



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

Weaving Words: Poetry for Everyday

Curriculum Unit 01.03.05
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Background

As a Library Media Specialist at Conte West Hills Magnet School, a K-8 facility, my place in the school and in the curriculum is not static. We are a social studies-based city magnet, and as such, have an economically and racially diverse student body from all over the city. Our teaching staff is comprised of 27 classroom teachers and approximately 15 additional teachers of special subjects and special education. It is a media specialist's responsibility to know and support the school's curriculum - all grades, all subjects. I welcome this responsibility as it affords me the opportunity to work with all the staff and students. I am also provided the opportunity to view the curriculum as a whole entity and identify areas that can be extended. Being a library media specialist is different from being a classroom teacher in many respects. Many of us, in fact, call ourselves Teacher-Librarian in an attempt to further define our role within the school community. While we do teach to whole classes, small groups, and individual students, there is also an extensive program to be run. The library media program encompasses not only classroom work, but also reading incentive programs, non-print media manipulation, and administrative tasks. The primary role of the library media specialist is to teach the process of learning to the students. We are usually involved in research tasks, fact-finding missions and separating the useful information from the useless.

In New Haven the Library Media Services department has its own curriculum, just as any other department. However, our curriculum differs in that our concentration is not content specific, but rather is the process of attaining the content knowledge. Information seeking strategies based upon the Big6™ Information Problem-Solving method designed by Mike Eisenberg and Bob Berkowitz drives the city's library media programs.

The Big6™ is a series of six steps applied to an information problem, ranging from grand projects such as a research paper to a one-page biographical study. Our goal in applying the Big6™ is to encourage students to become effective seekers and users of information. When students master this technique they are information literate. The process of information problem-solving begins with task definition. This can be deceptively difficult. It requires that students are clear about what is expected of them, and that they know exactly what the assignment is. Once students know what they need to do, identifying sources, gathering information, and using the information are next in the process. As the media specialist in a collaborative setting, I work with teachers on the synthesis, or product, that includes the information. Often, I am also involved with the evaluation of the product and the process.

The library media curriculum cannot be completed without the subject area curriculum and the content materials cannot be taught effectively without the process. Classroom teachers and media specialists work in a symbiotic relationship, each needing what the other offers in order to meet the educational needs of the students.

I intend to create a Poetry Workshop for students in grades 6 and 7. The media center is flexibly scheduled, meaning that classes are not set for specific days and times. Because of this schedule, I do not have the opportunity to create and execute a workshop like this for use during the regular school day. Fortunately, the New Haven school district provides opportunities in the Extended Day Academy. The Academy is designed to enrich curricular areas outside of regular school hours. Extended Day is open to any student who chooses to participate, as well as students who are recommended by a teacher for further academic enrichment.

The students I will teach in this workshop will be a mix of the two categories. However, I can request that certain criteria be considered when a student signs up for the program. For example, this program would not suit a student who is not on or very near grade level in reading. We will be studying some poems by authors whose ideas and themes may take some work to understand, and students will need to concentrate on the message versus decoding the words.

While the focus of the workshop is, of course, the reading, writing, and understanding of poetry, there is another underlying goal to my project. Middle school students need guidance in enhancing their ability to think on a higher level. Making connections, drawing conclusions, and believing in their abilities of observation, seems inherently difficult for this age group. The very nature of adolescence is self-doubt. I believe that it is an additional responsibility of middle school teachers and staff to help students find their voices and encourage them to believe in what they know to be true - and trust it. Teaching this through poetry allows for an atmosphere of flexibility and experimentation that students may find comforting.

Last year, as I taught a lesson to a class of 7th graders, this lack of confidence became apparent. Students were working on a study of African countries. Their task was to answer a series of questions from various research sources. One of the questions was what the people of the country ate. After reading about the agricultural structure and economy of the country, one student could not answer. We went over the text together, and I lingered on the information the student needed to answer the question without directly pointing it out. "It doesn't say" was the student's constant reply. After a time, even with additional coaxing, the student was not making the connection between what was grown and harvested, and the staples of the country's diet. An exact answer was not written in the material the student read, and so drawing a conclusion was a necessity. After explaining how the question could have been answered with the information given, the student responded with: "Well, that's what I thought, but I didn't want to lie."

