



RIVER OF WORDS

YOUNG POETS AND ARTISTS

on the

NATURE OF THINGS

TEACHING
GUIDE





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 INTRODUCTION

You have in your hands (or on your computer desktop) an outstanding collection of strategies and lesson plans for teaching poetry to children. Our thanks go out to Louisiana Teachers Extraordinaire, Connie McDonald and Harriet Maher, for pouring their years of experience, their passion for teaching, and their belief in the beauty and power of young minds (and hearts) into this guide. It will help you to more effectively utilize *River of Words: Young Poets and Artists on the Nature of Things* in the classroom by drawing on work by young poets from around the world.

The teaching strategies in this guide will help students get beyond preconceived notions about poetry, inhibitions and fears, excessive reliance on rhyme, and the thorny host of other impediments to creativity and expression that a poetry assignment often invokes. Connie and Harriet have created a fun, investigatory, challenging set of classroom activities that we hope will help you to inspire your students to explore both their “inner” worlds and the complicated, endlessly fascinating “outer” world around them.

We hope you use this guide as a starting place or as an enhancement to your own exploration of “your place in space” with your students. Try to implement as much of this curriculum as you can outdoors. Nurture your students’ powers of observation—the essence of both science and art—by helping them to identify the flora and fauna around them, the cycles of seasons, and the interconnected ecosystems that sustain life. Study together the poems, stories, songs, paintings, and legends that your particular landscape has inspired over time. Discuss how residents of your region used the land and the waterways to survive hundreds of years ago, or even fifty years ago. Discuss what challenges and opportunities for sustainability face your community today. What might they be in fifty years? A hundred? Getting students’ imaginations working on the places they live will reap benefits—for the kids *and* their communities—that go far beyond the classroom. We promise.

We wish you a delightful plunge into the River of Words, and would love to hear about your experiences in working with this guide and *River of Words: Young Poets and Artists on the Nature of Things*. Happy exploring.

Pamela Michael

Executive Director & Co-founder, River of Words



ABOUT RIVER
OF WORDS

River of Words is a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting literacy, creative expression and community awareness of our most critical environmental concern: water. River of Words was co-founded by U.S. Poet Laureate (1995–1997) Robert Hass and writer Pamela Michael to help young people make a personal and lasting connection to the environment. With its roots in the Library of Congress and its Center for the Book, River of Words’s young “Watershed Explorers” are contributing to a legacy of nature-inspired art and poetry that will influence, inform, and inspire all of us.

River of Words is internationally recognized for its unique watershed education model that integrates art and poetry in a place-based curriculum. Since 1995, River of Words has encouraged young people to explore and savor the watersheds where they live and has trained educators to guide them with inspiration and passion. Through educational services, traveling exhibits, publications, and community programs, River of Words reaches thousands of educators and young people, grades K–12, around the world.

With over thirty state coordinators housed at state resource agencies, arts and humanities councils, and libraries, River of Words has successfully introduced and migrated an innovative approach to community building, educational reform, and true ecological literacy. Adjacent to its Berkeley office, River of Words operates the Young at Art Gallery, one of the first galleries in the world devoted exclusively to children’s art, and the Creative Learning Lab, where classes are offered for young people, families, and teachers.

To learn more about this creative nonprofit organization, honored as one of the 100 most effective organizations by the Kennedy School of Government in 2004 with an Innovations in Government Award, visit our website: www.riverofwords.org.



HOW TO USE
THIS TEACHING
GUIDE

This teaching guide is designed to extend the use of *River of Words: Young Poets and Artists on the Nature of Things* as a text for teaching poetry writing to students. The activities in this guide look at poetry from the inside out, contending that students who write poetry themselves and apprentice themselves to other writers bring deeper understanding and appreciation to their reading and to their own lives as well.

TEACHING GUIDE OVERVIEW

Although the activities in this guide are sequenced from least to most complex, we'd like to encourage you to jump in anywhere and shape the lessons to your own ends. We think the advice we give to young writers also applies to teachers and teaching: Find your own angle in, and make the lessons your own.

Each activity begins with a brief rationale and list of materials. The writing exercises in this guide use a variety of resources—CDs, videos, art, natural objects—and invite students to use talk, sketching, brief bursts of writing, and other low-stress response strategies. The resources we reference are kid-tested, tried-and-true, and easily accessible.

Most activities suggest professional works as touchstone texts for whole-class craft lessons and recommend *River of Words* (ROW) poems and handouts of sample student poems as mentor texts, student-selected models for individual study. Peer exemplars are indispensable tools for coaching poets. We've found a resource such as *River of Words: Young Poets and Artists on the Nature of Things* is like having unrestricted access to a veteran teacher's filing cabinet of exemplary student work. At the end of each lesson, you'll find that filing cabinet in the lists of ROW tie-in poems that complement the activity's content.

Instructional procedures are written in narrative form, in much the same way teachers speak to colleagues about their classroom practice. Some activities include multiple lessons; it isn't necessary to do them all or to do them in sequence. They have been grouped under activity headings because they address related skills. This guide also includes handouts to accompany the activities: sample poems from students aged 6-18, revision strategies, a take-along guide for a haiku hike, and a graphic organizer to help mine mentor texts, among other documents.

Finally, we've included a section, "Field Notes," with suggestions for moving students into the school-without-walls, the natural world, along with a bibliography of some of our favorite professional resources.

While the activities in this guide are directed chiefly to middle and high school language arts teachers, teachers involved in cross-disciplinary



teaching in the sciences, arts, and other languages will also find easily adaptable lessons, as will parents and leaders of youth groups. To adapt the activities for use with elementary school students, ESL students, or lower-level readers, teachers may choose from a great variety of ROW poems as model texts and substitute other appropriate professional models for those suggested.

TIPS FOR CREATING A POETRY-RICH CLASSROOM

These suggestions will help build the kind of space that nurtures the poet in every student.

Help students make the connection between writing and thinking by asking them to write every day in a writing notebook. Have them write when they want to entertain ideas, when they need clarity, and when they want to record an insight. Help them to see their writing notebook as a seedbed to return to over and over. Teach them to grow their inner ergometer, their sense of which issues and lines radiate the most energy and write from there. Once they associate musing with getting it down on paper, inviting the muse is easy.

Write with your students. Demonstrate how you come up with ideas and work through your writing processes. Help them to reflect on their own processes by modeling how you think about yours. Share your writing. Post the strategies you teach and refer to them often.

Go heavy on the alpha and omega. Stress heuristics, idea-makers like writing to music, art, or film, and expect to spend time front-loading before writing. After writing, invite revision by giving students lots of workshop time to investigate mentor texts and confer with you and their peers. Remember, too, that sometimes revision comes with the next piece of writing.

Read lots of poetry to and with your students. Use it every day, not just during an April-is-poetry-month unit. Reading and writing poetry teaches observation, specificity, compression, and attention to powerful language. These important skills transfer into most other reading and writing tasks. Build the poetry collection in your classroom library. Don't forget field guides and other nature resources.

Take students outside into the school-without-walls. Roam the campus with a botanist or zoologist for an on-the-hoof lesson in specificity; write and read on the school grounds or in a nearby park. See more possibilities in the section "Field Notes."

Enlarge your students' notions of nature poetry. Since humans are part of ecosystems, almost anything counts. Leafing through ROW offers a wide range of writing possibilities—from processing the aftermath of



hurricanes to commemorating the high-water mark of a first kiss. Poetry is about outer *and* inner worlds.

Look for opportunities for your students to go public with their work. Encourage your students to share their poetry in class, on posters around campus, in zines and self- or class-published booklets, on class Web sites, as gifts, and as submissions to publications and contests. We can't recommend highly enough River of Words Environmental Art and Poetry contest, the most thoughtfully conceived venue for student work we've encountered.

A WORD ABOUT THE NATIONAL ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS

Teachers are under a lot of pressure to ensure they teach to state and national standards. Perhaps, like us, you juggle state and district curricula, plus school mandates. Maybe you're wondering what use you could make of yet another curriculum document, like this teaching guide? Here's why we think the guide contains valuable activities: These lessons fit the large picture of what ELA students should know, understand, and be able to do.

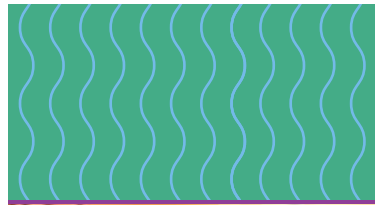
Derived from authentic workshop activities by practicing poets, the exercises in this teaching guide encourage strategic reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, and representing. They emphasize process, attention to purpose, audience, and conventions. They use multi-sensory approaches, promote research, and move students beyond formula writing into the creation of knowledge for personally important purposes.

So while we may have different curricula and different grade-level expectations depending on which state we teach in, our documents—including this one—are supported by the same underlying framework: the ELA Standards crafted by the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association.

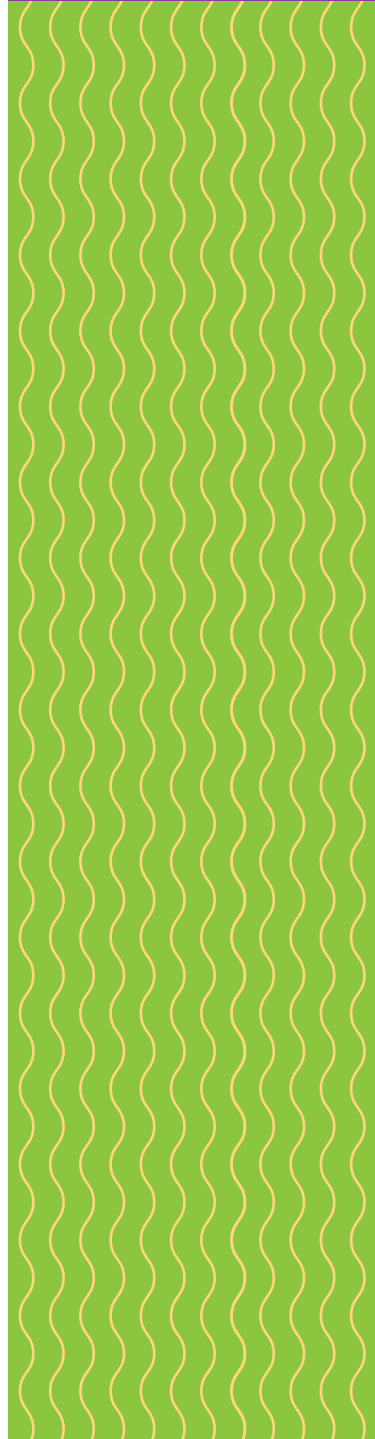
As teachers, our ability to evaluate and implement curricula depends on what we know and know how to do. There are any number of ways we can help our students become "knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members" of the community here on planet Earth (to quote from Standard 11). In the pages of this guide, we hope you'll find some engaging practices that will dovetail with your own professional goals to grow along with your students.

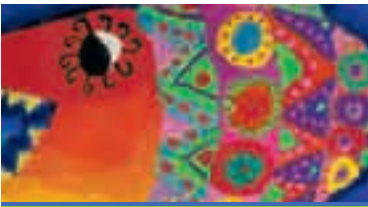
*Harriet Maher, NBCT
Lafayette Parish School System
Lafayette, LA*

*Connie McDonald
2005 ROW Teacher of the Year
University High
Baton Rouge, LA*



ACTIVITIES





ACTIVITY 1

LISTS AND LITANIES

Cataloging or listing images and ideas is an easy, early way to cue observation, specificity, and reflection—key elements of good writing. Lists serve as seedbeds for topics which can be revisited and reworked, as well as merit attention in themselves. The lessons in this activity feature poems that use enumeration, plus a quick revision strategy.

LESSON 1

LIST POEM

MATERIALS

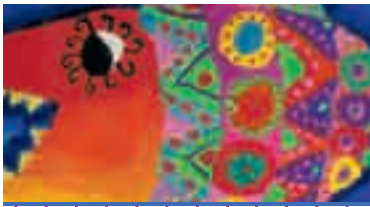
- ~ *The Pillow Book of Sei Shonagon* (available translations include those by Meredith McKinney, Ivan Morris, and Arthur Waley)
- ~ transparencies of a few illustrative passages from *Pillow Book*
- ~ sample student poems (Handout 1)
- ~ field guides and other resources that help identify and provide specific names for things in the natural world
- ~ index cards

PROCEDURE

Kept in a drawer of her wooden pillow, the poetic diary of Sei Shonagon describes people and scenes of nature recorded during her years as lady-in-waiting in the eleventh-century Japanese Imperial court. To begin this exercise, read several entry titles from *Pillow Book* and a few entries that exemplify keen observation and use of specific names of things. Suggested entries include “Splendid Things,” “Depressing Things,” “Elegant Things,” and “Squalid Things.”

