
Appendix 2: Poetry Events by Larry Swartz

Some Poems by the Students in Room 203

A bird without wings,
A world without sky
A clock without hands,
Is like a reason without why.

A picture without paint,
A group without a leader,
A song without notes,
Is like a book without a reader.

Matt

Books are like barbecued
steaks—

Sometimes tender
Sometimes juicy
Sometimes well done.

How do you like yours?
Me?

I like mine with
lots of spice
lots of flavour
lots of meat
lots to savour.

Liza

The trees look up at the sky
The sky looks down at the
water
The water looks up at the
clouds
And the clouds look down at
me.

Chris

My program, I felt, was rich with picture books and novels, but I recognized the need to pay attention to poems and one summer, in the middle of my career, two things influenced my understanding of teaching through poetry: I attended a conference and heard Georgia Heard speak about teaching poetry and was inspired by her passion and the ideas she offered for creating poems on life experiences. Also, I carefully read *Poems Please!* by David Booth and Bill Moore. When I went back to my classroom in September, I challenged myself to enrich my language program by spending more time with poetry and to help the students in my Grade 4/5 class to recognize the value of poetry as an art experience. I hoped to enhance the children's learning not only for reading and writing, but also for chanting, singing, discussing, arguing, responding, interpreting, questioning, performing, role playing, painting, and dancing.

Throughout the year I organized events that allowed my students to explore and experience the scope of poetry in all its forms. By year's end the class had met more than 300 poems written by professional poets, by their peers, and by their teacher. Students read poems by themselves, in small groups, and as a whole class. They read poems quietly and aloud. They talked with others about the poems they read or wrote responses to poems in their reading journals. They wrote poems short and long. They wrote poems stimulated by a theme or topic, prompted by the poetry of others, or patterned on a poetic form. Occasionally, they revised their poems and prepared published forms of their work to be shared with others.

I recognize that students sometimes need shape and pattern to assist them in their struggle to write poems. When they examine the way that words are placed on paper by poets (as well as by their friends), they might be encouraged to create original poems using patterns that they find engaging. Form can give students a sense of control and economy as they write. Having said this, I have some hesitation about teaching the writing of poetry in this fashion. When students write formula poems, which are usually short and written to specific criteria, they might see poetry as a paint-by-number exercise where they fill in spaces according to rules. Sometimes, I have offered suggestions to comply with poetic patterns and structures. The students have particularly enjoyed writing concrete shape poems, poems with a repeated line pattern, list poems, and poems of 20 words or less. At other times, I have woven poetry events into themes or curriculum topics experienced throughout the year. The students have written poems to accompany paintings by the Group of Seven and their own artwork, to express their feelings about reading, and to reflect on world events. They have written poems on the computer, in their notebooks, on the bulletin board, on small file cards, on the blackboard, on chart paper, and on overhead transparencies. Some poems remained in their notebooks, some were developed into published pieces, and some were chosen to be part of an anthology produced each term to share with others in the school and with their families.

Golden trees
Stand around me.

Green hills
Sleep beside me.

Swan-like clouds
Fly above me

And my soul rings
Like a church bell.

Trevor

Beetles for breakfast
Spiders for lunch
Lizards for dinner
Munch!
Munch!
Munch!

Connie

The Pet Store

10 guinea pigs wobbling
9 snakes slithering.
8 parrots squawking.
7 mice munching.
6 gerbils scurrying.
5 puppies yapping.
4 fish wiggling.
3 monkeys laughing.
2 kittens leaping.
1 hamster sleeping.

Josh

40 Poetry Events

1. Poem of the day: read by the teacher
2. Poem of the day: read by students who have rehearsed the reading
3. Choose a favorite poem of the week or month.
4. Celebrate the work of a poet.
5. Explore whole-class shared reading of favorite poems.
6. Have students read poems aloud chorally in small groups.
7. Prepare a presentation of a long poem by assigning different parts to individuals and groups.
8. Prepare snippets of poetry to be displayed around the classroom or the school.
9. Write poems as graffiti on a bulletin board display.
10. Write a personal definition of poetry.
11. Develop a class book with each student creating a page illustrating a line or part of a poem.
12. Write a response to a poem.
13. Brainstorm a list of questions about a poem.
14. Organize discussion in pairs, small groups, or the whole class.
15. Build a class anthology of favorite published poems.
16. Assemble a class anthology of student-authored poems.
17. Make a tape recording of favorite poems.
18. Use a poem as a stimulus for illustration.
19. Rearrange lines of a poem that have been mixed up.
20. Sing a poem.
21. Transcribe familiar rhymes that are ringing inside the head.
22. Find new poems in the library.
23. Read poems together with a buddy.
24. Transform a passage from a novel into a free verse poem.
25. Find poetry in the newspaper, on billboards, on labels, in recipes, in dictionaries, in instructions, and so on.
26. Collect appealing, strange, or unfamiliar words found in poems.
27. Create displays of poetry anthologies. Change them frequently.
28. Share poems from a variety of cultures.
29. Read a picture book told in narrative verse (e.g., *Hooray for Diffendorfer Day!* by Dr. Seuss)
30. Use poems as a source for dance drama or movement.
31. Ask the students: What makes a poem good?
32. Invent a story about a nursery rhyme.
33. Invite the students to role-play and interview characters from a poem.
34. Borrow a title, first line, rhyme scheme, or form of a poem to create a new poem.
35. Offer alternative titles to poems.
36. Compare two poems.
37. Compare two poets.
38. Write at least one poem for the children.
39. Organize a Poetry Club during the noon hour or after school.
40. Let the poem be.