After this incident it was crystal clear that at this stage in middle school academic development, early 7th grade, students are very hesitant to know what they know, and trust it enough to present it to a teacher or share with another student. The refrain seems to go: If it's not written in the book, it can't be true. Therefore, the students themselves have demonstrated a true need for the teaching of information seeking strategies and higher order thinking skills.

In *Making Your Own Days: The Pleasures of Reading and Writing Poetry* Kenneth Koch speaks about how some poetry "lies." His point is that what a poet puts into his or her poem does not have to be truth as accepted by those outside of the poem (64). A poet puts into lines that which he or she feels to be true. I would suggest an addendum. What a reader draws from a poem, the emotions that are drawn out, the implications of a poem to its reader are not a lie either.

Dealing in such territory as personal truths through poetry, I believe, will help students to find it within themselves to trust what they do not see in a text, and rather what they know, intuitively. Making an honest judgment about a poem, someone else's or one's own, is a vital element to the cycle of learning. Very often, it is in the evaluation of work that one gains the most for one's efforts. Deciding the criteria for evaluation and critiquing based on those criteria is most valuable. Unfortunately, it is also the part of the cycle where most students are likely to feel a loss of control and unsure of their work. Oftentimes students are not involved in this process and we, as teachers do a great disservice to them because of it. They have nothing vested in the arrangement. Students offer up an assignment, many times not having a clear sense of what is expected, and we offer back a grade and comments based on that work. Neither party gets anything of real value from the exchange.

Thinking critically, developing the ability to make rational conclusions, and evaluating the information we gather have become benchmarks for a successful, educated person. In an essay by Kathleen Cotton, titled "Teaching Thinking Skills" she observes that:

In the twentieth century, the ability to engage in careful, reflective thought has been viewed in various ways: as a fundamental characteristic of an educated person, as a requirement for responsible citizenship in a democratic society, and, more recently, as an employability skill for an increasingly wide range of jobs (1).

Learning to view material and information on a level higher than simply words and facts on a page, beyond face value, is a task that does not come naturally to many. Thankfully, it is a skill that can be taught and nurtured through practice. This workshop is designed to aid the student's movement through the process of learning to think creatively and independently using the Big6™ which is based upon Bloom's Taxonomy of Higher Order Thinking Skills. Benjamin Bloom designed a ladder of cognitive activity. There are six levels of cognition from ranging from simple to complex, concrete to abstract. Base Knowledge is the lowest level of thinking skill. This, essentially, is the memorization of facts. Listing, naming, recalling, and recognizing are tasks at this level of involvement. Comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation are then added step by step to the learning process. The Big6™ mirrors these concepts, but in language that is easy for students to learn and recall. The Big6 can also be reduced to the Super3: Beginning, Middle, and End, for younger students.

The seventh grade student I mentioned previously was caught at the third step of the information problem-solving process. He had located the source he needed, a reference volume about African countries, but had not completely engaged in the source. He was reading, yes, but not fully understanding and using the information he was given. This is not an uncommon phenomenon. It is at this stage in the 'research' process where plagiarism is very often committed. Students hover around the right words and phrases on the page and write it down, hoping that what they've written will have a kernel of what the teacher is looking for.

It is a rare opportunity that I get to work on my own with just the kids. I am seeking ownership of a project and the chance to work something through beginning to end. However, I am taking into consideration the grade levels at which poetry is not a concentration, and the curricular requirements for Language Arts.

Workshop Design

Regarding the workshop that I propose, the Extended Day Academy (EDA) is available to students for 1 hour and 15 minutes, two days a week. This leaves me approximately 2 and ½ hours for approximately 8 weeks to conduct the program. Lessons will include some of the strategies that Koch suggests in *Wishes, Lies, and Dreams*, such as creating a Color poem and a Comparison poem. I would also like to broaden and add new dimensions to some of these elementary ideas, challenging my middle school students. Koch's idea of a collaborative poem, for example, will be slightly altered. My students will each contribute a line of poetry to create one titled work by the whole group. We will begin by observing one of the rooms in our school. Not only will standard classrooms be used, but also rooms like a locker room or custodial closet. I will compile a list of areas and students will randomly select which room they will observe. I want students to observe their surroundings differently than they might during the day. There may well be activity in the room they choose, but this will only help to add content and character to their work. Students will work individually so there can be no sense of what the finished product will be. They will have to trust that their individual work will benefit the whole.

