Let the Light In:

An Introduction to Writing Poetry in Inclusive Settings

VSA arts
818 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 600
Washington, DC 20006

Tel.: (202) 628-2800
Fax: (202) 429-0868
TTY: (202) 737-0645
www.vsarts.org

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Contributors: Mimi White, Deborah Stuart

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"The Delight Song of Tsoai-Talee," by N. Scott Momaday (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997)
"Things I Didn't Know I Loved," by Nazim Hikmet. Trans. Randy Blasing and Mutlu Konuk Blasing (New York: Persea Books, 1975)
"Knoxville, Tennessee," by Nikki Giovanni. New York: HarperCollins Publishers,1994
The Book of Questions, by Pablo Neruda. Trans. William O' Daly. Fort Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press, 2001

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FOREWORD

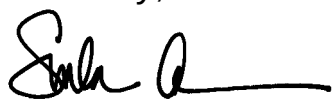
Whether it's a nursery rhyme from childhood, a moving song lyric, or a few lines of classic verse, poetry strikes a chord for many of us. With *Let the Light In: An Introduction to Writing Poetry in Inclusive Settings*, *VSA arts* introduces the art of poetry writing to students of all abilities.

Poetry is a perfect classroom tool for both students with and without disabilities. It allows students freedom to explore and experiment with writing and empowers them to express their thoughts and feelings in new ways. It also helps to develop reading skills. Poetry writing is a flexible medium that can take many shapes and students of all abilities can feel confident creating in a non-competitive atmosphere.

The lessons in *Light the Light In* are appropriate for all ages. They feature suggestions to ensure that students, including students with disabilities, have opportunities to express themselves and their creativity.

Please look for our other resource books in this series: *Opening Up the Sky: An Introduction to Creative Writing in Inclusive Settings* and *Real Stuff That Matters: An Introduction to Journal Writing in Inclusive Settings*.

Sincerely,



Soula Antoniou
President
VSA arts

INTRODUCTION

Let the Light In, part of the *VSA arts* writing book series, uses poetry as its art form. All learners benefit from the challenge poetry writing presents to express their thoughts and feelings in new ways. The key is to ignite the imagination.

The lessons in this book are only plans, not formulas. They are triggering devices. Accept what comes from any lesson and focus on your students' instincts and abilities. Poems can be made with a few words, with unique line structures, and with flexibility in regard to grammar or even spelling. Grammar and spelling are essential, but the intent is to engage in the use of words.

The lessons provide alternative strategies and approaches to enhance the creative experience for everyone. The suggested adaptive tips are a springboard for new ways of thinking and working with students of all abilities.

While the lessons are presented as classroom activities, they work equally as well in a one-on-one situation, in after-school enrichment groups, in small group settings in residential facilities, or as creative workshops in cultural institutions. These lessons have all been taught many times in a variety of settings and with a wide range of age groups. Activities that work best for a particular age or grade are included. The teacher need only adapt the approach to fit a particular group or age range. There isn't any "right" or "wrong" way to lead these lessons—they are simply intended to provide structure to poetry writing as an inclusive art form.

Starting Tips

Buy a contemporary collection of poetry, something written within the last five years. Read poems to your students everyday from this collection. You will find a list of books that have been used successfully with young people in the bibliography.

Be playful when trying to write poetry with your students. Demonstrate the lesson you will be teaching and write with them.

Don’t rush the process. Start with oral work and feel the pleasure of hearing the spoken word. Tape the poems. Move your body as if it were a poem. Sing the poem. Honor the sound of the words.

Lesson Structure

The first two lessons include techniques for revision. This same process can be followed with other lessons. There are links to art, music, and academic subjects, and suggestions for excellent ways to tie the poetry process to language studies and other classroom learning.

The **One Step Further or Back** sections have suggestions for expanding the lesson so that more time can be taken, or more attention given to certain aspects of the lesson. This allows teachers to consider the individual needs of the group and choose a focus and pace that will work best. In **Extensions**, there are suggestions for a variety of ways that the poetry or the writing process can be enlarged and can link to other activities or classroom subjects. In both cases, these suggestions are not prescriptive, but simply offer examples. The possibilities are endless and much of the joy of teaching these lessons will be to see where the lead the teacher and students.

The **Including All Learners** sections suggest adaptive approaches that illustrate a few of the many ways to make the experience accessible and satisfying for students with disabilities. You will find practical information necessary for providing appropriate adaptations for specific disabilities. Remember that much of successful inclusion depends on the creative problem solving of the teacher or workshop leader, and the participants.

You will find in the lessons three kinds of key points that are highlighted within boxes. **Links to Learning** highlights ways that the lesson's writing activities and extensions can tie into and enrich the core curriculum. **Let's Say That Again** emphasizes educational approaches that are vital to the success of the activity. **Lesson Learned** points to the insights gained into students' experiences, thought processes, and learning styles which can come from the writing experience.

Mimi White has worked as poet in residence in a variety of locales since 1982. She has taught in public schools, settings for individuals with disabilities, residential facilities for seniors and for people with mental health disabilities, and community sites including churches, temples, daycare, and hospice care facilities.

Deb Stuart is a teaching artist whose discipline is children’s traditional music and folklore. She has worked with students across the United States, in Central and South America, and in Europe as a residency artist and teacher trainer. Her training has focused on the integration of music into the classroom with particular emphasis on meeting the needs of all learners through arts-based approaches. Stuart has been a roster artist for the New Hampshire State Council on the Arts for 24 years.

TIME OUT FOR POETRY

Poetry Does Not Come Out of Thin Air

Poetry does not come out
Of thin air. It comes
From your heart
So you cannot be
Empty-hearted.
Let the light in.
If you don’t
It will turn into
A burden and you
Will feel so empty.

Greg, middle school
Farmington, New Hampshire

LESSON ONE: SEVEN-WORD SPILL

To write a poem, begin with the words. Words are the basic building block of a poem. First words, then lines, then stanzas. Poets play around with word choice until the poem is printed or shared or simply called “done.” (Adapted from *The Practice of Poetry*, edited by Robin Behn and Chase Twitchell)

GOALS

To explore the meanings and connotations of different words; to let the subject of the poem arise from the juxtaposition of the words; to demonstrate the connection between words and images

HOW TO BEGIN

Start by asking the students to fill in the blank. “If a painting is made out of paint, a poem is made out of _____.” The answers vary and are insightful: “Paper, pencils, poets, ink, lines, feelings.” And, someone always says, “words.” Tell the name of the lesson and that you will be giving them seven words to write a poem. To start, however, first they must give you seven words. You will use these to demonstrate how to use the words in an interesting way. Ask the students for seven words and then give them an example. For instance, someone using the words “reading” and “sky” might write, “The weatherman reads the sky for snow.”

Next, you can share a list of words. Here are the seven words given to some students, which inspired a poem by a second-grade student. The words were “wild,” “wings,” “writing,” “forest,” and “peacock.” She only needed five out of the seven words to get a poem she liked.

Two Wild Peacocks

Two wild peacocks
were running in the
forest writing poems
with their wings.

