
Schoolyard Poetry/Rap

Activity Overview

Students write poetry to express their feelings and experiences in a natural system.

Objectives

Students will:

- Write expressive pieces in response to direct experience.
- Develop writing that expresses creative and aesthetic content.
- Practice observation skills
- Gain knowledge and practice writing different types of poetry.
- Practice the use of poetic devices.

Subjects Covered

Language Arts

Grades

K through 12

Activity Time

Varies, 30 minutes or more

Season

Any

Materials

Outdoor natural space, Notebook, and Pencil

State Standards

Language Arts: B.4.1, B.4.2, B.4.3, B.8.1, B.8.2, B.8.3, B.12.1, B.12.2, B.12.3

Background

Incorporating poetry writing into field experiences and other native garden project activities can provide students with a new perspective on the natural world. Poetry can be a way to enhance observation skills, make personal connections to a subject or understand the subject of the writing more clearly. Insisting that students experiment with verse will help them hone their message and become more clear about exactly what they wish to convey to their reading/listening audience.

Activity Description

Locate yourself in a comfortable spot in a natural area.

Your might find yourself more inspired by walking slowly, sitting still or by trying both. Consider what you are seeing, feeling, hearing, smelling, thinking and observing. Pick one of the poetry styles described in the following pages and try to convey something about what you are experiencing.

Haiku

An ancient poetry form from Japan built on three lines using 17 syllables, usually in a 5-7-5 pattern. (Example from Kathleen Morgan, teacher, Verona Middle School)

Line 1: 5 syllables

Line 2: 7 syllables

Line 3: 5 syllables

Indian Grass
Once upon a time
you brushed chins with buffalo.
come, tickle mine now.

Cinquian (Example for Sylvia Marek, UW- Arboretum Naturalist)

Line 1: title

Line 2: description of title

Line 3: action of title

Line 4: statement or feeling

Line 5: repeated title, synonym, or rename

Feathers
Colorful, Light
Flying, Preening, Fluffing
Wish I could fly
Bird

Noun Verse (Example from Joan Field, teacher, Mendota Elementary School)

Line 1: noun

Line 2: 2 adjectives

Line 3: 2 gerunds (verb ending in "ing")

Line 4: synonym

Leadplant
purple, spiky
growing, stretching
Amorpha canescens

Schoolyard Poetry/Rap (cont.)

Diamonte

Line 1: first noun

Line 2: 2 adjectives

Line 3: 3 verbs

Line 4: 2 words for 1st noun and 2 for 2nd noun

Line 5: Second noun (opposite the first)

Prairie

Hot, multi-colored

Teaming, streaming, dreaming

Wild fired, stately crowned

Woodland

Rap:

Raps are rhymes recited along with a beat or rhythm. The rhymes are commonly arranged in a couplet or quatrain poetry form.

Couplet -Two lines that rhyme, often part of a longer poem.

Quatrain - Four lines that rhyme, often part of a longer poem.

The form of a quatrain will be aabb, abab, abcb, or abba rhyme pattern. The letters that are the same represent which lines should rhyme with each other.

When using couplets line 1 and 2 rhyme and line 3 and 4 can rhyme, but they do not all rhyme together. Try to create the same rhythm in both lines of your couplet when using them in a rap. Couplets can be long or short. To create the same rhythm in rhyming lines make phrases with the same amount of syllables in each line, or drag out some of the syllables in your shorter line to hold more beats than one. Let yourself get creative. Counts will be explained further for more ideas.

Step 1: Think of a story you would like to tell about your topic. Select a few key words you would like to use in your story that are descriptive of the prairie and your experience. Brainstorm and come up with as many words that rhyme with your key words as you can.

Step 2: Create short phrases with one to five words each using the rhyming word last. Keep in mind different goals when creating your phrases. Use names of plants and animals found in the natural habitat. Think about their actions and functions or how other inhabitants of their environment use them. Use your senses to describe sounds, smells, sight and touch to describe. Think about new understandings and overall feeling from your experience. New words that you would like to rhyme with may result from this step. Feel free to brainstorm more rhyming words to work with the ends of some of your new phrases.

Step 3: Mix and match phrases until you find a combination of lyrics you like.