Observational poetry, in various formats, will begin our workshop. In three lessons I will introduce students to new ways of viewing poetry through new eyes. My point is to show that poetry can be made manageable, that it is not all as daunting as Shakespearean sonnets. By beginning slowly and ensuring success right away, students gain faith in their abilities to move onto more difficult pieces.

The workshop will begin on our first meeting with an introduction to what we are doing and why I wanted to lead a workshop like this. I believe that on some occasions, especially in out-of-school experiences like this one, the students are set at ease much more quickly when the instructor can share a little bit about the "mystery" behind lessons and learning. It's important that we as teachers show our hand when it comes to gaining the trust of students in our class. It will be very important when I ask them to begin writing their own poetry, that I already have their trust.

Also, at this first meeting I have provided a journal for every student. One of the requirements for successful completion of EDA will be the regular use of a journal to write their poetry assignments, but also students should use it to record general observations that may lend themselves to future poems. Words, phrases, ideas that inspire the students should be kept in this journal.

Our second meeting together will begin straight away with the poem about rooms in our school. This poem is collaborative as well as observational in nature. This first lesson is meant to be a safe and fun way for students to get their feet wet writing poetry. The only expectation is that they write two lines about what they sense, see, feel, smell in their assigned room. The lines may be full sentences or fragments however as a group, we should be able to identify what room the lines are describing. The only roles I hope to play in this creation are as recorder and moderator. The students will have to decide the order of the lines and what they want their poem to say. As with all of the work that my students create, this poem will have to be named. It is important to give a title to their work, as naming something implies validity and value. I choose to use this exercise first, because it is light-hearted and there is little individual risk in dealing with such a benign topic as school rooms. Also, students are not be working on a poem of their own, so the risk is minimal.

This lesson is taught using the Big6. As a group we comprehend what we have written, and synthesize the lines creating one final product, evaluating and adjusting as we go. Students are learning that what they wrote in isolation was just a small part of the big picture. They learn that their contribution, added to the group work,

has a new, altered meaning. Just as a paragraph in a text has one meaning, when read as part of a chapter, the greater intention is seen.

As a follow-up lesson to the first observational poem, we'll try something more concrete. This second lesson is called "Dancing Raisins." The goal of this experience is simple. Students will observe how raisins behave when they are dropped into a glass of clear, carbonated liquid, like Sprite. I will place two to three clear glasses half-full of Sprite on the table. My instructions to the students are to pay attention to every detail that is in front of them. I will then drop four to five raisins into the glasses. Students will have 1 minute to observe what happens in the glasses, before they write anything down.

This observational poem does not have any restrictions when it comes to format or length. As their first experience with me, writing their own poem, I want the lesson to be as free form as possible. If a student wishes to rhyme and make a more formal dissertation on the activities of raisins, it is the student's choice. I have no such expectations.

For their first take-home assignment for the workshop, I will ask students to write about something that they observe in their own homes. It may be a person with whom they live, their bedroom walls, or the street outside their house. The content is completely up to the student's discretion. The only requirements are that the poem is titled and has at least 15 lines.

It is important for students to know right away that their work will not be judged by myself or their classmates. I do, however, expect that they share some of what they have written throughout the course of the workshop. Sharing personal writing is an important step in learning to trust themselves and their efforts. At the end of every week I will collect the journals. Students may signal the work that they prefer I do not read by folding the page in half. It is my expectation that they will write in their journals at least three days a week.

After we have practiced some of the non-threatening ways to explore our universes through poetry, week three begins with a discussion about "What is Poetry?" Students will receive a glossary of poetic terms to keep in their journals as reference. I will touch briefly on historical uses and the importance of studying classic poets, as well as their relevance, if any, to the student's lives. Various formats such as metered poetry, calligrammes (picture poems), rhyming, and personification will be explored. In future lessons we will experiment with these forms.