Samantha, grade 2
Rye, New Hampshire

INSTRUCTIONS

To choose your words, look in poems. Look for short words or long words, words that sound interesting, words that can have several meanings. If you end up with one that just doesn't work, use it as an example of a word that is too big or noisy for a poem. Some lists I have used are: whisper, wind, owl, garden, river, voice, autumn, green, light, crooked, burden, everything, empty, branches. "Poetry Does Not Come Out of Thin Air" (page 7) was triggered by this last list.

Write your poem, which you have created from the students' words on the board. Talk about how the words happened to fall into place (and they will!). Then write their list on the board. Give them the following instructions. This is an open-ended exercise and these rules provide boundaries and structure.

Tell your students:

Try to use all the words (try is the operative word).
Use the words in any order you wish.
You may repeat words.
You may change the endings of words: "silence" to "silent," "talking" to "talk."
You may add any other words you may need.
Do not think about writing a poem. It can look like a paragraph.
Read the poem out loud to yourself. Title the poem when you are done.

When you finish writing, draw a pencil sketch below the poem, to show what you were imagining.
Write quickly. Do not think too much.
It is fine if not all the words are used. You are after something that is interesting.
It does not have to rhyme.
Have fun!

Here is one more example. Notice how the comparison in the third and fourth lines enlarges the poem. You can offer this as another example either before or after the children have written their poems.

The Wind

The wind is howling, scaring
the owls looking for food.
The river is as quiet as
somebody's voice whispering
to a friend.

Cayla, grade 3
Somersworth, New Hampshire

REVISION

Now we're going to revise a poem. Revision means "to see again." To teach this, write a random but long sentence on the board, such as, "The wind tries every corner of the house." Then play with breaking it into smaller units.

The
Wind
Tries
every corner
of
the house.

The wind
tries
every
corner
of
the
house.

Write this sentence on the board, then ask the students to break it into smaller units. Breaking the poem into short lines slows the poem down and creates white space around the words. The sound changes as well. More emphasis is placed on words at the end of a line, creating a pause, an expectation. Skip ahead to Nikki Giovanni's poem "Knoxville, Tennessee" in Lesson 9 to see what a long, skinny poem looks like. Ask the students to listen for the changes in sound and meaning as you read the various line breaks. They may also wish to break the poem into stanzas or parts. Tell the students that "stanza" means "room" in Italian, and the stanza acts like a paragraph. It suggests a shift in tone or action and slows the poem down. Now have them read their poems out loud. Some may like the sound of their poems. Others may decide to slow words down by adding more white space around the words, or by breaking the poem into shorter lines and stanzas.

During the revision process, the students may discover that they want to change, delete, or add other words. They may, in fact, drop a word from the list—it sticks out or does not belong after the revision process. That is great. They are playing around with the words!

Links to Learning
Editing and rewriting are important tools for students. Revision of these poems provides an invaluable opportunity for teachers to work on these skills in a way that is creative and appealing.

ONE STEP FURTHER OR BACK

Read the poems out loud, first in pairs, then in a larger group. Ask students what words they added to their poems. For example, if they had used owl, what other words came to mind?

—branch
wings—Owl—night
—hoot

Write the word from the original list on the board and surround it with the added words. These new words can be called "cousins" because

they are closely related. Then write “connotation” on the board, the fancy word for suggested meaning. Poems revolve around these hidden meanings. Then ask, **“Did I only give you seven words?”** and they will shout, “No!” They see that the poem is small, but that each word stands for more than just its literal meaning.

You can also slow the lesson down by taking more time with each step. First focus on the poem that you wrote on the board. Then, in another session, have students work on their poems.

Let students participate in choosing lists of words. They could also literally cut their poems into individual words and rearrange the words to form different ways of making the lines.

EXTENSIONS

Create a new poem every day for a week. This will teach you how the mind works quickly once the imagination has been triggered. Write a seven-word class poem on the board. Revise it together. Talk about the revisions. This preparation will make the assigned seven-word exercise feel familiar and easy.

Just for fun, play this poem exercise for five minutes at the end or opening of the day. It focuses and quiets the group. List the words and say, **“You have five minutes. Ready. Set. Go!”**

INCLUDING ALL LEARNERS

“Seven-Word Spill” can be done literally with word cards, letter cubes (perhaps borrowed from Scrabble or Boggle game sets), magnetic letters and words on a metal board, or a variety of other tactile ways of actually manipulating the words.

When children with language-related disabilities are included in the group, offer a wide variety of ways to approach these exercises. Allow plenty of response time for these students. Offer strategies that lend themselves to very simple poems. A student could simply take the five words written on word cards and arrange them in a pleasing

order. If necessary, the words could be picture coded. The student could ask for other word cards that could be manipulated and added to his or her poem.

LESSON TWO: BORROWED LINES

This lesson is a good follow up to “Seven-Word Spill.” It works well with students ages 10–15, fifth grade through high school, and best with the older students. A line triggers the poem instead of a cluster of words.

GOALS

To allow the line to lead to the subject; to explore the line as the basic unit of thought in a poem; to work with longer lines

HOW TO BEGIN

Prepare a list of lines borrowed from poems you like (a list is provided at the end of this lesson). To develop your own list, use an anthology or visit a library or bookstore and browse. Note the poet who wrote the poem and the title of the poem for follow-up work. Distribute the list of lines. Ask the students to mark the lines they like as you read the list, slowly, out loud.

INSTRUCTIONS

After reading the list twice (or asking if a student would like to read the list), hand out paper and give these instructions:

> Choose your favorite line and borrow it as your first line.
> You may change or delete any words in the line.
> You may repeat the line or vary the line.
> You may introduce another line from the list after you have written at least five lines of your own, trying to choose a line that moves the poem forward.
> Do not worry if the poem does not make complete sense; you can revise it later.
> Title your poem at the beginning or at the end and you may borrow a line for the title.
> If you get stuck, repeat the line or try another line.
> Be playful, be brave, and do not worry whether or not it is a poem.

Before they start, demonstrate the process for the students. Ask someone for a first line. Then, create a poem spontaneously, on your feet, saying/reciting.

Another technique is to say a line out loud and ask the students to add the next line. One line leads to another. You can let the students call out a response spontaneously or you can choose a structure, such as pointing to a raised hand—whatever will work best for your particular class.

> That's where no lives
> under my feet (the student line)
>
> I am told, but I do not believe
> that I was shy as a child

REVISION

Writing poetry is like building with blocks. You add a block to make your building higher. Sometimes you take away a block to create a more pleasing shape. Experiment with your poems by pulling out a line or moving lines around. Maybe the first line belongs in the middle section. Maybe two lines say the same thing and one can be deleted. The poem does not have to stay the way it is first written. Have fun playing with the lines.

This is the time to see if the poem makes sense, not an easy task since some of the best poems retain a sense of the unknown and invite the reader in to explore what it is all about. Pair the students for a sharing of their poems. Ask them to read their poems to their partners. Both the poet and the listener are listening to what pleases them, what makes sense, what may confuse. This kind of feedback, listening to each other, will help with revision. You may discover that many students will not want to revise their poems and that is fine. Writing the next poem is often the best way to improve writing.

ONE STEP FURTHER OR BACK

To take more time with this lesson, visit the school or local library. Ask students to find a children's anthology of poetry with poems that they like. Share these books, looking at some of the pictures and the poems. Ask students to find a favorite line. There is no need to read the whole poem, as right now they are just looking for language.

