



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1991 Volume IV: Recent American Poetry: Expanding the Canon

Seeing with the Heart: Poetry in the Classroom

Curriculum Unit 91.04.07
by Lorna Dils

It is easy to teach a subject you love, and I love poetry. I spend enjoyable hours reading and attempting to write poetry. I share this enthusiasm with my students as we read poetry and as I help them write their own poetry. Throughout my years of teaching, whether I have taught learning disabled or gifted students, I have exposed my students to a wide array of published poetry to help them develop an appreciation for this literary form. I have used an equally wide range of teaching techniques to encourage and motivate students to write their own poetry. This unit will be my attempt to organize and present the many strategies I have developed for bringing poetry into the classroom. I will also present strategies based on my reading from several well-known authors who write about poetry writing with younger students. Some, such as Myra Cohn Livingston, Kenneth Koch, and David M. Johnson are published poets in their own rights. The first part of this unit will discuss exposing students to a wide range of poetry and will focus on writing activities for students. The second part, the lesson plans, will introduce students to several contemporary American poets of Native American, African-American and Hispanic background. Poems chosen for the lesson plans contain themes important to the lives of seventh graders: prejudice, family relationships, and self-identity. The assignments in these lessons are based on the themes identified in the poems and are designed to provide students with an opportunity to read and analyze poetry as well as an opportunity to think about and express their feelings and ideas about issues important in their lives.

The students for whom I am writing this unit are in my seventh grade Talented and Gifted class. These students come to me from three middle schools and one kindergarten through eighth grade school. I meet with them once each week and our poetry sessions range in time from forty minutes to one hour. While many of the strategies for introducing students to reading and writing poetry are also appropriate for younger students, the poetry that is included in the lesson plans is appropriate for seventh grade or older.

The objectives of this unit are for students to:

1. develop an appreciation for reading poetry
2. understand different poetic forms
3. develop poetry writing skills
4. develop vocabulary through poetry writing
5. develop analytical skills through poetry reading
6. develop creativity

7. become acquainted with the work of several contemporary American poets.

Almost every morning, my students are read a poem. I have several anthologies of poetry, some, but not all, collected specifically for children and I choose my poems to correspond with current events—inside and outside of the classroom. The outbreak of war in the Middle East prompted the reading of “Speaking: the Hero” by Felix Pollak. (Larrick *Crazy* 129). This is a poem written about a soldier who died during the Viet Nam War. On one student’s birthday, I read “Little Brand New Baby” by Tom Paxton (Peck 2). The first snow of the season, coupled with the beginning of a mythology unit, was the perfect opportunity to read “Snowflake” by Marchette Chute (Larrick *Piping* 104). In this poem, Chute compares snowflakes to feathers shaken from the moon. A recent quarrel between two students led to the reading of “Some People” by Rachel Field (Larrick *Piping* 42), a poem that succinctly describes the “chemistry” that exists between friends. After each poem is read aloud at least twice, students are asked to respond to the poem’s themes or to discuss the imagery in the poem. In addition, I put as many poems as possible onto large sheets of construction paper and hang them around my classroom. I believe that poetry has a visual component and it is as important to see what a poem looks like as it is to hear what it sounds like. Both components are absolutely essential in comprehending a poem. In fact, in my classroom, it is not unusual to see students standing in front of a group of posted poems, rereading them and discussing them among themselves.

Besides having poem posters around the room, I also have many different anthologies and collections of poetry readily available for students to read. Fortunately for those who love poetry, there are many wonderful collections available that are perfect for classrooms. Of special note are collections such as *Sing a Song of Popcorn* (deRegnier, et al), a collection of poems for younger students centering around themes such as holidays, weather and seasons with delightful illustrations. My particular favorite is *Talking to the Sun* (Koch and Farrell) which has wide range of poems from ancient Chinese and Native American poetry to more modern poets. The poems are illustrated with color plates of pieces of art from the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In opposition to *Talking to the Sun* is *Honey I Love and other love poems* by Eloise Greenfield. This is a tiny volume of poems written for children and is about relationships between people—friends, parents, and other special relatives. With its simple sketched illustrations, it is as moving in its simplicity as *Talking to the Sun* is moving in its elegance.