To this point, we have not looked at or explored the works of some better known poets. I have intentionally waited to do this until after we have done some of our own work. Writing your own poetry can be a scary experience, and I wanted to ease any nervousness about that right away. However, reading and understanding other people's work is also a daunting task. As we use and examine our glossaries, we'll study examples of poetry terms and types. For example, we'll look the "Ballad of Chocolate Mabbie" by Gwendolyn Brooks and identify the qualities that make it a ballad. We will also delve into the story of Mabbie within the poem and look at the message that Brooks is sending the reader. "The Ballad of Chocolate Mabbie" contains lessons about history and human nature embedded within it and by practicing their deductive reasoning and higher order thinking skills, I hope that students will be able to tell me about the underlying issues facing Mabbie and Gwendolyn Brooks during the time of the poem.

I would like to spend some time with a couple of other Brooks poems like "We Real Cool" and "Sadie and Maud." These two poems are so powerful in their clear and concise messages, I believe that students will readily identify with them. I am primarily interested in the reactions students will have to these poems and will ask that they make a journal entry in response to each of the poems.

After studying the Brooks poems my students will begin work on a color poem of their own. The choice of color words in "The Ballad of Chocolate Mabbie" makes all the difference in a reader's response to the poem. While the idea of color will be literal in the poem they write, the use of color words like 'lemon-hued' and 'chocolate' to describe Brooks' characters may help to get them started. The topic of their color poem can be anything they choose, as long as one color word per line is included. They will choose the format of the poem, the line length, and its rhyme scheme, if any.

By this point students will have written one collaborative poem, one observational poem, and one color poem. They also will have had the opportunity to journal ideas they might want to explore further on in our workshop. During the fourth week of our program, I will re-introduce the idea of our final project. I am asking that students write a narrative poem, of considerable length, written and illustrated in picture book format. Students may work independently or as a pair. If working as a team, students may divide responsibilities as they like. One may write and one may illustrate, or it can be a collaboration of all areas.

In preparation, I will illustrate the type of work I expect by sharing books such as *Hush! A Thai Lullaby* by Mingfong Ho, and *Harlem* by Walter Dean Myers. Each is a book which illustrates one poem.

I will read each book to the students talking, about the layout of the poem, how its words are illustrated on each page, and the flow of the story.

Hush! is a poem of the sounds that might lull a baby to sleep in Thailand.

Hush!
Who's that peeping from the ceiling?

A lizard is the culprit on this page, but each page asks a similar question and a different animal is found to be making the noise. All the while, if you examine the illustrations carefully, you can see that the baby is not sleeping at all, but rather crawling around the pages, never in the bed where his mother laid him.

Harlem by Walter Dean Myers is a very different sort of poem and book. It is written with an older audience in mind and the graphics reflect a more mature reader. They are collage-like with very bold colors. The poem is much longer and more complex than Hush! It is the story of the development of the city of Harlem, with all of its musical, and sometimes dangerous, elements. Neither poem rhymes, but there is a distinct beat in *Harlem* and a soothing repetition of words and phrases in Hush! Each book has something unique to offer its reader.

Students will have the remaining four weeks to work on and complete their poems. During this time we will also continue learning other forms of poetry and students will continue to write their own. We will cover fairly elementary processes such as the rhymed couplet using "Puzzled" by Margaret Hillert, and move to more experimental poetry like the calligramme. In a calligramme, a combination of the words calligraphy and telegram, the words of the poem are arranged into a visual symbol of the meaning or subject of the poem. I will show an example of Guillaume Apollinaire's work, "Heart, Crown and Mirror," and "Easter Wings" by George Herbert. We will move through these two forms quickly, so that my students will have the opportunity to experiment with them. For a take-home assignment, I ask that each student come back with at least one calligramme and three rhymed couplets.

Through week five the workshop has opened students up to the possibilities of learning through poetry. We have taken some of the mystery of poetry away and I have begun to show them how to write it on their own, by giving them examples of simple form and allowing them to do a lot of work outside of the workshop itself. As I mentioned previously, the purpose of the workshop is two-fold. I want to expose students to reading and writing poetry, but I also want them learn the process information problem-solving. Each task I assign to them is a problem that they must solve. What to write about it is only the first step, the task definition.

