



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
2023 Volume I: Poetry as Sound and Object

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## **Visualization and Illustration: Poetry for Developing Readers**

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### **Introduction:**

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The school where I teach is a creative thinking through STEAM magnet school. Our student population attends from around the city, as well as from the neighborhood surrounding the school. As a result, students come from a variety of backgrounds and cultures. Students are accustomed to working together and learning from each other through both their similarities and differences. I teach in a self-contained first-grade classroom, meaning that I teach all subjects to the same group of students. This curriculum unit focuses on teaching visualization through poetry during the reading block; however, I have selected poems that span all subjects including science and history to tie together all aspects of the curriculum that I teach.

From birth, children are accustomed to the sound of oral language in the form of lullabies, nursery rhymes, and the sound of their loved ones' voices. Poetry can draw on these earliest memories and has the power to spark interest in word play, reading, and both creative imagining and writing. When guided through analyzing and interpreting, children can grow to have a greater love and understanding of poetry. Poems do not have to stand alone as words or sound, but often operate as objects. The presentation is often equally important to the poem as the words themselves. Poems can be presented in a variety of ways, including isolated in a picture book, as part of an anthology or collection, as a video, or even as an oral presentation. In picture books, poems can be accompanied by drawings, collage, paintings, or photographs. The chosen representation can aid a child's visualization and interpretation of the poem itself. When taught how to read and understand poems, children are equipped to enjoy poetry for the rest of their lives.

### **Comprehension and Word Recognition for Developing Readers:**

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As far as reading growth and development are concerned, first graders fall on a continuum of learning. Scarborough's rope offers a visual for thinking about how students develop as readers. As readers develop, they should be increasing their language comprehension, which includes background knowledge, vocabulary, language structures, verbal reasoning, and literacy knowledge. This exists as one strand. They also should be

increasing their word recognition, which includes phonological awareness, decoding, and sight recognition. This exists as a second strand. As these skills or “strands” develop and become intertwined, students become more accurate and strategic readers while still comprehending what they are reading (1). Both language comprehension and word recognition are vital for students to grow as fluent readers. As first graders, some students are still emerging as readers and need more focus around learning to decode words; other students are ready to learn more complex ideas around language, vocabulary, and knowledge. All students benefit from explicit instruction around reading comprehension.

This curriculum unit is designed for first graders; however, it could easily be taught to students in kindergarten through second grade, who are developing as early readers. Students in these grades are in the early stages of beginning to read. Students are learning to decode words while simultaneously learning to make meaning and to understand what they are reading through comprehension strategies. Poetry incorporates many language features that can help students with their word recognition abilities. Some of these features are alliteration, rhyme, and rhythm. These are all elements of phonological awareness, or the ability to manipulate and hear various sounds. This is an early indicator for reading ability and strengthening phonological awareness can help students grow in their ability to decode or read words. Students who enter preschool and kindergarten with the ability to rhyme words, isolate beginning or end sounds, and blend sounds together often learn to read more quickly. This foundation is laid at an early age with nursery rhymes and word manipulation games. Poetry can help children grow in their phonological awareness because of its language features. Word decoding is not an explicit focus of this curriculum, but students’ phonological awareness abilities still benefit from listening to and reading poetry.

With explicit comprehension instruction, students gain strategies to comprehend what they are reading. One major strategy that helps students understand what they are reading is visualizing. Visualization occurs across a variety of genres and lends itself to both prose and poetry. Poetry offers a starting point for learning the skill of visualization because it is often shorter and allows students to focus their cognitive attention on a specific line or stanza. Poems also offer snippets of imagery rich language, which allows students to focus on learning how to visualize before moving on to longer texts and eventually chapter books, which often lack illustrations (2). Visualization ensures that children are picturing what is happening in the text and understanding language, particularly language that is rich in imagery. This unit utilizes poetry as a tool to teach students how to visualize as they are reading. Visualization as a reading comprehension skill is one of the primary focuses of this unit.