I consider these brief poetry readings and discussions invaluable as a beginning to introducing students to appreciating poetry. All too often, a student’s only exposure to poetry is a poem that is wedged between two units in his/her reader. Often a student’s only exposure to poetry is nursery rhymes or the simple four lined “roses are red, violets are blue” type of rhymes. If students have been exposed to poetry, they may think that there is no link between poetry and day-to-day living and that poetry is too intellectual and too complicated for them to read and understand, let alone write. By providing students with frequent opportunities to hear and see poetry about a variety of subjects and to hear and see poetry that is written in a variety of styles, many of these myths can be dispelled. This will also help students begin to listen to the sounds around them (in the lyrics of music and the words of others) and is a first step in finding their own writing voices (Zaversky 5). I

should note here that since I use poetry that is not always written for children, I occasionally use only parts of a poem that may pertain to a theme or subject I want to present to my class but which may also contain other subjects that are inappropriate for younger readers. I also, on occasion, present a poem to my students that I know will be difficult for them to understand but one which is especially appropriate for an occasion or situation. For example, during a visit to the Yale Art Gallery with a group of fourth graders, we viewed many Greek pots depicting some of the gods and goddesses we were studying in our Greek Mythology unit. Upon our return, I read John Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn" to these students. I asked them to listen to the words and the rhythm of the poem. I also asked them to try to visualize what Keats was describing using their knowledge from our studies and our trip. They were delighted to find that they shared a common interest with a great poet who wrote 170 years ago and a lively discussion followed when I asked them whether they agreed that beauty is truth, truth beauty" (Allison, et al 663) and what those lines meant to them.

At the same time that I expose my students to a wide variety of published poetry, I also take them through a variety of activities to begin writing their own poetry. One reason I like to have students write poetry is that I believe it fosters language development in a way that is fun and a way that fosters creativity. Poetry is the essence of language; it is distilled language and students need to be allowed ample opportunity to write poetry and to see the difference between poetry and prose. It is not just that poetry is written in lines and sometimes in stanzas. The language of poetry is different. It is concrete, it evokes emotion, it is full of imagery and metaphor, it shows not tells. It is thinking and seeing with our hearts (Johnson x). Admittedly, writing good poetry is a tall order for any writer, particularly young students, but they, when given the opportunity, will produce wonderful poetry.

It is important when starting off to provide students with activities that are easy to understand and interesting. They should also bring something new to the student: a new awareness, a new subject matter or perhaps a new poetic form like haiku or sestina (Koch *Wishes* 14). The activities must also provide successful experiences for the their early writing, they will be inspired to try new ideas and write more. Kenneth Koch, in *Wishes, Lies and Dreams* suggests having students fill in comparative sentences such as "I used to . . . but now I . . . , and to use them as the basis of short poems (21). I have had good success with beginning poetry writing by having students brainstorm a list of words that describe a subject such as rain or snow. They are then asked to use in a poem only the words that have been listed. They are allowed to use conjunctions and one or two words of their own only if they feel it is absolutely necessary. What has always resulted is wonderful poetry because through this exercise, students are provided the words and, for beginning poetry writers, this frees them to manipulate the words, to concentrate only on sound, rhythm, and shape. I have included the following example of this activity written by one of my students. Because in this activity Shinetta was allowed to concentrate on manipulating the words and, obviously, the punctuation, she was successful in her writing effort. As she worked, I observed her whispering the words of her poem. As she listened, she would stop, cross out a word and insert another. Occasionally she held her paper up in front of her to observe its shape. Her finished product speaks for itself.

What Fun is Rain to Have!
Rain is refreshing and fun.
It drips, drops all the time.
;What fun is rain to have!
;What fun is rain to have!
It's splashy and wet.
;What fun is rain to have!

