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ABSTRACT

This research project studied the effects of using poetry to build community in a diverse third grade classroom. Eight poetry activities were taught twice a week for 6 weeks to a class of 23 students. More than half of the students who took part in this study were English Language Learners and several students had special needs. Poetry brought these students together in their classroom and increased their social relationships inside and outside the classroom. This research project demonstrates how activities, teaching methods, and classroom environments focused on poetry helped build community in a classroom where students were trying to belong. (Contains 25 references and 28 figures representing students poems, poetry writing activity forms, example poems, and survey results. Appendixes contain sociogram data, thank you cards, and a letter to next year's teacher.) (RS)

Running Head: USING POETRY TO BUILD COMMUNITY

Using Poetry to Build Community
in a Diverse Third Grade Classroom

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An action research project submitted in
fulfillment of the requirements of T & L 702

College of Education
Washington State University-Vancouver
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Abstract

This action research project studied the effects of using poetry to build community in a diverse third grade classroom. Eight poetry activities were taught twice a week for six weeks to a class of 23 students. More than half of the students who took part in this study were English Language Learners and several students had special needs. Poetry brought these students together in their classroom and increased their social relationships inside and outside the classroom. This research project demonstrates how activities, teaching methods, and classroom environments focused on poetry helped build community in a classroom where students were trying to belong.

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Using Poetry to Build Community

In a Diverse Third Grade Classroom

Today's classrooms display the changes taking place in American society. Student populations in classrooms are increasing in cultural, language, and economic diversity. Often teachers are faced with the needs of many diverse students, increasing curriculum and school requirements, and the important need of building community within a classroom. Meeting these objectives can be frustrating when trying to achieve academic and social success for all students. Poetry positively bridges the gap between many issues facing today's teacher by encouraging the process of community building. All students including gifted, academically challenged, ELL (English Language Learner), and behaviorally challenged students can write poetry. Many resources are available on how to teach poetry, but relatively little information exists on how to use poetry as a tool for building community in a classroom.

This paper explains why poetry is an excellent form of literature to be integrated into a schedule already filled with curriculum and school requirements. This paper also demonstrates how to teach poetry as a way to build community in a classroom. Through a six-week study, eight original and published poetry activities were introduced in a third grade classroom in order to evaluate the effectiveness of poetry as a community building tool. Observations, surveys, videotapes, and student work provide the rich data base that demonstrate the need and benefits of using poetry in the classroom to build community.

Literature Review

Third grade is a time when many students begin to comprehend jokes, puns, word games, limericks, riddles and poetry. They also make personal connections to the poems they hear and read. Poetry is an influential form of literature that can enchant the minds of blossoming third graders. When they experience poetry they begin to relate it to themselves and others. Poetry gives third graders insights into other's lives, lets them know they are not alone, and helps them overcome their struggles with loneliness. Third graders want to know what other students are feeling without necessarily becoming the students' best friend. I believe poetry is a way third graders begin to reflect and make connections to the other students in their classroom. Through this reflection they begin to understand themselves and others. According to George Maxim, "Poetry turns a unique lens on the world, making the ordinary special. Appropriately presented, it can inspire in children special reflections on the way things are, on themselves, and on others" (Maxim, 1998, p. 208).

Poetry also enriches the lives of students who are considered not of the mainstream culture of the classroom. For example, poetry for ELL students and students with special needs may reflect their emotions, struggles, and accomplishments in ways they cannot clearly express. When these students listen to and write poetry they understand how language can be used to express their thoughts and realize that there are universal feelings and emotions.

Kathy A. Perfect suggests,

Because it speaks so often of our common human condition and experiences, poetry is a bridge between ourselves and the poet, ourselves and others. It can validate our feelings and help us make sense of the events of our lives. Students seem relieved that their hurtful or angry memories are important enough to have

been written about by a poet. At a time when the complexities of the world grow ever more confusing and even more frightening, poetry not only can grant us a place of beauty and temporary escape but also can give us the language and imagery to make sense of our reality. It can take us away or it can keep us grounded. (Perfect, 1999, p. 729)

Poetry can be interpreted in many different ways and still touch the lives of students. Sometimes poems are comprehended literally, word by word, and other times there is a meaning provoked by the use of words. ELL students often understand words for their literal meanings. Poetry helps these students understand words that have dual meanings and understand idioms and expressions in speech. Poetry also expands their vocabulary and critical thinking. Hearing and sharing poetry with other students lets them know what other students are feeling and experiencing and provides a common bond when conversation may be too difficult to express their feelings. According to Greta Barclay Lipson,

When we are ineffably happy, profoundly sad, inspired beyond words, defeated by life, hailed as a winner, madly in love, beaten by despair, exultant in life's beneficence—we turn to the language of song and poetry to capture the moment in ways that prose cannot express! If not in our own words then we look to someone else's words—those who say it is for us with lyricism and understanding! “Ah yes”, we reflect to ourselves. Those lines explain what's going on in the far reaches of my heart and soul! (Lipson, 1998, p.8)

I believe Lipson's notion of 'we' encompasses all students including those who are considered not of the mainstream culture of the classroom.