In their writing notebooks, ask students to jot down some of Shonagon’s titles, such as elegant things, annoying things, depressing things, birds, herbs and shrubs, things that give an unclean feeling, adorable things, things that fall from the sky, things that should be short, wind instruments, things worth seeing, things that one should hurry to see or hear, things that gain by being painted, things that lose by being painted, festivals.

As a class, brainstorm additional categories of experience to catalog. Then ask students to list items under the categories. While students work, project a *Pillow Book* passage or two or read a sample student poem as models for insightful, concrete writing. Students should be encouraged to browse through field guides and other references for specific names. Students can copy their most powerful list onto an index card, share it with a group or whole class, and post the cards in the classroom. Invite students to revisit and expand their lists, as well as mine them for writing topics.



ACTIVITY 1

11

VARIATIONS

Post chart paper on classroom walls. Label each chart with one of Shonagon's entry titles and invite students to browse the room as they would a museum exhibit and contribute a line or two to the lists. After about fifteen minutes, guide students in deciding which images are strongest and why. Read and publish the lists as class poems or ask students to choose lines and make their own poem.

LESSON 2

LITANIES

MATERIALS

- ~ transparency of a passage ("My litany of Karachi winter characteristics runs something like this:") from *Kartography* by Kamila Shamsie
- ~ field guides and other resources that help identify and provide specific names for things in the natural world

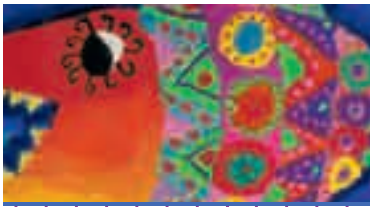
PROCEDURE

Explain that a litany is a recital or enumeration occurring originally in prayer that resembles a list. Pakistan-born author Kamila Shamsie uses this form in a chapter from *Kartography*. After reading this passage, project it and ask students to point to lines and discuss what they notice. Ask students to write their own litany about a season or one of the topics from the *Pillow Book* exercise.

REVISION STRATEGY

To fashion poetry from a jot list or freewriting, ask students to select their best lines and spend time reworking them for specificity and appeal to the senses. Point to lines from "My litany of Karachi winter characteristics," such as, "peaches that you twist just so to separate them into halves, flesh falling cleanly off seed," "hibiscus flowers," and "feet slippery on rock moss" as models for image-laden writing.

To lay out their text on the page, students should read their work aloud, marking their pauses with a slash (/). The slashes indicate the ends of poetic lines. In addition, suggest they try to end most lines with strong words, like nouns and verbs. Finally, have them investigate white space by looking at word placement in ROW tie-in poems.

**ROW TIE-IN**

These poems incorporate lists and specific images, as well as thoughtful arrangement of text: “Nature,” 23; “Spring on Mount Tamalpais,” 31; Untitled, 52; “August,” 66; “Before a Snowfall,” 83; “changing seasons,” 95; “My Trip to the Hudson River,” 151; “Just Imagine,” 174; “Behind the Light House Hotel,” 208; “Berwick,” 227; “I am From,” 238

LESSON 3**“WHERE I’M FROM” POEM****MATERIALS**

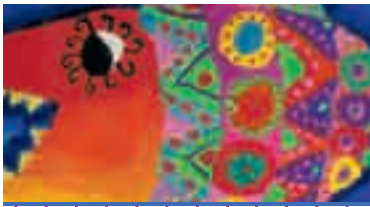
- ~ transparency or handouts of “Where I’m From” by George Ella Lyon
- ~ transparencies or handouts of ROW tie-in poems “Berwick” and “I Am From”
- ~ field guides and other resources that help identify and provide specific names for things in the natural world

PROCEDURE

In “Where I’m From,” George Ella Lyon uses listing to map her place in the family. Students can use her poem as a model text to explore their own experiences. In addition, the writing generated by this exercise can serve as a topic list for future pieces of writing. To write a “Where I’m From” poem, guide students by asking them to jot list or free write in response to the prompts below. Use the teacher script to ease students into writing, pausing for a few minutes after each prompt for students to write what comes to mind.

Prompts for the Teacher: *Imagine a place you lived in when you were a child. Please answer these questions with as many details as you can remember.*

- ~ Name some familiar household items that you remember seeing or playing with—rolling pin, stack of firewood, blocks, etc.
- ~ Name some things you’d see in your yard outside or playground—swingset, a tree you climbed, a car)
- ~ Can you give specific names of plants, trees, flowers, vines or vegetables that you grew up around—blackberries, honeysuckle, dandelions, poison ivy?
- ~ Name places you and your parents and grandparents and ancestors have lived.
- ~ Are there any unusual names/nicknames of people in your family?
- ~ What are some foods you enjoyed as a child?



ACTIVITY 1

- ~ Do you remember any games you used to play?
- ~ Are there any outstanding family triumphs and/or tragedies?
- ~ How about special books, songs, rhymes, or lines you memorized?
- ~ Can you quote some old sayings, words of advice, or familiar expressions you heard often?
- ~ Do you have a special place where you keep mementos and souvenirs?

As students “rest their hands,” show them George Ella Lyon’s poem. Have them point out what they notice about her details, language structures, ending lines, and format. Furnish samples of good student lines that contain specific details and names of things. Encourage them to elaborate on at least one of their best lines; give them a minute or two to do this. Follow up with a class whiparound, or quick reading by each group member, for on-the-spot models.

Finally, ask students to look over what they’ve written and select their best ideas to polish and fashion into their own “Where I’m From” poem.

VARIATIONS

For elementary and ESL students, use the “Prompts for Teacher Script” to write a model poem from your point of view at the age of your students.

ROW TIE-IN

These poems use “Where I’m From” as a mentor text: “Berwick,” 227; “I Am From,” 238

“Here’s to the best words in the right place at the perfect time.”

~ Sekou Sundiata, *Spoken Word Poet, 1951-2007*

“Tell stories; spit truth.”

~ Kevin Coval, *Hip-Hop Poet*

ACTIVITY 2

SHOUT OUT

A *Shout-Out* poem is a type of list poem that celebrates life’s highs and lows and in-betweens. Whether composed by the whole class or individually, shout-outs are sure to be crowd pleasers. They’re a natural way for students to ease into the spoken-word scene.

MATERIALS

- ~ recording of “Shout Out” by Sekou Sundiata from *The Blue Oneness of Dreams* CD
- ~ “Shout Out” handouts
- ~ CD player
- ~ handouts or transparencies of sample student poem (Handout 1)
- ~ board or poster for lists

PROCEDURE

Begin by reading aloud or playing Sekou Sundiata’s legendary “Shout Out” poem. After students have heard it once, pass out handouts of the lines and ask them to read the poem silently and underline words, phrases, and lines that jump out at them, and to think about why they noticed the lines. Have students volunteer to read and “unpack” their favorite lines. Depending on their experience with poetry, students may point to repetition, alliteration, paradox, simile.

Then make a plus and minus column on the board or on a poster and ask students to call out positive and negative things in their own lives that are worth mentioning in a shout out. Have one or two students record what is being said: “getting an *A* when you expected a *B*,” “the price of gas,” “being grounded,” “weekends with no homework.” Once five or six items are listed on each side, have students consider these and other ups and downs they might mention in a shout-out poem.

After students have jotted down a few items, have them pause to look over their lists. Anna West, Founding Director of Wordplay Teen Writing Project in Louisiana, suggests showing students how to “crack open” a vague image to turn it into a vivid one. Instead of “Here’s to my mom,” maybe “Here’s to Mom, sitting on the couch at 11 p.m. with rollers in her hair folding clothes as the baby finally falls asleep.”



ACTIVITY 2

Another helpful prewriting exercise at this point might be to brainstorm ways to say *Here's to*, such as *Kudos to*, *Props to*, *Here's a holla*, or *Let's hear it for . . .*

Read a student sample and give students time to complete their own shout-outs. Share by doing a whiparound, with every student shouting out a single line; or in small groups, with students reading to each other. Perhaps each group could nominate a representative to step up for a quick open mic or poetry slam.

VARIATIONS

Each student submits his/her best line on a sticky note, and the teacher or a couple students arrange them into a class shout-out. Then the whole class performs the poem as a choral reading.

Shout-out poem performances work well for back-to-school assemblies, schoolwide open mics, or poetry slams. For elementary and ESL students, write an appropriate poem to use as a model text.



ACTIVITY 3 IN TRANSLATION

Words written in other languages suggest associations and images, whether or not we understand those languages. Poet and teacher Kenneth Koch used an exercise like this one to help students flex their imaginations and focus on words. The pieces shaped from this activity are translations only in the sense that they carry over associations from one language to another. Some poets call them “imitations.”

MATERIALS

- ~ sample poems and translated poems for projection and discussion. (Handout 1)
- ~ overhead projector or other projection system
- ~ handouts of poems in other languages. Students can benefit from working with poems in a target language they’re studying or can indulge their sense of fantasy by working from a language they’ve no experience with.

PROCEDURE

Talk about the various languages you and your students know or have studied in school, and how even after many lessons, poems can be difficult to translate. Introduce this activity by explaining that it’s a heuristic, an idea-maker, like using borrowed first lines or writing to art or music. Read the sample poem from the transparency and help students to trace the translations or transformations from Petrarch’s work to the student’s words.

In “Nostalgia” (Activity 3, Handout 1), for Andrew Nesbit, the phrase “ad ora ad ora” suggested “speak and sing.” He seems to have transformed “viso di costei” as “out over the sea.” “Quanto ciascuna” became the name of a lover, and the words “cresce” and “innamora” turned into “crescent moon.” Thus, he chose about a dozen words to shape his translation. Ask students to look for other correspondences and associations. The tone of the discussion should be tentative because everyone will be speculating about the author’s intentions.

Invite students to choose a poem from your selections. Your observations will determine the length of this activity, but most students will need fifteen to twenty minutes to write. Students might work in pairs to discuss their initial ideas. In sharing their work, students might also point out the transformations and decisions they made.

VARIATIONS

- ~ Students might enjoy reading translations of the poems they’ve worked with. Examining multiple translations would underscore the complicated art of working between languages, as well as the differ-



ence between translation and the intentional mistranslation in this exercise.

- ~ Students could be encouraged to incorporate words from languages they're studying into other poems they write. Classmates who speak other languages could be valuable resources.
- ~ David Lee, former Utah Poet Laureate, uses Chinese characters to discuss language as pictograph and as narrative map. He works from a handout of characters to explore suggested meanings then asks students to do their own translations. Google Images may provide sources of characters for this handout.
- ~ To use this activity with young students or inexperienced writers, co-construct a class poem from a poem in another language.

ROW TIE-IN

"Crossing El Desierto," 120, or any of the dual-language poems. "What Wasn't Born," the 2008 ROW Grand Prize winning poem in Category IV, uses binary code, a symbolic computer language. View this poem and other winning poems online at www.riverofwords.org.



ACTIVITY 4

SENSES AND SENSIBILITY

Some students respond more readily to a piece of music or a work of art than to a written prompt. Darrell Bourque, Louisiana poet, calls this a form of “call and response”—something in a piece of art or an artifact of nature touches us and we want to respond. These ekphrastic exercises tap this impulse and show students a way to carve out and display some of their best images.

LESSON 1

WRITING TO MUSIC

MATERIALS

- ~ CD player
- ~ CD of instrumental or other evocative music
- ~ copy of sample student poems (Handout 1)
- ~ transparency of model poem for line arrangement, such as “Between Walls” by W. C. Williams

Suggested musical works include *River* by Jia Peng Fang—smooth, soothing sounds of traditional Chinese string instruments; *Self-Healing with Sound and Music* by Dr. Andrew Weil and Kimba Arem— sounds of nature blend with indigenous instruments like singing bowls, *ting she*, didgeridoos; *A Day without Rain* by Enya—varying rhythms, vocals, and instruments set a dreamy mood. Classical music pieces, too, are valuable as heuristics, or idea-makers. Possible selections include Claude Debussy’s “Prélude à l’Après-Midi d’une Faune,” Richard Wagner’s “The Ride of the Valkyries,” and W. A. Mozart’s Symphony 41, “Jupiter Symphony.”