¡What fun is rain to have!
Rain is muddy, drifty, cold,
it's very, very cold.
¡What fun is rain to have!
¡What fun is rain to have!
It's crashy, misty, its foggy
in all but . . .
¡What fun is rain to have!
Shinetta Gethers

As well as providing writing activities that promote success, it is important for the teacher to remove the barriers that will prevent students from writing good poetry. Spelling and neatness requirements should be suspended until after the first draft and the revision process so that students can concentrate on expressing their ideas first. There are differing opinions among authors as to whether or not students should be encouraged to use rhyme in their poetry. I have found through my own experience that students often sacrifice the quality of their writing when they try to rhyme. Their energy goes into finding rhyming words, rather than looking for the words they need to express their meanings. Kenneth Koch, in *Wishes, Lies and Dreams*, states "Rhyme is wonderful, but children generally aren't able to use it skillfully enough to make good poetry. It gets in their way" (14). Since I agree, I try to structure beginning writing activities so that students feel rhyming is not necessary. One way to do this is to have students complete and repeat sentence

starters such as “I wish that . . .” (Hazard such as “I wish that . . .” (Hazard 22) or sentences like “I used to be . . . but now I . . .” (Koch *Wishes* 21) . These two suggestions also lend themselves to class poems in which each student contributes one line to the poem. Creating a class poem is helpful when beginning poetry writing. The activity provides examples for students to refer to and is a chance to write poetry that is not quite as difficult or risky as writing poems on their own.

Another beginning poetry writing activity is to have students write unlikely comparisons. For example, wonderful poetry can come from asking students to answer questions such as “What color is love?”, “What color is summer?” or “Red is . . . ?” and explain why. When two or three of these sentences are put together, they can make delightful poetry. In addition, when students are asked to make unlikely comparisons such as these, they are allowed to flex their creative muscles.

There is also disagreement among authors as to whether or not students should be taught the “language” of poetry. While Kenneth Koch, in *Wishes, Lies and Dreams* suggests using lay terms for those words (30) and Lee Bennett Hopkins in *Pass the Poetry, Please* suggests that it is easy to turn students off by overdoing the discussion and dissecting of a poem (13), I have found a middle ground works the best. Students enjoy the “grown-up” feeling of using with understanding words such as “personification”, and “alliteration” and “metaphor.” The teaching of these terms is easily done while reading poetry and students can be encouraged to use different techniques in their own writing. It is always a good idea to point out when students use a specific poetic device in their poetry as many times they write what they instinctively know sounds right and pointing out examples of devices encourages them to continue using their instincts as well as their knowledge. One enhances the other in their writing.

One of my favorite writing activities is called “Alphabet Poetry” (Lipson 112). In this activity, each student chooses a word that is the title of his/her poem. A concrete noun works best although my example shows other nouns work too. The alphabet is written down the side of the paper, one letter per line. Each line of the poem must include at least one word that starts with whatever letter is on the line. For example if the word chosen is “Autumn” the lines might go as follows:

A Always, autumn
B brings
C cool air and
D drifting leaves

I like to use this activity for a number of reasons. It encourages students to really search for appropriate words which, of course, helps develop their vocabulary. It tends to lend itself to students using alliterations and, in fact, if alliteration is being taught, using alliterative phrases can be included as a requirement of the assignment. I also like this activity because it can be used to show students the difference between prose and poetry and how to get rid of non-essential words in their poems. I have noticed that very often students tend to write a complete sentence for each line of this poem. Therefore, when the first draft is completed, and they are ready to revise, I show them how to eliminate any words that are not essential, especially “the’s”, “an’s”

and “a’s.” Often the subject of a sentence can be inferred and that word left out. I ask students to read their poetry aloud to themselves and try to eliminate any words that are not absolutely necessary to the meaning of the poem. This is hard work for some, especially after being reminded for years to write in complete sentences, but once a few examples have been demonstrated and students can hear the difference in the rhythm of their work, they are able to do this kind of revision by themselves.

Another writing exercise that particularly encourages language development is what I call, “Five Ways of Looking at a Graham Cracker.” This activity begins by reading Wallace Stevens’ “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird” (Ellman and O’Clair 287) several times aloud. Students are asked to close their eyes and listen to the words and try to see what images of the blackbird occur to them. Each is then given a graham cracker. The writing assignment is to write about the cracker using each of the five senses and, if possible, add the sixth component of emotion. That is, not only how does the cracker feel, but how does eating (or smelling, or looking at) a graham cracker make them feel? Does it remind them, for example, of warm kitchens on snowy afternoons or some other special time or event in their lives? Students respond nicely to this writing activity. They love the mysterious quality of Stevens’ poem and the novelty, of course, of nibbling while they write. Occasionally the writing process is so arduous, a second or third cracker is necessary for inspiration.

