



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
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## **The Poet Within: a Workshop Series**

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### **Introduction**

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The urban American language sea in which many, if not most, of New Haven Public Schools' students are immersed is not one of broad-ranging vocabulary, verbal eloquence, or even coherent Standard English. Consequently, I am planning to teach a writers' workshop series this coming academic year at the comprehensive high school where I teach Spanish as a Second Language. The workshop will be open to all students because, regardless of a particular student's linguistic or social background, each (even, or perhaps especially, those not enrolled in a language class) could benefit from more exposure to fun and non-threatening writing activities. I expect mainly to enroll ninth- and tenth-graders, as they tend to constitute the majority of students in similar programs and are the students most concerned with up-coming standardized language testing. They also form the bulk of my teaching load, and most students seem to prefer attending extra-curricular classes with familiar teachers, at least at first. For the year-long workshop series, I have two main goals-to increase the frequency and breadth of the students' reading activities and to engage them in both expository and creative writing pursuits. Meeting twice a week after school and on Saturday mornings for 50-minute sessions, we will spend the first half of the year working on reading and writing expository material, focusing on improvements in Standard English usage and developing the rhetorical conventions of composition. I also plan to use those first twenty weeks to develop a sense of camaraderie amongst the students and of trust in me as the instructor, which should make the more emotionally demanding tasks of creative writing easier to manage. In the second twenty weeks of the academic year, our focus will shift to creative works-specifically the reading and writing of poetry. As Mark Twain said, "A reader is not a person who can read, but one who does." Since good readers become good writers, I will strive to help the students become better at both, through the enjoyment of both prose and poetry. What follows is an outline for the second half of the workshop, in which I detail my objectives for the students and strategies for achieving those goals with poetry.

## Objectives and Strategies

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Building on Prior Knowledge & Skills - Seeing Ourselves as Writers in Progress As Natalie Goldberg makes clear in *Writing Down the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within*, it is not that one can learn to be writer, it is that one must seek to release the language artist lurking inside oneself. The task, then, is to commit to that writer within and to consistently engage in the often frustrating yet rewarding act of producing a poem or other piece of writing. Towards that end, I intend to emphasize participation and production more heavily in the poetry half of the year than in the first half of the year. The students will listen to spoken poetry, read their own and others' poems both silently and aloud, respond to read poetry both verbally and in writing, and write poems. Each session, or lesson, will follow the same basic format: first we will read or listen to some poetry, then respond to it, and finally write our own, somehow connected, pieces of poetry.

Upon completion of the first half of the year, the students will have developed a daily (or every session) writing habit through the use of dialog journals. I intend to rely on that habit throughout the poetry unit so that the students come to see poetic language as what Kenneth Koch calls it - "an extension of everyday language" in which the meaning of language (sense) is augmented by its music (sound). I have often used dialog journals to encourage ESL students to write, and they have proven a very effective method. A dialog journal is a private, two-way conversation between the student and teacher in which the instructor responds to the student's written work, but does not correct it. Although it can be very difficult for the teacher to refrain from marking the students' errors, the improvement in sheer production achieved with this type of journaling is worth the effort. At times, when a student consistently makes the same error, I have made a suggestion in my response such as "Americans usually say 'There were three of us' instead of 'We were three,'" thus avoiding possible fossilization of the error without actually red marking it. The basic technique is simple: present each student with a marbled cover "Compositions" notebook and ask them to bring it to every session. Tell them that no one but yourself will read the entries and that you will not discuss the contents with anyone. Provide space in a locked filing cabinet or closet in the classroom, so that those who wish to may safely leave their journals in between class sessions. Assign the students to write a journal entry in the first ten minutes of each session, either on the suggested topic you write on the board, or one of their choosing. (Sometimes, I have had the students tape a photocopied list of possible subjects onto the back cover of their notebooks, which is then used to make up missing entries from days absent or tardy.) Require or suggest a specific length - half a page, one paragraph, a full page, etc., depending on the age and ability level(s) of the students. With prose journaling, especially for teenage and adult students, controversial opinion statements, such as "Abortion is murder," often provoke a veritable flurry of writing, even in the most reluctant students. In any case, collect the journals promptly at the ten minute mark, as this helps the students train themselves to buckle down immediately upon entering the classroom. Be sure to respond - even if only with one sentence - after each entry is turned in, and hand the journals back to each student as s/he enters class for the next session. In addition to providing invaluable writing practice, the journal's daily non-critical back and forth with the teacher helps the students develop a trusting relationship with him or her. That trusting relationship in turn leads to fewer discipline problems and a greater openness in the classroom over all.

The journals will continue to form an on-going conversation between teacher and student regarding participation, writing process, and progress in the second half of the year, with the change of using them towards the end of every lesson for poetry-related writings, rather than for prose practice at the beginning of class. Throughout the year, I will ask students to copy in a few checklist-style assessment questions at regular intervals, as well as requiring that they "talk" to me in prose about how the session(s) are going for them. Additionally, during the poetry unit, I will ask the students to carry their notebooks with them at all times

(rather than storing them with me) so as to jot down poem ideas, interesting images, and language fragments as they appear on a day-to-day basis. I will then need to review and respond to their writings less frequently, perhaps weekly on the same non-session day, returning the journals at our next meeting. As with the prose activities, I will not correct or criticize the students' pieces, simply comment on them in a positive way (for example "You seem to really be interested in dogs-have you tried writing about an animal you hate?") or make suggestions as to further reading that might interest the student (such as "Langston Hughes wrote some great poems on themes that seem to interest you-have you read his work?").