Links to Learning
This activity offers a good chance to include library work and an introduction to anthologies and their possibilities.

EXTENSIONS

Take a closer look at the original poems from which the teacher took the lines. Perhaps three or four students borrowed the same first line. Ask them to share their poems with the whole class, then read the original to the whole class and discuss how the students may have changed the meaning of the line or may have followed the same line of thinking as the original poet.

Learn something about the poets who wrote the poems. Check interviews on the Internet. Invite a local poet to read his or her poems and find out how he or she got started.

INCLUDING ALL LEARNERS

For students with learning disabilities, preparation for this lesson might include having a chance to see the lines in advance, either to read or to have them read by a volunteer or aide. Students with cognitive disabilities would benefit from pictorial cues for the lines. One or two lines that are just a few words long could be included in the list.

Invite a student who is Deaf to sign her or his favorite line for the class. If the class is all learning to sign (as is often the case when there is a student who is deaf in a class), a group poem could be developed in which each line is signed by a different student while others read.

For students with cognitive or learning disabilities, the list of instructions will need to be presented in ways that are easily understood and remembered. A simplified list that says, **“OK to change or repeat, OK to use more than one line, OK to not make sense—Have fun!”** could be posted in large letters on the board.

An example of the power of writing (The line: *Then, no, now*):

No, Not Parents

Then, no, now
now, no, then
why, why, why
arguing with parents
you’re never gonna win.

Clean this, wash that
did this, done that;
not enough,
wow this is tough;
parents just don’t get enough.

Respect, respect,
stand up straight,
look me in the eye,
be a man don’t cry.

Why oh why
did I get these folks;
I think I’m gonna die.

Hey, A-, what is this
we’re sick of giving kindness
go to your room, you’re not good enough
do better in school
and life won’t be so tough.

Justin, middle school
Farmington, New Hampshire

Borrowed Lines (examples of lines that can be used):

I'm told but I do not believe
When two times two was three
That's where No lives
Sometimes walking late at night
Go inside a stone
When I was a kid one of the questions asked me
Dear Phoebe, wherever you are
Somebody told me I didn't exist even though
Everywhere that summer there were angels
She said her hair only grew in Arizona
Then. No. Now.
I'm most impressive when I disappear
The Buddhists have taken the ball field
Some memories won't sleep
How can I make bread speak
Inside the cold petals
Tonight there's a mirror on the sidewalk
I'd like to tell you something with my hands
Disaster was my favorite recipe
It takes many doves to make a woman
There was rain, then snow, then rain again
We're seated face to face take off your mask
In the dream I am burning the rice
The woman opening the red umbrella
As soon as I walked out I felt a mistake in the weather
The crow hears lies, lies, lies, and cries
Goodbye to childhood, that unhappy haven
This letter is sacred. It promises nothing
I hate the radio, how it pretends to be your friend
What stops him in his track is that his soul
How will we get used to joy
Time's honey
I don't understand why the water keeps saying yes
Let the light of the late afternoon

LESSON THREE: NATIVE PEOPLES' VOICES

I Am

I am the
rainbow
    spreading
    color after
    the rain.

Flora, grade 2
Somersworth, New Hampshire

Poetry was first an oral expression, a necessary utterance of awe or praise. Traditional sources in many cultures reflect this. To honor this oral tradition, one can turn to Native American songs. Native American people spoke, chanted, danced, and sang their songs. The human voice conveys the meaning and spirit of the poem.

GOALS

To hear native peoples' poetry and practice its oral tradition; to expand a simple line of poetry into a textured, complex one

HOW TO BEGIN

Read "The Delight Song of Tsoai-Talee." This poem from the Kiowa Nation is written and translated here by N. Scott Momaday in The Man Made of Words.

The Delight Song of Tsoai-Talee

I am the feather on the bright sky
I am the blue horse that runs in the plain
I am the fish that rolls, shining, in the water
I am the shadow that follows a child
I am the evening light, the luster of meadows
I am an eagle playing with the wind
I am a cluster of bright beads
I am the farthest star
I am the cold of the dawn
I am the roaring of the rain
I am the glitter on the crust of the snow
I am the long track of the moon in a lake
I am a flame of four colors
I am a deer standing away in the dusk
I am a field of sumac and the pomme blanche
I am an angle of geese in the winter sky
I am the hunger of a young wolf
I am the whole dream of these things

You see, I am alive, I am alive
I stand in good relation to the earth
I stand in good relation to the gods
I stand in good relation to all that is beautiful
I stand in good relation to the daughter of Tsen-tainte
You see, I am alive, I am alive.

To prepare the students for the poem, speak briefly about the oral tradition, how this poem was first danced and chanted. Tell students that it was translated from the Kiowa language into English by N. Scott Momaday. Talk about the word “delighted” so students understand the joyous tone of the poem. Ask the students to shut their eyes if they listen best that way. Tell the students that you will ask two questions when you finish reading: **“What did you see in your imagination?”** and **“What did you hear that you liked?”**

SPEAKING A POEM

After you and the students share your thoughts, ask them, "**How did most lines begin?"** (with "I am") and **"What was each line about?"** (nature). Draw a big circle on the board and write your name on its perimeter. Across from it write something that is found in nature. Explain that the people in the Kiowa Nation see life as a circle, that we are all connected and equal. Then ask the students to fill the outline of the circle with nature words, helping them to go beyond animals to weather, to what is underground, to things that are overlooked. Ask that the words be specific: not bird but eagle, not water but stream. When the circle is filled, say, **"Are you ready for a game?"** They all shout, "Yes!"

INSTRUCTIONS

Tell your students:

> Fold or sit on your hands, as you will not be raising them.
> Think of a line that begins with "I am" and ends with something in nature.
> When the spirit moves you, speak your line out loud.
> If two of you start, one of you stop and let the other one go.
> Wait five turns before you speak again.
> Speak in a loud, clear voice.
> Silence is fine—it's part of the process.
> You may use the words on the circle.

When you say, **"Someone may begin,"** the game begins.

As always, demonstrate first. Give a short line: "I am the wind." Then add adjectives: "I am the cold, blue wind." Then stretch the line out: "I am the cold, blue wind that rattles your window." Sometimes they like to model too, adding words, helping the line to grow.

Once they begin, nod at the person as he or she says a line. Be prepared for early and late silence, a few giggles, rapid-fire lines, then silence again. The teacher also plays, but never speaks first or last. Some good follow-up discussion questions are: **How did it feel to listen? How did you feel speaking a line? Where did the lines go? Who worried about spelling or penmanship? What is the**

difference between the lines “I am the night sky” and “Look at the night sky”? Who wants to write some lines? They all do. Again, demonstrate briefly, asking them to add uncommon adjectives, vivid verbs, and detailed clauses.

One Step Further or Back

Spending a few days or a week on the oral part of this lesson encourages the creative use of language without concerns for penmanship or spelling. This also allows the quiet voices to be heard and provides a chance for students to practice listening. Play the game for a day or two, then record a favorite line from each student. Students may want to illustrate their lines. A book could be made of the lines and pictures and placed in a quiet listening area, a reading corner, or the library.