To use form, or not to use form—that is another question when teaching beginning poetry. The first part of my answer is—why not? Even fairly young writers can understand haiku and writing haiku can help students develop the ability to write vivid imagery (Hazzard 83). There are many other forms similar to haiku that count syllables and lines such as senryu, tanka, sijo and cinquain, and poems that are written to form a shape such as diamante. All work well with beginning poetry writers. There are more complicated forms such as sestina that will challenge more experienced writers. The second part to this answer, more of a caution really, is that the use of form should be flexible. Poetic forms have been described as “empty bottles, waiting to be filled by the poet” (Johnson 34) and for some students using specific form provides parameters that help their writing process. The pitfalls are easy to see. The first, as in using rhyme, is that students can become more involved with meeting the requirements of the form than with putting ideas and feelings down on paper. The second is that we, as teachers, can be too insistent that students adhere completely to a form. The point is to expose students to different forms of poetry but to be flexible in our requirements by allowing plenty of leeway within whatever poetic form the student is using.

There is no particular order, for the most part, in which the strategies I have described need to be presented to students. What is important is that students be allowed to read plenty of published poetry as well as given plenty of opportunities to write their own poetry. The teacher’s knowledge of her own students will also assist in deciding which strategies would be best at a given time. Certainly, I would use a sentence completion activity such as “I wish . . .” or “I used to be . . .” before I would try a more difficult writing exercise like “Five Ways of Looking at a Graham Cracker.” I would also be sure early on to include a discussion of the difference between prose and poetry. By the seventh grade, students may have a good sense of this, but a class discussion will help them articulate the differences.

By the time students have been exposed to the strategies proposed in the first section of this unit, they will be ready to move onto the more difficult reading and writing assignments detailed in the following lesson plans. As stated earlier, each includes the reading of at least one poem written by a recent American poet of Native American, African-American or Hispanic background. I have chosen these poets purposefully and each lesson plan includes brief biographical information about the poet read in that lesson as these poets’ lives can serve as role models to my students, many of whom are minority. Because the poems in these lesson plans are written by minorities, my students can more easily identify with the poets and the topics about which they

write. Two lessons will center around form or poetic device. The rest look at themes that are important in the every day lives of seventh graders: family relationships; role models; their own roles in life and places in nature; and prejudice. As they read the poetry in these lessons, students are provided an opportunity to think about themselves in relationship to other people and the world around them; to begin to more fully analyze poetry; and to begin putting their ideas and feelings about important issues into poetic form.

Poetry is about experience, the experiences of sight, touch, hearing, and feeling and as teachers we must provide our students with many new experiences. Poetry belongs in our classrooms as a tool to allow students to develop their language skills, their writing skills, their creativity and their ability to express themselves. The following lesson plans will demonstrate how poetry is a tool to help students develop these skills.

Lesson Plan—Haiku

This lesson will review traditional haiku and introduce students to four modern haikus written by Sonia Sanchez in *I've Been A Woman* (67) and Victor Hernandez Cruz in *By Lingual Wholes* (n.p.).

Sonia Sanchez was born in 1935 in Birmingham, Alabama. She is a professor of English at Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Her poetry shows her diversity and her blending of the roles of mother, teacher, poet, and political activist. She does not always use standard English in her poetry, preferring to take her language from her surroundings. Much of her poetry relates to her interest in African American children and themes of black heritage and black identity can be found in her work (Lauter, et al 2440).

Victor Hernandez Cruz was born in Puerto Rico and, as is true of many of our New Haven students, moved to the mainland (New York City) when he was five. He writes about Hispanic images in the city. Some of his poetry is very concrete and what is called “minimalist” (Lauter, et al 2533). Most of his poetry is too mature to be used in the classroom but the haikus selected for this lesson show a different, very concrete use of the haiku form.

Begin this lesson by discussing the traditional haiku form with the students. Since many may be familiar with it, encourage them to provide their classmates with the information. The following should be discussed and listed on the chalkboard:

1. Traditional haiku is Japanese
2. It has three non-rhyming lines of seventeen syllables, divided into 5, 7, and 5 syllables per line
3. Haiku should relate to nature or a season of the year
4. Haiku should capture a moment or single image in nature. It should strike an image.

Present several traditional haikus. Examples can be found in *Poem-Making* by Myra Cohn Livingston (104). After each haiku has been read two or three times, discuss the ways in which each meets the criteria listed on the board.

