
 words became rubble, to be cleared away  
 for the ritual mating of asphalt and earth.

But what of real love? Did Barbie and T.'s  
 live past demolition, or die long before it?  
 Did T.'s love leave the wall? Was Barbie's ever  
 there?

When Barbie laid azure or emerald or onyx  
 eyes on T.'s declaration, did she roll them  
 in ecstasy or embarrassment?

Did Barbie and T. find out too late  
 that love can squall and soil itself,  
 or wither in a stranger's wink, or survive  
 the fatal screech of cars against each other?

Or did Barbie and T., a couple not perfect  
 but comfortable with their familiarity.  
 see their wall come down with a pang for youth  
 so long gone, so shortly gone,  
 hold hands for the millionth time, and wave  
 at T. Junior walking with his first girlfriend?  
 If the earth has an answer, the dozers drown it  
 out.

Their burring voices shake the overpass  
 where "Todd Loves Tiffany" appeared last  
 week  
 and echo in the park, rustling the oak tree  
 where Isaac has loved Maude a hundred years.

-----  
**Fatslug on Ice** by Miles David Moore

It's the Olympic skating finals, Fatslug.  
 Never mind you've never skated before.  
 Never mind you were brought here under false  
 pretenses.  
 Never mind your hands are tied behind your back  
 and you're wearing roller skates.  
 The spotlight shines on you, Fatslug.  
 The program calls for you to begin  
 with a triple-Salkow and double-Lutz,  
 whatever those are.

The friends who told you this was just for fun  
 are the judges. They sit  
 immovable as Aku-Aku, lights  
 refracting from their glasses like sun from glaciers,  
 pencils sharpened to stiletto points.

The crowd is sending up a chant  
 which is either, "Fat-SLUG! Fat-SLUG! Fat-SLUG!"  
 or something far less pleasant.  
 The judges, with ostentatious flourishes,  
 write zero-point-zero before you even move.  
 "The Flight of the Bumblebee" squawks through the  
 P.A. system  
 as you take your first step and fall full forward  
 to meet your old friend ice.

**Two Men** by Miles David Moore

Two men drive by a field  
With a horse, a tree, and a pond.

"What a beautiful horse!" the first man says.

The second man, driving, glances toward the horse.

"Awfully swaybacked," he answers.

The first man is humbled  
And says nothing more.  
Only later--much later--  
Does he realize it wasn't a horse  
He found beautiful,  
But a horse with a windblown mane  
In a green field with a windblown tree  
And the sun scattering stars on a pond.

**The Waking** by Theodore Roethke

I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.  
I feel my fate in what I cannot fear.  
I learn by going where I have to go.

We think by feeling. What is there to know?  
I hear my being dance from ear to ear.  
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.

Of those so close beside me, which are you?  
God bless the Ground! I shall walk softly there,  
And learn by going where I have to go.

Light takes the Tree; but who can tell us how?  
The lowly worm climbs up a winding stair;  
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.

Great Nature has another thing to do  
To you and me so take the lively air,  
And, lovely, learn by going where to go.

This shaking keeps me steady. I should know.  
What falls away is always. And is near.  
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.  
I learn by going where I have to go.

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

POETRY SITES: these sites offer poetry texts.

Bartelby.com Great Books Online  
[www.bartleby.com/verse/](http://www.bartleby.com/verse/)

The Poetry Archive at eMule.com  
[www.emule.com/poetry/index.cgi](http://www.emule.com/poetry/index.cgi)

Everypoet.com  
[www.everypoet.com/index.htm](http://www.everypoet.com/index.htm)

Representing Poetry Online  
[www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/rp/intro.html](http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/rp/intro.html)

The Academy of American Poets  
[www.poets.org](http://www.poets.org)

Contemporary Poetry at About.com  
[www.poetry.about.com/arts/poetry/](http://www.poetry.about.com/arts/poetry/)

American Verse Project  
[www.hti.umich.edu/cgo/a/amverse-idx?page=bibl](http://www.hti.umich.edu/cgo/a/amverse-idx?page=bibl)

Knopf Poetry Site  
<http://www.randomhouse.com/knopf/poetry>

Poetry Bay  
[www.poetrybay@aol.com](http://www.poetrybay@aol.com)

Poetry Daily  
<http://www.poems.com/>

Poetry Teachers  
<http://www.poetryteachers.com/>

Favorite Poem with tips for teachers site  
<http://www.favoritepoem.org/classroom/index.htm>

Potomac Review  
[www.meral.com/potomac](http://www.meral.com/potomac)

Beltway Poetry: the Washington DC area  
<http://www.washingtonart.com> -- ample selection of individual of local poets' poems

The Word Works, Inc.  
<http://www.wordworksdc.com> - good poems

Hilary Tham web-page  
<http://www.geocities.com/Hilarytham> - I have a section on some of my workshops.

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

### **BOOKS:**

1. Kenneth Koch: Wishes, Lies, and Dreams: Teaching Children to Write Poetry , Harper & Row, New York, 1980
2. Kenneth Koch: Rose, Where Did You Get that Red? Teaching Great Poetry to Children , Vintage Books, New York, 1974
3. Kenneth Koch & Kate Farrell: Sleeping on the Wing: An Anthology of Modern Poetry with Essays on Reading and Writing which is an anthology of poems with suggestions on writing exercises triggered by them- eg he has suggestion on Ways to look at an orange, et al from Steven's Thirteen Ways to look at a Blackbird.
4. Karin Faulkner et, Ed. The Boy Who Heard A Voice, California Poets in the Schools 1989 Anthology- has essays by poets-in-the schools on their best methods.
5. Audrey Brainard & Denise Wrubel: Literature-Based Science Activities: an integrated approach, Grades K-3, Scholastic Inc. 1993 Has hands on activities to springboard writing activities. (You have to think up the writing activity).
6. Ron Padgett, Ed., The Teachers & Writers HANDBOOK of POETIC FORMS, Teachers & Writers Collaborative, New York. 1987
7. Nikki Moustaki: The COMPLETE IDIOT's GUIDE to Writing Poetry - fun to read and good for generating ideas for workshops., Alpha Books 2001
8. Lavonne Mueller/Jerry D. Reynolds: CREATIVE WRITING: Forms & Techniques, NTC 1990-- again good place for fun ideas/ things to get kids turned on to writing.
9. The Scholastic RHYMING DICTIONARY: this is a good book as a resource in the workshop for most kids love to rhyme and I like to allow them to use rhyme judiciously-- and stress the importance of restraint in rhyme, unless it is a nonsense poem, which is another form to enable kids to enjoy creative writing.
10. Mary O'Neill: Hailstones and Halibut Bones, Doubleday, 1989 - 12 wonderful poems about the colors. Good example resource for color poems.