

LESSON 4: WATER POETRY: *RIVER OF WORDS*

Lesson Overview

After the special presenter has visited the class, this post-visit lesson gives students the opportunity to explore what water means to them. Through poetry, the students express thoughts and feelings about the importance of water in the desert. Students will recognize the variety of ways that water affects them and may develop a deeper level of water appreciation and understanding.

Arizona Department of Education Academic Standards

Please refer to the Arizona Department of Education Academic Standards section for the ADE standards addressed by this lesson.

Learning Outcomes

Students will be able to:

- Describe the ways in which water affects their lives and all life in the desert.
- Describe their local environment in vivid, specific language.
- List some of the natural inhabitants of Tucson and the surrounding areas.
- Create similes, metaphors, and/or descriptive words and phrases.
- Revise and edit ideas and language.

Materials

- sample poems, written by other students (provided)
- paper, pencils and/or pens
- chalkboard or white board with writing tools
- “A Word about Form”: The teacher’s mini-guide to poetry forms (provided)

Advance Preparation

- Read through the Suggested Procedure to familiarize yourself with the kinds of questions that prompt poetic brainstorming.
- Have the enclosed poetry samples on hand to share with class.
- Read through “A Word about Form”. Choose one form for the whole class to mimic or allow students to individually select an appropriate form.
- Review River of Words contest materials.

Duration

Total: 1 to 2 class periods

Poetry form discussion and “water-storming”: 30 minutes

Writing and revising poems: 30 minutes or more

Suggested Procedure

Some of these suggestions come from *Life is the Teacher* by Sandford Lyne in The River of Words’ Educator’s Guide. (available on-line at www.riverofwords.org)

1) Share Poetry Examples. Remind students that we live in two worlds – the outer world of the senses (what we can see, touch, taste, smell, hear) and the inner world of thought, emotion, imagination, and memory. One of the reasons

we write poetry is to go into these two worlds and find the places where they overlap. Just as no two people have the same fingerprints, no two people put poems together in the same way. Ask the students to listen for their favorite lines and images as you read one of the sample poems provided.

2) Discuss Poetry Form and Rhythm. Point out to the students that the poem you read does NOT rhyme. Poems do not need to rhyme in order to have rhythm. Such poems are called Free Verse poems (see “A Word about Form”). Discuss the students’ favorite lines and images. Read the poem a second time. Ask the students to pick out the words and sounds that give the poem its rhythm.

3) Make a Storm of Water Words. Beginning is the most difficult part of writing a poem. Create a list of words on the board to help make the river of words flow. IMPORTANT: Instead of writing general poems about water, encourage students to focus on water in their life experience or in real places. Have the students imagine their favorite place in the desert (such as the wash behind grandpa’s house, the yard after it rains). Write some of the students’ favorite places in the middle of the board. Now ask the following questions. Write the responses on the board for students to reference when they write their own poems.

 **What do these places make you think of? How do they make you feel?**

for example: wildflowers in bloom, fishing with my dad, walking with my grandma, swimming with my friends, fearless, free, full of joy, tiny, enormous, excited

 **What kinds of weather come to mind?**

for example: monsoon rains, loud thunder, lightning, hot, lazy sun

 **What animals and plants might live there? Can you name some?**

for example: saguaro cactus, coyote, prickly pear, kit fox, cactus wren, mountain lion, javelina, palo verde, mesquite tree, creosote bush, spadefoot toad, gila monster

 **When is your place quiet? What kind of sounds do you hear in that place?**

for example: early in the morning, after a storm, birds calling, coyotes howling, trees swooshing; when I slap a puddle with my feet, it explodes like firecrackers

4) The Writing Process. Using the Storm of Water Words, and other words they wish, students write their own poems. One easy way to do this is to write it together, line by line. For example, ask students to write the first line of their poem, placing themselves in their favorite place in the desert. Tell the students to add a second line, this time putting in something about the weather. In the next line, tell students to add something about an animal or a plant. Keep going, adding experiences and memories. This process might net this example:

*I am walking down a river of sand
The air is cool on my neck
A hungry fox sleeps in the shade of a mesquite tree,
dreaming of rabbits and rain.*

Some Suggestions:

Particular Poems Pack Power. The best poems often make you feel like you are in a particular place at a particular moment. Remind students not to be afraid to use the names of places, people, animals, and plants. Using more spe-

cific words helps readers share your experience more vividly.

Check the Sensory Circle. After the first draft, ask the students whether they have checked the “sensory circle.” Can you see, hear, taste, smell, and touch the place the poet describes?