Extensions

Speak a new line each day with the announcements.

Have each student choose a favorite line and write it on a strip of paper. Rearrange the lines on the floor, creating a collaborative poem. After writing several lines, have each student select and illustrate one line for a poetry book.

Read more Native American poetry. Invite a Native American or someone from another culture with an oral tradition to your class to sing the songs of his or her nation.

Take turns acting out a series of lines.

Including All Learners

If taking turns or keeping track of the times others have spoken is difficult, create a structure that makes this easier. Giving students a few markers or counters to drop in a cup as they contribute will help them know how many times they may speak.

Encourage them to count on fingers so that they know how many students have spoken after them. Have appropriate objects for handling and observing, as many students will benefit from this. For students with cognitive disabilities and those who are nonverbal, be sure to have ways for them to indicate choices—pictures, word cards, or actual items.

Write the directions out in large letters on the board as well as giving them verbally. Use picture cues with the directions, if necessary. Be sure to allow plenty of time for responses.

Recording the lines digitally or on tape and creating illustrations are excellent techniques for students with language-based learning disabilities.

One second-grade student from Hampton, New Hampshire, wrote in a letter, “I really like how you taught us how to make place poems because we could draw and describe it. I also liked to make Native American poems because I could add cool words like I am the crying rain swimming through the sky.”

Let’s Say That Again

“…be sure to have ways for them to indicate choices…” One of the most important things to remember in the creative process is to assure that the work being done is truly reflective of the choices and ideas of the student. Particularly with students who have difficulties with expressive language, it is critical that teachers and aides not assume the role of choosing words or thoughts for the student, but find the ways to allow the students to express their own ideas.

Here is another child's poem:

I am the invisible air blowing through the willow trees making a wishing sound.
I am a colorful rainbow in the sky and I am full of happiness.
I am the burning sun, yellow and bright, shining down on children.
I am the cold, white sparkling snow falling on the mountainsides in winter.
I am a gray dolphin leaping in the sparkling blue water.
I am the beautiful green grass that sprouts in springtime.
I am the white puffy clouds that turn gray because it's angry when it is about to rain.

Alexis, grade 2
Hampton, New Hampshire

LESSON FOUR: HELLO MOON

Spring Comes

Bird, chirp for joy, chirp, chirp, chirp for me.
Chirp my old friend, remember me?
Chirp my friend, now remember me?

Chirp, chirp, now I do.
Hi, my old friend, I remember you.

Jenna, grade 3
Portsmouth, New Hampshire

Look at poems by indigenous peoples, either those from where you live or from a region that the class is studying, and let their poems be the inspiration for your lesson. Try to find short pieces and study their common characteristics. This lesson can be easily adapted to use with poetry from many cultures.

GOALS

To write small poems with short lines; to use the imperative or command voice

HOW TO BEGIN

Read selected poems from *The Trees Stand Shining* by Hettie Jones or from a text that you have selected. As you read, highlight the common elements in the poems: repetition, speaking directly, the frequent use of “you” as a form of address, short lines, questions, and anything else you might notice. This list will vary depending on the poems and the culture you have chosen to highlight.

INSTRUCTIONS

List these on the board. They are presented as guidelines, not as rules. Students often find their own way into a poem.

Think of something in nature or in the world around us, which you would like to talk to.
Address it: Hello sky; Dear wind.
Tell it something: You are big and high.
Try to use a simile: You are quiet as the grass; Your wings feel like silk.
Ask it a question that is specific and reflects a particular quality. "How are you?" is too general, but you might ask a worm, "How do you see in the dark?"
You may repeat any words or lines.
Try to sing what you have written.

ONE STEP FURTHER OR BACK

Take a trip outdoors before starting this lesson. Ask the students to notice objects that are close to them (the sidewalk, the grass) and things far away (the sky, treetops, tall buildings). Have them ask a question right out loud to the objects, whispering to the nearby objects and speaking loudly to the ones in the distance or up high. The students can take turns doing this. When you come back inside, bring small objects if possible or draw pictures of objects too large or far away.

Spend your first sessions on reading and exploring the poems chosen. Work on this lesson orally at first, having students ask questions and respond either in a group or in pairs to one another.

EXTENSIONS

These poems make lovely note cards. And, because they are small, they can be memorized and sung. You might work with your music teacher to set some of the poems to music and perform them for other classes or in an assembly.

Write the poems and decorate them with artwork, fancy borders, or illustrations for a display in the classroom or a public area.

Links to Learning
Looking for ways to work together with art and music specialists will open many new possibilities for extending the writing experience. Students will gain a new understanding of the partnering of different art forms—words becoming lyrics or inspiring visual representation.

INCLUDING ALL LEARNERS

Many students with leaning disabilities will benefit from the outdoor activity suggested. Take more time with actual objects and use them to stimulate language and observation. Back in the class, the students can talk about their objects. They can compare them to other things—soft grass to cotton balls, or a trash bag flapping to a flag blowing in the wind. This lesson lends itself well to tactile experiences. A display of objects could be set up in the room.

Students who are shy will love whispering to objects. Students who have behavioral issues may need structure and redirection to keep their verbal interactions appropriate and focused. Give lots of praise and attention to imaginative interchanges and creative ideas.

Shine Sun

Shine sun shine
on my door.

Shine sun shine
on the crops all over the world.

Shine sun shine
on the people all over the world.

Shine sun shine
on all the animals all over the world.

Shine sun shine
on the earth.

Shine sun shine
on the beautiful flowers.

Shine sun shine
on me.

Thomas, grade 3
Portsmouth, New Hampshire

LESSON FIVE: FROM IMAGE TO WORD

It often works well to use children's literature as a starting point for poems. Many students are visual learners and enjoy starting the writing process with artwork. Choose any richly illustrated book that revolves around one theme—sky, clouds, seasons—often focusing on nature. This lesson highlights the poems that were inspired from Thomas Locker's *Sky Tree*, but any children's book with exceptional illustrations will work well.

GOALS

To look closely at a variety of skies; to create a sky picture that will be the inspiration for a poem; to imagine what cannot be seen in the sky; to go beyond the visual; to use as many senses as possible

HOW TO BEGIN

Read the book slowly, pointing out elements in the illustrations you wish to highlight later in the lesson. For instance, in *Sky Tree*: **"Is the sky always the same color? How do you know the wind is blowing?"** Also, point out words or phrases that you think are beautiful. Choosing a book that is rich in the visual and written text is the key to a successful lesson. After you have read the text, pass out small squares of white paper (8 1/2" x 5 1/2" works well). Tell the students to pretend each square is a window of sky and that, when the lesson begins, they will be drawing whatever sky they wish. Review together all the skies they saw in the book—fiery, starry, wintry—and have them add any others they like. Ask them to think of a sky they would like to draw. To further focus the drawing, ask the following questions: **"What time of day is it? What weather do you see? Could it be dusk or dawn? How can you show wind or cold air? Are the clouds low or high or breaking up?"** Make up your own questions and tell the students just to imagine, not to answer out loud.