If poetry can be a genre for others to discover our interests, fears, and questions and reveal who we are as people, it is naturally a tool for building community in classroom because it inspires those necessary qualities to do so. “Poetry gives children a voice about their truth—a powerful thing that it can do, enabling us to connect to others but also to our own inner selves” (Perfect, 1999, p.729). Through Perfect’s belief and the beliefs of others, I chose poetry to be the tool to build community in my classroom.

Rationale

I noticed the need for community building activities was noticed when I observed how students interacted prior to this study. Several students were discriminated against due to their cultural background, race, gender, medical conditions, and/or behavioral problems. Racial slurs, harassment, gossip, lying, and stealing within and outside of the classroom indicated to me that the classroom could benefit from some community building. Many of these occurrences arose from students’ awareness of their differences coupled with insensitivity to other students’ needs, interests, and feelings. My placement classroom included a diverse student population. Over half the students were ELL, there was a high proportion of females, there were several students with special needs such as IEPs (Individual Educational Plans), high medical needs, and students with ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyper-Activity Disorder). Over time, sociograms indicated that the social structure of the class was changing negatively because some students were becoming social isolates and others were rated in the low range on the sociograms (See Appendix A). My goal as a pre-service teacher was to increase the relationships within the classroom by reducing the social isolates through poetry activities.

As a pre-service teacher, I thought building community in a classroom occurred exclusively through community building activities such as class meetings and games. I wanted to introduce more specific community building activities, but had no additional time to do so. When schools have teaching requirements and these requirements are added to other curricular classes and activities there is little or no time for anything else. My placement school required daily one hour of mathematics instruction, two hours of literacy instruction, ½ hour of recess, ½ hour of lunch, and on any given day; science, social studies, creative dance, art, PE, music, computer lab, and routine procedures. I chose to introduce poetry during part of the daily two hour literacy requirement, simply because that was when time was available and students indicated that they liked poetry in question 3 of Survey # 1.

When I began to think about how I could build community in the classroom through poetry, the following research questions came to mind:

1. Can poetry build community in a classroom?
2. What effects does poetry have when taught as a tool for building community in a classroom?
3. What qualities and techniques are essential to teach poetry as a tool for building community in a classroom?

In order to follow the class routine, I incorporated poetry into a Writer's Workshop format where students would brainstorm, write, edit, and share the poems they write. Writer's Workshop is taught twice a week for one hour each session. It provided a familiar setting for me to perform my study and the only change for students was the content. Because this study was relatively short, I wanted the least disruption to the existing schedule to

accurately measure any changes in the classroom. Writer's Workshop had the steps and procedures established that are also necessary for poetry.

Poetry accommodated a Writer's Workshop in several ways. First, according to Lee Bennet Hopkins, "It [poetry] is good for slow readers who cannot possibly get through a long story or novel, but who can understand and relish the message a poem conveys" (Hopkins, 1998, p. 10). As part of peer editing, poetry is easy for others to read and therefore edit. Second, poetry is great for the revising part of Writer's Workshop. Hopkins states that "Valerie Worth, for example, wrote that her poem "water Lily" which contains ten lines and a total of twenty words, went through almost a hundred revisions" (p. 176) (See Figure 1).

water lily

A hundred
Shallow green
Questions pressed
Upon the
Silent pool,

Before it
Answers all
With a single
Deep white
Syllable.

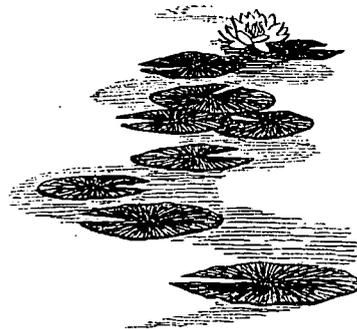


Figure 1. "water lily" from all the small poems by Valerie Worth

While this may be extreme, it emphasizes that poems are short enough not to intimidate students during the revising process, a step I've seen many students not do and not want to do. Third, poetry often takes minimal time to write and can be completed in shorter amounts of time than other forms of writing. Finally, poetry has the presentation component of reading poetry aloud that nicely accommodates the 'Author's Chair' part of Writer's Workshop, or sharing. Poetry also meets one of the Washington State EALRs (Essential Academic Learning Requirements) a requirement for public schools in Washington state. Thus, for numerous reasons, poetry fits nicely into Writer's Workshop and the literacy component of any curriculum.

During this action research study taking place in Writer's Workshop, I wanted to observe whether or not students would explore their inner thoughts and try to make sense of their own feelings. I believe the classroom should be a supportive place where together teachers and students can explore the unknown and unexpected and not lose their inquisitive nature upon entering through the door. I wanted to know if poetry created a new spark for unmotivated students and gave voices to those who seldom spoke. I hoped through poetry, students would notice their differences and similarities and appreciate the qualities of each other. I also hoped this study would answer for me whether or not I should teach poetry as a first year teacher and how to do so.

School Setting

This study took place at an urban elementary school in Vancouver, Washington. The population of the school was racially and culturally diverse. Seventeen different languages were spoken and of the total 690 students, 265 or 26% were ELL students. ELL students included newcomers, beginning English speakers, developing English speakers with native

language acquisition assistance, and bilingual students. Bilingual staff and translators helped many of the ELL students in groups and one-on-one. The school library contained many Spanish and Russian books to support native language learning. Throughout the school there was an emphasis on cultural understanding, community building, and multilingual communication through posters, handouts, and a diversity of staff members.