## **Visualizing Poetry as Sound and Object:**

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### **Poetry as Sound**

One of the best ways for both adults and children to enjoy poetry is by reading it aloud. This allows for the language of the poem to become sound. Repetition, rhyme, meter, and alliteration are some of the elements of poems that make them enjoyable as oral language. From an early age, children instinctively respond to poetry. Even in the earliest years, babies and young children are calmed by lullabies and exact retellings of stories. The melodic language of poetry creates comforting memories from an early age (3). These expressions of love are stored as neurological pathways in the brain. Our worlds are organized by the memories of language, music, and sound that we have heard in the past. This begins even as infants. As we

grow older, we latch onto language that is predictable and familiar (4). Recalling sound and music can bring back visceral experiences because sound is so strongly tied to memory. Poetry is the written form of music, and it provides a joyful sensory experience as well as activating multiple intelligences. Poetic language inspires visual imagery, evokes creative thinking, and gives perspective into other worlds. These interactions, when begun in childhood, can carry into adulthood as enjoyable and impactful experiences.

## **Poetry as Object**

The presentation of a poem is equally as important as the language of the poem. The object of the words can be presented as a video poem, erasure poem, a published work, or even letters. The form and presentation of a poem can also contribute to the meaning of the poem itself. For young students, the most common presentation of poetry is in the form of a picture book. The picture book is an art object that is accessible to both children and adults because of the ability to hold and interact with it. The words and pictures play off each other allowing the reader to draw meaning from both. Children can interpret ideas in this form that are beyond what they can read and what is expected of them developmentally (5). A poem can gain new meaning when published in a picture book, whether it is a part of an anthology or a stand-alone poem that carries across the pages with accompanying artwork. The presentation of poetry in picture books also gives the opportunity for different visuals including photography, drawing, painting, collage, or illustration. A poem can become a new object when the visual accompaniment changes. For example, a poem may appear in a collection of poems by a particular author. The same poem may also appear in a collection of a particular type of poetry, such as silly poems or poems by Black authors. Again, the same poem may appear by itself in a picture book with each line or verse on a different page with illustrations or photographs. The visual effects and experience of reading the poem change as its presentation changes. Students may gain new meaning and greater comprehension from reading a poem in a new form.

## **Visualization as a Comprehension Strategy**

Students benefit from guidance as they are learning a new skill. In a gradual release model, instruction begins with a teacher demonstrating and guiding a group of students. As students grow in their abilities, the teacher gives over the practice and learning for students to complete with their peers and eventually independently. Visualization is a reading comprehension strategy, and many students need explicit modeling of the new skill before they can correctly use it independently. After students see a teacher model the skill, they are ready to work with their peers to practice this skill. Discussion is an important part of learning reading comprehension strategies. Students need to be able to talk to each other and share ideas under the guidance of a facilitating teacher. Kate Noble researched the role that discussion and drawing plays in comprehending picture books:

... when children draw and talk about picture books, they often reveal their cognitive, aesthetic and emotional awareness, which in turn contributes to understanding the development of visual literacy (6).

By expressing their ideas, whether through conversation or drawing, students are better able to process what they are reading and seeing. This leads to a greater sense of visual literacy. Children benefit from responding to texts and pictures in drawings. This allows students to express their thoughts when they may have difficulty using words. Many young students are still learning how to write and expressing ideas through words can be difficult for some children. Drawing removes the pressure and frustration that children who struggle with writing experience. It also builds their ability to visualize what is happening in a text. As children discuss and draw, they build their visual literacy, which will transfer over into future things that they read and art that they see. This unit focuses on visualization through illustration so that all students can focus on mastering this

reading comprehension strategy without the challenge of expressing their thoughts through writing.