This is really a process of slowing the pace of learning. Students always seem to be in hurry to finish what they're doing, to make the due date. Because of this practice, though, they are missing the point of the exercise. To finish quickly is not the desired end result, but rather learning the material and becoming capable of drawing conclusions about what one has read is the ultimate goal.

Poetry is a natural solution to teaching students how to slow down and consider what they are reading. In order to fully appreciate a poem it must be taken line by line and then really thought about. Obviously, the true meaning of a poem is not often as it first appears. Two techniques can assist students in fully understanding the meaning of a poem. First, read the poem aloud. When students can hear a work being read, they have time to listen closely to word choice, beat, rhyme scheme, if there is one, and flow of the poem. As you read aloud you are forced to slow down and concentrate on each word as it is being said. The second strategy is to take each line as it comes and understand it by itself before adding it to the mix of other lines. Be sure that everyone understands all of the words and any meaning the line has in relation to the topic of the poem.

With all of the remaining poems I will use these methods when necessary to be sure that after a time students will be able to reread these poems and work on any further understanding and meaning that they might hold. "Jabberwocky" is an example of the type of poem which might require these methods.

For the last three weeks of the workshop we will continue to explore form, but will begin spending a greater amount of time on reading and understanding poetry. Meanwhile, we are continuing to write our own pieces gaining inspiration from what has been written in journals and also using some picture books. One of the books I will share with the students is Chris Van Allsburg's book *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick*, in which each page has a black and white painting, a title, and an opening sentence. Each page in this book serves as a great writing prompt. Students may use the painting, the sentences or both to devise their own comparison poem about the image on the page. A comparison poem is exactly as it sounds. Using like and as students create a poem comparing unusual elements. Kenneth Koch suggests in *Wishes, Lies and Dreams: Teaching Children to Write Poetry* that as students, people, get older, this sort of poem is more difficult to write. Children have a natural ability to perceive things around them without attaching a judgment. Their ideas are still unconventional and they are still comfortable writing them down. Middle school students may have already reached the point where they find it difficult to let their imaginations roam, but I am interested to see how this picture book can help.

Nonsense poems and odes will be the final types of poetry that we will study together. I have chosen "Jabberwocky" by Lewis Carroll as the best example of a nonsense poem to share. There is such a beautiful use of language using words that don't exist. Carroll tricks the reader into thinking that he's speaking proper English during this story-telling. There are examples throughout the poem of portmanteau words. These are words that have been created using elements of two other words. For example, the word smog is combination of smoke and fog, thereby creating the portmanteau word - smog. Carroll creates some of his language this way.

'Twas brillig , and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;

Slithy is a combination of lithe and slimy. My challenge to the students is to first tell me the story of the poem and then identify some of the other portmanteau words and how they were designed. This is a fun exercise once the students understand that there is in fact a real story being told and once they allow themselves to think about what these fake mean. Each of the phrases and words helps to create a mood for the poem. I would like for my students to identify that mood and recognize that what they have learned from the poem was not written down in front of them. They had to use intuitive skills, as well as, reasoning abilities.

After reading "Jabberwocky" and studying the devices of the poem we will write our own nonsense poetry with the help of a book called *A Cheese and Tomato Spider* by Nick Sharratt. This book is a children's book with flaps that allow the reader to play with disparate elements, ideas or elements that you would not normally put together. By having students replicate elements from the poems that we've read, they have been able to practice the techniques they've learned, but also they have practiced the process of learning to understand. When they write their own poems, students are using what they know and using knowledge is a surefire way to remember what you've been taught. Students are past only reading and are into synthesizing what they know and making connections between what they read and their own lives.

During the final two weeks of the program students will be concentrating on their final projects. Having had six weeks to think about a poem that they want to write and illustrate, they will have the four remaining sessions to work. The last type of poetry I want to share with my students is the ode. I have chosen to give them "Ode to a Tomato," "Ode to Laziness," and "Ode to my Suit" written by Pablo Neruda. We'll explore the importance of personification and the natural world in poetry using these odes as examples. These poems are all written in both English and Spanish. It is likely that some of the students in the workshop are native Spanish speakers, so we'll have an opportunity to hear the poems in both languages. Students will then, of course, be asked to write an ode of their own.