In addition to the many ELL students, there was a challenge program, or gifted program at the school attended by above grade average students. The school was one of three in the school district that has a challenge program. Students were eligible by teacher recommendations and test scores. Sixty-seven students within the school were challenge students and were supported by three staff members in multi-aged classrooms. Eighty percent of the students in the school received free and reduced lunches. There were also 56 students on IEP plans and several students waiting to be evaluated for IEP plans.

Classroom Setting

The third grade classroom that took part in this study consisted of 23 diverse students. There were 10 Caucasian students, seven Russian students, one Bosnian student, one Mexican student, Somalian-American student, one Mexican-American student, one Samoan-American student, and one Vietnamese-American student. There were eight boys and 15 girls in the class between the ages of eight and nine. Ten students were ELL students and four of those students received pull-out support once or more a day which accompanies the language arts curriculum. During my study the ELL students attended their usual pull-out classes in addition to the poetry lessons I taught. One student in the classroom qualified for the challenge program, one student was diagnosed with ADHD and sporadically took medication, four students had IEPs, two students received reading assistance from a support staff assistant,

one student had extreme medical needs, and one student was waiting to be admitted to a special behavior disorder program.

The physical setting of the classroom was composed of six groups of four desks put together in pairs facing each other. Students selected their own desks and who they wanted to sit next to each day by placing their name tag on a desk at the beginning of the day. They rarely sat in the same desk the following day and were free to move to another desk if problems occurred.

Limitations to the Study

During the school year students were admitted and withdrawn from the classroom. Since the beginning of the school year four new students were added to the class (Lisa, Jose, Curtis and Peter)¹ and three students were withdrawn (Carol, Andy, and Peter). Two students were not present during the poetry activities (Curtis and Janet) because they were pulled out on IEP plans and had special behavior and medical needs. Sociogram information included these students who were not present during the poetry activities because they were still members of the class.

There are many other factors in addition to new students that affected community building in the classroom such as discipline problems, absences, testing, holidays, and school assemblies and multicultural activities. Disruptive students often required the activities to be stopped and redirected. Sometimes, this built community because of the need to pull together to redirect. Absent students limited success of partner activities because follow-up activities were hard to complete. Testing, holidays, and school assemblies and multicultural activities

¹ Pseudonyms are used throughout the study to ensure anonymity of the participants

broke the momentum of community building during poetry because of the distraction or excitement caused. These factors were all occurrences that could happen in the course of any day, but because this classroom had many diverse students these occurrences happened more frequently and should be acknowledged.

Method

Procedure

To engage students in poetry I regularly read poetry to them once a week, brought in poetry books for them to read, encouraged them to read poetry, and encouraged them to share poems they had read and written. The poems I chose to read and introduce to the students were poems I liked and believed students would also like and understand. I firmly believe with Lee Bennet Hopkins that,

The one criterion we must set for ourselves as adults when choosing poems we are going to share with children is that we *love* the poems. If we don't like a particular poem, we shouldn't read it to our children; our distaste will certainly be obvious to them. There are plenty of poems around. Why bother with those that are not pleasing to us? (Hopkins, 1998, p. 12)

It seems evident to me and Hopkins that in order to successfully share poetry with children we must like the poems we share. We must also model our enthusiasm of the poems we choose to be successful at using poetry a tool to build community in a classroom.

In order to measure if poetry was building community within the classroom I gathered quantitative and qualitative data. Sociogram data was collected before this study began to measure change in social attitudes (see Appendix A). Quantitative data was collected

regularly during the two days per week that poetry occurred. Qualitative data was also taken during this time often at spontaneous moments when students would make comments about poetry or their relationships to other students. Throughout the study, surveys were given to the students to gain more insightful information. A final comprehensive survey given at the end of the study measured changes in the data and is reflected in the results of this study.

Similarities, differences, and changes in response to the final survey were noted and some conclusions were drawn from this data. Videotapes were also recorded and data from these tapes support many of the results and conclusions about using poetry to build community in the classroom.

In addition to the data within the classroom, I also engaged myself in poetry in order to teach poetry effectively. I observed in elementary classrooms where teachers were teaching poetry and was a student in university classrooms where professors talked about how to teach poetry to elementary students. I watched a video of an eighth grade poetry slam that helped me visualize how a poetry slam could be done in a classroom. I read several books about teaching poetry to elementary students such as: Wishes, Lies, and Dreams: Teaching Children to Write Poetry by Kenneth Koch, Kid's Poems: Teaching Third & Fourth Graders to Love Writing Poetry, by Regie Routman, Pass the Poetry Please, by Lee Bennett Hopkins, Awakening the Heart: Exploring Poetry in Elementary and Middle School, by Georgia Heard, Teaching Poetry Writing to Adolescents, by Joseph I. Tsujimoto, and the book poemcrazy: freeing your life with words by Susan Goldsmith Wooldridge which gave me inspiration to write my own poems. These books provided the basic theoretical information about how to teach poetry, but learning to teach poetry alone did not make me feel competent and

passionate enough to introduce poetry into my classroom. I decided to become engaged in poetry to change my ideals of how it should be taught.

