



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2001 Volume III: Reading and Writing Poetry

Using Personal Poetic Expression to Enhance Reading and Writing

Curriculum Unit 01.03.04
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As a classroom educator, I know that reading and writing levels will vary from child to child and from class to class. Also, as a classroom educator, it is essential for me to allow my students to express themselves to the best of their ability. In this curriculum unit, students will be able to use poetry to express themselves. Learning through poetry will be fun, new and different for most students that I will be teaching. Poetic Expression is a form of writing poetry as well as reading poetry. This curriculum unit is intended for students in grade 6. Many of my student's level of comprehension in reading and writing will be at least two years below the actual grade they are in. My students will be able to adapt quite easily to this unit. The instructional time for this unit is about 45 minutes, three days a week for six weeks. It goes without writing, but I'll write it anyway.... your instructional time will vary, which is A-O.K. I will use this unit as a writing component in Reading and Language Arts. I will use this curriculum unit in mid-spring, after April vacation. What I have discovered as a seasoned teacher, is that students need something new and fresh to focus on. This unit will be great for my students as we continue to do reading and writing and of course, look forward to the end of the school year. Aside from guiding you through this curriculum unit, I will also include some samples of poems that I tried with my sixth grade students. They have all given me permission to have their work included in this unit. In fact, my students were overjoyed to know other educators will see their poems and possibly use with their students. I must mention that it is important to me that you and your students have fun with this unit. Why? Because students and educators should be enthusiastic when learning is taking place. No one knows your students and their capabilities better than you do. Each student is an individual and they each progress at his or her own pace. Each teacher has their own particular style of teaching and method in the way that they teach. The bottom line is, when preparing for instruction of this curriculum unit..... go with what you know about your students and their level of accomplishments. This curriculum unit is not difficult to modify to meet the needs of your students. I feel confident that you and your students will enjoy the educationally and personally rewarding ways, of how using personal poetic expression enhances reading and writing. I intend to have my student's read, write and comprehend words in a way that is new, different and special to them. Their comprehension of how and what they write will be more retainable for them. They will write about themselves, their thoughts and feelings, their family, their environment and their ideas about the world in which they live.

Introduction

As a simple introduction into teaching this unit, I will read a few nursery rhymes to my students. Most of the rhymes I use will be short, four-line stanzas. These nursery rhymes will be easy for my students and most of them will have been exposed to them at an early age. This lesson will be simple and brief. They will recall and possibly recite, with very little difficulty, a few of their favorite nursery rhymes. Some of my more out-spoken students will recite a few lines of their favorite songs. Many music videos and lyrics from songs are overflowing with rhythm and rhyme. After I read a few nursery rhymes, I will briefly discuss the importance of poetry. I will inform them that poetry is a form of literature and it uses words in a special way. The students will be able to see and understand that poetry usually tells a story and describe a picture. For my students, nursery rhymes will work well in this aspect-words in poems that relate to a picture. Reading nursery rhymes to my class will be putting them in a comfortable setting to explore. The students will enjoy the travel back in time with nursery rhymes. They will bring in their "baby books" of simple rhymes. I will place these timeless treasure books on a display table in a designated area in the classroom. I will have a nice display of poetry books in the classroom. There are many poetry books by children and for children. Many of these books are beautifully illustrated and wonderful to include in your personal or classroom library. I will read all kinds of poetry to my students. It will give them more understanding about how colorful, comical and powerful words can be in a poetic and fun way. They will be able to appreciate the literature. As always and especially throughout instruction of this unit, it is essential to read, read and read various poetry books to my students.

I will read poetry aloud to my students in small and in large group settings. I will encourage my students to select poetry books to read from the school library. Silent Sustained Reading (SSR) is a great time for students to read these books on their own. Literacy will remain a focal point throughout the instruction of this unit. Reading, verbal expression, writing, oral recall is just a few objectives contained in this unit. Many of the students that I teach are not great writers, but they express themselves well verbally. I will record many of their verbal responses on the blackboard or on chart paper. My students will use these responses later. Again, use what works best for complete comprehension of poetic expression with your students.

