

Poetry Project Workshop Activities

by Laurel Nakanishi

National Water Dance has incorporated poetry writing and performance into our outreach plan. Students all over the country will be encouraged to write odes to water, with the guidance of online curriculum resources.

Goals

1. Exposure to creative expression through poetry
2. Awareness of the connections between personal ecosystems and the water cycle (greater ecosystem)
3. Celebration of water and the students' creative work

Curriculum Development

(Note: Because two curricula will be created, one focusing on elementary-aged students and one focusing on middle school-aged students, this process is repeated for each age group)

- Research teaching resources on national poetry databases
- Select example poems from published authors
- Identify and articulate learning outcomes
- Create interactive exercises and games that emphasize close observation and specific description
- Write a concise and clear description of odes, include examples and questions for the interpretation of these examples
- Create a poetic visual description of the water cycle
- Write two prompts for ode creation
- Include instructions for teachers on how to guide students individually
- Devise system for student sharing and feedback
- Teach pilot curriculum at local schools and modify as needed
- Format text to be appropriate for web sharing
- Publish and publicize curriculum on the National Water Dance website

Lesson Plans

Water Ode Lesson Plans – Elementary School

Introduction to Poetry

Begin by discussing students' experience with and perceptions of poetry. I usually ask students: "Who here has read a poem before?" "Who has written a poem before?" "What are poems usually about?" This last question usually elicits responses like: "love, death, feelings, or flowers." Take this time to explain that poems can be about anything: socks, chocolate chip cookies, public restrooms, or a smashed wedding cake on the side of the road. Poets encounter subjects for poems everywhere. I usually go on to explain that poets are people who pay attention to things that others usually ignore.

Activity Option: Three Changes—a Game about Paying Attention

The "Three Changes" game helps students learn to pay attention to details. Begin by choosing one student to model the game with you. Ask the student-volunteer to take a good look at you, noticing and paying attention to all of the details that make up your appearance (you may want to do a little twirl). Then send the student out of the room. Instruct the rest of the class to not make any noise or shout out, because it will ruin the game. Change three things about your appearance (I usually muss up my hair, change my sandals around, or un-zip my jacket). Then invite the student-volunteer back into the room. Instruct the student-volunteer to identify the three changes that you made. (Note: I start off with obvious changes to help the student-volunteer along.)

You can play again with two students (one "changer" and one "guesser"). If a "guesser" gets stuck, I ask a classmate to give a hint that doesn't give the change away (i.e. "What region of her/his body should she pay attention to?"). You can end the game by reiterating that poets pay attention to the world around them, and that good poems include a lot of details.

Activity Option: Hands-On Water Experience

If you have the time, it may be inspiring for students to tactilely explore water forms. You may introduce this activity as an exercise in paying attention.

Here are some different water forms that students could explore:

Dew: Drip water onto leaves or flowers and distribute to students. Observe this "dew" with magnifying glasses. As a class, describe the appearance of the leaf/flower through the dewdrop. *Materials needed: magnifying glasses, spray bottle, water, leaves and flowers.*

Mist: Distribute small mirrors and instruct students to breathe on their mirror to create mist. If small mirrors are not available, bring in one larger mirror and do the activity as a class. Ask students to try to write words on the mirror that describe the mist. *Materials: mirrors.*

Bodies of water: Distribute cups containing a little water to each student. Ask students to pour a little water into their cupped hand. Instruct the students to observe the water with all of their senses (touch, sight, smell, sound, taste). Ask them leading questions to get them thinking poetically. For example, "Imagine that you are holding a tiny lake in your hand. What lives in your lake? Who visits it?" or "What does your water look like? Could it be shining like the scales of a monster? Could it be smooth like the sky without clouds?" *Materials: a cup or pitcher with water.*

Activity Option: Water Cycle Visualization

This visualization is a good way for students to immerse themselves in the water cycle. Distribute small cups of water to each student. Instruct them to take a slow sip of water when you prompt them. Then proceed to read through this visualization script. If you prefer, there is also an audio file with a recording of the visualization instructions that you could play for the students.

Script:

Begin by sitting in a comfortable position. Try to relax your feet... then your legs... then your hands...Relax your arms... and your back... now your neck... and finally your face.

*Take a sip of water.

Pay attention to how the water feels in your mouth and on your tongue. Pay attention the muscles in your throat as you swallow.

*Take another sip of water.

The water you drink was once a river. It was once a cloud. It was once the sea. We'll now trace this water back through the water cycle.

Imagine a cloud, high up in the still blue sky. It drifts slowly in the breeze.

Now go closer. The cloud is made up of mist. Feel the droplets, cool on your face. Let them surround your body. Now you are floating with the cloud.

*Take a sip of water.

More water droplets begin to form around you on the edges of the cloud. They become heavy. The cloud turns thick and grey. Suddenly you are falling with the rain down to the earth. Splash! You hit the ground.

You trickle, gather with the other drops into a little mountain stream. You splish and splash over and around the smooth stones. Above, a bird calls. You are flowing through a forest. Some water is soaked up into the roots of the trees. Some water is drunk by otters and foxes, but you flow on.

*Take a sip of water.

This stream gathers with others and becomes a river. Your waters are deep and muddy. You slow and meander through the flat lands. Boats float on your back, children fish in your shallows. You flow on.

*Take a sip of water.

Then up ahead you see a vast blue plain. You look closer and it's the ocean. The sparkling water stretches for miles and miles. The river is pouring into the sea, brown and blue water mixing and twirling together.

You tumble into the sea, moving out to the deep water. The surface of the water grows warm and evaporates. Once again you are water vapor floating up. Other water droplets join you and you form a cloud. You float above the earth, looking down at all of the lakes, rivers, reservoirs, pools, glaciers, ice cubes, tears, ponds, and cups of water that are also you.