INSTRUCTIONS

Tell your students:

Use crayons, not markers (watercolor is lovely, but takes more time).
Blend your colors.
Fill up the whole sky.
Work quickly.
Do not draw what is below your sky (we'll imagine that later).
Pretend you are looking at the sky.
Title your picture at the top or on the back when you have finished.

Here is a poem from Southwest Harbor, Maine, written after a series of questions—most of which Joshua ignored because his poem had already composed itself in his mind as he drew his sky.

Spring Sky

My sky is quiet.
There is a path
where you can go
to the top
of the mountain and
try and touch the sun.

Joshua, elementary school
Southwest Harbor, Maine

FROM IMAGE TO WORD

Creating a title for the drawing, which will also be the title of the poem, asks the student to think about what he or she sees. It is also a bridge to the poem; it is the beginning of language based on images. Have the students share their skies, talking about them briefly. Then ask a series of questions that goes beyond this first examination: **"Is your sky quiet or noisy? What sounds do you**

hear? Is it quiet? As quiet as what? What are the colors in your sky? What is below your sky—the sea, people sleeping, a city? What weather is coming?" One question may trigger the whole poem. They are not meant to be answered, but to unlock what is already in the student's mind.

Let's Say That Again
"[These questions] are not meant to be answered, but to unlock what is already in the student's mind." This technique builds on the educational premise that true teaching and learning lead to what's already present in the student.

ONE STEP FURTHER OR BACK

To take more time with this lesson, read the book more than once and spend time talking about what the students see in the pictures. Do the art work and the poetry writing as separate sessions, taking time to talk about each of these steps. Thinking of possible titles for the pictures can be done as a mini lesson in itself. Then, in the next session the students can move to writing a poem using their favorite title.

EXTENSIONS

An art show at the school, local gallery, shop, library, town hall, post office, or hospital is a perfect finale for this work. Reproduce the pictures and poems as calendars and note cards, then sell them as a fund-raiser.

Revise the poem into lines and stanzas, although a poem need not look like a poem to move the mind and spirit.

Sunrises in Fall, Summer, and Spring

Sunrises, sunrises all in different
seasons. First of all is spring with apple
buds. Second of all let's look at summer. All
green, green, green. Third is fall, but not
the last. I like fall the best because of its
golden sunrises and red apples.

Zach, elementary school
Southwest Harbor, Maine

INCLUDING ALL LEARNERS

If there are students with learning or cognitive disabilities in the group, giving them a chance to hear and see the book chosen in advance of the whole class reading may make the lesson more accessible for them. For students who are nonverbal, prepare ways for them to answer questions and show what they are seeing in the book's pictures—color charts, picture cards, textured materials.

Students with motor disabilities may need to do their artwork on larger pieces of paper. Remember to offer this option to all students if it is needed for some.

If there are students who need more time to reflect on the questions, provide a chance for them to work with an aide or volunteer so that they are able to think and respond at their own pace.

LESSON SIX: MAPPING YOUR WORLD

(Adapted from Georgia Heard's *Awakening the Heart*)

The Trampoline

Madly jumping on a trampoline
Bouncing alone with a companion in my head
Leaping around with my friends
Watching the clouds pass over the sky
Then watching the sunset
As I lie down on the cool mesh net
I get back up, then bounce some more,
Sitting down to catch my breath
Wind whistling through the treetops
Laughter from my friends whipping through my brain like sugar
The springs launching me into the darkening sky
As I bounce in the upcoming night
The sun is long gone, the moon rules the sky
I forget my fears and angers
As happy thoughts surround me

Jonathan, middle school
Northwood, New Hampshire

Students often have a refuge, a place where they can be alone. The younger the student, the more imagined or fanciful the space. Starting in middle school, students seem to need a place to sort out their feelings and ideas.

GOALS

To imagine or reimagine a place in the world where the student feels "at home"; to use as many of our senses as possible in exploring this space; to practice some of the skills learned in the Seven-Word Spill

How to Begin

Begin by asking the students several questions. These will help them focus on their places and imagine them more fully. The questions are not asked to be answered, but rather to stimulate the imagination: “Where do you go when you want to be alone? Is it in the mountains, the sea, or an open field? Is it in a small alley or the corner of a park? Is there a river? What time of day is it—dusk, dawn, noon? What is the weather like? Where are you? Are you sitting on a rock or a bench? Are you lying in the sun or curled up beside a warm brick wall?” Some students choose their bedrooms or their cars. One student chose a closed hockey rink. The key is to choose a place that feels like ‘‘home.”

The Map

Pass out lined or unlined 8 1/2” x 11” paper. Ask the students to fold the paper in half the long way—or, as one eight-year-old said, “the hot dog way.” Then fold the paper in thirds, as if it were going into a business-sized envelope, a third down from the top, a third up from the bottom. Open the paper up and you have six rectangles. Draw the six boxes on the board and as you go through the directions, mark each box with what you have asked them to do.

Instructions

In one section draw a sketch of this place, put in as much detail, using only your pencil or pen. **“What is in the sky? What is the weather like? What time of day is it? If you are in a room, do you see anything out the window?”**

In another section write short phrases describing your place. Talk briefly about the difference between a phrase and a sentence. A sentence would be, “The wind is blowing the trees,” but the phrase would be “wind in trees.” Encourage the use of interesting adjectives and the filling up of the space.

In another section write about sounds. **“What sound do you hear? Rustling of leaves, crack of thunder? It may be completely quiet. Write a phrase about the silence.”**

Write about the quality of light in another box. “Is it light or dark where you are, or some of both?” Again encourage interesting adjectives, words associated with light and darkness. **“Think of words to describe the darkness and the light—‘a splintering of light,’ ‘brilliant stars.’”**

The next box is for words about the feelings we have in our place. **“Now think about what is going on inside your hearts and minds. Why did you come here? When do you come here? What do you think about when you are here? What are you feeling? Is anyone welcome?”**

Write seven words of your own on the board, placing them in the last box. Ask them to choose any words that they like and write them in their final rectangle.

Writing the Poem

Now they have a way into their poems. Tell them that they may use all the information, some of it, or none of it. Maybe doing the exercise triggered a whole other experience. Let them write about that. They may start anywhere, with any square. Maybe they want to start by describing where they are or the darkness or a sound. Sometimes it is fun to begin with a question. They may decide to write the whole poem in short phrases or mix phrases with sentences. This mixing varies the rhythm and creates interesting movement in the poem. When you teach this lesson, you may come up with your own idea for a box. Great! The map is an organizing device that students find very helpful.

One Step Further or Back

This lesson can be done in several sessions by first working orally and talking about places that are special to the students. The

mapping can be done in another lesson or even over two lessons if this seems best. Poems could be composed orally while looking at the squares. The writing of poems, which comes from the maps, can be a stand-alone activity.

All the other techniques from previous lessons work well here. Sessions for revising, illustrating, and audio recording make good follow-up activities.

EXTENSIONS

The maps can be refined and worked on so that they can be exhibited, along with the poems that they inspire. A photo exhibition of special places, either from actual snapshots or magazines with high quality photography, could be put up around the room.

The following poem was designed during a classroom collaboration with weaver Sarah Haskell. The weavings and poems were exhibited and sold at a local Chamber of Commerce as a fund-raiser for a community organization.