Part of the enchantment of experiencing poetry is to be engaged in it. I decided to become involved in my local community for inspiration to teach poetry. I attended a poetry reading on March 8, 2000 at Huckleberry's Cafe in Vancouver, WA, a poetry slam on March 29, 2000 at Berbatti's Pan in Portland OR, a poetry reading on April 10, 2000 at the Cascade Park Community Library in Vancouver, WA, and a poetry reading on April 15, 2000 at Barnes and Nobles in Portland, OR. I began to realize that the local commitment and interest in poetry could give me the enthusiasm and background needed to teach poetry in a classroom. As my life began being filled with poetry, I started seeing the importance of poetry within my classroom differently. I also realized the impact of poetry on my own life such as reflecting on life with new perspective.

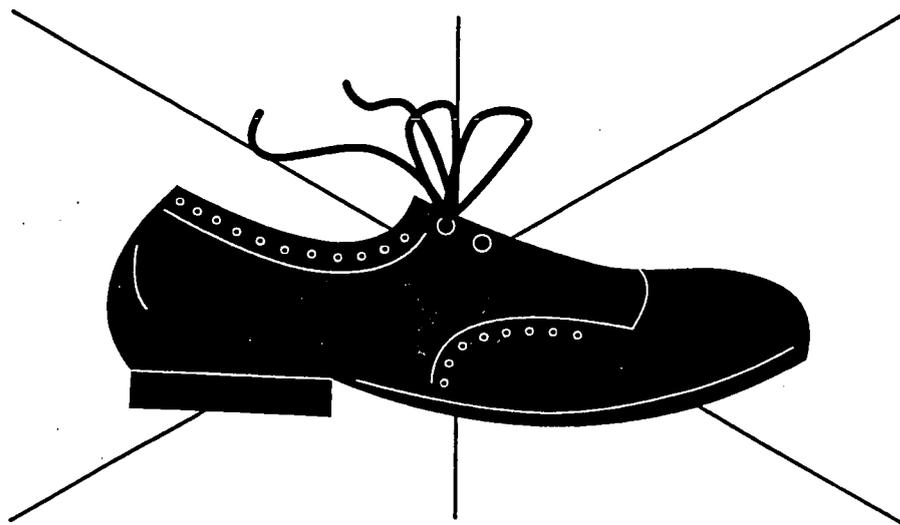
Poetry gave me new and different insights into life. I became a more passionate reader when I read poetry to the class and held higher expectations of my students during poetry because I had experience and knowledge of how poetry existed outside the classroom. Attending poetry events in my local community, reading poetry, and writing poetry made poetry and the teaching of poetry a reality with purpose and foresight, rather than an abstract teaching theory. I began to see the similarities between the essences of poetry and teaching that Louise M. Berman describes, "both teacher and poet deal with words of self and other, may have profound impacts upon those with whom they share time and space, have the power to transform, and have the potential for rich inner journeys" (Berman, 1999, p.18). Selecting the poetry activities for students was easier when I developed a realistic knowledge of how poetry relates to peoples' lives.

I began to select poetry activities that I believed students would enjoy. I chose a variety of activities for students to write individually and with a partner. I searched through several activity books such as: The Adventures of Dr. Alphabet: 104 Unusual Ways to Write Poetry in the Classroom and the Community by Dave Morice, Poetry Writing Handbook: Definitions, Examples, Lessons by Greta Barclay Lipson, Poetivities: Involvement Activities That Teach Children to Write Creative Poetry by James Wainwright, and Easy Poetry Lessons That Dazzle and Delight: 50 Reproducible Poems and Activities That Inspire Children to Read, Write, and Love Poetry by David L. Harrison and Bernice E. Cullinan. I chose fun activities because I remembered not having a positive experience with poetry by having to dissect, analyze, and memorize poems. Of course, learning about rhyme, meter, and stanzas are an important part of poetry, but this process must be a fun, engaging one to further instill a love of poetry. I also chose activities I believed would benefit the academic and social needs of the students. Several activities were modified to meet the needs of my diverse third grade classroom. Most importantly though, I developed my own poetry activities I believed would inspire and meet the needs of the students in my classroom. Poetry activities were done in the following schedule:

| | <u>MON.</u> | <u>TUES.</u> | <u>WED.</u> | <u>THUR.</u> | <u>FRI.</u> |
|---------------------------------|-------------|--------------|--|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Week One April 10-15, 2000 | Survey #1 | | Survey #2 The Shoe Poem | The Personal Poem | Poetry Book Covers |
| Week Two April 17-21, 2000 | | | The Name Poem | The Earth Poem | Survey #3 Share Earth Poems |
| Week Three April 24-27, 2000 | | | The Found Poem | The Found Poem | |
| Week Four May 1-5, 2000 | | | The Color Poem | The Color Poem | |
| Week Five May 8-12, 2000 | | | Read Poem For 2 Voices | Write Poem For 2 Voices | Share Poem For 2 Voices |
| Week Six May 15-19, 2000 | | Sociogram | Survey #4 Rehearse for Poetry Slam | The Poetry Slam | Final Survey |

The first activity to introduce poetry was The Shoe Poem. This poem I designed and was inspired by the Mad Libs® activity books and a picture I saw in Jo Gusman's Resource Handbook: Practical Strategies for Accelerating the Literacy Skills and Content Learning of your ESL Students (See Figure 2). The purpose of this activity was to start the poetry unit with an "icebreaker" activity and to get students to think about poetry in a new way. When the activity began, many students said, "This isn't poetry" and "This is too fun to be poetry." Catching the students' curiosity and interest was the important part of this activity. Other components of the activity were to introduce cooperative learning, trust, and sharing between students and to have students write about someone else within the classroom. I began the activity by placing a picture on the overhead projector for students to see after they entered the classroom from recess (See Figure 2.)