PROCEDURE

Create a dreamy atmosphere in the room by using natural lighting and a candle or two. Go over a few of Peter Elbow’s or Natalie Goldberg’s “rules of freewriting”: *Write fast; don’t stop. Keep your hand moving. Don’t worry about punctuation or spelling for now.* Ask students to listen to the music, letting what they hear suggest images to them, and try to get those images down. Read a sample student poem or two if students request a model. Start the music and monitor for a moment or two, moving slowly among the students; then sit down and write with them.

As the selection ends, slowly turn down the music and gently ask the students to take a few more minutes to finish their thoughts. Afterward, ask them to search through their freewriting for a phrase, sentence, or whole section that jumps out at them, and to underline that part.

**REVISION STRATEGY**

To show students a way they might lay out their best line(s) to make a poem, put a short poem like “Between Walls” on the overhead. Ask students to look at it closely and tell what they see. They may say things like “It’s short” or “It doesn’t have very many words” or “It’s just a sentence.” Point out how few words are on each line, how the poem doesn’t rhyme, and how the title is also the first line. After showing a few student samples, ask the students to try to write their best line(s) like Williams wrote his.

VARIATIONS

- ~ In *The Muses Among Us: Eloquent Listening and Other Pleasures of the Writer’s Craft*, Kim Stafford uses the phrases “Write like a river” and “Write like a drum” to encourage sentence variety. These phrases are useful as writing prompts, especially with water music or live musicians and instruments, like a flute or saxophone, to accompany the writers. The idea is to fill one page of writing (rolling-river writing) with one long, run-on sentence using “and” to connect sentences. In the second exercise, the writer fills the page with short “drum” sentences, none longer than four words, each containing a subject and a verb. This sort of exercise helps writers develop sensitivity to the pace of a line and the need to use both river and drum rhythms.
- ~ Darrell Bourque has students listen to selections from *On an Overgrown Path* by Leos Janacek and asks them to write about a memory the music invokes. After about ten minutes, he instructs them to go outside and write about an object of nature they notice. Finally, they come back in the room and see if they can find parallels between the two sets of images they created.
- ~ Play three-minute segments of music with various rhythms (classical, jazz, New Age) to evoke different responses. During sharing time, discuss and chart the images suggested by different selections.

ROW TIE-IN

Poems that reference music: “New Beginnings,” 181; “At Centennial Olympic Park,” 260

Poems that show thoughtful arrangement on the page: “Horizon please continue,” 95; “wading stream,” 98; “Through the Eyes of Morning,” 154; “When I was searching for a poem,” 162; “Heron,” 178



LESSON 2

WRITING TO ART AND PHOTOGRAPHS

Capturing the phrases and images that come to us as we look at a piece of art sometimes leads to poetry. Students who say, “I don’t know what to write,” often find this activity helpful.

MATERIALS

- ~ one art transparency, slide, online image, or large art print to demonstrate the process
- ~ projection equipment (optional)
- ~ collected art prints, gallery or museum post cards, laminated magazine pictures, art books, or other sources of art
- ~ transparency or copies of sample student poems (See ROW tie-in poems and Handout 2)

PROCEDURE

Model by showing the class an art print that everyone can easily see, perhaps on an overhead projector or computer screen. (John Sloan’s *The Wake of the Ferry* works well, but you might also choose art that relates thematically or historically to your curriculum.) Ask students to look closely at the image and jot down whatever comes to mind. Ask them to tell you what they see, what they imagine is happening in the piece. Brainstorm possible ways they might write about the painting. For example, they might describe what they see, tell the story it is illustrating, write a poem or song to go with it, imagine a conversation among the subjects, become a person or object in the piece and speak from its perspective, or speak from the perspective of someone or something that’s been left out of the piece.

Have students freewrite for three to five minutes and do a quick whiparound to collect ideas; students could read a few lines, the whole piece, or simply tell what they did.

Now ask students to try out the exercise on their own. Distribute art prints, one for each student. Ask students to study the art print that lands on their desks and to write about it for ten minutes or so, using ideas gleaned from you, their classmates, or perhaps something new that occurs to them as they think and write.

VARIATIONS

- ~ If your art collection is extensive, you may want to give students a stack of prints and let them select one. If the prints are large and sturdy, line them up along a wall and let students browse and write.



ACTIVITY 4

21

- ~ As an additional source of powerful conceptual and representational art, use ROW art, from the companion text to this teaching guide or available online at www.riverofwords.org.
- ~ Visit a nearby museum or gallery and have students select a piece of art or an artifact to write about. Ask students to bring in a favorite photo, piece of art, or magazine picture to work from.

ROW TIE-IN

“Untitled,” 59; “Seven Haiku on Goldfish and Why,” 164; “Rivers on Titan,” 224

LESSON 3

WRITING WITH ARTIFACTS—THE BRILLIANT OBSERVATION

Like writing to music and artwork, sometimes looking at an object or artifact triggers associations that lead to poetry and memoir. This activity incorporates a model poem to cue a very specific kind of response to an object. In this case, the object is a stone, or more specifically, what’s inside it.

MATERIALS

- ~ basket of assorted stones
- ~ transparency or handouts of “Stone” by Charles Simic
- ~ transparency or copies of sample poems (ROW tie-in poems and Handout 3)
- ~ field guides and charts on rocks and minerals or online access to references

PROCEDURE

Begin by inviting students to freewrite briefly about stones. What types do they know? What kinds of things have they done with them? What memories do they have that might involve stones? What other associations do stones have for them? After writing, do a quick whiparound, asking each student to read a line or phrase.

Then pass around the basket of stones and ask students to pick one, look hard at it, and sketch it. To help students examine their stone from different perspectives, guide them through a cubing exercise, using some of the following prompts:

- ~ What does your stone look like? What do you notice about its color, shape, texture, size? *Describe it.*
- ~ Where did it come from? What’s it made of? What keeps it together? What do you see in its future? *Analyze it.*



- ~ What other things, persons, places, issues are like your stone? How are they different? *Compare it.*
- ~ What else does your stone make you think of? Let your thoughts range far and wide on this one. *Associate it.*
- ~ What could you do with your stone? How could you use it? *Apply it.*
- ~ What can you say in your stone's defense? What are some pros about your stone? What are some cons about it? *Argue for and against it.*

Reassure students that they don't have to write for every prompt, just jot what comes to mind. About three minutes per prompt is usually enough writing time.

Then read and "unpack" Simic's "Stone." Share a few student samples to show how open the possibilities are. Fan out field guides and charts on rocks and minerals for students who want to identify their stone and add specificity to their work. Now the students are ready to revisit their free-writing and cubing and write their own response to Simic's invitation to "Go inside a stone."

Allow time for sharing at the end of writing workshop time.

VARIATIONS

- ~ Select an artifact from a basket of pinecones, moss, bones, dried wasp nests, seed pods, feathers, and other natural objects.
- ~ Using the children's book *Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge* by Mem Fox, show the pages with artifacts (seashell, egg, puppet, medal) and have students write associations about them.
- ~ Ask students to bring in or sketch a favorite possession. Write from its point of view (persona poem).

ROW TIE-IN

"Fish," 24; "The Flame," 43; Untitled, 52; "Bobcat," 56; "Ode to Blue Calcite," 61; "The Late Rose," 82; "Flags," 150; "Deer Print," 152; "Heron," 178; "Swamp Shack," 199

LESSON 4

WRITING FROM FILM

This lesson is adapted from workshops conducted by Darrell Bourque, who has led hundreds of Louisiana teachers and students through his writing prompts. The idea is to ask students to look closely and listen hard for words and images that resonate or stand out and to jot them down as they view. Their collective responses form a rich lexicon to draw from in their subsequent writings.

**MATERIALS**

- ~ a compelling film, such as *Koyaanisqatsi: Life Out of Balance*, or any of the nonverbal films in the *Qatsi* trilogy; *Baraka*; *Whale Rider*; *Winged Migration*; documentaries on naturalists or artists, like the Ansel Adams profile produced by the Public Broadcasting System; National Geographic films. Look for films that ask viewers to question their assumptions about how the world works. It's not necessary to show the whole film. Select ten- to twenty-minute segments for this exercise or multiple segments to view over several days.
- ~ DVD player or other projection equipment
- ~ chart or poster paper
- ~ copies of ROW tie-in poem "Down Deep" (written in response to the film *Whale Rider*) or sample student poem (Handout 4)

PROCEDURE

While viewing, ask students to jot words, images, and thoughts in their notebooks. After viewing, before discussion of any kind begins, participants are asked to record some of their words and images on large pieces of poster paper taped to the walls. Once everyone has contributed, students discuss their impressions and opinions in small groups or as a whole class. Finally, ask students to freewrite for about ten minutes on the movie and to try to incorporate words or lines from the newly formed lexicon that lines the walls.

After ten minutes, ask students to bring their pieces to a close (or trail off with ellipses) and share their writing in small circles or with the whole class.

You may share sample poems with students at any point when students might need a model text.

VARIATIONS

- ~ Another way to use the lexicon is to leave posters up and refer to them for fresh ideas during other freewrites or writing exercises.

ROW TIE-IN

"Down Deep," 220

ACTIVITY 5
JUMP-START
POETRY

Writers often borrow other writers' lines to begin their own poems; this exercise draws from that practice. Borrowing is a strategy that can help with fluency and attention to powerful language.

MATERIALS

- ~ copies of poems with strong opening lines or handouts of Jump-Start Poetry Lines (Handouts 1 and 2)
- ~ sample student poems (Handout 3)

PROCEDURE

Duplicate multiple copies of six to eight poems with strong opening lines. Some suggestions include "Woods" by Wendell Berry, "the mississippi river empties into the gulf" by Lucille Clifton, "Ah, Ah" by Joy Harjo, "Hornworm: Summer Reverie" by Stanley Kunitz, "To the Light of September" by W. S. Merwin, "Aunt Leaf" by Mary Oliver, and "How Poetry Comes to Me" by Gary Snyder.

Read a few student sample poems so that students will understand how to use an opening line to begin their own poem.

Arrange the stacks of poems around the room and ask students to browse through them until they find a poem that appeals to them. Have students use the opening line or another powerful line to freewrite for ten to fifteen minutes. Afterward, students may share their writing. Make sure to attribute the borrowed line by italicizing or placing it in quotes and including this phrase about the author: "First line from 'Name of poem' by _____."

As an alternative, distribute handouts of Jump-Start Poetry Lines and ask students to select a line to begin their freewriting.

VARIATION

- ~ Students may also collect powerful lines during their reading and store them in their writer's notebook for later use.

ACTIVITY 6
 WHERE YOU
 STAND IN
 RELATION TO
 THE HORIZON

“I have measured myself against the horizon; I have studied things up close.”

~ Darrell Bourque, Louisiana poet, from “Scratch”

“What do you have in common with a water strider?”

~ David Fox, Naturalist

The following lessons deal with environmental perspectives, asking students to consider their positions on the planet. The exercises foreground questions such as, “How do we relate to our environment in a micro/macro sense?” and “How are we like other organisms/insects/animals?” The first lesson asks students to focus on the world of insects; the second steps back for a larger view.

LESSON 1

ZOOMING IN

MATERIALS

- ~ *Microcosmos* documentary produced by Miramax Films
- ~ DVD player or other projection equipment
- ~ art supplies
- ~ entomology books
- ~ paper or writing notebooks
- ~ copies of persona interview (Handout 1)
- ~ sample persona poems (optional: “Mistress Stella Speaks,” a poem by Chicago poet Tyehimba Jess about the relationship between blues musician Leadbelly and his guitar, performed at Bowdoin College, Maine, in 2006. The recording is available through the Fishhouse Live Poetry Reading Series at www.fishhousepoems.org).
- ~ ROW tie-in poems or sample student poems (Handout 2)

PROCEDURE

Begin by asking students to write for a few minutes about the guiding question “How are we like other organisms, insects, and animals?” Invite students to share their quick writes and briefly discuss them before showing the film *Microcosmos* or a segment of the film. While viewing, ask students to keep a dialectical journal. Create the journal by having students fold a notebook page or sheet of paper in half vertically and make entries on one side of the fold about scenes that stood out. On the other half of the page, ask them to record thoughts and questions about those scenes. After the movie, do a whiparound, prompting students to share their impressions.