Present the four modern haikus. I would present both of Sanchez' haikus together, reading each two or three times. I would also present as much of her biographical information as is appropriate for the class. This same

process should be repeated for Cruz's haikus. I would then ask the students to tell in what ways each of these poems meets the criteria for haiku, and in what way each is different. It is through this discussion that the meaning of the poems can be discussed. I would ask which of these four haikus is the most traditional in the Japanese sense, which is the least and to explain why.

The last part of this lesson would be to allow students to write their own haikus in either the style of Sanchez or Cruz, and to have them present their haikus to the rest of the class.

Lesson Plan—Who Am I?

N. Scott Momaday was born in 1934. He is a Kiowa who was influenced by the oral story telling tradition of his father. This tradition is evident in much of his writing. He writes novels and autobiography, as well as poetry. As a child he went to school in both reservation and public schools. He attended the University of New Mexico and Stanford University, and taught comparative literature and English at Berkeley, Stanford and the University of Arizona (Lauter, et al 2038).

In Momaday's poem "The Delight Song of Tsoai-talee", found in *Angle of Geese and Other Poems* (22), he describes himself in relationship to the earth and all its living and natural beauty. Students might be asked to explain what it is about this poem that leads the reader to know it is written by a Native American poet? in a class discussion, students might be asked to compare themselves to and explain why they are like a season or a particular kind of weather.

Poetry writing for this lesson can be modeled after Momaday's poem using "I am . . ." as the start of lines of poetry in which students compare themselves to something in nature. Another approach to a writing assignment would be to examine roles that each of us have: we are children, brothers or sisters, students, athletes, poetry readers, nature lovers, etc. When listed and grouped, these lists make wonderful poems that encourage students to think about themselves in relationship to other people as well as to nature.

Lesson Plan—Prejudice

This lesson uses Countee Cullen's "Incident" found in *Reading Poetry—An Anthology of Poems* (66) and a poem by Wendy Rose entitled "Incident at a hamburger stand: Iowa City" found in *Lost Copper* (24) to present the issue of discrimination. In Cullen's poem, he is discriminated against as an African-American child. In Rose's poem the discrimination is because she is a Native American and a female.

Countee Cullen, who lived from 1903 until 1946, is the oldest of the poets included in these lesson plans. He was born in New York City, the son of a minister. He graduated from New York University and Harvard. He married the daughter of W. E. B. DuBois, the African-American writer. Cullen's poetry is written in a more traditional form than some of the other poets used in these lessons, but his poems show his concern for the racial prejudice he encountered (Lauter, et al 1510).

Wendy Rose, a Hopi, was born in 1948 and was educated at the University of California, Berkeley. She also taught Ethnic Studies and Native American Studies there. Now she is the Coordinator of the American Indian Studies Program at Fresno city college in California. Wendy Rose writes of being a Native American and a woman. She is, as are N. Scott Momaday and Leslie Marmon Silko, influenced by the oral storytelling tradition of her culture and she weaves this tradition into much of her poetry (Rose ix).

After the students have read each poem several times out loud, they should be asked to describe what is happening in each poem. These poems are straight forward in presentation and the students will understand

the story in each poem. These poems can then act as a catalyst for a discussion about the many kinds of prejudice most of us have experienced, be it racial, religious, gender or age prejudice.

From this discussion, students can be asked to describe, in a poem, a time that they were the recipient of some kind of prejudice. They should be asked to include in the poem some sense of their own feeling at the time of their own “incident.”

Lesson Plan—Role Models

Mari Evans is also an African-American poet whose writing shows her concern for African-American children and their identify, as well as political and social issues. She writes poetry for both children and adults. She is a dramatist, musician and educator, also (Lauter, et al 2358).

“Let Us Be That Something” in *Nightstar* (Evans 14) is about setting a good example for the young. After the poem has been read several times, the students should be asked to explain several parts of the poem. For example, they can be asked what exactly do the young need to believe in? What does Evans mean when she says “they need a map and a guide/to the interior”? What is the map a metaphor for? What is the interior?

From here, once again the discussion should be directed so that the students reflect upon their own lives. Who, in their lives, has provided a good role model for them? Who has been a “guide,” provided a “map” to the right paths? Can this person become the basis of a poem that describes him or her and explains the way in which he/she has influenced the student’s life? Students might be helped by using a phrase from the poem such as “something to believe in” or a “map and a guide” as the title of their poems.