Visualization allows students to make sense of the language in both poetry and prose. It considers the meaning of both the words and the pictures. This unit will focus on visualization of the text, although this strategy can also be practiced with illustrations. For readers, particularly developing ones, it is important to create mental pictures using the words in the text. Skilled readers actively engage with a text by picturing what is happening. This happens automatically and makes reading more enjoyable. Specifically, visualizing while reading poetry promotes abstract thinking and creativity (7). Poetry often requires thinking about figurative language and language that is not as straightforward as prose. Students can gain meaning from a text beyond what is on the surface, and they can synthesize the work of literature with their own thoughts, writings, and drawings. Another way of thinking of visualization is as making mind movies (8). This approach to visualization is engaging and entertaining to children. Students enjoy creating and sharing their own mind movies. Visualization is an important comprehension strategy for students because it supports the process of moving from reading picture books to chapter books. This transition naturally happens around the third grade, but for students that have mastered word decoding it can happen sooner. Students need explicit instruction to grasp the concept of visualizing and utilize it for themselves. They greatly benefit from having a teacher verbalize about their mental process and sharing their own visualizations. As students begin to understand how to visualize, they can model for their peers how to visualize. Students can engage in discussion around their visualizations to help them build off each other's ideas. Eventually, this comprehension strategy becomes automatic and skilled readers are rarely cognizant that they are visualizing as they read.

Visualization offers a starting point for accessing poetry. All students can experience poetry though sometimes students may not have the words to express their feelings out loud or in writing. There are different ways to approach poetry including illustration, writing poetry in response, and dramatic retellings. The important part of teaching poetry is that students are responding to poetry in their own individual way (9). When readers understand and reply to a poem, they become owners of it.

### **Selecting High Quality Poetry for Children**

One challenge of teaching poetry to young children is selecting high-quality poetry for reading and study. The poems included in many textbooks and curricula written for young students are often brief and lacking depth. This is condescending to children's abilities. Children deserve access and the support needed to understand high-quality poems (10). This means selecting poems that they may not have been exposed to and may not understand yet. Students may need support when reading poems that were originally written for adults, but with assistance they can claim ownership of poems. Studying and growing familiar with poems at a young age makes them more accessible as children age and move into adulthood. As a teacher, it is important to take time to find and choose poems that are both engaging and challenging for students.

The best poems written for children include language that can be both universal and personal. When children are included as participants and not just passive consumers of poetry, they can truly enjoy it. The best of children's poetry can be light-hearted but still profound (11). These types of poems engage students' curiosity and amuse them while still causing them to think. All children appreciate poems that make them laugh and push their imaginations. Children aged seven through nine especially appreciate silly poems (12). Students in first grade are entering this age range. Children are often surprised and greatly amused to get to study silly or outrageous poems in school. This can foster creativity and form a view of school as a place of belonging and enjoyment. This curriculum unit will look at a variety of types of poems both light-hearted and serious.

## Teaching Strategies:

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An important element of this curriculum will be the gradual release of responsibility as students begin to use the visualization strategy. When we first read the poems, I will show the poem in book form or display it digitally for the class to see. Many students will be relying on the oral reading of the poem, but having the words displayed will give students who can read the opportunity to follow along. Each book of poetry that we read will be displayed in the classroom so that students can access and read them during our independent reading time. I want students to have the opportunity to continue to read the poems that we have read in class as well as poems that we may not have had a chance to read and visualize together. Students can take them to read and look at independently or to share with their peers. It is important for children to feel close to the poems that they are reading (13). This allows them to continue to take ownership of the poetry that we are reading during our whole group lessons and to enjoy the process of reading and learning on their own.

The first week of lessons will include instruction about visualization. The definition of visualization that we will work with is: "Drawing pictures in your mind based on what you read." I will engage students by describing visualization as making mind movies or pictures. Before visualizing, I will read the poem out loud and pick a section of it to focus on. I will model what I am thinking as I read and how that helps me to visualize what is happening in the poem. As I visualize out loud, I will illustrate my visualizations on the board.