Then, in groups of four, students select an entomology book and decide which insect they would like to research for insight into the creature's perspective. First, groups compile information, including a detailed sketch, habitat, eating habits, mating habits, lifespan, and any other interesting facts. Afterward, explain that in a persona poem, a writer puts on a "mask" and speaks in the voice of something or someone else. Read a few examples, such as those mentioned in the ROW tie-in, or play a recording of "Mistress Stella Speaks." Point out examples of personification, anthropomorphism, first person point-of-view, and irony (because the point of view is limited).

Then distribute persona interview handouts and give groups about ten minutes to "be the bug" and fill out the interview form. After collecting that information, ask groups to write a persona poem from the insect's perspective, and later to prepare for a Persona Poem Slam.

VARIATIONS

- ~ Using Paul Fleischman's collections of multi-voiced poems as models, invite students to write predator/prey, symbiotic relationship, different gender or different life stage poems. His work includes *Joyful Noise* (about insects), *I Am Phoenix* (about birds), and *Big Talk: Poems for Four Voices* (about humans).

ROW TIE-IN

"Untitled," 28; "Butterfly," 32; "Wit and Fright," 176; "I Am a River," 272

LESSON 2

ZOOMING OUT

Writing about a familiar place is usually an easy exercise for student writers. Whether it's a neighbor's treehouse, the city park, the community center, or their own backyard, most students can quickly conjure up a favorite spot. With the help of a few guided questions gleaned from a poem by James Wright, students can come up with their own poem about a place they know.

MATERIALS

- ~ copies of "Lying in a Hammock at William Duffy's Farm in Pine Island, Minnesota" by James Wright
- ~ transparencies or handouts of ROW tie-in poems "Bayou II" and "Broken" or sample student poem (Handout 3)

PROCEDURE

Ask students to take a few minutes to picture a familiar place, preferably outdoors, that they consider special or meaningful. A teacher think-aloud is helpful; teachers might offer how they would respond to the following prompts as they lead students, one prompt at a time, through guided writing.

Prompts for the Teacher:

- ~ Think about this spot. Sketch it if you like.
- ~ Picture yourself in this location. Write a line or sentence that describes what you are doing and exactly where you are: “Sitting on a sandbar on the banks of the Calcasieu River in Indian Village, Louisiana.”
- ~ In your imagination, look up. What do you see? Begin this line with “Above me” or “Over my head.” Try to use a simile in this line.
- ~ Now look into the distance, as far as you can see. Write what you see.
- ~ Describe a sound you might hear in this place.
- ~ What is on your right?
- ~ Hone in on a single detail in this scene. Try to describe it, using an unusual or vivid verb in the line.
- ~ Shift your perspective and your position—stand up, flop down, walk away—and notice another detail in the landscape: the quality of light, the time of day, a seasonal plant or animal, for example.
- ~ Finally, read over your images and see if you can conclude with a reflective line that somehow captures how you feel about being in this place. (You might caution students not to rush this line; it may occur to them later as they compose their poem).

When most of the pencils stop, explain that the prompts were drawn from a poem by James Wright that has helped many students write about their own favorite places. Show them Wright’s poem; let them point to and comment on lines that jump out. Show a student sample or two. Then invite students to try their hands at writing their own sense-of-place poem.

VARIATIONS

- ~ Getting a “just right” last line is tricky. To encourage going beyond first thoughts (“I love this place!”), have students confer with a partner or a small group for ideas, or ask them to study strong closing lines in ROW poems.
- ~ Writing about a memorable experience in a special place is a natural outgrowth of this lesson. Duplicate and distribute several ROW

poems for a browsing session. Choose poems on a range of topics that might suggest experiences to write about. As students read, ask them to focus on the narrative developed in the poem, images, and sensory details. Once students have selected a memory to write about, ask them to list as many details as they can remember or invent and have a go at writing their own poem.

ROW TIE-IN

Poems with a strong sense of place: “Davidson Creek,” 145; “my woods,” 158; “Springwater Hill,” 191; “Sweetwater,” 198; “Rockefeller Wildlife Preserve: Mid-August,” 204; “Bayou II,” 233; “Broken,” 243; “Turtle Beach,” 248; “Al Alkhdhar, the Green Wadi,” 274

Poems with strong closing lines: “This Place,” 27; “Away,” 36; “The Levee,” 53; “Poseidon in the Infirmary,” 67; “The Late Rose,” 82; “Coming Back to Skyomish,” 89; “Two Worlds,” 91; “Geese over Mendon Ponds,” 187; “Letter to the Architect,” 223

Poems that focus on memorable experiences: “Fishing,” 76; “I Love my Dog,” 101; “Rooflessness,” 105; “Natural Selection or: How Dan McLane Was Nearly Lost Forever,” 114; “Branding in the Spring,” 125; “Blueberries,” 153; “When I was searching for a poem,” 162; “Roads,” 166; “Johnny Pump Down,” 168; “Swimming Summer,” 188; “Fire in Winter,” 190; “Festival Day,” 192; “Fishing on the Ouachita,” 195; “Behind the Light House Hotel,” 208; “Us Men,” 212; “Flowing Into the River One Day,” 216; “Down Deep,” 220; “The Lake,” 232; “Dear Aquarius,” 242; “Shrimping,” 246; “On Forgetting,” 250; “Sunday Afternoon,” 254; “At Centennial Olympic Park,” 260; “Colorful Shooting Star Night,” 264; “Lunch in Phuket, December 26th,” 270

Louisiana teacher Scott Stephenson helped develop this activity.



ACTIVITY 7

HAIKU HIKE

Haiku teaches compression of images and economy of language. It couples nicely with working from art and spending time in nature. This activity prompts students to produce art in a natural setting as a springboard for writing.

MATERIALS

- ~ *Rivers and Tides* documentary on DVD directed by Thomas Riedelsheimer, New Video Group
- ~ DVD player
- ~ books by Andy Goldsworthy, such as *Andy Goldsworthy: A Collaboration with Nature, Hand to Earth, Wood, and Passage*
- ~ teacher-made transparency or copies of sample haiku by Bashō
- ~ copies of “Hike and Write” (Handout 1)
- ~ art supplies (optional)
- ~ copies of “How to Revise Your Haiku (or anything else)” (Handout 2)
- ~ sample student poems (Handout 3)
- ~ digital camera, prints of student work (optional)
- ~ projection system (optional)

PROCEDURE

Depending on class length, this activity may take several periods to complete. Introduce British artist Andy Goldsworthy’s nature sculptures and photography as models for creating “found” art using artifacts in their natural environment and haiku based on environmental art. First, students work in pairs or small groups to study Goldsworthy’s work, noting the kinds of materials and arrangements he uses. They can also view clips of his work in the documentary *Rivers and Tides*. Discuss how artists (including students as apprentice writers) arrange their environment to make statements. What statements might Goldsworthy be making about the relationships between nature, art, and daily life? Students will have the opportunity to explore their own statements during this activity.

Discuss the Japanese word *ikebana*, meaning “to make flowers live” or “the arrangement of plant material.” Students will be tampering a bit with nature, just as a Japanese flower arranger would, just as Goldsworthy does.

Afterward, take the students outdoors to construct their own environmental art. Caution them to use fallen, not fresh, plant material. Twigs, stones, nuts, leaves, blossoms are fair game, so long as they’re not plucked or plundered. Take pictures of their completed artwork on site or have students sketch, color, and label their work as a way of capturing their art.



On returning to class, ask students to write about their works of art, perhaps using a strategy called cubing to help them consider their subject from six different angles. In cubing, writers *describe, compare, associate, analyze, apply,* and *argue for or against* the subject, in this case, their artwork. (See Activity 4, Lesson 3 for a description of the procedure.) They will mine this writing in subsequent lessons for words, phrases, and images to use in their haiku.

Begin the next part of the activity by reading and discussing Matsuo Bashō, 17th-century Japanese poet. Note that he wrote in the present tense, used simple words that appeal to the senses, and seasonal words rich with association. Discuss words students associate with the seasons; for example, peeper frogs for spring, fireflies for summer, geese for fall, and holly for winter. For the purposes of this activity, give students permission to vary from the form of haiku (three lines of verse with a pattern of five/seven/five syllables), suggesting they aim for three lines with a slightly longer middle line.

As a prelude to writing, show the students' environmental art as a slide show. Ask students to write haiku, using a photo of their own art and their freewriting. Consider asking students to share their sketches before writing.

Once students have at least one haiku, project a first-draft haiku and lead students through revision, one strategy at a time. See the handout "How to Revise Your Haiku (or anything else)." Then invite students to apply the strategies to their own writing. Finally, mount the haiku and pictures, and display them in hallways, the library, or the classroom.

VARIATIONS

Louisiana poet Darrell Bourque has an additional challenge for advanced haiku-ers. He asks them to bring an original haiku to class and explains the ancient ceremony of *renga*. Here's a version adapted for the classroom. To begin, students work in small groups. Each member reads a haiku aloud, and the group votes on which one they like best. This haiku will start the group's poem. Renga-making continues with a few simple rules:

- ~ Each haiku is followed by a two-line stanza that subtly connects to some aspect of the haiku before it.
- ~ Each group member writes a two-line stanza, and the group votes on which one they want to include in the renga they are making.
- ~ The two-line stanza is followed by another round of haiku writing. Participants read their haiku and vote again.



ACTIVITY 7

This procedure continues until the group has selected three haiku and three couplets. This set or sequence is called the renga. (See Handout 3 for sample renga.)

Two additional “renga rules”:

- ~ The next-to-last stanza (the last haiku) should contain the name of a plant (flower, tree, berry) common to the season in the poem
- ~ The final couplet must contain a “whiff” of the first haiku

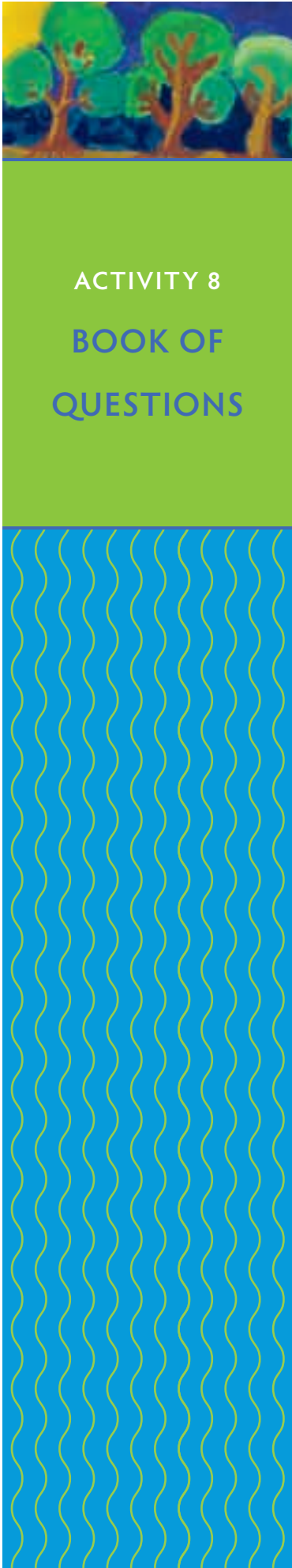
Students should be encouraged to save all of their attempts for future rengas or stand-alone poems.

For further reading on the renga ceremony, see “Whirling Petals, Windblown Leaves” in the Winter 2007 issue of *Tricycle*.

ROW TIE-IN

“Lucky,” 136; “The Forest’s Haiku,” 138; “Seven Haiku on Goldfish and Why,” 164; “Highland Spring,” 228

Louisiana teacher Scott Stephenson helped develop this activity.



ACTIVITY 8
BOOK OF
QUESTIONS

“Whom can I ask what I came / to make happen in this world?”

~ Pablo Neruda

“Live the questions now.”

~ Rainer Maria Rilke

“The answer is blowing in the wind.”

~ Bob Dylan

This activity challenges students to create questions that they might not know the answers to, that might have multiple answers, or possibly no answers at all. It is an invitation to explore, to speculate, to play in writing.