The Rain Forest

I stand in the tree top with my hand acting as a visor to
my eyes. I look far in the distance and see miles of wet rain
forest. To me there is no better place than the huge tree top.
If I look down or if I look up, all I see is green.
What could be better? Every day I see something
blossom, either a bird or a flower or a cloud. It's so loud yet so
peaceful, because all the noises I hear I enjoy: a bird song or
the rain pouring down on the trees and the ground like
elephants stomping.
Even after it stops raining, I can hear it because the trees that
are miles up are still dripping.

Jake, middle school
York, Maine

Lesson Learned
In this poem, we find a middle school student looking out a scene from a vantage point far outside of himself. Writing this poem allowed John, who is at an age where life is usually seen very much from an intensely personal point of view, to go outside of himself and experience this scene from a great height and see “far in the distance.”

INCLUDING ALL LEARNERS

This lesson would need to be taken in much smaller steps for students with learning disabilities. Allowing some students to work with an aide or a volunteer one-on-one would make it more accessible and appropriate. Be sure that if this is done, the adult allows the student to make the choices and is sensitive to the need for plenty of time to think, choose, and respond.

For students with emotional disabilities, this exercise may trigger memories of places, which are frightening or have a negative history. Be prepared to deal with this with an acknowledgment about the reality of this for the student, but with encouragement to think about a safe and good space, perhaps an imagined one.

For students who are nonverbal or who have severe language disabilities, the mapping can be done primarily or entirely with drawing. For students with limited ability to write easily, make it clear that simple words and phrases are fine. For students who have problems with dexterity and small writing, larger paper could be used.

LESSON SEVEN: STONE POEMS

Dear Rock

You are lines like Dracula teeth.
You are like puzzle pieces
of a map of America.
You are the inside of a volcano.
I hear the steam
hissing like a snake.
I see the lava bubbling.

Are you really a fossil
from inside the earth?

Connor, grade 2
Hampton, New Hampshire

This lesson is designed around looking at stones or other objects in new ways to see what poems might be hidden inside them. Look around you. What poems may be waiting inside your landscape? Seashells, small pieces of brick or concrete, pine cones, twigs, tall grass, colorful bits of paper, or maybe even trash, all have potential. When a student holds an object and observes it closely, the poem that follows is concrete, the language often more vivid.

GOALS

To explore metaphors; to see stones (and other objects) in a new way; to see the transforming power of poetry; to explore the connection between reality and the imagination

HOW TO BEGIN

Collect enough objects for all students, choosing things that surprise and please you. Bring them to class in a bag or box. Before or after showing the objects to the students, you might read a few poems

written about what you have brought in to share. Take the objects out of the bag one at a time, slowly passing them and asking the students to observe the shapes, colors, lines, patterns, cracks, indentations, textures. You might ask, **“What does this shape remind you of?”** or **“What does this look like?”** You are beginning to ask them to think in terms of metaphors.

INSTRUCTIONS

After each student chooses a rock or object from the ones that you have brought in and has had time to get to know it, pass out lined paper and give the following instructions:

Fold the paper in half the long way, open it up, then write above the left side, “Real,” and above the right side, “Imagined.”

Look at your rock again and write down an observation under the “Real” column, such as gray or long crooked line, or smooth—be an observer, be a scientist.

Across from this observed detail, in the “Imagined” column, write something else you imagine that line might be or what the color gray reminds you of—for example, gray could be rain clouds or a foggy sky or the wind off the river.

Write as many things as you would like for the imagined images. Go back to the real side and note another observation, maybe something about the texture or the shape, then write down imagined images for that observation—try to list in short phrases.

Make several observations; take your time; try using a magnifying lens to see as much as you can; hold your rock and shut your eyes; make an observation about its weight and texture.

WRITING THE POEM

When the object has been explored thoroughly, ask the students to look at their “Imagined” word lists. See if there are a few words that

cluster together and might begin a poem. Look for words that stick out and do not belong and eliminate these words. Circle the phrases that sound interesting. Words from the “Real” side and other new words that help to create a poem may be included. A simple poem, written in the form of questions, plus a more complex poem, are included in this lesson to show how the list can evolve into poetry. Sometimes one image triggers a whole poem. That is fine and that is what happened in the poem below.

My Pearly White Moon Pebble Rock

Fairies, elves, gnomes and dwarves
dancing in the light
of the pebble moon.
All the other people
were invited, too.
This pebble moon
is where they have their parties.
It is smooth
and they can just sway
across the room.

Ellice, grade 3
Portsmouth, New Hampshire

ONE STEP FURTHER OR BACK

Demonstrating with an object unlike those you will be sharing with the students helps them understand the concept. You are modeling the concept of imagining an ordinary concept in an extraordinary way. By choosing an object unlike those that the students will be examining, you refrain from influencing what they should see or imagine for themselves. Demonstrating also allows you to teach similes that enliven writing:

the gray reminds me of my grandmother’s
hair, her curls twisting like tiny roads,
a storm gathering

Taking even more time with the objects can extend this lesson. The class could take a walk outside for the purpose of finding one interesting thing to bring back. The real and imagined words can be done first as an oral exercise.

Links to Learning
This lesson offers an ideal way to reach metaphors and similes. Parts of speech taught creatively are not only fun, but are sure to stick!

EXTENSIONS

Sometimes the words that do not seem to fit can be used in a way that surprises the reader and the writer. Point these out as you read to students. If they hear heightened language often enough, they will want to use it. The “hissing snake” in Connor’s poem and Ellice’s last three lines are examples of heightened writing—we can actually hear that steam and see the fairies’ skirt hems swirling out over the pebble moon.

Read poems other students have written based on this exercise. Keep a file of poems and add to it as the lessons are taught.

Collaborate with the science teacher or a local scientist to learn how a scientist observes. See what tools you can borrow from them.

Objects that make sounds can be used. Bells, rain sticks, and drums make sounds that open up the imagination. These may evoke horses running, rain, or breaking glass. The concept is the same—real or imagined.

INCLUDING ALL LEARNERS

The tactile aspect of this lesson makes it very good for students with learning and cognitive disabilities. Taking a lot of time with this portion

of the lesson will be helpful. Allow students who do not write easily to use the two sides of their paper to draw the real and the imagined.

Set up simple exercises, which allow comparisons to be chosen by nonverbal students—pictures of objects to be paired with color cards, various nature pictures, or textured materials.

Students who have visual disabilities will explore the objects with their hands. Offer all students the opportunity to “see” their objects in this way. Talk about how much more we learn when we do not just look, but feel, taste, sniff, put our cheek on it, or listen to see if it makes a secret sound.

If there are students with hearing disabilities in the class, explore the vibrations of the object when tapped or knocked against another surface. All students will enjoy doing this. Using drums, as suggested in the Extensions section, would be effective with both hearing students and students with hearing disabilities.