During the initial ten to fifteen 50-minute poetry sessions, I plan to rely on the students' previous experience with nursery rhymes, song lyrics, and poetic fragments (such as aphorisms) to inspire full class and small group discussions as well as the writing of original pieces. In addition, I intend to have them read about and write on themes common to all young persons, such as family life, childhood experiences, and emotions. We will focus on an expansion of vocabulary and an improved understanding of language terminology, such as part of speech, image, and description. I think that a number of the students will enter the workshop thinking that they cannot understand, much less write, poetry. I intend to use techniques such as class collaboration, in which the students each contribute a word or line to a "poem" written on a given subject, to lessen that resistance. During the first five weeks of the twenty devoted to poetry, I plan to work the students away from any self-perceived lacks regarding poetry towards a braver, more self-accepting attitude. Another way in which the students will gain confidence is to emphasize the poetic elements of language they already know well. I plan to have the students write out and bring in copies of their favorite song lyrics. We will then discuss what appeals to them about the song, how it changes from the page to the ear, if it's different recited versus sung, if the most important element is the tune or lyrics, and how sound elements such as rhyme, repetition, alliteration, assonance, and consonance, etc., enhance the lyrics. We will also spend quite a bit of time on writing exercises in their journals, such as writing (in prose) about the ugliest, most beautiful, scariest, most enjoyable experiences they have had, and then closing trying to put that experience into a ten-word poem. In order that the students focus on the sound of the words they are putting together, I will use some lines of my own and others' poetry and have the students discuss why one draft is "better" than another - why a poet might choose the word "clam" over "shell" or vice versa in a specific situation. In addition, we will do some silliness exercises, such as constructing nonsense lines of alliterative nouns and adjectives (for example "Six simple sheep swam sillily") so that the students will relax and have fun with language. I plan to introduce formalized poetry (with limericks) at this point, as a segue into a five- to ten-week long set of sessions on reading great poetry and writing after it. Once the students have discovered that every day experiences expressed in simple language can become "poetry," their resistance to "literature" will lessen, allowing their own creativity to come to the fore. After their resistance has lessened, I will slowly introduce poems, or sections of poems, by published poets, both contemporary and classically canonical. Kenneth Koch's experiences teaching the reading and writing of poetry to New York City's public school children have shown us that even very young children can understand, enjoy, and respond to works such as William Blake's "The Tyger" or Emily Dickinson's "I Never Saw a Moor" when given "poetry ideas" (Rose xxii). I will generally follow Koch's lead in these poetry sessions, asking the students to write pieces which are somehow related to what we have read or heard read, without analyzing the pieces to death or becoming overly caught up in drafting and revising (Rose 336). I plan to employ Koch's concept of poetic language as being that in which sound and meaning work together to create something more than everyday speech (Making 20-21), and we will spend a good deal of time in the sessions listening to one another read aloud, and perhaps, listening to published poets read aloud (via audio cassette) as well as discussing what makes a poem.

In anticipation of planning this unit, I did try some simple poetry writing activities late in the past academic year, and my students generally responded well. Most had previously worked with Acrostic poems and Haiku

in English and enjoyed it, so they were excited to try those forms in Spanish. Learning that many "professional" writers often struggle to overcome the same difficulties and blocks encountered by everyday people (an insight from the Goldberg book mentioned above) surprised nearly all of the students and encouraged them to continue forward themselves. I therefore plan to include "tips" for writers from Natalie Goldberg's *Writing Down the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within*, Ray Bradbury's *Zen in the Art of Writing*, and William Higginson and Penny Harter's *The Haiku Handbook*, in my presentations and individually with students as appropriate. In terms of the work my students produced this year, even though we did not do much reading or discussion of poetry before writing, the students were undeterred from writing. They produced a number of nice pieces, and some students went beyond the requirements, producing extra poems and decorating their final drafts with artwork.

I am intrigued, however, by Koch's method of teaching the reading and writing of poetry as one subject (Rose xxi) and intend to follow his lead in my own poetry unit. Towards that end, I will begin with three William Blake poems - "The Tyger," "the Lamb, and "The Sick Rose," as Koch suggests in Chapter One of *Rose, Where Did You Get That Red?* (3-35). I detail this lesson plan below as a mid-semester class possibility, after the students have gained some practice reading and writing pieces closer to their own everyday lives - pieces based on nursery rhymes, song lyrics and observational exercises. We will then read some of the "great poets" and write poems somehow similar to theirs. The lesson on the Blake poems, for example, asks the students to write a poem in which they converse with an animal. After the Blake, we will read Marianne Moore's "The Wood-Weasel" and write about animals (including birds and insects) that we like despite others' dislike of that same beast. Continuing with the Nature theme, I plan to have the students read a number of Japanese Haiku and then write their own (282-4). This lesson should work well with Spanish-dominant and bilingual students, as the five-seven-five syllable pattern essential to this form is easier to manage in Latin languages than in English. Another poet whose work led Koch's students to a burst of creativity is William Carlos Williams, so I will attempt to do the same. I will have the students read "This Is Just To Say," pausing afterwards to have the students write an apology poem. We will then read "The Locust Tree in Flower," followed by a class collaboration poem and then individual pieces with one word per line about something seen. And finally, we will read "Between Walls" and then each write a poem about something we find beautiful although it isn't supposed to be so (100-2). I plan to use Walt Whitman as another inspiration for poems about everyday occurrences. We will read two sections from *Song of Myself* (numbers 15 and 26) and write about either all the actions that the students imagine people are doing at the moment they are writing or about all the sounds they imagine are being made. The directions for these pieces will include the suggestion that the students make the pieces as long as they possibly can (227-233). In the following class, we will read and discuss Emily Dickinson's "I Never Saw a Moor" and write poems about things we have never seen, but are nevertheless certain we know in some way (234). To end up this section of the workshop, we will read some Shakespeare. Koch suggests three of the Songs, so I will start with "Come Unto These Yellow Sands," "Fancy," and "Where the Bee Sucks." We will then write poems inviting someone to a place full of interesting sounds and colors and happenings (60-63). Perhaps, depending on time constraints and the students' abilities, we may work with some of the Sonnets as well. I want the students in the writers' workshop to see that the effort they put into their reading and writing projects vests in both them and the product an intrinsic value entirely separate from any potential "literary" value. The sheer fact of completing a poem project is a very important step for the students, and one whose difficulty I hope will diminish with each completed assignment.