I will take a break from nursery rhymes and read "*Ten -Second Rainshowers*" Poems by Young People compiled by Sandford Lyne. It is a great collection of poems by young poets ages eight to eighteen. These poems will relate to my own students due to the similar and personal experiences they'll share. Another fun poetry book for my students is "*Mrs. Cole on an Onion Roll*" and *Other School Poems* by Kalli Dakos. This book is also fantastic because it's a collection of poems celebrating life in school. Building background and connecting to life experiences is part of the literacy focus. I will prepare my students to become great readers and writers of poetry.

Journal Writing

Students rarely have the opportunity to become imaginative and creative on their own, finding ideas for that is quite simple. Journal writing. We have said to children or heard it said on occasion how wild, vivid and peculiar the imagination children are apt to have. My students will put that creative imagination to use. Journal writing. They will write about their observations. They will jot down their inner thoughts and fears. They will write down phrases and/or sentences in their journal. Most students are familiar with journal writing, so it will not be too difficult to use them in the classroom. The only task required in journal writing is allowing

my students to write freely and with ease. I will use journal writing with my students often. These journal entries will be used as collectors of phrases, sentences and expressions that will become the foundation for future writing of poems. Journals are a resourceful, tangible book for my students. There are no restrictions about what to write in them. Educators, please be aware that journal writing of thoughts and ideas are those belonging to your students. Allow time for your students to "share" aloud their thoughts from their journals, some students may NOT want to share aloud. Respect their right to privacy so that they'll be more comfortable to write their thoughts through poetry. As the entire class writes inside their journals, I will walk around the room to see that they are on task.

The Writing Process

I will use the Writing Process with this unit. It is necessary for my students to follow specific guidelines and learn some basic fundamentals in writing poetry, especially since they will have a journal filled with sentences and phrases to write about. The Writing Process and the understanding of it are used in most school districts. It is basically the same for every form of writing. Since poetry is a written format, the writing process strategy should also be used for writing poetry. When using the writing process with my students, it will help them become better writers each time they write their poems. The writing process is a good routine for students to be familiar with. The writing process may be a part of your district literacy standards, so I feel strongly about educators incorporating it in this unit. If you haven't done the writing process with your students, it may be a good time to go through some general yet specific procedures. These procedures are a nice way to acquire great works of poetry and all other forms of writing. Those of you that are familiar with the writing process, just continue to use it with this unit. The Writing Process can be divided into six stages:

Brainstorming

This is the journal writing "stuff". These are the sentences, phrases, feelings and inner thoughts that are found in the journals. These incomplete ideas must be developed and figured out through thinking and planning.

Pre-writing

The pre-writing stage allows students to make a list of possible ideas where they will need to focus on a topic. In this stage, students will focus on a single feeling or moment. They will think, plan and write everything they may want to say. Once the students have gotten the topic of their poem completed, it is on to the next stage.

Drafting

Now my students have a piece of work that I will call their "sloppy copy". This of course, is not their final work. In the draft stage, their work will be filled with many errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation. The draft is when they will be able to take a good look at what they've written. My students will find many mistakes in their poems, mistakes are o.k. at this time. In this stage, my students will make a change or two as they improve their poems.

Editing/Revising

This stage is when students will need to look for ways to improve what they have written. All errors in grammar, spelling and punctuation should be corrected during this stage of the writing process. Make sure the student has expressed himself or herself. Their ideas should flow nicely. This particular stage may take a little longer to get through than the other stages. Proofreading each poem is necessary. These poems are

individually expressed, so I will make sure my students read and re-read their poems. Whenever possible, my students will help each other out during this stage. Working in small groups will show them how they can become better readers and writers when it is a whole-class effort.