MATERIALS

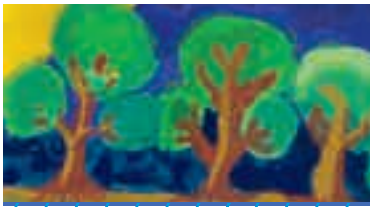
- ~ sample questions from Pablo Neruda’s *Book of Questions*; transparencies or handouts facilitate whole-class discussion
- ~ transparency or handouts of ROW tie-in poem “Snow”
- ~ sample student poems (Handout 1)
- ~ list of question words and phrases
- ~ writing notebooks
- ~ chart paper

PROCEDURE

Project and read aloud a few sample questions from Neruda’s book. Ask students what they notice about the questions he poses. Help them see that some are hard questions, “thought questions,” that might have more than one answer or that contain images, unusual juxtapositions, and personification. Many of Neruda’s poems carry the tone of a child’s musings.

Read sample student questions and ask students to form their own questions. Encourage them to think past their first (and even second) thoughts and try to come up with questions that have some of the characteristics they pointed out in Neruda’s work. Ask students to look through their writing notebooks to identify observations they might rework as questions. Post question words and ways to ask questions on a chart. In addition to the journalists’ questions (*who, what, when, where, why, and how*), the list might include phrases such as “Tell me,” “Do you know?” and “Can anyone say?”

Have students write their best questions, using Neruda’s structure as a model for line arrangement (one question or image divided into two brief lines). Then ask students to post their questions on chart paper around the room. Group the lines according to subject, and ask authors of similar questions to work in small groups to arrange their lines into a poem.



VARIATIONS

- ~ Create a whole-class poem or zine by collecting and arranging lines from students.
- ~ Invite students to write their own poem of questions, now or any time, since they have added a new genre to their toolbox.
- ~ To extend this activity, invite students to revise a piece of writing to include an imaginative question or two.
- ~ A silent walk around school sometimes helps students form questions based on things they see, hear, touch, or smell.

ROW TIE-IN

"Sad Sun," 17; "Snow," 44; "Vision of a River," 276

Adapted from "What is the Voice That Whispers? Writing Nature Poems Based on Pablo Neruda's Book of Questions" by Mary Edwards Wertsch, published in The Alphabet of the Trees: A Guide to Nature Writing. Edited by Christian McEwen and Mark Statman. New York: Teachers & Writers Collaborative, 2000.



ACTIVITY 9
DREAM
SENSE

“There’s a sense in which poetry is not so much the writing of words as it is the movement of breath itself.”

~ Robert Hass

“No ideas, but in things.”

~ William Carlos Williams

Dreams can inspire art and innovation. This exercise invites students to pay attention to their dreams and to explore them through images and words.

MATERIALS

- ~ unlined paper for sketching or paper printed with three blocks, comic book style
- ~ sample poems (Handouts 1 and 2)

PROCEDURE

Introduce this activity by sharing some thoughts about the connection between sleep and art; art and dreams. Ask students if they remember their dreams and whether they have ever written them down. To get students ready to recall and write their dreams, invite them to slow down their brain waves (like in REM sleep) by sitting quietly for a few minutes. Ask students to take a few deep breaths and focus on the sound and action of breathing. Tell them to treat their thoughts as unwelcome guests; don’t let them get comfortable. Just turn them away and go back to focusing on breathing. Explain that they’re training their minds to focus on only one thing: breathing.

After sitting quietly for a few minutes, distribute sketch paper to students. The paper can be printed with three blocks, comic book-style, or students can draw their own blocks. Telling students not to worry too much about technique, give them about one minute per block to sketch different scenes from dreams they remember, with as much detail as possible. Ask them to label their images with colors and words that suggest themselves. The images will serve as a source of ideas for writing.

When they are done, ask two or three students to share particularly unusual dreams. Discuss how dreams lodge in our memory, even though they might not make sense at first, because their images are very powerful and a little mysterious. Good poems, too, speak to us through images. Discuss William Carlos Williams’s notion that ideas are expressible only in images, (“No ideas, but in things). Explain that rather than expressing the *idea*, “My friend was always there for me,” a writer might create a more vivid *image* with “My friend reached into her closet and



pulled out her brand new skirt when I told her I didn't have anything to wear to the party."

Next, freewrite for five minutes on whatever feelings or thoughts their sketches conjure up or any other dream images that come to mind. As students write, drop hints about what to include: settings, colors, and feelings certain people or animals elicit. Afterward, in a whiparound, share any good lines or ideas.

Then read the model poems. Ask students to look at all the images and ideas they have collected and try out a dream poem about themselves or someone else. They could start by writing down a few additional ideas about themselves or another person—what they like to do, what worries them, what issues they struggle with—and then transform those ideas into a poem as rich in images as a dream.

Save time at the end of the activity to share and discuss.

VARIATIONS

- ~ About a week before beginning this lesson, ask students to record their dreams in their writing notebooks.
- ~ Teachers of younger students might write a model appropriate for their children. Kenneth Koch's *Wishes, Lies, and Dreams* contains additional exercises incorporating dream imagery.
- ~ Prints and transparencies of surrealist and abstract expressionist art are valuable prompts for writing about dreams. Artists such as Salvador Dali and René Magritte mined their dreams for images, and works by these artists, as well M. C. Escher, Frida Kahlo, and Vasily Kandinsky, lend themselves to writing a dream poem suggested by art. ROW images are another good source of visual prompts. Locate them in *River of Words: Young Poets and Artists on the Nature of Things* or online at www.riverofwords.org.

ROW TIE-IN

"Circles," 73; "The Simple Life," 196; "Heaven's Truth," 197

Performance poet Bonny "Bonfire" McDonald developed this activity.

ACTIVITY 10

AT THE FEET
OF MASTERS

Writers grow by reading widely and apprenticing themselves to other writers. Texts become powerful teachers. The lessons in this activity draw from the work of masters, professional poets, but they also point the way to learning from peers. The sample student poems and River of Words tie-in poems can serve as accessible mentor texts for students.

LESSON 1

AN INVITATION TO EXPERIENCE NATURE

MATERIALS

- ~ transparency or handouts of “Summons” by Robert Francis
- ~ transparencies or handouts of ROW tie-in poems

PROCEDURE

Ask students to recall a time someone (a parent, grandparent, sibling, friend, teacher) showed them something wonderful in nature, something they hadn’t really seen or noticed before. It might have been a spider weaving its web, a meteor shower, trees after an ice storm, or fog on a lake, for example. Tell a personal anecdote about that kind of experience as a prelude to reading and discussing “Summons.”

Afterward, help students brainstorm experiences to write about, and have them briefly discuss one experience with a partner. Partners should ask each other questions to elicit detailed memories. They can use journalists’ questions (*who, what, when, where, why, how*) to prompt each other for elaboration. The paired discussions serve as prewriting that leads into individual writing.

As students write, invite them to try some of Francis’s structures. Underline imperatives, such as *keep, come, bang, stomp*, and help them to see that the poem is a series of twelve sentences written as commands with a concluding personal statement. Circle the conjunctions *or* and *and*, used to vary the rhythm of the imperatives. Suggest they play with using structures such as “or if . . .,” “not only . . . but,” and others to keep the poem moving.

VARIATIONS

- ~ Children’s picture books, such as *Fireflies* by Julie Brinckloe and *Owl Moon* by Jane Yolen, pair well with “Summons.” They can be used to help prime students of all ages to write about memorable nature experiences.

ROW TIE-IN

“Return,” 68; “Pulling Life Onward,” 147; “The Evening Creek,” 172; “Sunday Afternoon,” 254



LESSON 2

IN FLOW—WRITING ABOUT WATERSHEDS

MATERIALS

- ~ transparency or handouts of “Spring Rain” by Robert Hass
- ~ handouts of ROW tie-in poems
- ~ maps, field guides, nature resources
- ~ transparency or copies of “A Handful of Revision Strategies” (Handout 1)

PROCEDURE

Ask students to read “Spring Rain” silently. Then ask them if they need any words or phrases defined. After multiple readings, discuss the flow of the poem, from Pacific storm to rain over the Sierras, to snowmelt in Dead Man’s Creek, through various bodies of water to the San Francisco Bay salt marshes. On its path, water sustains plants and animals, interdependent as gray jays and larkspurs, fragile and fleeting as the beauty of flowers in a vase on the table.

To use this poem as a mentor text, lead students through guided writing; that is, have students jot lists or freewrite as you ask questions, one at a time, allowing writing time for each one.

Prompts for the Teacher:

- ~ Choose a place (a stream, lake, river, ocean, pool . . .) that means something to you. Think about an experience you’ve had there. Write a little about where and when that was.
- ~ What details do you remember about that time? Jot as many as you can.
- ~ Did you visit it in more than one season? What differences do you remember in your visits?
- ~ Where did the water in your pond, creek, pool come from? Just guess. We can verify your guess later. Where did it originate? What route did it take to get to your lake or ocean or pool?
- ~ What plants or animals live in your special place? List as many as you remember.
- ~ What kinds of human activity does this body of water see or might it have seen? (Think historically as well as currently).
- ~ What’s something about this body of water you think no one would notice but you?
- ~ What role does it play or has it played in your life?



Ask students to underline and share the most interesting parts of their work with a partner or small group.

To expand this lesson, revisit “Spring Rain,” and ask students to identify specific names of things. Hass, for example, writes of marmots, gray jays, penstemon, and poppies. He talks about the Sierras, Sonora Pass, and the San Joaquin. Distribute maps, field guides, and other nature resources for students to consult during writing time. Help students to use resources to locate their body of water and their watershed. Invite them to research names for flora and fauna, geographical and geophysical features. Even if this research doesn’t find its way into the polished piece, it will still inform their writing. See “A Handful of Revision Strategies” (Handout 1) for guidance in shaping poems from guided writing and freewriting.

VARIATIONS

- ~ Any of the ROW tie-in poems make good model texts for this exercise. Students can benefit from reading peer models and noting other ways of approaching their subject. Suggest students read for ideas and images that interest them, then use those to jump-start additional freewriting.
- ~ Ask students to visit a favorite place at different times of day, during different kinds of weather, or different seasons, and write about how their experience of that place changes.

ROW TIE-IN

“Picture This,” 84; “Amazon Slough Watershed,” 86; “The Deschutes River,” 96; “In the West,” 124; “History of a Cornfield,” 140; “River Histories,” 222; “Watershed Life,” 268

LESSON 3

FAMILIAR GROUND—WRITING ABOUT HOME

MATERIALS

- ~ transparency or handouts of “Eating Together” by Li-Young Lee
- ~ transparency or handouts of sample student poem (Handout 2)

PROCEDURE

This guided writing exercise is based on a piece by Indonesian poet Li-Young Lee. To get students to write about a special time around a table, use the suggested prompts below, pausing after each one for a minute or two so that students can jot down their thoughts. When most of the pens stop, move to the next prompt.

**Prompts for Teacher Script**

- ~ Think about a gathering of family or close friends that involves cooking food.
- ~ As you picture this gathering, concentrate on what is cooking—a special dish on the stove, in the oven, or on the grill. What does it look like? Smell like? What kind of pan or dish is it in? Write a little about that.
- ~ What is the food “doing”? Can you think of vivid verbs to describe it, like *sizzling* or *sautéing*?
- ~ Can you name some other ingredients involved in the preparation of this dish? Be as specific as you can—*pepper* might be *green bell pepper* or *spice* might be *cinnamon* or *oregano*.
- ~ Who is going to eat this meal? Name them; perhaps sketch them.
- ~ Where will they sit to eat? What is the occasion?
- ~ Now zoom in on one person at the table. Take a minute to observe this person in your imagination. Describe the way he/she is eating the food, interacting (or not) with others.
- ~ Think about why this person is special to you. Write something about that.
- ~ Say why this meal or this occasion is meaningful to the group.

Now read and discuss Li-Young Lee’s food poem, “Eating Together.” The last line suggests the poem is about something deeper than a shared family meal. Invite students to speculate about the meaning of the last line. Then share a student model or two. Ask students to read through their notes and see if they can write their own “food poem.” Monitor for awhile; help if anyone is “stuck.” Then sit down and work on your own food poem.

VARIATIONS

- ~ Writing about the natural world can include poetry that foregrounds human relationships in a natural setting. Duplicate suggested ROW tie-in poems and have students read around or browse them until they find one to use as a mentor text. They can use “Working With a Mentor Text” (Handout 3) to record their notes before writing their own poem. This graphic organizer helps students pay attention to texts they admire and would like to emulate.

Before asking students to work independently, scaffold for them by teaching some of the “Areas of Investigation” in mini-lessons, using touchstone texts. Once students understand how to respond to the



questions, they could work in pairs or groups to jigsaw their thoughts. To avoid analysis overload, encourage students to narrow their focus to a few areas.