Next, I will lead the class in visualizing the same passage together. I will encourage students to create mental pictures as I read. I will prompt students to close their eyes as I read through the text twice. Then I will prompt them to share what images pop into their heads (14). I will then draw their pictures on the board. Many students enjoy closing their eyes and being immersed in the poem. We will repeat the exercise with a different section of the poem. Once again, I will read it through twice. Students will have time to think about their visualizations. They will then turn to a partner to share their visualizations. Finally, I will call the class back together and allow them to share their thinking with the whole group. I will call students to come to the board to illustrate. Part of this process is brainstorming and recording our ideas in drawing and writing to better illustrate our visualizations (15). At the beginning of our use of this protocol we will share visualizations as a whole group so that I can monitor their visualizations and offer feedback. As students grow more fluent in their ability to visualize, I will allow students to discuss more as partners before sharing with the group.

At the end of each class, students will return to their desks where they will have their own copy of the poem printed in a booklet. Having their own copy supports the process of owning the poem and creating their own meaning (16). On one side of the book will be the printed words of the poem that we have read in class and on the other side will be a blank space for the student to illustrate their visualization. This practice is supported as a shared and interactive practice from Fountas and Pinnell (17). Each week, we will read new poems and add illustrations to our books. At the end of the unit, students will have an illustrated poetry object that they can keep.

As we start a new type of poem, I will show them examples of how some authors and illustrators have chosen to illustrate or select objects to match their poems. We will compare our own mind movies to the illustrations and visual representations that other authors and illustrators have selected (18). This will allow students to see others' visualization while remaining true to their own visualizations. Most students aged five through seven enjoy creating their own drawings and are not overly reliant on what someone else has drawn. I am not concerned about them explicitly copying someone else's visualization. This will also give us an opportunity to discuss things that may be included in the pictures and not the text (19). Discussion around the pictures will

help strengthen students' visual literacy while encouraging them to expand on their illustrations based on what they visualize. Besides comparing their work to other authors and illustrators, I will share students' complete visualization illustrations with the group so that they can compare their own ideas to their peers' (20).

We will follow this same protocol for each poem that we read. As I read the poem out loud, I will clarify and define confusing language and vocabulary. I will also draw attention to language features that are common in poetry, such as alliteration or rhyme. Students are often eager to identify these features, and I will share and celebrate these with the whole group. As we read, I will make the dramatic situation of the poem real through questioning (21). This further engages students in the process of reading the poem. I will also use questioning to allow students to draw meaning from parts of the poems. We will linger over specific parts of the poem to help make them more real. When reading poems with young children, it is not necessary to teach every detail (22). I will also emphasize that they do not have to visualize the whole poem, but they can focus their visualizations on a particular section.

Young readers often have wild imaginations. One difficulty that I foresee for some readers, particularly with reading poetry, is staying on topic when visualizing. For example, when visualizing during a poem about a lizard, a student may instead share about their pet tiger. I will offer feedback to help guide them to make accurate visualizations and to stay on topic. However, it is important to still respond positively even to wrong answers (23). This allows readers to remain active and respected participants in our reading community. I will also encourage as many meanings and visualizations as possible. It is also important not to nail down a single meaning when reading poetry (24).

The four types of poetry that we will look at over the course of four weeks will be silly poems, shape poems, science poems, and poems by Black poets. We will begin the unit of study by studying silly poems to engage students. Each genre will take a week (4 days of instruction) and include 1-3 poems each day depending on the length of poems. This will allow students to look at a variety of poems across types of poems.

The first poetry type that we will look at is silly poems. This includes poems that make students laugh or look at silly or ridiculous topics. The purpose of beginning with this genre of poetry is to engage students and pique their interest in poetry. I want to begin this unit by making children laugh and to think about things that are funny. This is also an opportunity for children's imaginations to run wild. I want to give all students an access point to poetry regardless of whether they have read it before or not. Poetry can often seem daunting or confusing, and I want to help students enjoy reading poetry. Silly poems also allow for a wider range of visualization interpretations.