Step 4: Now that you have some of your lyrics it is time to match them with a rhythm. Most raps are based on a 4/4 rhythm. The count would look like this 1,2,3,4. 1,2,3,4..... Each number gets one beat. Within your four count you can come up with many different rhythms. Here are examples of how to add beats to a four count. The numbers still fall on the beat and the symbols and letters will be between so count slowly to start.

Schoolyard Poetry/Rap (cont.)

1...2...3...4 (regular four count)

1, and, 2, and, 3, and, 4 ("and" is a half beat between the beats, called the off beat)

1, eand, 2, eand, 3, eand, 4 (1, eand, 1/4 rest, 2, rest so beat and the half stay in time)

1, enda ,2, eanda, 3 eanda, 4 (one, eanda, two) on the previous rhythm the "a" is the rest)

Mix up different combinations of beats to get different rhythms. Try taping out the rhythms on your knee to see if you like the flow of your new rhythm creation.

Example: (1 and 2 eanda 3, 4) (1 eand 2, 3 eanda 4)

Each syllable in your lyrics can represent a beat to create the flow of your lyrics. The back beat should be made of simple sounds and simple rhythm to keep the four count steady for the rapper.

Example: (1, 2, 3,4) (mm, ba, mm, ba)
(1, 2, 3 and 4) (mm, ba, mm, chi-ba)
(1 & 2, 3 and 4) (mm, chi-ba, mm, mm chi- ba)

Step 5: Put all your work together and perform your own rap song.

Shape Poems

1. Decide the theme you will use for your poem.
2. Pick an image that is symbolic of your poem.
3. Decide whether you want your words to form the outline of the picture or to fill in the image.
4. Sketch the image in dark lines on the page entitled "Native Garden Shape." You will use this page as a guide to see where you need to place your words.
5. Write your poem on the page entitled "Native Garden Shape Poem." If you want your words to follow the outline, turn the paper as you print.
6. There are no poetic rules for your poem; choose any rhyming or metrical form your wish.
7. Write enough words to fill the shape or alter the size of the shape to fit your words.

Schoolyard Poetry/Rap (cont.)

A List of poetic devices that you can use to write your poetry.

Alliteration- The repetition of initial consonant sounds

Allusion- A reference to a well-known person, place, event, literary work, or work of art

Hyperbole- Exaggeration for effect (I'm so hungry I could eat a horse)

Imagery- A word or phrase appealing to the sense of sight, sound, smell, taste, or feel

Metaphor- A figure of speech in which something is described as though it were something else (a heart of stone, a copper sky)

Meter- The rhythmical pattern of a poem

Onomatopoeia- The use of words that imitate sounds (hiss, crash, buzz, ring, jingle)

Personification- Figurative language giving human characteristics to a non-human subject (father time, mother earth)

Repetition- The use, more than once of a sound, word, phrase, sentence, or pattern in poetry

Rhyme- The repetition of sounds at the ends of words.

Simile- A figure of speech making a comparison between two unlike things using like or as (her teeth were like pearls)

Extensions

- Sometimes it is useful for the class to generate a list of nouns, adjectives and verbs that can be used to describe your native garden's plants and animals.
- Encourage students to create a poetry journal for their writings
- Establish a poetry reading circle at your school, or designate a section of your garden as a poetry garden with benches and tables for listening, reading and writing.
- Incorporate poetry writing in any future field trips or restoration projects.
- Rap
- Teach children about how to count rhythms and have a music circle in class using instruments or voices. If there are no instruments have students make their own. (i.e. drums, shakers, sticks)

- Have the music circle provide a back beat for student rap presentations if they have trouble creating one, or use a back beat circle for show and tell or other speaking opportunities that give students a chance to free-style

Additional Resources

- Fleischman, P. (1988). Joyful noise: Poems for two voices. Harper Collins.
- Write a Rap Song: www.Lessonplanspage.com/MusicWriteRapSong68.htm
- Ryder, Joanne. (1985). Inside turtle's shell and other poems from the field. Macmillon Publishing Company.

Assessments

- Describe 2 types of poetry writings and provide an example of each.
- Write a poetry sample indoors before visiting natural area and after visiting natural area. Note differences in writing content and style.
- Student poetry journals can become a portfolio of their writing abilities over time.