#### Pair and Group Work - Making Cultural Connections & Reducing Prejudice

Despite the fact that the New Haven Public Schools are integrated - in my building approximately 45% of students self-identify as African-American, 45% as Hispanic, and 10 % as White/Other - most students appear

to spend the majority of their "social" time with members of their own racial or cultural group(s). The classroom is, therefore, the place where a student can most readily get to know another's culture and perhaps come to see that "other" as a teenager more similar to than different from him/herself. The use of pairs and small group work in this poetry workshop, particularly with regard to brainstorming of ideas, discussion of themes, and collaborative poems, will help the students to see each other as human beings in need of understanding and with valuable contributions to make. Much research has shown that getting to know someone from a cultural or racial background different from one's own opens the door to lessening prejudice. It is difficult to maintain negative prejudgments against someone who has become a respected classmate, a valued group member, or, perhaps, a friend. Social interactions are of extreme importance to teenagers, and I intend to employ that to my benefit, and theirs, by establishing and maintaining the workshop sessions as a safe space where students can express themselves without fear and work together towards the mutual goal of understanding and producing poetry. I hope that the combination of high interest activities, low (or non-existent) grade pressure, and the chance to mix academic pursuits with social interaction will prove successful in helping the students lower cultural barriers and genuinely bridge differences.

#### Active Participation - Reducing Fear and Raising Confidence

I will use active participation as the main assessment criterion for success in the workshop sessions. Since the sessions are not part of their regular classes, the students need not concern themselves with getting the "right" answer and can let their creativity flower. Similarly, the individual "grading" system I use for class participation encourages the students to take part consistently while the journaling system discussed above offers them an outlet for thoughts and feelings they may not wish to share with the group. Active participation will be assessed in two ways - via a participation calendar and a series of assessment checklists.

Participation calendars are an evaluation tool that I use in my classes for two reasons - they hold the student responsible for his/her active participation in the lesson and they help the teacher maintain a balanced pattern of calling on students. Essentially, students construct a two by three grid on a sheet of landscape-oriented paper, which is then used to keep track of class meetings, absences, day and date information, and individual answers given. The teacher circulates among the students while teaching and presents opportunities for participation by asking questions about the material presented, requesting suggestions from the class, having the students offer items in use in the lesson, etc. When a student answers correctly, even if prompting or other assistance is required, the teacher "stamps" the student's calendar on the appropriate day's square. I have previously used a permanently red-inked star stamp from an office supply store but am presently using the readily available flower, insect, dinosaur, spaceship type of marker stamps meant for scrap book activities. The students love to be "stamped," and the calendars provide a simple means for the teacher to assess who is speaking too frequently and who not enough. In my classes, I only award stamps for individual, oral participation in Spanish, but I will vary that formula somewhat for the writers' workshop sessions. First of all, the students receive only an "attendance and participation" grade in the after school and Saturday academies, so the calendar score will not be calculated into their averages as it is in class. I will use it as a way to help the students self-evaluate and to maintain balanced calling among the participants when we are in large group situations. Secondly, with a mix of ability levels, language backgrounds, and varied individual goals, I will vary what type of response qualifies for which quantity of participation stamps. For example, reading one's own poem aloud might result in two stamps per line read versus two stamps total for reading a similar-length poem out of a book.

The use of the calendars also helps more introverted students participate by visually reminding them that they need to raise their hands and answer aloud a specified number of times per session or week. In my