The second poetry type that we will look at is shape or concrete poetry. These are poems that are about a specific topic and are written to look like that topic either using a single word or a poem that is in the shape of the topic. We will look at these poems both in their object form as the designed shape and with just the words. This will allow students to think about the poems both as sound and object. Students will be able to guess what these poems are about and to support their predictions with visualizations. We will read the poem as a class in its concrete or shape form, but the version that is printed in their poetry book will be in a standard form.

The third poetry type that we will look at is science poetry. These poems will allow us to make cross-curricular connections between poems and other content areas. I chose science as a focus since we are a STEAM school. One topic of study in first grade science curriculum is space. Students learn about the sun and the moon and how light is reflected. We will read a collection of poems about light and space. Another topic of study in first

grade curriculum is animals. Students learn about animals' habitats, offspring and parents, and predators and prey. We will read poems that focus on animals.

The last poetry type that we will look at are poems by Black poets. We will look at poems written especially for children and great poems that have been adapted into books for children. We will look at poems in isolation as well as in books that have specific artwork chosen for them. I am interested in teaching and exploring with children different published versions of poems. Students will have the opportunity to compare their visualizations with how editors, authors, and illustrators have chosen to represent specific poems. I will select poems that are heavy on imagery that children can understand and that lend to visualization. However, I do want to allow children to be challenged in visualization. This part of the unit will focus on adult poems that children may need more support to understand and interpret. I want to end the unit allowing students to be challenged beyond the surface of visualization.

## Lesson Objectives:

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We will use the following objectives for the entirety of the curriculum unit:

1. Students will be able to identify words and phrases in poems that suggest feelings or appeal to the senses and use these to visualize.
2. Students will be able to, with prompting and support, read poetry of appropriate complexity for grade 1.
3. Students will be able to ask and answer questions about key details in a poem read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.
4. Students will be able to visualize and describe people, places, things, and events with relevant details, expressing ideas and feelings clearly.
5. Students will be able to use drawings when appropriate to clarify ideas, thoughts, and feelings when visualizing and illustrating their book of poems.

## Classroom Activities and Lesson Plans:

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### Week 1: Silly Poems

Texts: *Where the Sidewalk Ends*, *Flamingos on the Roof*

Additional Texts for Extension: *Truckery Rhymes*, *Don't Bump the Glump! And Other Fantasies*

Materials: Book with poem, Pre-printed poetry booklet, crayons or colored pencils

### Sample Lesson

I will begin by introducing the concept of visualization and displaying the word "visualize" on the board. I will explain to students that good readers visualize as they read. Visualizing is creating mind movies or pictures as you read. This helps you to better understand what is happening in a story or poem. Before reading the

poems, I will tell students that we are reading poems that are silly or funny. I will display the poem “One Inch Tall” from *Where the Sidewalk Ends* on the board and read it aloud. Then, I will model visualizing and illustrating the first stanza of the poem. I will reread the stanza aloud and say, “I picture a little, tiny person. Like imagine Mrs. Draper as one inch tall (motions with fingers). If I were that small, I would be able to take a crumb from a cake! I wouldn’t even need the whole cake, just a little piece. (Closes eyes) I picture a crumb of chocolate cake. Even that much would fill me up because I’m so small! It would take me all week to eat that one crumb. Now if I wanted to draw a picture or illustrate this, I would draw a tiny version of Mrs. Draper holding a crumb of chocolate cake (draws picture as I narrate on the board).” When I visualize, I will emphasize that I am focusing on only one or two lines at a time.

Next, I will read the second stanza aloud twice pausing in between reads. I will have students close their eyes (if they want to) and picture what is happening. I will remind them that they do not have to visualize the whole stanza, but they can pick one part to visualize just as I did when I modeled. After students have had a chance to visualize, I will call on a few students to share their visualizations with the class. I will encourage students in their visualizations and the only time I will correct students is when they are totally off topic and not visualizing the poem at hand.