Through the reading and discussion about all of the poems I've mentioned above, it is my intention to teach my students about the value of taking risks with their assumptions and conclusions. We will have read some fairly difficult poems. But, also, the students will have successfully deciphered some less complicated poetry on their own, giving them a sense of accomplishment. Knowing that they took on poetry, managed it and even wrote their own poems will serve them well in future assignments. To carry this feeling of accomplishment with them into other academic areas, knowing that if they slow down to look for the best strategy to solve the information problem, they will have continued success in their studies.

With all of the poets used in this workshop, I will have prepared myself on the biographical backgrounds and intent of the poets of these poems so that I might guide discussion. However, it is not my desire to stifle the insights of my students. The point of the workshop is for the students to learn to make connections and inferences on their own, and eventually feel secure enough in their abilities to carry over to other curriculum areas. I will serve only as a guide and give credence to their theories about the poems.

I hope to prove to these students that they can trust their instincts and feelings about reading and writing poetry. I hope that these same instincts and feelings about poetry will be transferred to the work they will need to do on classroom assignments. Weaving their poetic words into the final project will enable my EDA

students to develop their information problem solving abilities and higher order thinking skills. Their books will be a concrete example of how their newly woven words demonstrate increased confidence and an enhanced understanding of their own humanity.

Standards and Assessment

This unit will address the following Language Arts and Information Literacy Standards for grades 6 and 7 as are approved by the New Haven Board of Education. The standards are virtually identical for grades 6 and 7 in these areas, so I have listed them only once.

Language Arts

Content Standard 1.0: Reading

Demonstrate strategic reading skills after reading:

- Students will identify and give examples of metaphors, similes, imagery, sarcasm, irony, propaganda, persuasion, humor, heroism.
- Students will draw conclusions and make inferences about the author's purpose.

Content Standard 2.0: Writing

Demonstrate strategic writing skills before, during, and after writing:

- Students will add descriptive words, phrases, metaphors, similes, and sensory details.
- Students will create various types of poetry, limericks, ballads, and sonnets.

Information Literacy

Use of Information

Students will engage in the source:

- Participate in group discussions and activities and express opinions about materials heard, read or viewed.

Synthesis

Students will present the information:

- Create a final product using appropriate and/or assigned format, such as written, oral, visual, dramatic, electronic, musical, etc.

Evaluation

Students will judge the result (effectiveness):

- Read, reflect, and respond to reviews and comments from peers, parents, and teachers.

Students will judge the process (efficiency):

- Keep a diary/log of the process.

The assessment of our students' work has always been important. Though, currently, it seems to be taking an ever-more prominent place in our curriculum. I, as a library media specialist, do not assign grades for library work. The Extended Day Academy does not require a grade. This leaves me with a dilemma. I know that if the students know that they will not receive a 'grade' for their work, I risk getting poor quality and poor effort in the program. Students attending the program will have a syllabus on the first day. This prepares them right away for what the program will offer; that I am taking the Academy seriously, and that I expect the same from them. The requirements for the final project, while fairly loose and negotiable, will be given to them, as well as what I expect in the way of journal content and use. There can be no mistake about what I hope to accomplish during the eight weeks. While the spirit of the workshop is one of experimentation and risk, it is also meant to be less strict and structured than an academic class. I will give written feedback on the student's journals, as well as conferencing with them. I will monitor the activity of the workshop while they work on their poetry or talk about a poem we are reading. For our first meeting together I have prepared a pre-workshop survey about poetry. The survey asks about terminology and previous experience with writing poetry, as well as any feelings they may have about reading poetry. I will administer the same survey during the last session of the workshop. Hopefully, any negative attitudes have changed and base knowledge of the mechanics of poetry has also increased. I am sure that this assessment plan will provide what I need to determine a student's progress and effort.

From the very outset, I will make it very clear that I cannot, and will not decide whether or not what they write is "good." That they are writing and making efforts at poetry at all means that they are being successful. I can only determine whether or not their efforts are sincere, and, perhaps offer some counsel on direction or word choice.

Syllabus

Extended Day Academy

Reading and Writing Poetry

Week I

Session 1: Introduction: why I choose to teach a poetry workshop.

Receive syllabus and survey.