classes, that is an average of twice a day for a passing grade of 60 and an average of three times a day for an A- score of 90. The daily scores are totaled across the whole ten-week quarter and then averaged by the actual number of class days that included stamping activities. In the fifty-minute workshop sessions, I plan to ask each student to participate a certain number of times per lesson, varying the number from session to session depending on the specific activities I have planned. Absences and tardiness are also recorded on the calendar, so the student can see when s/he has missed something and should ask a classmate for that specific day's work. In doing so, s/he will also see the number of stamp opportunities missed, thus encouraging promptness and consistent attendance. At first, the more introverted students are often intimidated by the idea of having to participate aloud in every class. After explaining that speaking is an essential part of a language class, I often make arrangements with the more shy children to help them feel more comfortable. We usually agree that I will not call on them unless their hands are raised, but they will raise their hands every time they suspect they have an answer. I expect that this shyness difficulty will be further ameliorated in the poetry workshops by the lack of grade pressure, as well as the nature of many of the activities, which have to do more with creative or original responses than with "getting the right answer." Another way in which calendars help both the teacher and students is by encouraging the students to attempt otherwise onerous or disliked tasks, such as oral reading or recitation in front of the class, call and response activities like dialogues or rounds, and rough and ready brainstorming or defining of terms. When I offer double or triple stamps to the first student who can find a needed item in a glossary or dictionary, it is amazing how many students will go for their books. Similarly, I will often offer one stamp per line for students willing to read aloud or participate in a dialog in front of the class. Nearly every hand will be raised, and some students actually prefer these opportunities, gaining several sessions' worth of stamps on one more brave-feeling day. Finally, my planning is pre-organized to support the objectives of high student participation and teacher vigilance. Since I know the students will be expecting to get stamped, I always figure in lots of student-centered activities and find myself constantly walking around the room, observing the students' work, and speaking individually with the quieter ones. As Koch points out (Rose 334), the teacher must be actively involved with the material and with the students as they write. Above all else, I have found that the students genuinely enjoy the calendars, and they provide a simple fairness system for the teacher.

Assessment checklists are the final tool I will use to evaluate the students. Each week (every three sessions), students will have at least one activity that requires the use of a checklist. I use a variety of these in my classes presently, as they allow the students to self-assess both process and product, clarify and organize the peer review process, and help keep everyone on task. For example, in a poem-writing activity, the assessment checklist might be made up of questions with No, Somewhat, and Yes answers, with two columns given--one for the student's self-assessment and one for the teacher's. Items to be evaluated might include adherence to directions, length of piece produced, use of peer review, etc. I also plan to employ assessment checklists in conjunction with the journaling process, primarily in order to help the students make a commitment to writing as an everyday, or at least every session, part of their lives.

### Putting It All Together - A Final Class Project

For a culminating project, I plan to have the students put together their own favorite poems anthology, a la Pinsky. During the final five weeks of the year, I will ask each of the students to select two of his or her favorite poems from the workshop. One will be from the student's own writings and the other from the poets we have read or heard in class or in outside readings. The students will write explanatory "blurbs" like those in *Americans' Favorite Poems: The Favorite Poem Project Anthology*, explaining why they have selected that particular piece. In class we will discuss some of the submissions in Pinsky's Anthology, hopefully discovering some of our own reasons for liking or disliking a poem as well as finding some rationales we perhaps had not

thought of previously. We will use the school's computer facilities to design, word process, and publish our anthology, with each student responsible for his/her own two-page spread of poems. I will write an introduction and assemble an index. In addition to providing each student with a bound, laminated "book" to keep, I hope to publish the students' pieces on our school's website as well. One of the fifty-minute lessons I have planned for this part of the workshop series is detailed below.

## Classroom Activities (Lesson Plans)

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**An Early Lesson Building on Prior Knowledge - Good Night, Sleep Tight Responses** This lesson is intended for use at the beginning of the classroom sessions I will have with the students, perhaps even on the first day. Its intent is to evoke in the students remembrances of sayings or blessings they heard when younger (including nursery rhymes as needed), analyze those expressions, and use them as the basis for a response poem.

### *Objectives:*

The students will be able to

1. recognize the "poetic nature" of aphorisms, or sayings, and blessings.
2. suggest, in their own words, possible meanings behind such expressions.
3. offer possibilities for implied speaker and listener, as well as characters.
4. write a response to a saying of their choice.

### *Materials:*

Copies of "Good Night, Sleep Tight" and "Bedbugs Marching Song" (Jones 112).

A list of similar blessings and bedtime rhymes, in case the students come up blank.

A chalkboard, whiteboard, or chart paper with appropriate writing utensils.

Paper and writing utensils for the students.

### *Procedures:*

Orient the students to the topic by asking them who put them to bed at night when they were little. Explain what happened when you were a child, bringing up the idea of a blessing or saying that became a ritual for you and your special grownup (mother, grandparent, etc.). Mine is to talk about my mother and recite the rhyme "Good night, sleep tight; don't let the bedbugs bite." I write the rhyme on the board and have the students copy it into their notebooks. Ask the students what purpose this rhyme served - did my bed really have bugs? Discuss whether this kind of expression is a poem, or at least poetic. Suggest rhyme, repetition,

ritual purpose as poetic elements, if necessary. Once they have the idea of a poetic blessing or "take care" expression in mind, give them two minutes to write down similar expressions they have heard. At the end of the two-minute period, ask the students to volunteer some of their writings aloud. Post these on the board as well. Add some blessings or rhymes from your own list if the students have not come up with very many. Discuss the concepts of speaker, audience (or listener), and character. Repeat the "Good Night" rhyme you started with and ask the students who the implied speaker and listener are in that piece. Ask who the characters are, if there are any, in the piece. Do not resolve this question in any final way. Discuss possible speakers, listeners and characters in the other expressions written on the board. Then, read aloud "Bedbugs Marching Song," characterizing it as a response poem. Finally, have the students choose one of the blessings from the board (other than "Good Night") and write a response to it. You may want to suggest that they put themselves in the shoes of either the implied listener or one of the characters and think of themselves as "answering back."