Finally, I will read the third stanza aloud twice once again pausing between reads. I will give students a chance to visualize independently before participating in a turn and talk. Students will have the opportunity to share with a partner what they visualized happening in the poem. I will monitor students’ visualizations and select a few students to share aloud with the class.

We will end the lesson with students returning to their seats with their poetry booklet. The poem will be printed on one side, and they will pick one of the lines that they visualized to illustrate on the opposite page.

We will repeat this exercise throughout the week using the poems “Spaghetti” and “Invisible Boy” from *Where the Sidewalk Ends*. We will also use the poem “Alphabet Sherbert” from *Flamingos on the Roof*. These poems will be printed in the students’ booklets. Additional poems that we could use as an extension if we have additional time are “Sick,” “Snowman,” and “The Edge of the World” from *Where the Sidewalk Ends*, and “Bug Show” from *Flamingos on the Roof*.

## **Week 2: Shape and Concrete Poetry**

Texts: *Wet Cement* and *Ode to the Commode*

Additional Texts for Extension: *Flicker Flash*

Materials: Book with poem, Pre-printed poetry booklet, crayons or colored pencils

### **Sample Lesson**

We will begin the lesson by reminding students of how to visualize. I will remind them that good readers visualize what they are reading so that they better understand what is happening. I will tell them that you can visualize in poetry and fiction stories, but that these next few weeks we are going to practice visualizing using poetry. This week we will be focusing on shape and concrete poetry. I will tell students that concrete poems are poems that use one word to create a poem while shape poems write about their subject in the shape of what the poem is about. The book of poems that we are reading today, *Wet Cement*, has a concrete poem and a shape poem that are about the same thing beside each other. Before we read our poems for the day, I will



read the author's note at the beginning about word paintings. This author's note helps to further explain concrete and shape poems. As we read each poem, I will ask students to guess what the poem is about.

The first poem that we will read is "Clock." I will display the poem and ask students what they think this poem is going to be about. I will then read the poem aloud. First, I will give students a chance to visualize before modeling my own visualization. I will tell students that I picture students who are sitting at the edge of their seats waiting for class to be over so that they can go home. Then, I will ask students to share their visualizations with the class.

Next, we will read "Hopscotch." Before reading the poem, I will ask what they think the poem will be about. Then, I will read the poem aloud making sure to read from the bottom to the top of the page. I will ask students to turn and talk with their partners about what they visualize happening in the poem. I will monitor their conversations to select a few students to share with the class what they visualize.

Last, we will read the poem "Hanger." I will read it aloud and allow students to turn and talk. This time, students will not share their thoughts with the whole group, but they will instead return to their seats to draw their visualizations in their booklets.

We will repeat the exercise throughout the week using the poems "Dominoes," "Firefly," and "Balloon" from *Wet Cement*. We will also use the poems "What About Me," "A Twisted Tale," "Going Up," "Hi-Ho, Silverware," "I Chews You," and "Cool. Sweet... But Enough About Me" from *Ode to the Commode*. When we read this book, I will remind students that concrete poems are poems made only out of the word that the poem is about. Each day, we will focus on three poems.

### **Week 3: Science Poetry**

Texts: *Predator and Prey*; *Comets, Stars, the Moon, and Mars: Space Poems and Paintings*; *Song of the Water Boatman*

Additional Texts for Extension: *Oodles of Animals*, *Insectlopedia: Poems and paintings*, *Unbelievables: Honeybee Poems and Paintings*, and *Bees, Snails, & Peacock tails: Patterns & Shapes... Naturally*

Materials: Book with poem, Pre-printed poetry booklet, crayons or colored pencils