*Take a final sip of water.

Ode Writing

Begin by describing the ode form: odes are poems of praise and celebration. Traditionally odes were dedicated to well-known people, events, or nature. But we know that poems can be about anything. One person who wrote a lot of odes was Pablo Neruda from Chile. Neruda wrote odes to everyday objects because he believed that no one object was more important or carried more value than any other object. A Grecian Urn was no more important than a tomato. A great president was no more important than a pair of socks.

Read "Ode to the Ocean" or "Ode to Rain" (below). It is also helpful to project the poem on the board or hand out copies to each student.

After reading the poem, ask the students what they think. I ask often: "What was your favorite part?" "What images stuck out in your mind?" "Where do you see yourself in the poem?" As the students start to point to specific places in the poem, note how it is a detail, simile, or metaphor. (Note: You may need to define these terms, depending on the age and experience level of the students.)

Writing

Introduce the topic of water by sharing a few facts: 71% of the earth's surface is water. 60-70% of your body is made up of water. Water is everywhere, yet we often overlook it. Take a moment to brainstorm all of the different forms of water. Write these ideas on the board. Encourage students to get creative: bathwater, tears, smog, frozen oceans, steam for a kettle, dishwater, the water in showers, springs, etc.

Then ask students to choose one form of water and write a poem describing it. Encourage specific details (color, size, location, etc.) and comparisons (simile and metaphor).

Poem Sharing

If you have time, collect the poems of the students who would like to share their work. Shuffle the stack of poems three times (ask students to count with you) and whoever is on top is the "winner" and has the opportunity to read their work in front of the class. Encourage applause after the student reads and point out effective uses of simile, metaphor and description.

Thank you to Houston WITS for many of the Ode teaching ideas and to The Poetry Society for suggestions on incorporating sensory explorations of water.

Ode to the Sea
by Pablo Neruda
(translated from the Spanish by Linh Dinh)

Here on the island
the sea
and so much sea
overflowing,
relentless,
it says yes, then no,
then no, no, no,
then yes, in blue,
in foam, with gallops,
it says no, again no.
It cannot stay still,
my name is sea, it repeats
while slamming against rocks
but unable to convince rocks,
then
with seven green tongues
of seven green dogs,
of seven green tigers,
of seven green seas,
it smothers rocks, kisses rocks,

drenches rocks
and slamming its chest,
repeats its name.
O sea, you declare yourself,
O comrade ocean,
don't waste time and water,
don't beat yourself up,
help us,
we are lowly
fishermen,
men of the shore,
we're cold and hungry
and you're the enemy,
don't slam so hard,
don't scream like that,
open your green trunk
and give all of us
on our hands
your silver gifts:
fish every day.

Water Ode Lesson Plans - Middle School

Introduction to Poetry

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Enrichment Option

When talking about diversity of subjects you could mention Japanese haiku poets who wrote about flies, birds, and horses (Issa and Basho come to mind). There are also modern American poets: Kevin Young who wrote about aunties, Lucille Clifton who wrote a homage to her hips and Mary Oliver who wrote a poem set in a public restroom in Singapore.

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This stream gathers with others and becomes a river. Your waters are deep and muddy. You slow and meander through the flat lands. Boats float on your back, children fish in your shallows. You flow on.

*Take a sip of water.

Then up ahead you see a vast blue plain. You look closer and it's the ocean. The sparkling water stretches for miles and miles. The river is pouring into the sea, brown and blue water mixing and twirling together.

You tumble into the sea, moving out to the deep water. The surface of the water grows warm and evaporates. Once again you are water vapor floating up. Other water droplets join you and you form a cloud. You float above the earth, looking down at all of the lakes, rivers, reservoirs, pools, glaciers, ice cubes, tears, ponds, and cups of water that are also you.

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metaphor. (Note: You may need to define these terms, depending on the age and experience level of the students.)

Enrichment Option:

When introducing odes you can explain that traditionally they were written in a strict three-part structure consisting of the strophe, the antistrophe and the epode. Odes originated in ancient Greece and were often accompanied with music. Some of the most famous odes in the English language were written by John Keats, William Wordsworth, W.H. Auden and William Shakespeare.

Pre-Write

Ask students to choose a form of water (ice, lake, rain, cloud, dew, ocean, etc.) and then write a list of descriptions and memories about their form of water. After they are done with their list, ask them to start a new list of similes and metaphors.

Writing

Next, instruct students to choose their best, most resonant images and comparisons then revise them into a list poem. As students revise, encourage them to expand on their original descriptions and comparisons.

Poem Sharing

If you have time, collect the poems of the students who would like to share their work. Shuffle the stack of poems three times (ask students to count with you) and whoever is on top is the “winner” and has the opportunity to read their work in front of the class. Encourage applause after the student reads and point out effective uses of simile, metaphor and description.

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the sea
and so much sea
overflowing,
relentless,
it says yes, then no,
then no, no, no,
then yes, in blue,
in foam, with gallops,

it says no, again no.
It cannot stay still,
my name is sea, it repeats
while slamming against rocks
but unable to convince rocks,
then
with seven green tongues
of seven green dogs,
of seven green tigers,
of seven green seas,
it smothers rocks, kisses rocks,
drenches rocks
and slamming its chest,
repeats its name.
O sea, you declare yourself,
O comrade ocean,
don't waste time and water,
don't beat yourself up,
help us,
we are lowly
fishermen,
men of the shore,
we're cold and hungry
and you're the enemy,
don't slam so hard,
don't scream like that,
open your green trunk
and give all of us
on our hands
your silver gifts:
fish every day.

Created by Laurel Nakanishi

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