Receive journals.

Session 2: Observational Poetry

School room collaborative poem

Week II

Session 1: Observational Poetry

"Dancing Raisins"

Assignment: write an observational poem about something at home. It can be about someone who lives with you, what your bedroom walls look like, the street outside your house, etc.

Session 2: Share observational poems that you wrote.

Why do we write observational poetry? What's its purpose and point?

Week III

Session 1. Receive glossary of poetic terminology

Discussion of the historical purpose of writing poetry and poetic formats.

Session 2. Types of Poetry: the ballad/ Gwendolyn Brooks

"The Ballad of Chocolate Mabbie"

"We Real Cool"

"Sadie and Maud"

Assignment: Reread "We Real Cool" and "Sadie and Maud." Make a journal entry about your thoughts or feelings regarding the characters in each poem. Write a color poem.

Week IV

Session 1. *Hush! A Thai Lullaby* by Mingfong Ho

Discussion of final project.

Session 2. *Harlem* by Walter Dean Myers

Assignment: Journal 4 ideas about the final poem/picture book.

Week V

Session 1. Calligrammes and Rhymed Couplets

Guillaume Apollinaire's "Heart, Crown, and Mirror"

George Herbert's "Easter Wings"

Session 2. Writing our own calligrammes and couplets.

Week VI

Session 1. Nonsense poetry/Portmanteau words

"Jabberwocky" by Lewis Carroll

Session 2. Odes by Pablo Neruda

"Ode to a Tomato," "Ode to My Suit," "Ode to Laziness"

Assignment: Write your own ode.

Week VII

Session 1. Share odes you've written.

Poems and illustrations for final project.

Session 2. Work on final project.

Week VIII

Session 1. Complete work on final project.

Session 2. Share finished books. Complete Poetry Survey, and discuss any differences from the first survey.

Lesson One: Observational/Colaborative Poem,

Week I, Session 2

Objectives: Students will be able to:

- 1) Define and identify an observational poem.
- 2) Spend 5 to 10 minutes observing a specific room's atmosphere, noises, sights, smells.
- 3) Contribute one line of poetry to a collaborative poem being written by a group.

Procedure and Materials: (journal, pen, room assignment, chart paper, marker)

1. A bowl of slips of paper with rooms within the school building should be prepared ahead of time.
2. Have students draw a slip of paper at random.
3. Explain to students that have 10 minutes to go the room on their slip of paper and observe what is happening in the room. They should take note of any striking noises, scents, activities, people within the room.
4. After observing for a few moments students should write at least four lines describing what they experience. Have students be prepared to share at least two of the lines.
5. When all students have returned to the library (gathering place) record two lines from each student onto big pieces of chart paper. Each line should be on a separate piece of paper so that they can be easily rearranged.
6. Have students arrange the lines to form a poem about the school building.
7. Name the poem and explain the importance of naming their work.

Lesson Two: Observational Poetry, "Dancing Raisins"

Week II, Session 1 Objectives: Students will be able to:

- 1) Use past experience with writing an observational poem.
- 2) Quietly observe an event for 1 minute.
- 3) Write an observational poem based on what they see.
- 4) Include in their poem words that relate to their current mood.

Procedure and Materials: (2-3 clear glasses, a clear, carbonated liquid like Sprite, 1 box of raisins, journal, pen)

1. Explain to students that they are going to write their first poem on their own. They will not have to read the poem unless they volunteer. This is meant to be a safe exercise.
2. Explain the rules of the experience: For 1 minute they are to only watch what happens to the raisins in the glass. They may write anything down until time is called. Students should pay close attention to everything about the table setting, and ask them to take a moment and notice what kind of emotions their feeling right now. If they would like, emotion words can be included in the poem.
3. Fill each glass about half way full of Sprite.
4. Drop in 4-5 raisins.
5. Begin timing 1 minute.
6. At the end of 1 minute, tell students that they can begin to write their poem. There are no expectations or restrictions regarding the format that they use. Give students 15-20 minutes to write.
7. Ask students to share what they have written. Discuss the word choices and the elements that each student included. How are the poems similar? How do they differ?