Publishing

The published stage of the writing process is the complete paper or final poem. The poem is neat in grammar and appearance. It is ready to be displayed in the classroom or shared with someone special. I will use these types of poetry to do with my students. They are Acrostic, Couplet, Haiku, Lyric and Free Verse. These poems are great to use with students because they will use adjectives, identifying of syllables, the recognition of poetry format, and the use of stanzas rather than paragraphs. They will use their own prior knowledge. I will also assist my class with words that offer vivid images. Before beginning this unit, my students will be unfamiliar with most of these types of poetry. By the completion of this unit, they will be more appreciative of literature and gain a better understanding of reading and writing poetry.

Free Verse: these poems are without predictable rhyme, rhythm or length of line or stanza.

Lyric Poem: these are poems that express the poet's observations and feelings and often tell of the poet's personal experiences.

Couplet: two lines of poetry that rhyme, it usually has a distinct pattern of rhyme and rhythm.

Acrostic: It is a free verse poem. The first letter of each line, when read in a downward way, forms a word, usually the title and/or subject of the poem. I will do acrostic poetry by using adjectives to correlate with the letters in their first name.

Haiku: a form of poetry that developed in Japan. It is a three-line poem usually consisting of a total of seventeen syllable (5-7-5) sequence. It is a great skill to reinforce the use of syllabication in words. When I do haiku with my class, I will tell them that a haiku poem is unrhymed and has no rhythm. It sometimes captures nature as its subject or has a seasonal influence. A haiku should also suggest a strong thought and feeling.

Poetic Expression: Methods of Instruction

My lesson plan for this curriculum unit is based on how I will teach this to my students. I intend to teach the lesson for the prescribed week, but I will be flexible in my planning. My students will let me know how successfully they've mastered the objective. Their knowing and not knowing the poetic concepts completely will tell me if I will need to spend more or less time on any particular poetry lesson. I will aim for 100% mastery from each student. I will assist my students with this unit in a non-complex way that they will understand. I have high expectations for my students and I will let them know that. The method, in which I teach is based on where they are academically, not where they should be. That is not to say that my students will not be challenged. The challenge is learning and retaining what they've learned. They will read words that require them to think harder and it will push their comprehension level higher. The challenge for them is finding academic success. Their knowledge of poetic expression will be personal and retained. They will know that they are being challenged in many aspects of this unit. I will encourage my students for their efforts. Poetic Expression is a curriculum unit where the students will express his or her own feelings. My students will have the opportunity to use poetic expression to ease a sad feeling or by trying to find some meaning in their life. I

will praise them often. Students love to hear that they're doing a good job. As I stated earlier, your time frame for teaching this unit will vary. I will allow myself to be flexible when it comes to restraints on time. Six weeks of instructional time will be sufficient. If my class needs an extra day or an extra week to grasp a concept, it will be granted.

Lessons for Poetic Expression Instruction

Week 1-I will have on display a variety of poetry books around the classroom. Glued inside each writing journal, I will have the six stages of the Writing Process. Each day, I will read aloud the stages before they begin their writing. These stages will be easily accessible for them to refer to as we go through the instruction of this unit. I will distribute to each student a writing journal. I will instruct them to write words, phrases short sentences about whatever they are thinking about or anything that comes to mind. I will tell them to just jot it down. I will give them 15 minutes of this kind of writing. Next, I will read a few nursery rhymes as an introduction to reading and writing poetry. I will ask students to bring in some of their books of rhymes to share. We will visit the school library and select various poetry books to use. We will also visit the public library. I will arrange to have a member of the school staff come in and read to my students. I will invite parents to come in and read also. The school cafeteria workers, custodians, secretaries and school nurse will be great candidates to come in and read poetry to students. The staff and students will enjoy it.