"SHOE - N - TELL"



"If my shoe could tell you something about me, what would it say...?"

Figure 2. Picture to introduce The Shoe Poem.

As students entered the classroom, I asked them to take their shoes off and place one shoe aside in a pile and one into a large black bag. We began the activity by brainstorming ideas for what the picture meant. I took one of the shoes out of the bag. I examined the shoe and asked the class, "What could we learn about this person by looking at their shoe?" I completed the form I created in front of the class which was copied onto an overhead transparency as an example for what I wanted students to do (See Figure 3). I used my own first name as the name of the owner of the shoe so the class would not know who the shoe belonged to. I encouraged students not to copy my example and to come up with their own words.

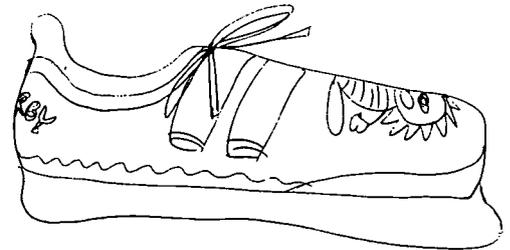
Next the form for the rough draft was passed out to each student. One by one they came up and drew a shoe out of the bag. After they examined the shoe and completed the

form, they shared their rough drafts of their poems. Each student held their unidentified shoe up and read their poem. The owner of the shoe was then identified and the title of the poem became the name of the person who owned the shoe. Everyone anticipated who and what the person wrote about their own shoe. A blank form without the type written words was passed out to use for the final draft. The final draft of the poem included an illustration of the shoe and the poem nicely written.

By _____

Lynnette

By Miss Mobley



I am _____ like the _____.

(adjective) (noun)

If you met me, you would say that I am _____.

(adjective)

You can usually find me at _____,

(a favorite place)

where I _____ and _____.

(verb) (verb)

I am _____ like the _____.

(adjective) (noun)

and if my shoes could talk they would tell you my stories.

I am happy like the Furby.

(adjective) (noun)

If you met me, you would say that I am fun.

(adjective)

You can usually find me at school,

(a favorite place)

where I learn and play.

(verb) (verb)

I am happy like the Furby.

(adjective) (noun)

and if my shoes could talk they would tell you my stories.

Figure 3. Form for The Shoe Poem and a completed rough draft of The Shoe Poem

Again, I encouraged students not to use my ideas or the ideas included in the example on the form. Students wrote their words on a copy of the form I passed out to them and then rewrote the poem as a final draft by copying the completed form onto a blank piece of paper. I also encouraged them to illustrate by making a self-portrait.

The third activity, The Name Poem, was an acrostic poem using the letters of each student's name in a vertical arrangement. This activity was another opportunity for students to write about themselves. I read them an example I had written using the letters of my name and then showed them what the poem looked like (See Figure 5).

Music makes me happy.
In my classroom and at home.
Smiles make me happy,
So does singing all alone.

My days are always busy;
Of course, the days are fun.
Busy with my students,
Loving each day one-by-one.
Early in the morning I get up and come to school
Yes, I have to admit: my students are very cool!

Figure 5. Example of The Name Poem.

Students wrote their first name vertically and then wrote a descriptive sentence horizontally for each letter of their name. Since this was the first poem students were to write without the help of a form to guide them, I showed them another copy of a name poem I found in the poetry activity book Poetry Works by Pamela Amick Klawitter (See Figure 6). This example was a good example for my class because there was a student named Elizabeth in the class. If students finished early, I encouraged them to add their last name to the poem.

NAME POEM

A name poem is one in which each letter of a person's name (first or first and last) is used as the initial letter for one line of the poem. This type of poem need not rhyme.

Example: Judy is a teenage girl,
Usually in a social swirl.
Drives her mother up a wall
Yacking on her tenth phone call.

Sean has bright red hair
Even freckles on his face
And he loves to play soccer
Never likes to do chores

On your own: Write poems about yourself and your friends. Illustrate your poems.

Eats almost anything,
Likes to climb a tree,
In overalls and T-shirt
Zany as can be.
Adopting any animal,
Big toe has a blister,
Elizabeth, Elizabeth—
That's my sister!
Hurrah!