### *Extension Activities*

Make a bulletin board of the original rhymes and the students' responses. Ask the students to write a response to a nursery rhyme of their or your choice, such as "Jack and Jill." Have the students interview older folks in the community, such as their grandparents, to assemble a collection of bedtime rhymes or other, similar blessings.

### A mid-Semester Lesson on Writing after Great Poetry -- "The Tyger"

This lesson is intended as an introduction to William Blake for novice poetry students. The poet's work is used to illustrate metaphor, poetic purpose, and as inspiration for the students' own creative efforts.

### *Objectives:*

The students will be able to

1. actively listen to William Blake's "The Tyger."
2. suggest possible meanings for the poem's metaphors
3. read two other short Blake poems on their own
4. write a poem asking questions of an animal or plant

### *Materials:*

Copies of Blake's "The Tyger," "The Lamb," and "The Sick Rose."

Paper and writing utensils for the students.

### *Procedures:*

As Kenneth Koch suggests in *Rose, Where Did You Get That Red?*, read "The Tyger" poem aloud to the



students, pass out copies, and have them help you work out the metaphors. See if you can elicit a description of the poem as one of questioning why the animal is assembled as it is. Hand out "The Lamb" and "The Sick Rose." Give the students five minutes to read these poems, looking for similarities and differences to "The Tyger." Circulate while the children read, giving assistance when asked. Discuss their ideas aloud afterwards. Finally, have them write a conversation poem in which they speak to an animal or plant of their choice, focusing on asking it questions. Tell them that they may have the animal or plant respond in the poem, if they want. Circulate while the students write, offering assistance and encouragement where necessary. Collect the students' poems at the end of the period.

#### *Extension Activities:*

Write a second poem, using a plant if the first was to an animal and vice versa. Have the students illustrate their poems. Exchange poems and write responses (in poetry or prose) to others' pieces.

#### The Culminating Poetry Project -- Our Favorite Poems Anthology

This lesson is intended for use after the students have read and written a large number of poems, including some of those in *Americans' Favorite Poems: The Favorite Poem Project Anthology*. I will use the lesson to help the students express themselves more coherently and with a more literary style in the blurbs they will be writing for our own class anthology.

#### *Objectives:*

Students will be able to justify, in writing, why they like a particular poem.

#### *Materials:*

Copies of Robert Pinsky and Maggie Dietz's *Americans' Favorite Poems: The Favorite Poem Project Anthology*.

A chalkboard, whiteboard, or chart paper with appropriate writing utensils.

Paper and writing utensils for the students.

#### *Procedures:*

Give the students five minutes to thumb through Pinsky, focusing on reading the introductory blurbs submitted to the editors rather than on the poems themselves. Ask them to look for what they consider to be well- and poorly-written explanations of why the poem was the person's favorite. At the end of the five minutes, have them offer suggestions for "good" and "bad" blurbs. Ask what they think should be included in this type of explanation. Emphasize that specific reasons (such as "The images in this poem made me think about birds in a different way.") are more understandable and helpful to the reader than vague generalizations ("It's a good poem," for example). Ask whether a simple "I like it" is enough. Have them improve "I like this poem" by asking them to complete the statement "I like this poem because it makes me feel \_\_\_\_." Write suggestions from the Pinsky submissions on the board, emphasizing those that refer to the poetic elements of the selections, such as metaphor, image, rhyme, rhythm, etc. Have the students take out one of the poems they have particularly liked during the course of the semester and ask them to write five statements explaining, as specifically as possible, exactly why they liked it. Suggest that they write about how

the poem made them feel, how it applied to or reflected their experiences, how the piece worked as a poem, or how it inspired them as poets. Have them share their explanations in pairs, commenting on the specifics contained in each other's work. Ask the students to turn in the one statement they feel is the best, along with the title of the poem it describes.

#### *Extension Activities:*

Have the students do the five statements activity for a poem they dislike, again emphasizing specificity. Make a bulletin board matching game out of copies of the poems and yarn thumb tacked to cards with the student descriptions written out. Have the students write specific, admiring statements about their own (or classmates') poems.

## Reading Resources for Students and Teachers

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Note: ISBN's included in [ ]'s to aid purchase of less readily available works.

### Teachers' Print and Internet Resources

Bogen, Nancy. *How to Write Poetry* , 2nd ed. New York: MacMillan, 1994. [ISBN 0-671-89567-2]. An excellent edition for the teacher interested in clear explanations of poetic devices such as meter, simile, etc. Includes descriptions and examples of classic and contemporary poetic forms as well, including the ode, sonnet, and ballad. Excellent resource for more advanced students or teachers who aspire to craft more developed poems themselves.

Bradbury, Ray. *Zen in the Art of Writing* . New York: Bantam Books, 1990. [ISBN 0-553-29634-5]. A prose guide to the non-process method Bradbury used for his writing, emphasizing letting go to the flow or writing. Mixes practical writers' tips with Bradbury's discussion of his works. Helpful in small chunks, especially as a resource for students who get blocked easily or think that they cannot write. Similar in theoretical position to the Goldberg, below.

Doresky, Carole Kiler and William Doreski. *How to Read and Interpret Poetry* . New York: Prentice Hall, 1988. [0-13-431081-0]. A good basic guide to the interpretation of poetry, especially for teachers wholly new to this literary genre. Includes full explications of several poems, as well as descriptions of many contemporary types of criticism. An excellent glossary of poetic terms is appended.