Week 2-I will read the Writing Process for 5 minutes and then the students will write in their journals for 15 minutes. I will give my students a quick adjective assignment where they will need to use their language book. I will go over the assignment beforehand for understanding, and then we will correct it as a group. They will have an adjective homework assignment for that night. I will introduce Acrostic poetry to them. I will call on a student to tell me the definition of an adjective and I will record it on the blackboard. As an example of an Acrostic poem, I will select a cartoon character as the subject. Cartoon characters are fun to use because they're easy targets. I will write the characters name on the blackboard. For practice, I will tell my students to think of one adjective to place next to each letter of the characters name. This adjective must begin with the specific letter they are doing. If time allows, I will do this assignment again. By the third day of this lesson, my students will use their own names in as a personal form of Acrostic poetry.

Week 3- the students will do 15 minutes of journal writing and I will read the Writing Process for 5 minutes. Syllabication is a difficult concept for many students to truly grasp 100%. As a drill before I do Haiku poetry; my students will clap the number of syllables they hear in their names and other words. This drill will start as an individual exercise, but the entire class will do the clapping. An extra day may be used to teach haiku. I will write a few words on the blackboard and separated it to show the number of syllables. The 5-7-5 sequence in a haiku is shown to my students on the blackboard. It is essential to visually teach my students the ways of reading and writing poetry. Since three lines are used to complete this type of poem, I will have my students produce at least 3 nature related haiku poems.

Week 4- my students will continue journal writing for 15 minutes. They will keep their journals on their desk when writing their poems. The poems will reflect what comes from their journals. When my students write poems, it has to be original and use clear language. Journals help because the contents of them are original. Clarity will come through practice and through the writing process. I will tell students not to be too concerned about having good vocabulary. I will inform them that language in many poems is simple and plain language. It doesn't have to be complex. This will act as a springboard as I get into the next type of poetry, which is Free

Verse poetry. It allows students to write poetry that is free of a set rhyme or rhythm. It does not have a predictable length, line or stanza. Free Verse poems are an extension of what my students write in their journals. By the fourth week into the unit, the students are responsive and eager poets. They may come with poems they create outside of class. They might be willing to share these writing samples-their poems! Many of my reluctant students will be able to share their poems to the world! I will read some aloud and some students will read their own poems. This is whole class participation - reading, writing and sharing expressions of poetry. Lyric Poems are very expressive poems. A few of my students may create some awesome lyric poems. I have tried lyric poems in the past. These poems are genuine observations of their inner thoughts and feelings.

Week 5-during this week, I will distribute a poetry packet to each student. This packet will contain assignments to reinforce previous skills on reading and writing poetry. These packets will contain a few samples of each poem studied during the previous weeks and the definitions. I will go over each page thoroughly with the entire class. I will pose a few questions pertaining to the assignment for comprehension purposes. I don't expect all of my students to complete the entire poetry packet during one class period. I will give them the entire week to finish it.

As I approach the end of this unit, my students will be better readers and writers through their own creativity and inner personal experiences. The poetic expression packet is a follow-up and a continuation of works in progress. I will continue to encourage and praise them for their efforts. While completing the packet, my students will refer to their journals, the six stages of the Writing Process, their language books, the library and the blackboard. Dictionaries will be used to spell-check words or to confirm some meanings to words.

Week 6-I will go over the poetry packets. I will read, discuss and go over all the exercises. I will give feedback and oral interpretations of the poems from the packets. My students will respond to the poems also.

On the second day of this lesson, my students will choose one of their favorite poems. They will create a visual illustration as it relates to their poem. Sixth graders still enjoy the art of drawing and coloring with crayons; it is nice outlet for them. On the last day of this unit, I will have the classroom decorated with individual and artistic poems. These colorful illustrations will be fantastic.

My students will be challenged to form two-line rhyming poems called Couplets. Couplets have a specific pattern of rhyme and rhythm. I will have my students write a four-line couplet. If their poems don't "fit"the precise model, that's o.k. Learn by doing is a great premise in this unit. This curriculum unit contains the necessary elements for my students to obtain and master each objective set forth. I will give homework assignments to my students in capitalization, punctuation and general knowledge grammatical usage. I will be quite satisfied with 99.9% mastery from all of my students.