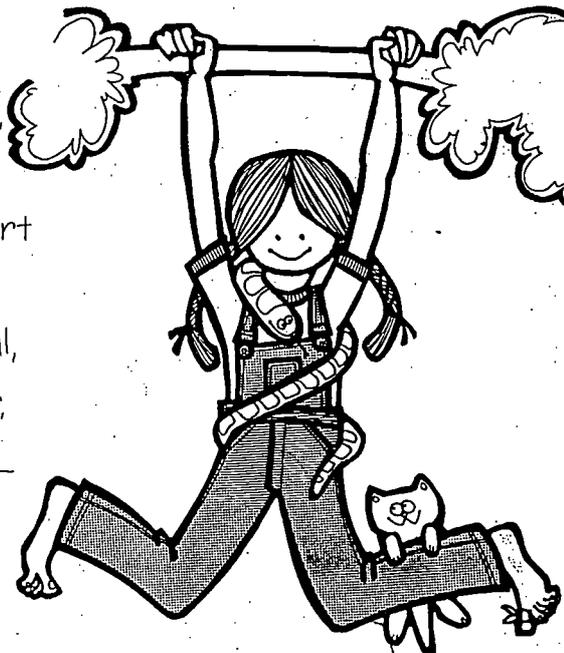


Figure 6. "Name Poem" from Poetry Works by Pamela Amick Klawitter

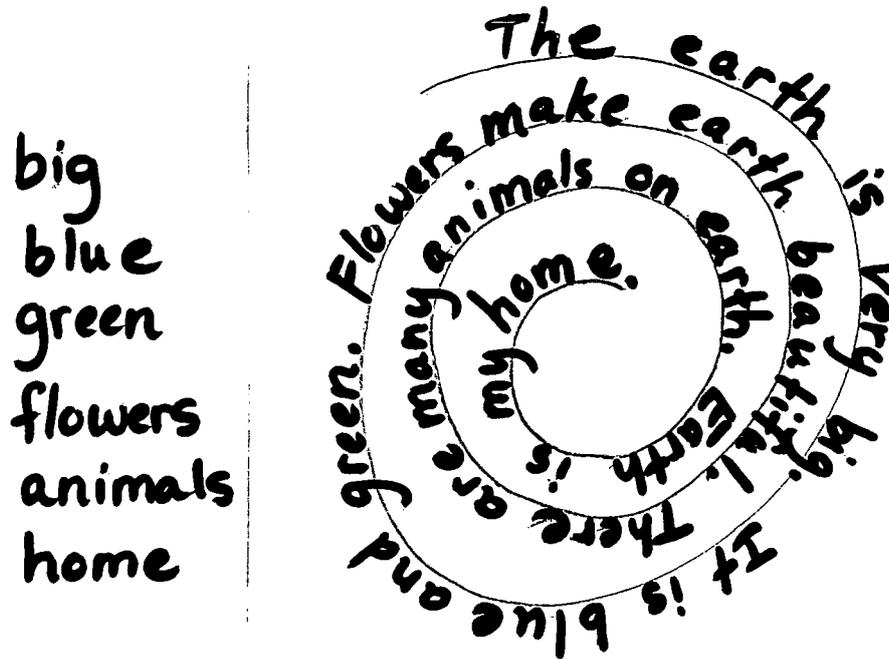


Figure 8. Example of The Earth Poem.

Students were given a piece of notebook paper and instructed to first brainstorm their own ideas about the earth and make sentences from those ideas. They were to arrange them into a shape of their choice that represented the earth. For the final draft, I provided a white piece of paper with a circle on it for them to copy their final poem onto. The poems were colored and illustrated and cut out in the form of their shape. All poems were illustrated, colored, and cut out in the form of their shape.

The fifth activity, The Color Poem, was the first activity where students worked with another person to write a poem. This activity also introduced students to using simile in a poem. It was inspired by an eighth grade class I observed on a video tape doing a poetry slam

and an activity in Poetry Works by Pamela Amick Klawitter. Prior to the activity I collected several paint samples from a home improvement store and modified the lesson by using colors I thought would be popular with third graders and with names they would understand. I placed the color samples in a box and demonstrated the procedure for writing the poem.

I began The Color Poem by drawing a color from the box. On the white board I wrote “Sneaker White” as the title for my poem and displayed this color sample by using a magnet to affix it to the white board. Next, I wrote five words off to the side that came to my mind when I looked at the color sample. I wrote a sentence under the title using the first word in my list. I continued to write sentences under the title using each of the words I had brainstormed. A total of five sentences were written which became the poem (See Figure 9).

sneakers
clean
sheets
clouds
my shoes

Sneaker White
by Miss Mobley

Sneaker White is as white
as a new pair of sneakers.

Its as clean as my
doctor's office.

When I see it I think of
clean white sheets.

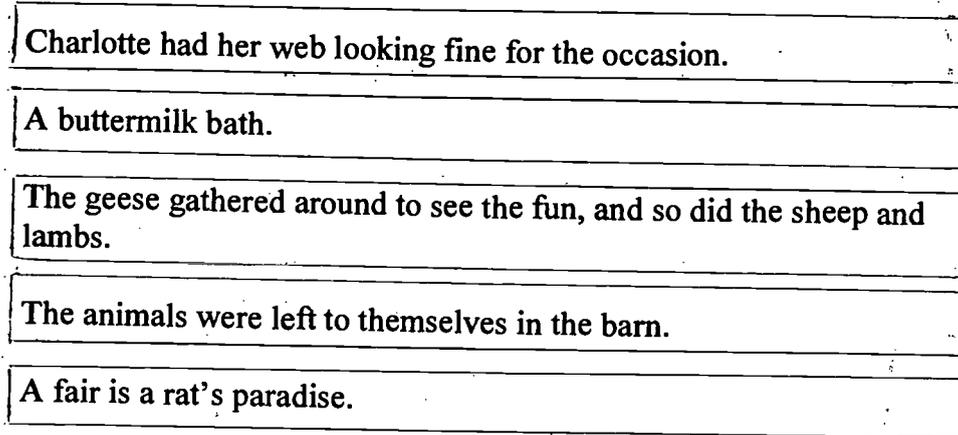
It is like clouds in the sky.