Goldberg, Natalie. *Writing Down the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within* . Emily Bower, Ed. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1988. [ISBN: 0-87773-375-9]. An absolutely engaging "how to" guide written in short sections. Easily used as a reference resource for a short set of writing classes or as a main text for a longer, or more intensive workshop. Includes lots of advice on how to make "writing activities" a part of one's everyday life.

Higginson, William J. with Penny Harter. *The Haiku Handbook* . New York: Kodansha International, 1985. [ISBN 4-7700-1430-9]. Includes a scholarly discussion of the history of Haiku, and is written for adults, but also contains many examples of the form which easily lend themselves to use in a mini-unit or single lesson on this popular Japanese form.

Koch, Kenneth. *Making Your Own Days: The Pleasures of Reading and Writing Poetry* . New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999. Written as a guide for adults wishing to explore the world of poetry, this book is based on Koch's idea that "the language of poetry" is a version of "ordinary language." Excellent for the teacher's own development as a writer, but many of Koch's ideas should prove helpful to the students as well.

----- *Rose, Where Did You Get That Red?: Teaching Great Poetry to Children* . New York: Vintage Books, 1990. A reprint of this teacher's 1973 work on how to teach the canon to children. As with the earlier unit (see below), Koch includes many useful suggestions for the classroom teacher and writes in a highly approachable style.

----- *Wishes, Lies & Dreams: Teaching Children to Write Poetry* . New York: Harper Perennial, 1999. Classic reprint of this poet/teacher's adventures doing poetry with elementary students at New York City's P.S. 61 in the late 1960's. Includes many very useful lesson ideas for teachers, as well as examples of the results Koch achieved with his students.

Sweeney, Jacqueline. *Quick Poetry Activities You Can Really Do* . Illus. Rowan Barnes Murphy. New York: Scholastic Professional Books. 1994. A highly engaging and readable guide for teachers. Filled with quick and easy "poetry" activities meant to involve elementary students (grades 2-5) in the writing of poetry. Like Koch's lessons, I find these also to be useful for older students, especially as warm-up or introductory lessons.

Sweeney, Jacqueline. *Teaching Poetry: Yes, You Can!* . Illus. Janice Fried. New York: Scholastic Professional Books. 1993. Similar in tone to the above, but in more complicated prose format focusing on explanations and how-to theory, with fewer quick-starting activities. Includes a bibliography with very brief comments.

Yáñez Cossío, Alicia. *Ni-os Escritores: Talleres de Literatura Infantil para padres y Profesores* . Bogotá: Editorial La Oveja Negra, 1999. [ISBN 84-82802118]. Intended as a resource for Spanish-speaking teachers and parents, this slim paperback is of use to fluent teachers looking for readings, activities, and project ideas for Spanish literate students. No English.

<http://www.education-world.com/standards> An excellent commercial site offering extensive resources to teachers, including the National Standards for a number of content areas, with citations and links to their establishing bodies, such as the National Council of Teachers of English.

<http://www.nhps.net> The indispensable source for New Haven Public School teachers. Our own official website, this set of pages contains downloadable versions of the most recent revisions of local curricula for all grade levels.

<http://www.state.ct.us/sde> The State of Connecticut's Education Department main webpage. Links include state standards for all content areas, as well as useful documents, such as the State Board of Education's Vision Statement for Bilingual / ESL Education.

<http://www.tesol.org> The official website of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc., the national association of ESL teaching professionals. Includes downloadable standards, including detailed classroom scenarios with teaching suggestions.

## Poetry Collections in English

Bagert, Brod, ed. *Poetry for Young People: Edgar Allen Poe* . Illus. Carolyn Cobleigh. New York: Sterling Publishing Co., Inc., 1995. A beautifully illustrated volume of a high-quality series introducing students to bits and pieces of Poe's work. Especially useful for teenage groups and to inspire interest in discussion of genre and technique.

Cisneros, Sandra. *The House on Mango Street* . New York: Vintage Contemporaries, 1991. [ISBN 0-679-73477-5]. A genre-defying collection of vignettes often described as "prose poems" which together tell the story of Esperanza Cordero, a young Chicana growing up in Chicago's Latino neighborhood. Read it for its beautiful sparseness, for the inspiration it will offer you and your students, and for the linguistic magic Cisneros brings to every page.

Clinton, Catherine, ed. *I, Too, Sing America: Three Centuries of African American Poetry* . Illus. Stephen Alcorn. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1998. Includes poems by twenty-five major figures, with biographical information and notes on the works. Beautiful facing page illustrations accompany each poem, allowing for pre-reading exercises, as well as inspiring creative interpretation and critical viewing on the students' part.

Hale, Glorvya, ed. *Read-Aloud Poems for Young People: An Introduction to the Magic and Excitement of Poetry*. New York: Black Dog & Levanthal Publishers, Inc., 1997. An extensive collection of British and American verses "themed" into sections such as "Nature's Family," "Meet the Family," and "Poems That Tell Stories." Meant as an introductory book for adults and children to use together, it is not juvenile and contains marginal biographical notes for many of the poets, who range from Robert Burns to Robert Frost to Maya Angelou and New Haven's own Jane Yolen. Includes indices of poets and first lines.