ROW TIE-IN

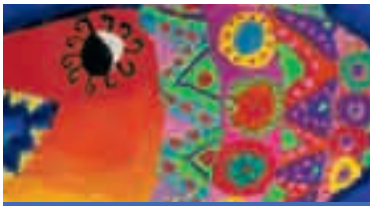
Poems about family, about sharing a meal: “Family,” 63; “Tree,” 65; “August,” 66; “Shrimping,” 246

Poems that focus on relationships: “The Millionth Circle,” 51; “Natural Selection or: How Dan McLane Was Nearly Lost Forever,” 114; “Belting Broadway,” 149; “dogsweetdog,” 163; “Roads,” 166; “A Rain of You,” 186; “To My Father,” 206; “Flowing into the river one day,” 216; “Gutter Duty,” 218; “Chlorination,” 230; “Submerged,” 244; “At Centennial Olympic Park,” 260



HANDOUTS





SAMPLE STUDENT POEMS

ACTIVITY 1

LISTS AND LITANIES

HANDOUT 1

COMFORTING THINGS

The sound of rain on a tin roof
 lilies wet with dew
 the smell of honeysuckle at daybreak
 a cup of warm cocoa on a winter's eve
 the scent of lavender on my sister
 the taste of sticky maple syrup
 mixed with slowly melting chocolate chips
 on a Sunday morning pancake

~ Ashley Kimbrell

LOUISIANA SUMMER LASTS

through
 the drone of lawn mowers from distant yards in the early morning before it
 gets too hot
 birds chitting from somewhere up in the tall pines
 rivulets of sweat trickling down your back
 mirages dancing at the end of the street
 summer rain, cooling things down and then steaming things up
 fire ants, chiggers, poison ivy, and water moccasins, threatening to sabotage
 your contentment
 snow cone stands offering temporary relief with flavors like Silver Fox,
 Dragon Blood, Blue Eagle, and Pink Flamingo.
 little kids selling lemonade in plastic pitchers on the end of the driveway
 trucks parked on service roads, tempting passers-by with watermelons and
 home-grown tomatoes
 shorts and flip-flops from March 'til December
 Louisiana summer lasts

~ Class collaborative poem arranged by Victoria Hall and Michael Crippen



SAMPLE STUDENT POEM

ACTIVITY 2

SHOUT OUT

HANDOUT 1

IMMORTALITY

This is a toast
 to youth and summer time
 the Rolling Stones with the windows rolled down
 to weather too hot for shoes, and cursing the broken A/C
 To mud on freshly washed Chucks, to exploration
 To Phillip explaining the ins and outs of bombs to the A-Day lunch crew,
 To the boy who wears his shorts in thirty-three degree weather,
 to cafeteria art!
 To laughing at the same old cheesy jokes
 To Brand New, the Beatles, Blink 182 and Sublime
 To the Art Walk in June and July and August
 To dancing with J-hop just because it's fun
 To Le Ranger, and Lee, for writing down instructions for how to drive
 a standard so I would finally get it
 To angst, to Holden Caulfield, to idealists
 To the thirty-three-year old Chick-Fil-A employee who thinks sticking it
 to the man still involves working at a fast food joint
 To hippie skirts and pictures, to coffee runs and flip flops in December
 To driving home past curfew, listening to Dashboard
 and laughing at our
 immortality
 to loving life because you have time to enjoy it
 This is a toast to Youth

~ *Emily Touchet*



SAMPLE STUDENT POEM

ACTIVITY 2

SHOUT OUT

HANDOUT 2

SHOUT OUT

Here's to the man in the subway station
still playing his guitar.

Here's to the people who will never
give up: cancer survivors, cast-aways,
and the security guard on a never-ending shift at Winn Dixie.

Here's to the men and women fighting
an unjust war.

Here's to YOU reading and listening
to me right now.

Give out to firemen, lawyers, and
the little guy stocking shelves at 7-11.

Here's to education and to the hole it leaves
in your parents' pockets.

Give out to air traffic controllers, mail people,
and the Easter bunny.

Here's to looking forward, and never
looking back.

Here's to "helping me help you"

Here's to building a brighter future
with what little we have

Give out to the hippies and the clowns and the
person who isn't ever heard.

~ Casey Hawkland



POEM TO "TRANSLATE"

ACTIVITY 3

IN TRANSLATION

HANDOUT 1

QUANDO FRA L'ALTRE DONNE AD ORA AD ORA

Quando fra l'altre donne ad ora ad ora
 Amor vien nel bel viso di costei,
 quanto ciascuna è men bella di lei
 tanto cresce 'l desio che m'innamora.
 I' benedico il loco e 'l tempo et l'ora
 che sí alto miraron gli occhi mei,
 et dico: Anima, assai ringratiar dêi
 che fosti a tanto honor degnata allora.
 Da lei ti vèn l'amoroso pensiero,
 che mentre 'l segui al sommo ben t'invia,
 pocho prezando quel ch'ogni huom desia;
 da lei vien l'animosa leggiadria
 ch'al ciel ti scorge per destro sentero,
 sí ch'í' vo già de la speranza altero.

~ Francesco Petrarca

STUDENT "TRANSLATION"

NOSTALGIA

Remember the fragile woman who could speak and sing
 Spinning tales of love out over the sea
 Quanto Ciascuna was her lover
 Whom she stood with under that crescent moon

~ Andrew Nesbit



MODELS OF “TRANSLATIONS” FROM WORKS IN OTHER LANGUAGES

ACTIVITY 3
IN TRANSLATION
HANDOUT 2

MUSIC

Thanks, violins
for the solid arpeggio,
for the musical sonnets
and the dark blue notes
that fill the air.

~ *Evan Anderson*
(a translation of a stanza from Pablo Neruda’s
“The Wind and the Bells”)

TRANSLATION

Why is it an obligation
to hide in the winter
to dream under blankets
the cruel wind howling
the snow falling
blowing in dreams
of the cold, of you,
of what is past . . .

~ *Emily Creed*
(a translation of a stanza from Pablo Neruda’s
“The Wind and the Bells”)



ACTIVITY 4
 SENSES AND
 SENSIBILITY
 HANDOUT 1

LESSON 1: WRITING TO MUSIC

SAMPLE STUDENT POEMS

BELLE RIVE

Moving with a delicacy
 that leaves nothing but desire in its wake
 like a dancer at home on stage
 flowing through motions forever repeated but never rivaled
 flowing toward sunset
 capturing anything and everything,
 company on its never-ending journey
 reflecting the envy of the birds in its warm waters
 balancing perfection and chaos

~ Kelsie Mumphrey

RIVER

Jumping, diving, flipping, spinning
 deeper and deeper I swim
 searching for something
 in the muddy waters
 winding, meandering, cascading
 crystal clear, turquoise, aqua, rootbeer
 colors of rivers
 flooding my mind
 rivulets and memories
 circling out
 into wide open space

~ Jeffrey Johnston



LESSON 2: WRITING TO ART

SAMPLE STUDENT POEMS

ACTIVITY 4

SENSES AND

SENSIBILITY

HANDOUT 2

TAOS PUEBLO

From afar
squares and rectangles
big and small
blue and orange
lines dancing
playing with perception

~ Jeffrey Johnson

After "Taos Pueblo" by Emil Bistman

BANANA LEAF BASKET

wrinkled hands move slowly
memory calls them to weave in and out
the flies find remnants of something they need
and we find
just what she wanted
curve in and out
hold on to what you carry
my banana leaf basket
will sit on her table
it asks for my *pesos*
the flies ask for fruit
the old man asks for more
a young girl's cheek for a banana leaf basket
a fair trade
soft trade
for the old man and the flies
the memory of sweetness is all that's left
of the banana leaf basket

~ Nancy McDonald

After a magazine photograph



LESSON 3: WRITING WITH ARTIFACTS

SAMPLE STUDENT POEMS

ACTIVITY 4

SENSES AND

SENSIBILITY

HANDOUT 3

When I go inside my crystal crater
 I peer into its iridescence,
 expecting magical charms
 and runic inscriptions
 but when I go inside
 I find a tiny kitchen, and
 a pot of soup (root vegetables and herbs)
 simmering atop a blazing wood stove
 waiting for the family to return
 from their winter walk

~ Zora Zen Ward
 with help from her grandmother

GARGOYLING

dress ragged
 wriggle your way to the grey place
 where the old rock gnarls its face
 pock-marked with cretaceous age
 where it scrawls sharp
 jags up from muck and clay
 invites moss and snakes
 moves shadows
 hides caves

don't talk
 climb right to the top
 ripe cave-rot will cling to your socks
 crawl through crevice and crack
 to the spot where the song of the falls
 rebounds off rock walls

breathe slow
 suck the cold through your toes
 now stick out your tongue
 now turn to stone

~ Bonny "Bonfire" McDonald



ACTIVITY 4

SENSES AND

SENSIBILITY

HANDOUT 4

LESSON 4: WRITING FROM FILM

SAMPLE STUDENT POEM

CLASS POEM FROM *KOYAANISQATSI*

(Koyaanisqatsi is a Hopi word meaning "life out of balance.")

This is the way the world evolves:
creation then destruction

man-made colors
plastered into the earth—
indelible destruction

demented clouds
pour out acid rain
signifying the beginning
of the end

Sounds of shattered glass pierce the air
mountains are purged
green is trampled
poverty and sadness reign

humans move in circles
on concrete paths
mocking nature's innocence

earth exudes its misty breath
a blanket of white clouds flows beneath the sun,
performs a dance
and sinks
into the waves of the sea
as machines claw the earth's epidermis

the pale yellow moon
glides through the black city night
keeping monsters at bay

This is the way the world evolves:
creation then destruction

~ Arranged by Casey Hawkland

FIRST LINES FROM POETS

ACTIVITY 5

JUMP-START

POETRY

HANDOUT 1

Sunset runs in a seam
from "Ornamental Sketch with Verbs" by May Swenson

The voice of the last cricket
from "Splinter" by Carl Sandburg

A touch of cold in the autumn night
from "Autumn" by T. E. Hulme

Dark brown is the river
from "Where Go the Boats" by Robert Louis Stevenson

I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions.
from "Mirror" by Sylvia Plath

We came to the edge of the forest where one goes
from Inferno, Canto XIV by Dante Alighieri, translated by John Ciardi

I have sown beside all waters in my day
from "A Black Man Talks of Reaping" by Arna Bontemps

We were tired. We were very merry—
from "Recuerdo" by Edna St. Vincent Millay

Remember the sky that you were born under
from "Remember" by Joy Harjo

I have been listening, for years now
from "Vocation" by Denise Levertov

A light exists in spring
from "A Light Exists in Spring" by Emily Dickinson

Nothing is ever still
from "Undertow" by John Montague

Ah to be alive
from "For All" by Gary Snyder

JUMP-START POETRY LINES FROM RIVER OF WORDS POEMS

ACTIVITY 5
 JUMP-START
 POETRY
 HANDOUT 2

I dream in circles if I dream at all
from "Circles" by Anais Koivisto, 73

Then I'll just sit right down
from "Rooflessness" by Parker Shaw, 105

I am curled around wood and air
from "Point of Order" by Zachary England, 112

I was born in the belly of that river
from "Davidson Creek" by Elizabeth Clark, 145

Think of the mischievous nights
from "Breathing Vermont" by Clarkie Hussey, 156

The woods were alive but silent
from "my woods" by Wyatt Ray, 158

I am here to watch the river
from "Flowing into the river one day" by Elizabeth Clark, 216

We were standing on the hill
from "Natural Selection or: How Dan McLane was Nearly Lost Forever" by Tim Wirkus, 114

Bring me home by moonlit path
from "Return" by Celia La Luz, 68

I must tell you, silence
from "Dear Night," by Sarah Dooley, 226

SAMPLE STUDENT POEMS

ACTIVITY 5

JUMP-START

POETRY

HANDOUT 3

DREAMING

first line from "Circles" by Anais Koivisto

I dream in circles
 Twisting in twirls
 Wrapping curls around clouds
 Never ending and never beginning
 Forever swirling in the sea
 Of my imagination

I dream in stripes
 Slicing through thoughts
 Painting bars on hopes
 Stopping and starting
 Caging delicate desires in the chains
 Of my imagination

I dream in stars
 Turning above trees
 Doting sparkles on the night
 Shining on the possibilities in the tomorrow
 Of my imagination

~ Madeline Maestri

BEWARE

first line from "Circles" by Anais Koivisto

I dream in circles
 The trigonometric unit circle
 sin , cos , tan
 So much work
 //, //2, 3//2, 2//
 The flavor of ω that doesn't come from the oven
 or go well in my stomach
 So much more to be discovered,
 uncovered in each of the 360 degrees
 Square roots and squares
 Opposite over adjacent

BEWARE

Don't get too close
 Or the unit circle will wheel its way into
 Your dreams as well

~ Brehana Hawkins



ACTIVITY 5

JUMP-START

POETRY

HANDOUT 3

THE NIGHTS

first line from "Breathing Vermont" by Clarkie Hussey

Think of the mischievous nights

When friends laugh, bond, and have a good time.

