



Writing Poetry & the Creative Process

Original lesson plan by Laurence Overmire

Oregon Content Standards

EL.CM.WR.02 Discuss ideas for writing with classmates, teachers, and other writers, and develop drafts alone and collaboratively.

EL.CM.WR.05 Use the writing process - prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing successive versions.

EL.CM.WR.08 Revise drafts to improve the logic and coherence of the organization and controlling idea, the precision of word choice, and the tone - by taking into consideration the audience, purpose, and formality of the context.

EL.CM.SL.05 Analyze the occasion and the interests of the audience, and choose effective verbal techniques and language.

AR.CM.AC.01 Use knowledge of essential elements, organizational principles and aesthetic criteria to explain the artistic merit and aesthetic effect of a work of art.

Introduction

This lesson gives students an opportunity to write their own poetry and thereby gain deeper understanding of the creative process and appreciation for the art form. The teaching approach should be non-judgmental, focusing on the creative process itself and not the quality of the finished product, while emphasizing that writing poetry can be an enjoyable and enriching experience.

Period: One to three 50-minute sessions

Learning Objectives

- Students will gain an understanding of the creative process involved in writing poetry, including how one's aesthetic values influence the work.
- Students will gain an appreciation for how renowned poets regard the writing process.
- Students will practice writing skills: brainstorming, outlining ideas, editing, rewriting.
- Students will write their own short, rhyming poem.
- Students will write their own short, free verse poem.
- Students will experience sharing their own poems before an audience, practicing their oral interpretive skills.



Materials and Resources:

- White board or overhead to display quotes
- The Poetry Out Loud CD
- CD player
- William Stafford’s poem, “Traveling through the Dark,” from Poetry Out Loud anthology, available online at www.poetryoutloud.org

Day One

1. Prior to the class, place the following quotes on the board or overhead:

“Writing a poem is discovering.” - Robert Frost

“I’ve written some poetry I don’t understand myself.” - Carl Sandburg

“There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.” - Maya Angelou

“I don’t create poetry, I create myself, for me my poems are a way to me.” - Edith Södergran

“Poetry is a deal of joy and pain and wonder, with a dash of the dictionary.” - Kahlil Gibran

“A poem is never finished, only abandoned.” - Paul Valery

2. Write the word “aesthetics” on the board. What does this word mean? Have the students form a big circle. One at a time, various students enter the center of the circle and complete the sentence “I really like_____.” For example, one student might say “I really like the color yellow.” Any student who agrees with that statement, who also really likes the color yellow, will step into the circle as well. Some people will no doubt agree with the statement and others won’t. Those who have a mild liking for the color yellow should not step forward. Repeat this several times with different students making different statements, e.g., “I really like spaghetti,” or “I really like math.” Each time, those who agree step into the circle. Then try a few negative statements, “I really don’t like spinach,” for example. At the conclusion of the exercise, point out there is no right or wrong about any of this. We all have different tastes. How might a poet’s likes and dislikes affect word choice or imagery? Does a poet’s taste change over time? Why?
3. Ask the students to think of a word they really like. Go around the circle and ask each of them to say their word slowly, emphasizing the sounds of vowels and consonants. After hearing all the words, ask them if they can come up with a reason they like their particular word. Is it the sound of the word that’s appealing? The feeling that it gives you? The images that come to mind? Perhaps it evokes a specific experience? Could the word mean different things to different people, both positive and negative? Emphasize that a writer makes choices according to his/her tastes. Point out that, when writing a poem, poets are guided by their aesthetic values. They listen to that inner voice that says, “I really like this,” or, “I don’t quite like this enough.” If they don’t like it enough, they will want to edit or rewrite.



LESSON PLAN 4: WRITING POETRY

4. Take a few moments to read each of the quotes that you have put on the board or overhead. Using the quotes as a springboard for discussion, talk about the process of writing poetry.
5. Play Track 30 from the Poetry Out Loud CD, “Annabel Lee,” by Edgar Allen Poe. Discuss rhyming poetry. Why would a poet want to write in rhyme? Point out that many traditional forms use rhyme. Have a few students recall and recite a rhymed poem from memory, a nursery rhyme perhaps. Can rhyme be used for comedic effect? Discuss how music and rhythm add to the experience of this poem. What feeling does the music of the poem evoke? How does the image of the sea relate to the repeated mention of Annabel’s name?