Hedley, Alistair, ed. *Treasury of Poetry*. Illus. Kate Aldous, Claire Henley, Anna Cynthia Leplar, Karen Perrins, Jane Tattersfield, and Sara Walker. Bath, UK: Parragon Publishing, 2000. A beautifully color-illustrated collection including classics, traditional verses and contemporary poems. Divided primarily into themed sections about childhood, people, animals, nature and magic, there are also "poems to make you think," "story poems," and "bedtime poems." Ranges from "Frog Went A-Courtin'" to "Kubla Khan." Includes an index of titles and first lines, but authors are listed only with the poems, not in the contents or index.

Jones, Ivan and Mal Jones, eds. *Good Night, Sleep Tight: A Poem for Every Night of the Year!* New York: Scholastic, Inc., 2000. Organized chronologically, this collection groups traditional and contemporary poems by adults and children, from the famous to the anonymous, so as to offer a full year of read-aloud possibilities. Somewhat juvenile illustrations may detract from the text's usefulness with older students, but a wide variety is offered. Indexed by author only.

Kastan, David Scott and Marina Kastan, eds. *Poetry for Young People: William Shakespeare*. Illus. New York: Sterling Publishing Co., Inc., 2000. Another in the series described in Poe above. Interesting illustrations accompany intriguing selections from Shakespeare works, rendering them digestible to the common reader. Perfect for lessons needing canonical works or highly recognizable authors.

Lacock, Janice, ed. *Stories, Songs, Games, & Rhymes*. Illus. Moira and Colin Maclean and Chris Barker. New York: Larousse Kingfisher Chambers Inc., 2000. A collection of British and American traditional children's folklore, including jumprope songs, hand-slapping games, and classic tales such as "The Little Red Hen." Especially useful as a starting point, or with reluctant groups, particularly when discussing what makes a poem poetic or what distinguishes it from a story (prose).

Orozco, José Luis, Ed. and Trans. *De Colores and Other Latin American Folk Songs for Children*. Illus. Elisa Kleven. New York: Dutton Children's Books, 1994. Gorgeous compilation of traditional children's rhymes and songs, with accompanying musical arrangements and English translations. Stunning multi-media collage is used by the illustrator, which adds another example of decorative technique to the class repertoire. Highly useful in a multilingual group, especially if teacher or students are willing to sing. Tape of author singing is also available from Arcoiris Records, Berkeley, CA. Lends itself to discussions of cross-cultural similarities, such as with lullabies, as well as to the differences between poetry and song.

Pinsky, Robert and Maggie Dietz, Eds. *Americans' Favorite Poems: The Favorite Poem Project Anthology*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2000. A diverse collection of poems assembled by a Poet Laureate of the United States as a result of everyday people submitting their favorite pieces. People's explanatory blurbs accompany the submissions, which may serve as a part of lessons concerned with the impact of poetry on the reader, the variety of interpretations possible, or as an inspiration for the students to select their own favorites and develop a class anthology.

Prelutsky, Jack, Ed. *The 20th Century Children's Poetry Treasury*. Illus. Meilo So. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999. Two hundred eleven poems by one hundred thirty-seven writers, including Gwendolyn Brooks, Maxine Kumin, Arnold Lobel, and Gary Soto. Watercolors accompany these poems, which are presented three or four to a page based on a common theme, such as pets or summer. Mainly quite short and accessible, these poems easily serve as inspiration in writing projects, but also work as read-aloud examples for discussions of form and style.

Rich, Adrienne, Ed. *The Best American Poetry 1996*. New York: Scribner, 1996. [ISBN 0-684-81451-X]. A collection of the year's best, edited by Rich, herself an important contemporary writer. Includes work by Sandra Cisneros, as well as many other lesser-known poets writing today. Serves as an inspiration for the teacher's own writing, but may also open the horizons of students interested in

reading more poetry outside of class. Teacher may, for example, refer a student to an included work or poet based on interests indicated in the student's journal. Available used.

Tatum, Charles M., Ed. *New Chicana/Chicano Writing* . Tucson: U of AZ, 1992. [ISBN 1058-2770]. Similar to above in that it contains works intended for adults, but may be used as a resource for students. Particularly of interest to those working with Mexican-American and/or second-generation immigrant experiences. Available used.

Untermeyer, Louis, ed. *The Golden Book of Fun and Nonsense* . Illus. Provensen, Alice & Martin. New York: Golden Books, 1999. A beautiful and more sophisticated collection belies the juvenile cover of this book. Includes a foreword by the well-known editor, and the contents are somewhat loosely categorized by type-"Some Less Familiar Nursery Rhymes," "nineteenth Century Nonsense," etc. Several Lewis Carroll pieces are collected here, as well as Edward Lear, and an assortment of anonymous limericks and clerihews. Particularly useful for kids who are inspired by humor or for particularly silly class sessions.

## Poetry in Spanish

Note: These resources are for bi-lingual or Spanish-dominant students, as well as for teachers and students of Spanish as a Second Language.

Barahona González, Laurencia. *Rapsodia en Siete Tiempos: Poesía para Ni-os* . Quito: Hidalgo & Hidalgo, S.A., 1999. A somewhat difficult text in Spanish, which may best be suited to native speakers of Spanish, or to upper level Spanish-language students wanting to stretch their reading and vocabulary skills. Might also serve as read aloud practice for pronunciation, timing, stress, etc.