### **Sample Lesson**

I will begin the lesson by asking students what they remember about visualizing. I will ask a few students to share about what they remember about visualizing. After they have concluded that visualizing is creating mind pictures or movies about a poem or story, we will move on with the lesson. I will introduce this week's poetry style by telling students that authors can write poems about a variety of topics, but that this week we are focusing on poems about different science topics. I will introduce the book *Predator and Prey* by asking students what they remember about predators and prey. I will remind them that predators are animals that are looking for food and to eat other animals. Prey are the animals that are trying not to be eaten. These poems are special because they are two poems side by side, predators and prey talking to each other. The first poems that we will read is "Ant Armies" and "The Scent of Danger." Since we have been visualizing for two weeks now, I will allow students to lead the discussion of visualizing. I will pick a student to model visualization for the class, reminding them that since these poems are about predators and prey, they will be visualizing about two different animals. After we have practiced visualizing, I will read the author's note at the

bottom of the page talking about the animals to see how close our visualization was.

Next, we will read “Patience of a Snake” and “Hot-Tempered Squirrel.” I will read the poems aloud twice and give students’ time to individually visualize. Students will then turn and talk with their partner to visualize what they think is happening in the story. I will select a few students to share with the class. We will end by reading the author’s note.

Finally, I will read “Shadow Striker” and “Push-up Power” along with the author’s note about the animals. This time, students will return to their desks to illustrate their visualizations. This work will be independent. After students have had an opportunity to visualize and illustrate, I will select a few illustrations to have the students share with the class.

We will continue this exercise throughout the week with the poems “Listen for Me,” “Diving Beetle’s Food-Sharing Rules,” “In the Depths of the Summer Pond,” “Aquatic Fashion,” and “Into the Mud” from *Song of the Water Boatman*. We will also read the space poems “Skywatch,” “The Earth,” “The Moon,” and “The Black Hole” from *Comets, Stars, the Moon, and Mars: Space Poems and Paintings*. We will read three of these poems a day for the remainder of the week.

#### **Week 4: Poetry from Black Authors**

Texts: *Life Doesn’t Frighten Me*, *Seeing Into Tomorrow, That is My Dream*, *Hip Hop Speaks to Children: A Celebration of Poetry with a Beat*

Additional Texts for Extension: *The Undefeated*, *No Mirrors In My Nana’s House*, *A Place Inside of Me / A Poem to Heal the Heart*, *Soul Looks Back in Wonder*, *My People*, *Pass It On: African-American Poetry for Children*, *The Block*, *The Negro Speaks of Rivers*, *The Sweet and Sour Animal Book*

Materials: Book with poem, Pre-printed poetry booklet, crayons or colored pencils

#### **Sample Lesson**

We will begin our last poetry study with *Life Doesn’t Frighten Me* by Maya Angelou and illustrated by Jean-Michel Basquiat. I will tell students that the poems we read this week are written by Black poets. Many of these are poems that adults read and enjoy. Before we read the book/poem, I will read segments of the notes in the back about Maya Angelou and Jean-Michel Basquiat. We will discuss why these people are important. I will tell students that they did not write and illustrate this book together but that an editor took the poem and used Basquiat’s artwork for the illustrations.

I will read the whole book aloud, showing the pictures to students as we go. Next, I will go back to the first stanza, and reread it. Since this poem is more complex than some of the ones that we have been reading, I will model visualizing only the first stanza. I will say something like, “For the first stanza, I picture a little kid who is trying to go to bed, but he’s having trouble falling asleep. He sees the shadows from his toys and furniture on the wall. He can hear his parents and the dog in the hallway. He is a little scared and having trouble sleeping, but he’s trying to be brave. He is trying not to be afraid.” I will ask students if they have ever felt a similar way and remind them that we will go through each stanza, reading two at a time. I will have students turn and talk with each other. Then, I will call on students to share their visualizations with the class. I will encourage students to think about how they will illustrate their poems. Will they model their illustrations to look like Basquiat’s or something else?

After we have read the whole poem, students will return to their desks with their poetry booklets. I will remind them to pick one of their visualizations to illustrate. They do not have to draw everything that they visualized, but I will encourage them to pick the visualization that they like best. They can choose to illustrate in the style of Basquiat or in their own style. After they are finished illustrating, I will pick a few illustrations for students to share with the class.