Lesson Plan—Family Relationships

Leslie Marmon Silko is also a Native American poet. She is of the Laguna Pueblo tribe. She writes of her culture in which she grew up with an oral story-telling tradition in which stories were handed down from older women in her own and other families. In “ It Was A Long Time Before “ in *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry* (Ellmann and O’Clair 1643), there are many themes to be used in a class discussion: family relationships with older relatives; stories and lessons passed to us from our older relatives; role reversals; and loneliness.

In contrast. Rose’s poem “The small circling bird: Milpitas” (Rose 5) describes a small child’s participation in a pre-powwow ritual with her father who plays a drum. Students should be able to describe the relationship between the little girl and her father. When Rose says she “guards what’s hers”, what does that tell about the relationship between father and daughter? Are there any similarities between the relationship between the daughter and father in Rose’s poem and the granddaughter and grandmother in Silko’s poem? Are there times when children become caretakers and protectors of the adults in their lives?

Poetry writing that comes from the discussion of these two poems can center around the theme of the family. Students can write poems about their relationship with another family member or the influence their family and its traditions have had upon them. They should be encouraged to write about any family member who has influenced them in a positive way, or who has passed traditions down to them.

One additional poem, “Those Winter Sundays” by Robert Hayden can be found in *The Heath Anthology of American Literature, Vol. 2* (Lauter, et al 2303) and can be read and discussed as part of this lesson about family relationships. It, too, can serve as a model for student writing.

Lesson Plan—Metaphor

Wendy Rose’s “Loo-Wit” found in *The Heath Anthology of American Literature, Vol 2* (Lauter, et al 2527-2528) is a poem about Mt. St. Helens in which the volcano is compared to an old Indian woman who is displeased with her “playing” children who have “no sense of tomorrow.” This poem is rich in imagery which, when read by the students, will be evident to them. It might be a good idea not to tell them the poem is about Mt. St. Helens until after they have made the connection between Loo-Wit and a volcanic mountain.

Early on, the discussion should include a definition of metaphor as the comparison of two unlike objects. Students can be provided copies of Myra Cohn Livingstons’s chapter on metaphor in *Poem-Making* (87). The comparison can be as simple as one line or continued throughout out a whole poem as in the case of “Loo-Wit”. At no point does Rose say Mt. St. Helens is an old Indian woman but by the time she tells us that cedar trees hold her to the earth and that “her eyes are covered with bark” the metaphor is becoming clear. With each subsequent reading, the meaning of more and more images will become evident. Since the writing assignment for this lesson is difficult, it might be a good idea to refer students back to N. Scott Momaday’s “Delight Song of Tsoai-talee” and the metaphors in that poem. Students can be asked to explain why Momaday makes the comparisons that he does. Two other poems “All I Am” by Abiodun Oyewole and “Dreams” by Langston Hughes can be found in *Make A Joyful Sound* (Sliver 88 and 98) and are two more poems rich in metaphor. These poems can also be presented and discussed before asking students to try their own hand at using metaphor in a poem.

Also, if students have some experience making unlikely comparisons of the kind suggested in the first part of this unit, they will have success in using metaphor in their poetry. A few oral rounds of “red is . . .” or “Love is . . .” might be a good pre-writing activity.

Student and Teacher Bibliography

Allison, Alexander W., et al, *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*. New York: Norton, 1983. The works of great poets from Geoffrey Chaucer to Leslie Marmon Silko. Includes a good selection of modern poets.

Applegate, Maureen. *When the Teacher Says Write a Poem*. New York: Harper and Row, 1965. A Poetry how-to for junior high school students.

Baldwin, Neil. *The Poetry Writing Handbook*. New York: Scholastic, 1981. Ideas for reading and writing poetry.

Cruz, Victor Hernandez. *By Lingual Wholes*. San Francisco: Momo’s Press, 1982. Includes some examples of Gruz’s “minimalist” poetry.

deRegnier, Beatrice Schenk, et al, eds. *Sing A Song of Popcorn*. New York: Scholastic, 1988. A children’s anthology centered around themes of holidays and weather. Beautifully illustrated.