Literacy Standards

The literacy standards for New Haven Public Schools are reflected in my curriculum unit. The Comprehension School Plan and your schools Mission Statement should be incorporated in the teaching of this unit to your students. I strongly suggest you refer to your own schools plan and mission statement before using this unit.

WHAT STUDENTS SHOULD KNOW AND BE ABLE TO DO

Acquisition of knowledge: Reading for Pleasure and for Information Students read a wide range of print and media texts to build a knowledge base, to acquire new information which will support the needs and demands of society and the workplace, and to become lifelong readers for personal enjoyment
Becoming A Skilled Reader: Instructional Reading

Students apply a wide range of strategies to read, comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics)

Written Communication: Writing

Students will use the writing process to shape language in order to communicate their ideas and knowledge effectively.

I have just given you a few statements from the Literacy Standards Implementation Plan for New Haven Public Schools. I specifically referred to the 5-8 Contents and Performance Standard with Performance Description section. The plan addresses many more standards with more detail. Educators please review the literacy plan in your district and use it in conjunction with your school plan and/or mission statement before you implement this curriculum unit.

This curriculum unit is unlimited to its use because it could be applied to other forms and subjects of writing. I truly feel all students are capable of poetically expressing themselves in ways that they have yet to venture into. As educators, one of our many responsibilities is to give students ways to be explorers in their own right. Navigate your students through this unit and they'll discover the vast potential in which they have as writers and readers.

Samples of Poetic Expression

In preparing for this unit, some of my students and I were able to experience a unique way in reading and writing poetry. I like to give a heart-felt THANK-YOU to a few of these sixth grade students in my Reading and Language Arts classes for their indulgence and originality.

Charles Gardner,

Chris Pittman

Natasha Parker

Patrick Falconer

Tyrome Stevenson

Adja Diarrassouba

Tanika Simuel

Yenarah Alvarez

Ricardo J. Rodriguez

Yajaira Ferrer

Jessica Cameron

Come

Come to a place where I live
where I play and have fun where I sleep
and I eat.

Come to a place where I feel
depressed where I cry and where I think
about all the good things that come.

Come to a place where I love where
I have a broken heart.

Come With Me

Tanika Simuel

Gone

I use to be here but now I'm gone

The days past while you have fun

I might be gone but I know you

Remember me in you heart

You might think you're alone in the night but you are wrong

Every time you cry I hear your
Cry and I cry with you
I hear you laugh and I get happy
I look down from Heaven and wish
I was with you
But I am gone
Yenarah Alvarez

Lyric Poems
When it rains outside
I see little baby birds
They all huddle up
Charles Gardner

The snow is falling
It is getting very cold
I think it's winter
Chris Pittman

When the clouds float by
The sky gets light blue and gray
Very beautiful
Natasha Parker

Haiku
You
You are great you are special.
You are my friend to the very end.
You smell great.
I wonder where we'll go.
I hope it's fun.
Hey you I smell buns.
Do you like my coat?
I like yours too.
Let's go eat at Jimmy's and eat all the food.
Patrick Falconer - Free Verse Poem

Sleep

I sleep when I'm tired,
I sleep when I'm bored,
I don't sleep on boards,
When I sleep in my dream I'm in a house that creaks and shrieks,
Then I started to speak Greek,
Then I felt the light,
I awoke with a fright,
Sometime in my dream, I'm happy or sad,
Sometimes when I wake I'm glad,
So when I'm tired I sleep.