I wish my tennis shoes
were like Sneaker White.

Figure 9. Example of The Color Poem.

When I finished my poem I asked students to choose a partner to work with. Students came up to the box in pairs and each pair drew one color sample. I instructed students to talk with their partner about the color at their desks and then individually brainstorm a list of five words that described the color sample. I hoped working with a partner would inspire students to think of more words than if they had only thought individually. Students each wrote five sentences from their five words that were different from their partner's words. Next, students read their sentences to their partner and combined the sentences to make one poem with ten sentences. The final draft was to be nicely written on a blank piece of paper.

The sixth activity, The Found Poem (Words from Charlotte's Web) was another poem activity requiring students to work together. This activity was inspired by an activity done in one of my teacher preparation courses and by the Found Poem activity in the book Teaching Poetry Writing to Adolescents by Joseph I. Tsujimoto. I copied two pages from five different chapters of Charlotte's Web, a book we were reading every day during story time. I highlighted five sentences I thought best described the chapter from the two copied pages and then wrote those sentences on strips of paper I had cut. The strips of paper were arranged in the order I wanted them to appear as a poem and then rewritten on a blank piece of paper. I showed the class how I had highlighted the sentences and told them that I chose the five sentences because I thought the language was descriptive and I liked the sentences. I also showed the students how I wrote the sentences onto the strips of paper and then I showed them an overhead transparency of the five sentences and the five sentences arranged in the way that I wanted them to become a poem. The example included the title students were to use and where they were to write their name (See Figure 10).



Found Poem
(Words from Charlotte's Web)

The animals were left to themselves in the barn.
The geese gathered around to see the fun.
Charlotte had her web looking fine for the occasion.
A buttermilk bath.
A fair is a rat's paradise.

Arranged by Miss Mobley

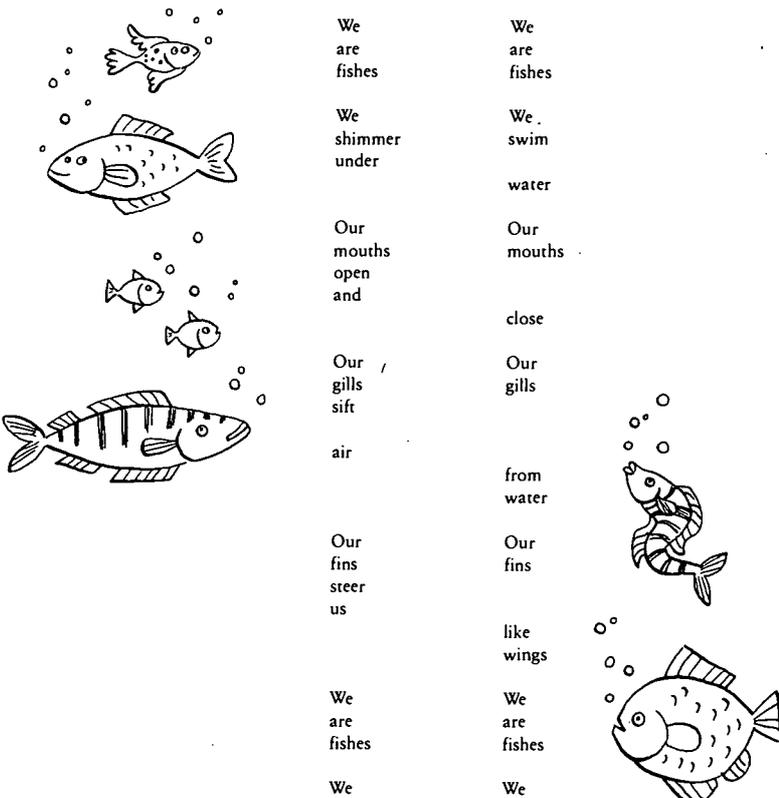
Figure 10. Example of The Found Poem.

I passed out copies of the pages from the book and gave each person in the group of four desks a different copy from the book. I instructed them to begin their own poems according to the example I showed them and to keep the five strips of paper with the sentences written on them so that they could later shuffle the strips and write a group poem from them.

The seventh activity was The Poem for 2 Voices. This activity was inspired by an activity from Easy Poetry Lessons That Dazzle and Delight by David L. Harrison and Bernice E. Cullinan and the book Joyful Noise: Poems for Two Voices by Paul Fleishchman. The first half of the activity involved learning how to read a poem for two voices. On the first day of this two day activity, students received a copy of the poem Fishes by Georgia Heard and read it with a partner (See Figure 11).