LESSON EIGHT: “I NEVER KNEW I LOVED”

If there were ever a poetic trap it would be writing love poems. They are fraught with a potential for cliché and sentimentality. Turning to poetry is often the first place to look when designing a lesson. This lesson is based on a poem by the Turkish poet Nazim Hikmet. He was a political prisoner for many years and when he was released he wrote a beautiful poem, “Things I Didn’t Know I Loved.” He wrote it on the train going home, the urgency of the poem being the relentless listing or litany, an outpouring of things he had missed while in captivity. This lesson borrows his refrain, creating a lesson about things we loved, but might have forgotten, had never written down, or never said out loud. Here are some excerpts from his poem:

> “I didn’t know I liked rain
> Whether it falls like a fine net or splatters against the glass…
>
> “I never knew I loved the sun
> even when setting cherry-red as now
> in Istanbul too it sometimes sets in postcard colors…
>
> “I didn’t know I loved the sparks
> I didn’t know I loved so many things and I had to wait
> until I
> was sixty to find it out sitting by the window on the
> Prague–
> Berlin train watching the world disappear as if on a journey
> from which one does not return”

GOALS

To teach a litany poem; to introduce refrains; to explore the five senses

HOW TO BEGIN

Read a few lines from “Things I Didn’t Know I Loved.” The point is to hear the refrain and its variations, and to enjoy the simplicity of the

language. Then shift gears and ask the students to pretend. Talk quietly. Ask them to listen to you, but not to answer out loud. **"You are in your bed ready for sleep. It is dark, but you can see. What can you see outside your window? In the sky? Can you see your clock numbers? A crack of light under your door—it is quiet, but you can hear sounds. Can you hear your parents' voices? A plane flying overhead? And what can you feel? Your dog lying on your feet? The warm blankets? The cool air coming in the open window? Are your feet cold? And can you smell the grass? The wood fires burning? Popcorn in the kitchen? How do you feel in your heart? What are you thinking or worrying about? Yesterday? A friend at school? Your mother's voice?"**

Then play the same game you played with the "I Am" poems, only this time the lines begin with, "I never knew I loved…" Write the refrain and the five senses, including feelings and thoughts, on the board. As in the "Mapping Your World" lesson, including what is in the heart and mind enlarges the poem. After saying lines out loud, turn to writing.

INSTRUCTIONS

Tell your students:

Write as many lines as you can using the refrain, or varying it.
Use as many senses as you can.
Do not worry about the order the lines come to you.
Try to enrich the lines with detail and specific language.

I Never Knew I Loved

I never knew I loved
the smooth gray fur of my cat snuggling with me.
I never knew I loved
the sound of the rain drip drop on my bedroom window.
I never knew I loved
the sound of the wind going shsssssssss outside at night.
I never knew I loved
to think about how much fun my sister is going to have at her dance.
I never knew I loved
to smell the fresh air when my mom puts the window up on a hot summer night.

Hillary, grade 2
Hampton, New Hampshire

ONE STEP FURTHER OR BACK

More time can be spent on the oral portion of this lesson. Before writing a poem, the students could simply list things that they love.

These may be read and recorded. Students can take turns reading one another's poems. This makes a good oral activity at the opening or closing of the day.

EXTENSIONS

Sometimes, it is fun to draw a huge heart and write all the lines within the heart, cut the heart out, write more on the back, and hang them as mobiles in the room.

These poems make lovely Valentine's Day or other occasion cards as family members often appear in the poems.

As with the “I Am” poems, these make fine picture books, each student contributing a line and picture. The illustrations could be in collage form using materials with a lot of texture and tactile interest.

This lesson reinforces science units that teach the five senses.

INCLUDING ALL LEARNERS

This is an excellent lesson for students with learning disabilities or cognitive limitations. Choices for things they love can easily be made from pictures and objects. Tactile materials—fabric, liquids, wood, stone—will prompt responses and get students started on associated ideas.

For students with behavioral or emotional disabilities, structures about appropriate responses may need to be reinforced. Be sensitive to students who have had traumatic experiences and are insecure about themselves and their lives. Provide safe and structured guidelines: **“Think about favorite games we play with our class**” or **“Think about any animals you have seen that were special to you.”** These kinds of sentences will get students started with nonthreatening associations, and then they can branch out from there.

Let’s Say That Again
“Choices…can easily be made from pictures and objects…” Here the important point of honoring choice is made possible and enriched by the tactile hands-on experience of using concrete items. This is not only a useful technique for students with disabilities, but can be very valuable in providing a deeper experience for all students.

LESSON NINE: OF TIME AND PLACE

Knoxville, Tennessee

I always like summer
best
you can eat fresh corn
from daddy's garden
and okra
and greens
and cabbages
and lots of
barbecue
and buttermilk
and homemade ice-cream
at the church picnic
and listen to
gospel music
outside
at the church
homecoming
and go to the mountains with
your grandmother
and go barefooted
and be warm
all the time
not only when you go to bed
and sleep

This poem by Nikki Giovanni (from *Celebrate America in Art and Poetry*) is the perfect poem to read on a warm spring day when everyone is anxious to be outside enjoying the weather. The poem is full of the details of summers when Giovanni was a child in Tennessee. The poem's strength is its velocity; she uses no punctuation! Have your students try to imitate this style in their own poems about times, places, and seasons that have given so much happiness.

GOALS

To write a long, skinny poem; to use as many ands as one likes so that the poem keeps moving; to use specific language; to write about something that brings great happiness

HOW TO BEGIN

Read the poem out loud a couple of times, the first time slowly, the second time as fast as you can, trying to say it all in one breath. This emphasizes the velocity of the poem and highlights its strength: the urgency to tell what is most loved and enjoyed. Read the poem a third time and ask the students to count the number of times they hear “and.” Pass around copies of the poem. Point out how the poem has no punctuation, very short lines, and keeps moving. Nikki Giovanni knows how to use punctuation, but has chosen to write a long fast poem that is not slowed down by periods or commas. Ask the students why she might have written her poem this way. Then look at the specific language. What does she love best about summer? What words do you remember after the poem is read? Talk briefly about the things the students love about spring or fall or visiting their grandparents. Keep asking for specific details that bring that experience to life.

INSTRUCTIONS

Hand out lined paper. Ask the students to fold the paper in half the long way; this ensures that the poem will be long and skinny. Have them write their poem down one side and up the other, if need be. They may write a second poem on the other side. Get them started by saying, **“Write as if you are speaking quickly, pretending the poem is spoken in one breath. Use the word ‘and’ as much as you like and write about something that gives you great happiness.”**

ONE STEP FURTHER OR BACK

After reading the poem and talking about it, pass out white paper and divide it into six parts, as we did with the “Mapping Your World” lesson. Ask the students to draw six pictures that show what they enjoy most about spring, or whatever their subject is. Talking about their pictures will release more memories. When they turn to their writing, their heads will be full of what they want to say. The focus of this poem is its speed. Think of it as a “talking” poem, as if the poet were telling it as he or she made it up. That is how the poem gets its funny, unexpected twists and turns.

EXTENSIONS

These poems are excellent for individual or class books with illustrations. Poems could also be written in large poster format with the poem going down one side and illustrations or decorations down the other. The posters could then be used in a hallway exhibit for other classes.

Alternatively, students could write their poems in small accordion books of long, skinny paper (folded back and forth) that are tied shut with a special piece of ribbon or string. The poem then becomes a little gift.

INCLUDING ALL LEARNERS

The simplicity of this poem is a friendly format for students with learning and cognitive disabilities. Take advantage of the “no punctuation” structure! For students with limited writing ability, drawing this poem can be very satisfying. The pictures could be “read” just as if they were words.