Doorbells ring, paper hangs from trees, tires squeal

When the getaway is better than the job

Those nights when you think any sound could mean trouble

When the woods are alive when most hear silence

Sounds amplified by the dark, the silence, and the brain

When every white car has to be the police


When sirens blocks away must be for you . . .

Once you're back home, safe and comfortable

All you want is to go back out and live

~ Porter Tarlton

PERSONA INTERVIEW



ACTIVITY 6
WHERE YOU STAND
IN RELATION
TO THE HORIZON
HANDOUT 1

- ~ Who are you?
- ~ Describe the place you are in right now.
- ~ List three objects you can reach out and touch right now.
- ~ Describe the quality of light in this place.
- ~ List three tactile things about your own body.
- ~ Describe one thing you ate or drank recently.
- ~ What is something others believe that you do not believe?
- ~ What is something you believe strongly?
- ~ What is something you might want to do right now?
- ~ List two direct quotes that relate to you—things you or someone observing you said.

SAMPLE STUDENT POEMS

ACTIVITY 6

WHERE YOU STAND

IN RELATION

TO THE HORIZON

HANDOUT 2

QUESTION MARK CATERPILLAR

Fate has stamped my coarse chest
 with an incandescent question mark
 I am but inches long
 Yet I can still swallow enough pride to admit
 I don't know all the answers
 Glare at my inquiring tatoo
 or the dagger's protruding red
 where someone else's backbone could be
 And yet, even lacking vertebrae.
 I have more spine and courage than they
 They are so terrified to change
 to alter their lifestyles
 But I am brave enough to morph
 to sink the spikes upon my spine
 and grow into my skin,
 til no one can be harmed
 release my wings,
 and have the courage to fly

~ Betty Vine and Casey Vickers

DEXTER THE CATERPILLAR

On my branch
 Surrounded by dark and gloom
 "Chillaxin'" on my branch
 Friends will be here soon
 Ants below moan and groan
 Sayin' "Things will never change."
 But I have always known
 that in the end
 All you need is a soft leaf
 And a strong friend

~ Betty Vine and Casey Vickers

FLIGHT (WATER STRIDER)

Why wait for the second coming?
 I'm already
 gliding across the pond you think
 he'll walk across when he comes again.
 Want a miracle? Try
 surface tension.

~ Lyn Denby



SAMPLE STUDENT POEM

ACTIVITY 6
WHERE YOU STAND
IN RELATION
TO THE HORIZON
HANDOUT 3

HAMMOCK

Blue summer sky peeks through crisp greening
live oak leaves overhead.

The weatherbeaten treehouse ladder
is my stepping stone
to where my dreams were made
above the hums of washing machines and
childish sing-songs of the ice cream man.

To my right, behind overgrown azalea bushes
old clapboard looks at me
through peeling pink paint.

My soft hands knead the rough burlap
as I wonder how my dad felt, sitting on this same spot
a week ago
in the untouched rain forest of Venezuela
where crocodile, not man, reigns
and the roars of jaguars at midnight
made him shrink under his plaid cotton sheets
reminding him of just how small we all are...

The *clap clap* of the screen door pulls me from my daydreams.

~ Lauren Nyman



HIKE AND WRITE

ACTIVITY 7

HAIKU HIKE

HANDOUT 1

CHARACTER TRAITS OF HAIKU

- ~ traditional Japanese verse form (twelfth century)
- ~ “one breath” verse form
- ~ counts syllables:
 - 5
 - 7
 - 5
- ~ Paints a picture followed by a sudden flash of insight
- ~ Presents a scene from nature and draws a conclusion
- ~ Sometimes leaves it up to the reader to fill in the meaning or draw the conclusion

Grasshopper jumping
over dew-studded grasses:
joy overwhelming

~ *Marylyn Miller*

- ~ Haiku uses specific words and images : “what,” “where,” and “when”

THE FOREST'S HAIKU

Walking the deer path
Milkweed seeds catch in my hair
Eight quail in bramble

~ *Ben Santos, ROW*

- ~ Sometimes haiku compares

HIGHLAND SPRING

Winking water squeals
Rinsing pebbles' dirty faces,
Reflecting horizon

~ *Ruth Warren*



ACTIVITY 7

HAIKU HIKE

HANDOUT 1

- ~ Sometimes haiku uses a touch of humor

LUCKY

Osprey swoops downward
 Brook trout leaps skyward, airborne—
 Lucky day for one

~ *Clay McMullen, ROW*

- ~ Haiku makes us think

I.
 Why don't the fish drown!?
 Incessantly they circle
 the circular bowl.

VI.
 Tell me, what do you
 think amuses a fish? No,
 no, I've tried juggling.

~ *Maddy Johnson, ROW*

YOUR TURN!

- ~ Nature hike
- ~ Sit and stare
- ~ Think, draw, write
- ~ Back to room to tweak and share



REVISION STRATEGIES

ACTIVITY 7

HAIKU HIKE

HANDOUT 2

HOW TO REVISE YOUR HAIKU (OR ANYTHING ELSE)

1. Omit extra words (articles, repeated words, words you could live without).
2. Name a thing or two, using a specific term (*heron* instead of *bird*; *maple* instead of *tree*).
3. Change verbs from vague to vivid (*plunges* instead of *goes into*, *emerges* instead of *comes out*).
4. Spiff up your wording. Watch out for clichés, adjectives and adverbs (like *beautiful* or *quickly*) that *tell* rather than *show* the reader. Try to let your nouns and verbs do the work.
5. Think of a short, striking title.

SAMPLE HAIKU FOR REVISION

The trees sway, the red bird sings
 the water flows, and leaves turn green,
 but trees fall, the cars honk, and the garbage smells



SAMPLE STUDENT POEMS

ACTIVITY 7

HAIKU HIKE

HANDOUT 3

RENGA

Across the mountaintops
rain clouds move in
crashing against the rocks

Sand on the beach, white as pearls:
the ocean looks just like the sky

Wind howls
tree branches bend
like rubber bands

On land, chaos reigns
debris is flying everywhere

~ Arranged by Maggie Gladden

SUMMER DAY

A chill breeze blows
odd for a summer day
strange southern weather

the wind blows the fields
green currents on the ground

Grass reaches up
stretching, grabbing at the sky
growing until cut

Look closer—a whole world beneath it—
everything is moving

~ Arranged by Chris Akers



SAMPLE STUDENT POEMS

ACTIVITY 8

BOOK OF QUESTIONS

HANDOUT 1

QUESTIONS ABOUT TREES

What would the brown leaves beneath the tree
say to the magnolia blossom?

How long will roots cling
to the earth and
do the branches of a tree
reach for heaven?

What would the leaves give
to trade places with the wind?

What do you call the spaces
between shadows?

~ *Group poem arranged by Ally Johnson*

¿de dónde la luna oculta en la selva?
¿las nubes hablan en trueno o por el viento?

¿quién es el pájaro más ruidoso, y por qué?
¿cuándo de la noche el mar dice la verdad?

where does the moon hide in the jungle?
do clouds speak in thunder or by wind?

who is the loudest bird, and why?
what time of night does the sea tell the truth?

~ *Bonny "Bonfire" McDonald*



MODEL POEM

ACTIVITY 9

DREAM SENSE

HANDOUT 1

**SINCE YOU CANNOT REMEMBER YOUR DREAMS,
I HAVE BEGUN LISTENING IN**

last night—
i recall only landscape and a feeling in the mouth
dry shrubs and wide sky
orange light
iron in the back of the throat
tongue fur or a taste of feathers

the night before—
sky so dark it's purple-black
white clouds looking painted-in
you uproot huge carrots
arms length to carefully smell the holes they leave
sweet sweat of dark earth
you are full but hungry

a nightmare—
your third grade teacher nurses you
while you are very sick
she brings you tea
you notice her shoes
gold and pointy, too high and tight
on her white feet
she slow-crawls on top of you to
press a dictionary into your face
all your skin is gooseflesh
you think but i wanted to wear my
baseball clothes in my coffin

a nightmare on another night—
the moon passes so close to your window
its smell wakes you up
it is liquid, you cup your hands to catch the drips
the silvery stuff turns to music
it spills on the floor, dries up, is lost



ACTIVITY 9

DREAM SENSE

HANDOUT 1

one that returns—
 you are sitting on your grandfather's roof
 in a soft warm july rain
 the roof steams
 you are wet and somber
 and soaked in tears no one notices
 you lick your hands with relish

your dreams are filled with water and light
 motifs of tongue and sky
 in them, you never eat or fly
 and you lose music through cracks in the floor
 you watch songs
 spiral into silences
 of mud and shadow

i'm sorry—
 perhaps you do not want
 to remember

~ *Bonny "Bonfire" McDonald*



SAMPLE STUDENT POEM

ACTIVITY 9

DREAM SENSE

HANDOUT 2

CHASING YOUR DREAM

You're running in a pitch black forest
 You are chasing a faceless person
 As you run, a mirror appears in front of you and shatters

You walk into a clothing store
 A clerk walks up
 She has a distorted smile
 She holds up a beautiful sari
 It catches fire and turns into ash
 the ash falls on the floor
 It turns into a black power fist
 The ash spins around you
 It tries to go down your throat
 You disappear

You reappear in front of an Indian castle
 You're the princess
 African authorities walk in and try to take you away
 They say you belong with them
 You run

You're in a room
 There are girls with dots on their foreheads on one side
 And people wearing dashikis on the other
 They make you stand in the middle
 You want to go to one side, but your body is paralyzed

Now you're back in that same forest
 Chasing something again
 It's your soul

~ Valerie Milton



ACTIVITY 10
AT THE FEET
OF MASTERS
HANDOUT 1

A HANDFUL OF REVISION STRATEGIES

GETTING STARTED

Students often mistake editing for revision. They're ready to put finishing touches on an undeveloped, unexamined first draft. With guidance and practice, though, students see revision as an opportunity to view their work with a different lens, a looking-for-promising-possibilities lens. They develop a sensitive ergometer, or facility for finding energy and interest in their writing, and use those words, phrases, sentences, or passages to fuel additional writing.

The first three strategies help students re-enter their work and explore ideas, language, and structures before deciding their content is set. When a student is invested in a piece and shows ownership by wanting to present it at its best, it's time for strategy five—editing. Students can seek feedback from you or peers at any point in the process, but many need it when they're wrestling with content, as well as when they're pretty settled on their piece.

We have the most success when we treat revision as a guided process, much like guided writing, with chunks of time for tinkering. Revision sessions are a little loose. The teacher presents one strategy at a time, and students zone in and out, working on their own issues, perhaps thumbing through references to find the name of a bird or flower, or searching for a mentor text to help shape their poem.

STRATEGIES

1. Rereading your own work

- ~ marking strong words, lines, passages
- ~ combining your strongest lines and passages

Look over a freewrite (or several of them) for truthful sentences, key lines, and words that jump out. Perhaps use colored pencils or highlighters to mark passages. Pencil is fine, too. Continue writing from places that interest you. Paying attention to your most powerful words and ideas may take your writing in a different direction, helping you clarify what you'd really like to write about.

2. Playing with words

- ~ from references for specific names for things or places
- ~ from class lexicon or word lists
- ~ from dictionary or thesaurus

Pull and play with words to energize your writing. Aim for strong verbs, specific nouns, and surprising language. Look for where associations phrased as metaphors or similes will build images for your readers.



ACTIVITY 10
AT THE FEET
OF MASTERS
HANDOUT 1

3. Exploring structures

- ~ imitating the form or language structures of an admired poem
- ~ shaping and laying out the poem, saying the poem aloud, listening for your breaths, your pauses

Focused reading of mentor texts and reading your own work aloud will help shape writing into poetry.

