

What to Do with a Poem

1. The children may want to sketch quickly the poem's images. They may then later, after discussion or exploration, decide to work on one particular drawing that somehow represents the poem.
2. The children may jot down their first impressions of the poem as they read it, or as they read the group of poems, and then join a group to share what they have written. This gives them the protection of reading what they want to read aloud, and opportunities of elaborating and clarifying their own responses.
3. The children may jot down their thoughts and feelings as they are reading the poems, almost in a stream of consciousness with associations, connotations, and reflections. This may help them to understand their own processes of reading poetry and contribute to the discussion after the poem has been read.
4. Children may want to write up their own questions about the poem that can become the focus of their group work or the discussion.
5. The poem can be shared without a title; the children can then decide on an appropriate or possible title after re-reading the poem. These titles can be suggested, discussed, and voted upon.
6. As children contribute ideas and feelings, the perception of those taking part alters. It is important that children have shapes and constructs in which to share their feelings and thoughts, so that they feel safe, and so that the work becomes focused. They can use cue sheets, questions, guide points from the teacher, or contrast the ideas of another group.
7. Children can classify poems by the opinions represented. They can arrange poems by viewpoint; attitude, behavior, religion, ethics, morality. They can translate the form of the poem into other types of writing: monologues, scripts, paragraphs, or vice versa. They can change a short story into a poem, or translate an ad, a synopsis, or a photograph into poetic shape.
8. After reading poems, the teacher can ask the children for the words they liked, the way the words made them feel, and how the words sounded special. These can be put down on a chart and categorized and classified. They can list their favorite words and phrases, the rhymes they enjoy, the pictures that are the best, the metaphors and the comparisons they will remember.
9. Often a special time for poetry can highlight its inherent value and let children realize that poetry can be a positive and fascinating way to spend time.
10. The teacher can read poems by a single poet, choose poems on a theme, search out poems that somehow fit together by form, or choose poems from a specific country or a particular culture.

11. Teachers can combine folk tales, excerpts from novels, poems, and songs into a thematic unit to be explored; teachers can read poems of aboriginal peoples from around the world.
12. The children can take part in the poetry hour by presenting poetry through oral reading or drama, through interviewing authors, or by sharing their own discoveries and delights.
13. You can help children come to poetry by helping them to be more visually aware:
 - Use picture books.
 - Use films.
 - Use study prints that combine picture and poem.
 - Use art books and prints.
 - Use web sites of poems and poets.
 - Use signs and photographs to accompany poems.
 - Make the pupils tell you what they see; but don't make it a session of right or wrong answers. Use magazine pictures and advertisements with directed activities with poetic language.
14. Give children constant exposure to poetry:
 - Collect anthologies of every kind: riddles, jokes, ballads, funny poems, story poems, theme books, songs.
 - Clip your favorite poems from magazines or web sites.
 - Read two or three poems at one time so children can compare and have opinions. Always have more than one poem in case you have misjudged.
 - Make poetry natural in your class — use it often and it will become part of the environment.
15. Have the children respond to poems by:
 - Painting, drama, singing;
 - Talking about the poem;
 - Finding material related to the poem;
 - Reading the poem as a play for partners;
 - Writing a similar poem;
 - Making a word or picture collage from magazines and newspapers;
 - Finding a related excerpt in a book.