Charris Giraldo, Maritza and Marcela M. Arbaláez de Rodríguez, Eds. *Antología Comunicativa: Textos, Imágenes, Comunicaciones 3* . Bogotá: Editorial Normal: 1987. This is a textbook for upper level Spanish students or literate native speakers. It includes prose and poetic pieces by canonical Latin American and peninsular Spanish writers, with comprehension exercises and writing assignments. The most difficult of a three-level series, it is excellent for those students who are ready for literature in Spanish, but is not at all appropriate for students (nor teachers) with limited Spanish proficiency.

Cisneros, Sandra. *La Casa en Mango Street* . Trans. Elena Poniatowska. New York: Vintage Espa-ol, 1991. [ISBN 0-679-75526-8]. A genre-defying collection of vignettes often described as "prose poems" which together tell the story of Esperanza Cordero, a young Chicana growing up in Chicago's Latino neighborhood. Read it for its beautiful sparseness, for the inspiration it will offer you and your students, and for the linguistic magic Cisneros brings to every page. Translated by one of today's best-known contemporary Mexican writers.

Diéguez, Violeta Rojas, Ed. *La Magia de la Poesía: Antología de poesía Infantil No 2* . Santiago de Chile: Editorial Andrés Bello, 1991. [ISBN 956-13-0967-X]. With the following, forms a collection of medium difficulty poems collected from all over the Spanish-speaking world. Pencil drawings accompany all the poems, which are featured one to a page and are not translated into English. Some proficiency in Spanish is needed for these pieces, but they may also serve as material for oral reading or dictionary practice with Spanish language students, as well as forming a basis for discussions of the commonalities of childhood across time and cultures.

Diéguez, Violeta Rojas, Ed. *Mis Primeras Poesías: Antología de poesía Infantil No 1* . Santiago de Chile: Editorial Andrés Bello, 1991. [ISBN 956-13-0851-6]. See above. Somewhat easier of the two. Focuses on animal poems and includes a few riddles, songs and sayings at the end of the text. Slim paperbacks with final pageindices.

Grejniec, Michael. Trans. Alis Alejandro. *Buenos días, buenas noches* . New York: North-South Books, Inc., 1997. [ISBN 1-55858-717-9 (paper) or 1-55858-718-7 (hardcover)]. An easy-to-read story-poem presented as a picture book. A simple read aloud activity for students just beginning the study of Spanish or for those needing help with literacy in Spanish. May offer an opportunity for a

discussion of translation issues, if both the original English edition and this one are obtained. Also a great example of how to turn a short piece into a beautifully illustrated book project.

*El libro de los cuentos y leyendas de América Latina y España* . Barcelona: Ediciones B, S.A., 2000. [ISBN 84-406-9618-3]. Although this book focuses on stories and legends rather than poetry per se, it is useful for more advanced students who are ready for a more complex discussion of genre and / or technique. Students and teacher should be highly competent readers of Spanish, as English translations are not provided.

*Las Mejores Poesías Infantiles* . Madrid: Grafalco, S.A., 1999. [ISBN 84-7773-719-3]. All in Spanish, this text presents several dozen poems and other related types of writing by genre and period - Romantic, Golden Age, Folklore, etc. Although the illustrations are decidedly juvenile, most of the pieces require an intermediate understanding of Spanish and are probably best suited to those native speakers working on reading skills. Some short pieces may serve in lessons focusing on regional variations in Spanish or on drawing cultural connections and developing cultural interpretations based on literature.

Mistral, Gabriela. *Poesía Infantil* . Santiago de Chile: Editorial Andrés Bello, 1983. [ISBN 956-13-1083-X]. A small and slim paperback of Mistral's pieces for children, this book is nonetheless not a simple work, and will work best for intermediate and advanced Spanish speakers - students or teachers. Limited illustrations and flimsy production values also limit this edition's appeal and usefulness. Good for a student who becomes interested in Mistral or one who wishes to devote a large amount of time to her work. No English is included.

Orozco, José Luis, Ed. and Trans. *De Colores and Other Latin American Folk Songs for Children* . Illus. Elisa Kleven. New York: Dutton Children's Books, 1994. Gorgeous compilation of traditional children's rhymes and songs, with accompanying musical arrangements and English translations. Stunning multi-media collage is used by the illustrator, which adds another example of decorative technique to the class repertoire. Highly useful in a multilingual group, especially if teacher or students are willing to sing. Tape of author singing is also available from Arcoiris Records, Berkeley, CA. Lends itself to discussions of cross-cultural similarities, such as with lullabies, as well as to the differences between poetry and song.

Serna, Ana, Ed. *Poesía de Ayer y de Hoy para Chicos y Grandes* . Madrid: Susaeta ediciones, S.A. [ISBN 84-305-7456-5]. Again, juvenile illustrations detract from this book's appeal to high school aged readers, but there is a good selection of pieces arranged chronologically - today, yesterday and always (anonymous and popular pieces not otherwise attributable). Includes short pieces by Bécquer, Darío, García Lorca, Martí, Quevedo, and Vega, and is separately indexed by title and author, but lacks English translations, rendering it most useful for groups with a substantial number of fluent Spanish speakers or advanced students.

Santana, Gabriela de los Angeles, Ed. *Poesía para Niños* . Mexico City: Selector actualidad editorial, 2001. [ISBN 970-643-323-6]. A small and slim paperback printed on thin paper, this is the one to buy for teachers on a limited budget, or for those who want a class set of books. Limited illustration and flimsy production values limit its appeal, but it does contain many of the same pieces collected in the more expensive hardbacks described above.

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