We will continue the week by reading the following haikus from *Seeing Into Tomorrow*—"Is this the dirt road," "The clouds are smiling," and "Suddenly mindful." I will also read the author's note about Richard Wright and his haikus. The author's note also explains why the illustrator chose to use photographs. For another lesson, we will read poems from *Hip Hop Speaks to Children: A Celebration of Poetry with a Beat*. We will focus on "Books" by Eloise Greenfield, "The Girls in the Circle" by Nikki Giovanni, and "Audition" by Hope Anita Smith. On the last day of the week, we will read *That Is My Dream*, which is a picture book adaptation of "Dream Variation" by Langston Hughes. For each poem, we will discuss who the poet and illustrators were and why they are important.

## Endnotes:

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1. Scarborough, Hollis, *Scarborough's Reading Rope*.
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3. Styles, Morag. "The Case for Children's Poetry."
4. Heald, R. "Musicality in the Language of Picture Books," in *Child Lit Educ*.
5. Salisbury, Martin, and Morag Styles *Children's picturebooks: the art of visual storytelling*, 73.
6. Ibid, 73.
7. Cullinan, Bernice. "Imagery is of the essence," in *Instructor*.
8. Gregory, Anne E., and Mary Ann Cahill. "Kindergartners Can Do It, Too! Comprehension Strategies for Early Readers," in *The Reading Teacher*.
9. Koch, Kenneth, *Rose, where did you get that red?: Teaching great poetry to children*, 28.
10. Ibid, 5-6.
11. Styles, Morag. "The Case for Children's Poetry."
12. Koch, Kenneth, *Rose, where did you get that red?: Teaching great poetry to children*, 26.
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## Teacher Resources:

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"Poems for Kids Written by African American Poets." Rainy Day Poems, March 25, 2023.  
<https://rainydaypoems.com/poems-for-kids/poems-for-kids-written-by-african-american-poets/>. Helpful list of poems by Black poets.

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## Student Readings

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Florian, Douglas. *Comets, Stars, the Moon, and Mars: Space Poems and Paintings*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt, Inc., 2007.

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Silverstein, Shel. 1978. *Where the Sidewalk Ends*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Children's Books.

Wright, Richard, and Nina Crews. *Seeing Into Tomorrow: Haiku by Richard Wright*. Minneapolis, MN: Millbrook Press, 2018.

## Appendix on Implementing District Standards

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CCSS.ELA- Reading: Literature- RL.1.4: Identify words and phrases in stories or poems that suggest feelings or appeal to the senses.

Students will use words and phrases that suggest feelings and appeal to the senses to visualize what is happening in each poem that we read. We will focus on specific words and phrases that have strong imagery to create visualizations.

CCSS.ELA- Reading: Literature- RL.1.10: With prompting and support, read prose and poetry of appropriate complexity for grade 1.

Students will read poems appropriate for first grade. This includes silly poems, shape/concrete poems, Science poems, and poems by Black authors. I will support students by reading the poems aloud and providing them with the text to follow along with. I will also help clarify literary devices such as alliteration, rhyme, and rhythm as well as unknown vocabulary words.

CCSS.ELA- Speaking and Listening- SL.1.2: Ask and answer questions about key details in a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.

Students will be able to discuss and answer questions about visualization about the poem that we are reading. They also will be able to ask and answer questions about the accompanying illustrations.

CCSS.ELA- Speaking and Listening- SL.1.4: Describe people, places, things, and events with relevant details, expressing ideas and feelings clearly.

Students will be able to listen to their peers' ideas and share their own visualizations formed from the text with a partner and in a whole group setting.

CCSS.ELA- Speaking and Listening- SL.1.5: Add drawings or other visual displays to descriptions when appropriate to clarify ideas, thoughts, and feelings.

Students will illustrate their visualizations through drawings to communicate what they pictured when reading a text and to accompany poems that we have read in class.

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