DiYanni, Robert, ed. *Reading Poetry*. New York: Random House, 1989. A poetry textbook for reading and understanding poetry for upper middle and high school students.

Elledge, Scott, ed. *Wider Than the Sky*. New York: Harper and Row, 1990. A collection of poetry to grow up with. Covers a wide range of old and new poetry.

Ellmann, Richard and O'Clair, Robert, eds. *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry, 2nd Edition*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1988. Includes modern poets from Walt Whitman to Cathy Song.

Evans, Mari. *Nightstar*. Los Angeles: Center for Afro-American Studies, 1981.

Greenfield, Eloise. *Honey, I love and other love poems*. New York: Harper Trophy, 1986. For children, poems about family and friends.

Hall, Donald, ed. *The Oxford Book of Children's Verse in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985. A chronological selection of great poetry. Donald Hall, the editor, is a poet and author of children's books.

Harmon, William, ed. *The Concise Book of Poetry*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990. The 100 most widely anthologized poems. Includes biographical information about the poets.

Hazard, Russell. *It Scares Me But I Like It*. Don Mills, Ontario: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1979. For teachers, writing poetry with middle school students.

Hopkins, Lee Bennett. *Pass the Poetry Please*. New York: Citation Press, 1972. Poetry activities for elementary teachers with an annotated bibliography.

Johnson, David M. *Word Weaving*. Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English, 1990. Ideas for teaching poetry to high school students around themes of everyday life.

Kennedy, X.J. and Kennedy, Dorothy M. *Knock At A Star*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1982. An introduction to poetry for younger students but useful for older students. Includes a selection of shape poems.

Koch, Kenneth. *Rose, Where Did You Get That Red?* New York: Vintage Books, 1990. Essays and ideas on how to teach great poetry.

———. *Wishes, Lies and Dreams*. New York: Harper and Row, 1970. Ideas for teaching elementary students to write poetry. Can also be used by middle school teachers.

Koch, Kenneth and Farrell, Kate. *Sleeping on the Wing*. New York: Vintage Books, 1982. Essays on the poetry of great modern poets.

———. *Talking to the Sun*. New York: Henry Holt, 1985. A wide ranging anthology coupled with pictures of works of art from the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Larrick, Nancy ed. *Crazy to Be Alive in Such a Strange World*. New York: M. Evans. 1977. Poems and photos about people.

———. *Room for the Mountain Lion and Me*. New York: M. Evans, 1974. Poems about nature and living in harmony with our environment.

Lauter, Paul, et al eds. *The Heath Anthology of American Literature, Vol 2*. Lexington: D.C. Heath, 1990. American writers and poets from 1945 to the present.

Lipson, Greta Barclay. *Fast Ideas for Busy Teachers*. Carthage: Good Apple, 1989. Contains many ideas for classroom poetry writing activities.

Livingston, Myra Cohn. *Poem-Making: Ways to Begin Writing Poetry*. New York: Harper Collins, 1991. A poetry writing “how-to” for middle grade students. A useful handbook for teachers, too.

Merriam Eve, *A Sky Full of Poems*. New York: Dell, 1964. A book of poems by this award winning American poet. A useful reference for examples of different poetic techniques.

Momaday, N. Scott. *Angle of Geese and Other Poems*. Boston: David R. Godine, 1974.

Peck, Richard, ed. *Sounds and Silences*. New York: Dell, 1970. A Good anthology for upper middle school and high school students with poetry that centers around different themes such as family, communication, love and war.

Rose, Wendy. *Lost Copper*. Banning: Malki Museum Press, 1980.

Sanchez, Sonia. *I've Been A Woman*. Chicago: Third World Press, 1985.

Slier, Deborah, ed. *Make A Joyful Sound*. New York: Checkerboard Press, 1991. A beautifully illustrated anthology of poetry for children by African-American poets.

Sneve, Virginia Driving Hawk. *Dancing Teepees*. New York: Holiday House, 1989. Ancient and modern Indian poetry with wonderful illustrations.

Wainwright, James. *Poetivities*. Carthage: Good Apple, 1989. Poetry writing activities for the intermediate grades.

Zaversky, Bill. “Poetry in High School”. *Teachers and Writers* (Nov. Dec. 1981): 5.

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

©2019 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University

For terms of use visit <https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu/terms>