Lesson Three: Nonsense Poem, "Jabberwocky" by Lewis Carroll

Week VI, Session 1 Objectives: Students will be able to:

- 1) Define and identify a nonsense poem.
- 2) Retell the story of the Jabberwocky.
- 3) Define the concept of a portmanteau word.
- 4) Identify within Jabberwocky at least 3 portmanteau words.
- 5) Create their own portmanteau words.
- 6) Begin writing their own nonsense poem.

Procedure and Materials: (copy of "Jabberwocky" by Lewis Carroll)

1. Read "Jabberwocky" out loud to students.
2. Hand out a copy of the poem so that students can read along, and read the poem again.
3. Have students identify any poetic devices that they recognize; rhyme, meter, etc.
4. Have students look up the word 'portmanteau' in their glossaries. Identify the word 'slithy' from the poem and talk about how it is a portmanteau.
5. Ask students to tell you what the poem is about, even though they don't understand all of the words.
6. Ask if hearing the intonation of the lines was helpful in painting a picture of the message of the poem.
7. Have students work in pairs to identify 3 more portmanteau words and from which other words they were derived.

Student Reading List

Brooks, Gwendolyn. *Blacks* . Chicago: Third World Press, 2000. An anthology of all of Brooks' poetry.

Ho, Mingfong. *Hush! A Thai Lullaby* . New York: Orchard Books, 1996. A picture book poem of the sounds of Thailand that could lull a baby to sleep.

Janeczko, Paul B. *The Place My Words are Looking For: What Poets Say About and Through Their Work* . New York: Macmillan Books for Young Readers, 1990. An anthology of poems with commentary about words and writing by the poets.

Myers, Walter Dean. *Harlem* . New York: Scholastic, Inc., 1997. A picture book poem about the city of Harlem. The book includes dramatic collage-type graphics with a contemporary urban beat.

Neruda, Pablo. *Full Woman, Fleshly Apple, Hot Moon: Selected Poems of Pablo Neruda* . Translated by Stephen Mitchell. New York: HarperPerennial, 1997. An anthology of odes and poems printed in both the original Spanish and in English translation.

Norton Book of Light Verse . Russell Baker, ed. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1986. A collection of over 400 poems chosen to amuse and shock the reader.

Pinsky, Robert and Maggie Dietz. *Americans' Favorite Poems: The Favorite Poem Project Anthology* . New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2000. Selected poems by Americans with commentary about why the work was chosen as a favorite.

Sharratt, Nick. *A Cheese and Tomato Spider* . Hauppauge, NY: Barron's Educational Series, 1996. A children's flap book with opportunities to create crazy combinations of exclamations and pictures.

Van Allsburg, Chris. *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick* . Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1984. A virtually wordless picturebook with beautiful black and white drawings. Each picture is accompanied by a title and a sentence, but the story of each picture is left to the reader's imagination.

Teacher Reading List

Cotton, Kathleen. "Teaching Thinking Skills." School Improvement Research Series (SIRS), 1991. An essay and overview of the value of using Bloom's Taxonomy of Higher Order Thinking Skills.

Koch, Kenneth. *Making our Own Days: The Pleasures of Reading and Writing Poetry* . New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999. A comprehensive guide for understanding the mechanics of poetry and how good poetry manages to intoxicate its readers.

--. *Rose, Where Did You Get that Red?: Teaching Great Poetry to Children* . New York: Vintage Books, 1990. A volume that uses 10 lessons to teach teachers how to use and explain poetry to their students. The second half of the book is a collection of additional poems to use in the classroom.

--. *Wishes, Lies and Dreams: Teaching Children to Write Poetry* . New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999. Largely a collection of poetry written by inner-city children, with simple yet effective strategies to teach children how to write their own poems.

Moyers, Bill. *The Language of Life: A Festival of Poets* . New York: Doubleday, 1995. This book contains conversations with 34 poets about their poetry, what motivates them to write and their reactions to their own work.

Rubin, Robert Alden, ed. *Poetry Out Loud* . Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books, 1993. 100 poems specifically chosen because they are so well suited to being read aloud.

Ryan, Margaret. *How to Write a Poem* . New York: Franklin Watts, 1996. From the series of Speak Out, Write On! books, this book is an introduction to terminology and techniques needed to write poetry.

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