Pencil, paper, ACTION! Remind the students that poems do not have to be confined to the descriptive. Some of the best poems tell the story of an event, some even include dialogue. If a student does not know how to begin an action poem, try asking: It is a very hot summer day. Suddenly, it begins to rain. How would you celebrate? What would you do? Who would you be with? What would a rabbit do? A toad?

5) Share the poetry with the class. Students can read their poetry out loud, “publish” a class book of poems, or create a poetry bulletin board accompanied with their artwork.

6) Be a Contest Winner! We encourage you to submit the students’ poetry to Tucson’s River of Words Youth Poetry and Art Contest. For more info, please contact Wendy Burroughs at 877-6122 or wburroughs@parks.co.pima.az.us.

A Word about Form

The following explanations are adapted from *The Handbook of Poetic Forms*, Ron Padgett, Ed. The Teachers & Writers Collaborative. NY: 2000.

Free Verse

Free verse is the name given to lines of poetry that are written without rules. All of the poems on the sample pages are Free Verse poems. These poems do not rhyme, nor do they have a regular beat. They are, however, filled with natural sounds and rhythms. Free Verse offers no opportunities for sloppy writing. In fact, it forces the poet to choose his or her words very carefully, and test the shape and sound of each line. One way to begin writing Free Verse is to write a paragraph about your special watery place and then break it up into lines afterwards.

Cinquain

The Cinquain poem (‘sing-cane’) describes a natural place or object in five lines.

Line 1) Name your place/object in one word.

Line 2) Write two descriptive words about your object.

Line 3) Write three action words about your object.

Line 4) In four or five words, describe its relationship to the environment.

Line 5) Sum up your feelings about the object in one word.

example:

*Spring.
deep, liquid
seeps, soothes, releases,
a gift in the desert,
refuge.*

Concrete poem

These poems use space and sound to shape the lines. Poets who use this form want to make their poems not only something to read but also something to look at. One way to write a concrete poem is to first choose a shape (rain drop, river, cloud). Draw the outline of this shape on a piece of paper. Now fill the shape with words and lines that come to you when you think about rain, or swimming, or your favorite place in the desert.

Haiku

In Japan, people used to hold parties called “rengas” and write long poems made up of many short stanzas. The poets took turns writing about experiences or objects in nature. They used very few adjectives, preferring the power of verbs and descriptive nouns. Soon, people considered the short stanzas poems in themselves. They called them Haiku. Haiku captures the essence of a moment. To write a Haiku, write a list of thoughts about a moment in nature. Choose the strongest words that bring that moment alive. Now create three lines; the first and last lines should be a bit shorter than the middle line. Most Haikus follow a syllable pattern of 5, 7, 5. Here is a Haiku written in Spanish:

*El agua
Floata, brilla, burbuja
Se refleja nuestro mar*

Translation: *The water
Floats, shines, bubbles
Our sea is reflected*

River of Words Sample Poems

(These poems were finalists in Tucson’s River of Words contest in previous years.)

RIVER OF HOPE

*I am the Colorado River,
the river that heals the
dry throat of the desert.*

*The river that is clear and
shiny, dark and murky.*

*I am worth gold,
but only to those that treasure me.*

*I reflect beauty,
but only to those that are pure hearted.*

*I have saved many,
but only because they use me respectfully.*

*I make the sound,
the sound that gives courage. In some parts
of me I roar, in others
I just merely trickle.*

*I only exist, because people have
made a difference.*

Gaizka Urreiztieta, age 10
Harelson Elementary School
Teacher: Janet Misiaszek/Peggy Martin

INSIDE A POEM

*Inside a poem, waterfalls are tumbling
And storms are zapping.*

*Inside a poem, lizards are crawling
And fires are roaring.*

*Inside a poem, mountains are growing
And moons are slithering.*

Galen Stewart, age 8
DeGrazia Elementary School
Teacher: Laura Bourguet
Grand Prize Winner
Category 2: Grades 3-6

EL AGUA EN ARIZONA

*El Agua en Arizona
Tan necesaria
Como la luz del sol
Sin agua no podemos vivir
Sin agua pura y cristalina
Podemos Morir*

*El agua que baja
Por las montañas
Que corre por los arroyos
Que corre por los rios
Me siento tan feliz
Donde hay agua
Como en el lago de Monte Limon
Que tan alto y tiene agua*

*Donde hay agua hay vida
Tenemos agua tenemos vida*

Roger Canchola, age 11
Los Ninos Elementary
Teacher: Jim Civetta