GUIDE THE DISCUSSION

Why does someone write a poem? Because it is financially lucrative? Because someone forces them to do so? Who is the audience? Is it important to identify your audience before you write a poem? Why write poetry as opposed to prose?

6. Have students begin writing a short rhyming poem in any form. Start with a brainstorming session to generate subjects one could write about. Advise students that one technique is to jot down words and phrases that come to mind and then begin to incorporate them into the poem. Some poets start with an opening line that they really like and let the poem develop from that point. Emphasize that this should be a fun and playful process. Poets usually don’t write because they have to, they write because they want to. They may have something important to say that can only be expressed in poetry. Students should continue writing their poems on their own time and bring the finished poem to class for the second lesson.

Day Two

1. As in the previous class, place the following quotes on the board or overhead:
 - “Writing a poem is discovering.” -Robert Frost
 - “I’ve written some poetry I don’t understand myself.” - Carl Sandburg
 - “There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.” - Maya Angelou
 - “I don’t create poetry, I create myself, for me my poems are a way to me.” - Edith Södergran
 - “Poetry is a deal of joy and pain and wonder, with a dash of the dictionary.” - Kahlil Gibran
 - “A poem is never finished, only abandoned.” - Paul Valery
2. Talk about the students’ creative process. Was it easy or difficult to use rhyme? Why? Did you learn anything about writing, about yourself? If the process wasn’t enjoyable, try to identify why and make some suggestions that might make it less of a chore. Have each student read the first draft of the poem to themselves. Get a show of hands, how many of you aren’t completely satisfied with what you’ve written? How many of you really like what you’ve written? If you aren’t completely satisfied,



LESSON PLAN 4: WRITING POETRY

your aesthetic is telling you that you need to do more work on the poem. Have the students take their poems with them and continue to revise until they feel that the poem is ready to share with an audience. At the next lesson, they will read their poems to the class.

3. Point out that most modern poets choose to write in free verse rather than rhyme. Why? Introduce Oregonian William Stafford, who was named Poetry Consultant to the Library of Congress (now Poet Laureate) in 1970. Read Stafford's poem, "Traveling through the Dark." What story is being told in this poem? What is the dilemma of the speaker of the poem? What does he mean by, "I thought hard for us all"? Read the poem again, perhaps with different students reading a stanza each. Listen for the images and the sensory words that Stafford employs. Have the students write down particular words and phrases that they find particularly resonant or powerful. Discuss.
4. Have each student begin writing a short free verse poem that tells a story. Brainstorm as before and advise them to make notes of specific details or events they might like to include. Have them consider the audience for whom they are writing. They will need to complete the poem on their own time and bring it to the next class along with their finished rhyming poem. Tell them they will present their poems at this final class.

Day Three

1. Before the class, put the following quote on the board or overhead:

"The poem is meant to be given away, best of all by the spoken presentation of it; then the work is complete." - Mary Oliver
2. Read out loud the Mary Oliver quote. Talk about sharing one's writing. How does it make you feel? How can you share it with your audience most effectively so that they will be able to appreciate what you've written?
3. Divide the class into small groups. Have each person rehearse both their rhymed and free verse poems by reading them to the other students in their group. The instructor may coach as needed with the students making positive comments about what they liked in the poems.
4. Gather the entire class together again. The students read first their rhymed poem to the class and then their free verse poem, utilizing all the necessary skills to recite the poems effectively, paying particular attention to volume and diction. The instructor may coach them in their recitation skills, but there should be no negative judgments about the quality of the writing. Again, the focus here is on the process itself.
5. Ask the students if they have any insights about how poets might feel when they expose their work to the public. What have you learned about writing poetry? Is it easier or more difficult than prose? Did you enjoy the experience? Why or why not? How many of you think you might continue to write poetry in the future?