For nonverbal students, have plenty of picture cards or objects on hand for choices. Pictures from magazines could be pasted on a long skinny piece of paper with the words “What I Love…” at the top. Just be sure these students are making the choices themselves.

As in the lessons “Of Time and Place” and “I Never Knew I Loved,” give attention to students with emotional issues. Helping them feel comfortable with positive choices may take some individual time and preparation before they join this activity with the entire class.

Spring

I like spring best because I get to
wear
my sandals
and I
don’t get
fur stuck
in my
toes and
sometimes
I get
to play
in my
crazy dazy
and I
get wet
I like
going to
the beach
and when
it’s low tide
I get
to go
looking for
shrimp and
crabs and
sometimes
I find
fish but
I am
always late
when
I get
my bucket

Victoria, grade 2
Hampton, New Hampshire

Now go out and enjoy the day!

One final student poem. What exercise from the book might you teach, using this wonderful poem as an example? Or, come up with a new lesson that could use this poem as an example.

The Dark Footsteps

When my mom walks in
the mud she leaves dark footsteps.
The wind sounds like dark
footsteps.
When people are walking
down the road they have
dark footsteps.
In my dreams there are
dark footsteps.
When the squirrels walk
up the trees they have
dark footsteps.
When my old dog walk
in the yard he leaves
dark footsteps.

Whitney, grade 3
Portsmouth, New Hampshire

ADDENDUM

LINKING POETRY TO VISUAL ART

In many of the previous lessons, a drawing or painting component is offered either as a core activity or as an extension or adaptive technique. When linked to visual art, a poem becomes less a fixed object and more a thing made of words and feelings. Playing with these words and feelings is key in the experience of writing poetry, and visual art opens the students up to this quickly and easily.

Fabric art, in particular, is very freeing, perhaps because it is not representational, but rather a playful use of color and found materials. Here are two examples of more in-depth art links to two fabric art forms: weaving and quilt making. This is a sharing of ways in which I linked poetry writing to fabric art in collaborative efforts working with fiber artists. They are included in this addendum as a classroom teacher could well tap community or parent involvement, or share a personal arts interest or skill, and develop lessons that use visual arts as inspiration or an adjunct activity.

CLEAR LINES, COMMON THREADS

Another visual art that relates to poetry is weaving. In one collaborative weaving-poetry session in a high school class, students took yarn, fabric, ribbons, twigs, feathers, and simple cardboard and wove beautiful creations. Together, weaving and poetry offered students two different ways of thinking, of imagining their worlds—the visual and the literary.

Some students used their weaving as an inspiration for their poems. After Dorothy wove her sunflowers, this is what she wrote:

Sunflowers

I like sunflowers.
I like the color yellow.
I like how big they are.
If they weren't so big
I'd put one in my hair,
behind my ear. I'd
probably put a petal
behind each ear.
I wish I had
sunflower shoes.
If I had a dark blue shoe
I'd paste a silk sunflower onto it
and I wouldn't care
what anybody thought.

Dorothy, high school
Portsmouth, New Hampshire

You might ask the students to think in broad, general terms before they weave**—"Think of a place you go to when you want to be alone; pretend this is your calling card, how people would know you."** Other times, the materials selected dictate the weaving, as in Kim's work (below). She created a paper weaving from two postcards, a picture of a wolf, and one of an angel. As she wove, the angel's eyes disappeared, covered by the strips of paper. The poem almost wrote itself after she completed the weaving.

The Blind Angel

The girl is blind.
She can't see me,
my true feelings,
the way I really am.
I have to act differently
in front of other people.
I just say stuff,
like I'm cool
and just do things,
but I don't mean it.
The blind angel
doesn't see me
the way I am,
but she can see me
the way I feel.

Kim, high school
Portsmouth, New Hampshire

Even for high school students, consider asking them about their weaving and writing down what they say as they speak. This same technique can be used with young students and others who cannot write for themselves. Dictation allows the true voice of the poet to shine. The earlier lessons on line breaks can be taught in the revision process to shape the poem, if the student wishes. Start by asking, **"What is the title for this work?"**

BY HAND

In addition to weaving, quilts can also inspire poetry. Start by looking closely at a quilt, each student studying the detail, then viewing from further back, to take in the fuller design. After the students have had an opportunity to examine the quilt, ask for phrases: **"What they might hear if they entered the scene in the quilt, what might the air feel like, what weather might be coming, does the quilt evoke any feelings, what is far off?"** Write the phrases on the board and,

together, write a poem, keeping the phrases short, or making sentences, rearranging the lines until you like how the poem sounds.

Evening Arrives

It is a peaceful, quiet night
A tree cradles a lonely bird nest.
Snow falls in the dark sky.
Tall trees grasp the stars.
Crowded, green, pointed needles
Poke the sparkling snow.
Mountains roll with the sound
Of a mournful howl.

Collaborative, grade 5
Rye, New Hampshire

This collaborative poem is full of imagery adopted or imagined from a quilt. To encourage students to go beyond the visual and to introduce ideas alongside the images, turn to Pablo Neruda's *Book of Questions* for inspiration and guidance. The book, printed in Spanish with an English translation, is a series of poems written in the form of questions. Questions make us think in new ways, and his in particular inspire yet more questions, rather than answers.

XLVII

Oyes en medio del otoño detonaciones amarillas?	In the middle of autumn do you hear yellow explosions?
Por qué razón o sinrazón llora la lluvia su alegría?	By what reasons or injustice does the rain weep its joy?
Qué pájaros dictan el orden de la bandada cuando vuela?	Which birds lead the way when the flock takes flight?
De qué suspende el picaflor su simetría deslumbrante?	From what does the hummingbird hang its dazzling symmetry?

Read some to the students; they will likely be in awe of the simple words that raised questions they could not answer that would not leave their minds. Here is an example from the book. All the poems are written in couplets, two-lined stanzas. Just for fun, try this form when you and your students write your poems.

Here is what Whitney, also in the fifth grade, wrote:

The Expression

Do you see the sad expression
on this lonely tree?

Can you hear a song of sorrow
that a tree has sung?

And do you hear the sound
of blowing leaves playing together?

Do you see the purple and
blue flowers in the sky?

Whitney, grade 5
Rye, New Hampshire

Perhaps we were all collaborating with Neruda. Collaboration brings energy to the writing process. It allows another part of the mind to enter into the creation of a poem, and above all, it is a lot of fun.

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Recommended children's books

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Web Sites

http://mgfx.com/kidlit/kids/artlit/poetry/index.htm
KidLit Poetry Gallery

http://www.poets.org/
The Academy of American Poets

http://www.getty.edu/education/for_teachers/index.html
Teacher programs and resources at the Getty

http://www.poetrysociety.org/
The Poetry Society of America

http://www.twc.org/
Teachers & Writers Collaborative

http://www.favoritepoem.org/
Robert Pinsky, the Favorite Poem Project

http://www.riverofwords.org/
Robert Hass

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VSA arts
818 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 600
Washington, DC 20006
(202) 628-2800 • 800-933-8721 (Voice) (202) 737-0645 (TTY) • (202) 429-0868 (Fax)

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