For tips on marking lines for layout, see “Revision Strategy” (Activity 1, Lesson 2 and Activity 4, Lesson 1). For a graphic organizer to assist with studying a poem’s craft, see “Variations” (Activity 10, Lesson 3) and “Working with a Mentor Text” (Activity 10, Handout 3).

4. Getting feedback

- ~ asking a peer which images, lines, or words stuck with them; what they would like to hear more of; what was confusing
- ~ using response circles for detailed, explicit comments

5. Going beyond revision

- ~ checking for targeted errors
- ~ masking

Using a list of skills you are focusing on, examine your writing one skill at a time. For example, you might read once for parallel structure, a second time for ineffective repetitions, a third time for punctuation, and a final time for spelling.

If you’re editing your draft without benefit of a spell check program, use an index card to “mask” or cover your text so you view one line of writing at a time. Start reading your paper from the bottom, and read from right to left. Misspelled words are more likely to stand out with this kind of reading. Circle any word that looks as though it might be misspelled. Then use a resource to check the spelling of those words you’ve identified.

PARTING WORDS

Once students have gone through several revision sessions, they will need less support. Teachers can post and refer to the strategies, and students will understand the terminology as code for a more extensive activity. Teacher and students share a work ethos after a few of these sessions that can be referenced for what good work energy feels like in the room—purposeful and confident.



SAMPLE STUDENT POEMS

ACTIVITY 10

AT THE FEET

OF MASTERS

HANDOUT 2

HUNTING CAMP

From the stove comes the bacon—
 from the oven, the biscuits.
 We sit down to eat. The food
 is ceremoniously passed around,
 a ritual before the day's hunt.
 As I chew on some bacon,
 I peer out through the morning mists
 into the dark woods
 where the test will begin.

~ Ryan Wallis

SUPPER ON THE SCREENED PORCH

On the table are the steamed shrimp,
 coated with salt and cayenne,
 lemon wheels, coriander, and long spirals of sweet, yellow onion.
 We will eat them with a tangy hot sauce for supper,
 sisters, brothers, father, and mother, who will peel
 the shells from their tails,
 gently, the way mother brushes my hair in the evening.
 Then, over a growing mound of shrimp skins, she will cast her net of family stories
 and draw us to her past with words.

~ Harriet Maher

Teacher model written in her middle-school voice



WORKING WITH A MENTOR TEXT

ACTIVITY 10 AT THE FEET OF MASTERS HANDOUT 3

As you study how a poem is crafted, use this graphic organizer to record your thoughts. Select the areas you'd most like to investigate. It's not necessary to complete each column or answer every question. Many of the questions overlap. Concentrate on what stands out to you and try to figure out why and how you can apply what you notice and admire to your own writing.

AREA OF INVESTIGATION	WHAT I NOTICE	NOTES TO SELF: WHAT I CAN USE
<p>Topic, subject, or issue <i>What is this poem about?</i></p>		
<p>Opening lines <i>How does the poet invite you in? What engages your interest?</i></p>		
<p>The narrative or situation <i>What happens? What's the setting? What are the circumstances? Do different parts of the poem address different things?</i></p>		
<p>Structures <i>What types of sentences do you see? How are they put together? What tense is used? Does it change? Are elements repeated?</i></p>		
<p>Word choice and transitions <i>What words stand out? Look hard at nouns and verbs. What words connect the ideas and images or make the poem change direction?</i></p>		



AREA OF INVESTIGATION	WHAT I NOTICE	NOTES TO SELF: WHAT I CAN USE
<p>Images, imagery Which images strike you? Which words and phrases appeal to your senses?</p>		
<p>Simile, metaphor, and symbol What vivid images, striking comparisons, associations, or connections do you notice?</p>		
<p>Alliteration, assonance, consonance, rhyme, onomatopoeia What sounds do you notice the poet working with? What effect do the sounds have on you?</p>		
<p>Rhythm, cadence What can you hear in the arrangement of syllables, the length of the lines, the meter? What effect does the pace of the poem have on you?</p>		
<p>Layout or visual arrangement of lines on the page How does the shape of the poem affect your reading? How does the poet use space to control your breath as you read the poem aloud?</p>		
<p>Closing lines How do you feel at the end of the poem? How did the poet lead you there? What unusual or imaginative insight does the poet present? What thoughts, what theme(s) are you left with?</p>		



FIELD
NOTES

Growing up in the Deep South before air-conditioning, we felt the tug of the natural world around our ankles. Our childhood memories are rich with lightning bug chasing, backyard camping, and bayou wading in a lush, damp dreamscape. We just naturally shared our roads with egrets, our gardens with rabbits, and our porches with snakes.

Our students don't inhabit that world. Going from one climatized space to another, some of them are ambiguous about, even fearful of, the outdoors. Every year, a few more students seem to prefer writing nature observations from the classroom windows to going outside for a close-up. We think it's important to tear down some of the bricks that separate the school-within-walls from the school-without-walls. In the spirit of constructive demolition, we'd like to share a few activities that will help students feel more at home on our home planet.

COLLABORATING WITH COLLEAGUES

Sometimes walls divide language arts and science classrooms (or any other discipline for that matter). Kids get ecstatic when there's crossover from one class to the next. (Wait! You mean there's an application in poetry for binomial nomenclature?) Fanning out curriculum maps and looking for places to connect pays off big in retention of material, transfer of skills, and ultimately, understanding.

INVITING POETS IN

We've linked up with poets at every opportunity, writing grants and bartering gumbo when necessary, to support their efforts. Working with a poet in your own classroom is first-rate professional development. Teachers pick up craft lessons on writing *and* teaching; kids see what the pros do. Writing is a real-world activity.

TOURING CAMPUS OR THE NEIGHBORHOOD WITH A NATURALIST

We invite local naturalists to lead our students on campus flora and fauna hunts. We take notes, sketch, and write. Apprenticing ourselves for an hour or two to a scientist increases observational skills and awareness of the stress humans put on the natural world. On urban campuses like ours, nature has proved astonishingly adaptable.

WRITING *IN-SITU*

We extend the range of our rambles with field trips into less-inhabited natural settings—the Wetlands Center, our state arboretum, the banks of a nearby lake. We write *in-situ*, often in the company of biologists and park rangers. When the school calendar is too crowded to schedule trips during the school day, we offer sign-up Saturday excursions into the wilds.



WRITING IN MUSEUMS

Rural life museums, art museums, natural history museums—venues such as these offer possibilities for enriching curriculum and connecting with other disciplines. Writing in public places is a little tricky, but we're big fans of the advice and thoughtful lessons featured in *Collecting Their Thoughts: Using Museums as Resources for Student Writing*, a Smithsonian Institution publication.

MARATHONS

Dr. Richard Louth, director of the Southeastern Louisiana Writing Project in Hammond, hooked us on marathons years ago. Here's how they work for our students: Choose a locale, say a street downtown. Survey the public places that are conducive to students' writing *in-situ*—pocket parks, museums, or coffee shops, for example. Check with the folks in charge of each venue and explain that students will be writing quietly in groups of two or three for twenty to thirty minutes. In cafés, students will purchase something to buy their time at a table. Teachers supply students with maps indicating writing venues, handouts detailing rules for comportment, plus prompts and model poems to bait the muse.

During the marathon, students walk from one writing venue to another, moving on if they notice a group already has "write of way." Everyone meets back at an agreed upon time and place for a read-around. About two hours generally is sufficient for a student marathon.

Caveat: It's absolutely essential to secure consent and good will from proprietors in advance. We organize marathons for dedicated student writers and their parents.

WRITING RETREATS

It's probably the best thing we do, certainly the most fun and exhausting, anyway. But every year teachers across our district organize a writing camp-out where we ask kids to unplug and tune-in to nature. We call it the Dead (of Winter) Poets Society because it's held during our brief, mosquito-free cold season. Teachers prepare their best poetry lessons; we invite poets and naturalists and head for a weekend in the woods with teens and tons of food. We publish a chapbook that includes writing from everyone—teachers, students, and guests. Many of our campers end up submitting their work to ROW.



USEFUL
RESOURCES FOR
TEACHING POETRY
AND WRITING

Atwell, Nancie. *Naming the World: A Year of Poems and Lessons*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2005.

———. *Lessons That Change Writers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002.

Collecting Their Thoughts: Using Museums as Resources for Writing. Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Center for Education and Museum Studies, 1995. Now available as lessons on the Web at http://www.smithsonianeducation.org/educators/lesson_plans/language_arts.html

Elbow, Peter. *Writing Without Teachers*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Ferra, Lorraine and Diane Boardman. *A Crow Doesn't Need a Shadow: A Guide to Writing Poetry From Nature*. Layton, UT: Gibbs Smith, 1994.

Fletcher, Ralph. *Poetry Matters: Writing a Poem From the Inside Out*. New York: Harper Trophy, 2002.

Goldberg, Natalie. *Writing Down the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within*. Boston: Shambhala, 1986.

Heard, Georgia. *Awakening the Heart: Exploring Poetry in Elementary and Middle School*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998.

———. *For the Good of the Earth and Sun: Teaching Poetry*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1989.

———. *The Revision Toolbox: Teaching Techniques That Work*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002.

Janezko, Paul. *How to Write Poetry Scholastic Guides*. New York: Scholastic Reference, 2001.

Koch, Kenneth. *Wishes, Lies, and Dreams: Teaching Children to Write Poetry*. New York: Harper Paperbacks, 1999.

———. *Rose, Where Did You Get That Red: Teaching Great Poetry to Children*. New York: Vintage, 1990.

Lyne, Sandford. *Writing Poetry From the Inside Out*. Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, 2007.

McEwen, Christian and Mark Statman, editors. *The Alphabet of the Trees: A Guide to Nature Writing*. New York: Teachers & Writers Collaborative, 2007.

Michael, Pamela, editor. *River of Words Educator's Guide*. Available on the Web at <http://www.riverofwords.org>



USEFUL RESOURCES

Oliver, Mary. *A Poetry Handbook*. San Diego, CA: Harvest Books, 1994.

Orr, David. *Ecological Literacy: Educating our Children for a Sustainable World*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 2005.

Padgett, Ron, editor. *The Teachers and Writers Handbook of Poetic Forms*. 2d ed. New York: Teachers & Writers Collaborative, 2007.

Sobel, David. *Place-Based Education: Connecting Classrooms & Communities*. 3d ed. Great Barrington, MA: The Orion Society, 2004.

Stafford, Kim. *The Muses Among Us: Eloquent Listening and Other Pleasures of the Writer's Craft*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003.

WEB-ACCESSIBLE RESOURCES

ACADEMY OF AMERICAN POETS—provides audio and text materials, lesson plans, tips, teacher discussion forum, and description of the Poetry Read-a-Thon project. Information available at this Web address: <http://www.poets.org>

ANNENBERG MEDIA—*Voices and Visions*, 13 one-hour programs on as many famous American poets, and teaching materials available at this address: <http://www.learner.org>

KENNEDY CENTER ARTSEGE—the National Arts and Education Network offers standards-based interdisciplinary lessons and materials at this Web address: <http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/>

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS—offers Poetry 180, a poem for each day of the school year, plus webcasts, an archive of readings and interviews, lessons and other resources. Web address: <http://www.loc.gov/poetry/>

THE ORION SOCIETY—valuable resource for place-based education. Its Nature Literacy Series and standards-based curricula and lessons are especially useful. The second volume in the series, *Stories in the Land: A Place-Based Environmental Education Anthology* is available for download. Web address: <http://www.orionsociety.org/>

POETRY FOUNDATION—compendious list of resources, including videos, audio recordings, and podcasts, plus information on the Poetry Outloud national recitation contest. Web address: <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/>



USEFUL RESOURCES

READWRITETHINK—lessons and resources based on the National Standards for English Language Arts and effective practices. Co-sponsored by the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association. Web address: <http://www.readwritethink.org/>

RIVER OF WORDS—tremendous collection of high quality student poetry and art on environmental themes, plus the Watershed Explorers Curriculum, and a bibliography of online environmental resources. With the Library of Congress, annually sponsors the largest international children's art and poetry contest. Web address: <http://www.riverofwords.org>

THINKFINITY—umbrella education site that references standards-based lessons and resources in partnership with such organizations as NCTE, IRA, the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, and the Smithsonian. Web address: <http://www.thinkfinity.org/>

The texts and resources referenced in this guide are easily located using your favorite search engine.