Tyrome Stevenson - Free Verse Poem

Cats

Cats are nice and furry
My medium size cats name is Murry
His nails are pretty sharp
Thank you God he don't play the harp
My little cat follows me along
Now in the cemetery and gone
Don't you hear it?
I think I've heard his spirit
I give him flowers
I think about him for hours
Cats are nice and furry
My medium size cats name is Murry
Yajaira Ferrer-Couplet

Why?
Why am I bad?
Why am I sad?
Why am I mad?
Why am I glad?
Why am I happy?
Why is my friend's hair nappy?
Why is she so sloppy?
Why does she like to copy?
Why am I tall?
Why do I hate playing basketball?
Why do I have an attitude?
Why am I so rude?
Why do I like to eat?
Why do I like to sleep?
Why am I so greedy?
Why do I hate Chef Boyardee?
Adja Diarrassouba-4-stanza Rhyme

I the Poet

I'm an amateur poet, so they say,
I ask them if I'm good, they say, "no way."
But someday it will happen, Someday it will come.
When I take the glory, In becoming number one!
The people will love me, And then they'll see.
That I'll be the best, That there ever will be.
I will become a Poet! I will become the Best!
I will be well known in both East and the West!
When I'm all grown-up, everybody will see,
That I am indeed the Best poet that there ever will be!
Ricardo J. Rodriguez-Lyric

Valentine Poem

Valentine's Day is for love;
Just like two little doves.
If you love to dance,
You'll love my romance.
I like the love that's in a boy,
Because all of that love brings me great joy.
I really love dates;
As long as we are mates.
Nice men would give a flower;
Nice women would give men power.
If you give me a present;
It would be so pleasant.
We can write love letters to each other;

But we just can't give it to our mother.
I know that you boys like girls;
So if that's the case, give them pearls.
If you give me a pretty, stuffed bear;
I know that you really, really care.
Jessica Cameron-Couplet

Acrostic Poem
Bad
Abnormal

Rude
Troubled
Stupid
Ignorant
Mean
Pathetic
Short
Orange
Nasty

I made up this Acrostic poem based on the cartoon character Bart Simpson.

I Wish
I wish I had more time to sleep,
I wish I had gutters that keep.
I wish my life were somehow less filled,
I wish for a Zima that's really chilled.
I wish for fewer payments, less stress,
I wish for all my children the best.
I wish I had more time to grow,
I wish I had a big brother...ya know.
I wish I could play the piano real well,
I wish I could have that man, don't tell.

This poem I created was inspired by "*Wishes, Lies and Dreams*" *Teaching Children to Write Poetry* by Kenneth Koch. This book is an excellent resource for beginning poetry with children.

Goals: Poetically Speaking

I want the students to enjoy what they're doing.

I want to share my feeling that poetry is fun.

I want my students to be involved in something they can relate to.

I want my students to write poetry that has a personal connection.

I believe as an educator that it's part of my job to give kids an environment where they can work and play while they're learning.

I believe as an educator that my students need to use their thoughts and knowledge to create something that will help them remember what they've learned.

I want my students to be proud of what they wrote and want to share it.

I believe that if my students work relates to their world, they will have a better chance of retaining it and they'll remember it.

This unit will help them read well, write well and spell well so they'll understand why it's important to do well later on in life.

They will be reading poetry that they write.

By the end of this unit, my students will be writing poetry on their own because they enjoy it. It's a new experience for them to have confidence in their own ability to accomplish something, to create meaningful work out of their own heads.

Kids often throw away their work because it doesn't have much meaning for them. I want my students to be able to share their poems with other students, family members and friends because they will have higher self-esteem when they are finished.

My goal is to give them the tools to build their own poems. I believe they will be excited and proud when they write about their inner thoughts, feelings and experiences. Anything kids do should have meaning and connection to where they live, their environment, what they know already and then they can be more responsive and learn better when they are in familiar territory. Most of what I teach in a year is rigid. I have to follow certain and specific guidelines for items that each child must be exposed to in an academic year, such as: literature appreciation, main theme, character analysis, interpretation of actions, metaphors, similes and other grammar fundamentals. Teaching these things are important, but this curriculum unit is the area in which I intend to teach and create freedom, play and make room for feelings.

When I teach this unit, I want to remember to use examples for my students like: "I know the fire is hot, because I burnt myself...I'll remember that."

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