Fishes

Poem for two voices



| | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Atlantic blue tang | Zebra pipe |
| Royal gramma | French angel |
| Cuban hock | Golden butterfly |
| We are fishes | We are fishes |
| We shimmer under | We swim water |
| Our mouths open and | Our mouths close |
| Our gills sift | Our gills from water |
| air | Our fins like wings |
| Our fins steer us | We are fishes |
| We are fishes | We swim |
| We shimmer | |

—Georgia Heard

Figure 11. “Fishes” from Easy Poetry Lessons That Dazzle and Delight by David L. Harrison

Once this poem was practiced and read aloud to me students could then select to read poems from the book Joyful Noise: Poems for Two Voices which I had made photocopies of some of the easier poems. On the second day students chose a partner and wrote their own poems for two voices. I instructed them to write about an animal from the rainforest as part of our integrated thematic unit or to write about something they both liked. They were to write their poems in the same format as the example of the Fishes poem.

The final activity was The Poetry Slam. A poetry slam is a competition of poetry reading. I introduced the activity as a poetry reading to be taken more seriously than the elective sharing done in class. For this activity I told everyone they were required to participate. I did not encourage the competitiveness seen in true poetry slams, but I did encourage the students to read passionately and dramatically. I named the activity “The Poetry Slam” to introduce them to the genre of poetry readings as they occur outside the classroom, however it was not a true poetry slam with prizes and fierce competition. I printed a program of The Poetry Slam and changed into a formal black velvet dress to change my role to be their poetry slam host instead of their teacher. This activity concluded the poetry unit.

Prior to this study I told students I was changing Writer's Workshop to a Poetry Workshop because I like poetry and thought they would like it too. I explained that my expectations of them would be the same and that we would be completing many different activities. Throughout the study rough drafts and finished poems were collected from students and filed according to the activity. After the first activity I informed the class they would be making poetry books or poetry anthologies including all the poems they would write. I passed out paper to make covers for their books and instructed them to design their covers with images of things that poems are written about. Prior to The Poetry Slam I graded

their poems and arranged them in the order they were written for each student. I laminated their covers and stapled the cover on top of the poems they had written to become their books. At The Poetry Slam students read their poems from their books and then took their books home to share with their families.

Results

Qualitative Results

The first activity, The Shoe Poem, was well received by the class because it was something they never had done in the classroom: take off their shoes and share their shoes with another person. Two students refused to take their shoes off, but once I explained that the activity would not work without them they obliged. When everyone had a shoe at their desks many comments were made about the smell of the shoes. I had to set standards of how the class should act before I could begin to give instructions and my example of what I wanted the students to do. Many students were writing about people they did not know or like and I thought harsh comments would be made and students would try to trade shoes. After my example they were excited to begin. As they began diligently working I heard Keri remark, "Hey, that's not nice!" She did not feel inhibited to speak her opinion. A student had made a rude remark about the shoe they were writing about and she was letting the class know she did not approve of the comments being made. Everyone heard her remark and began quietly working again. The videotape showed only two students trading shoes when I was not looking. All poems however, ended up being polite. Everyone wanted to share their poems and find out who had their shoe.

~~Anna~~ Anna

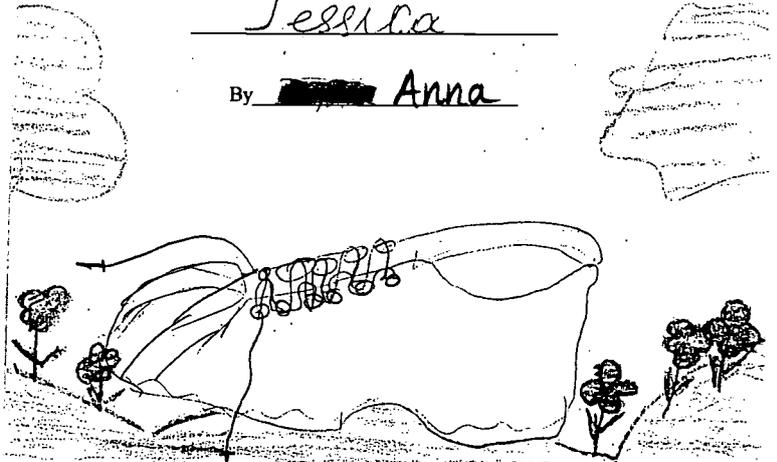
By ~~Miranda~~ Miranda



I am Britz
 My latter is soft.
 If you meet me,
 You wood say I am
 cool. You wood see me at
 school. I ma cool,
 and if my shoes could
 talk they wood tell you
 my stories.

Jessica

By ~~Anna~~ Anna



I am happy like the shoe
 If you met me, you would say that I am busy.
 you can usually find me at
 my house where I play and eat.
 I am happy like the shoe and
 if my shoes could talk they would tell you
 my stories.

The second activity, The Personal Poem, was more difficult for students to comprehend. There were many comments of "I don't get it" coming from the class. Possibly more brainstorming together would have given them more examples and clarified how to

write the poem. Sean replied frustrated about the example on the form, “Who’s this Jason guy anyways? He’s not a real person!” I thought then to myself, “it will be hard for students to self reflect about the things I want them to write about.” I also wished I had authentic examples of poems written by other students their age to show as examples. I instructed the class to try their best and work with a neighbor if they needed help. I also walked around the classroom to help individual students too. For several ELL students I rephrased the examples and brainstormed ideas with them at their desks.

Not as many students were excited to share The Personal Poem as they were with The Shoe Poem. At first I thought this was because they had difficulty writing the poem, but after looking at their examples I realized their poems were very personal. Many of the poems expressed what students truly love, need, feel, and fear. I learned that Linda feels sad and mad and wants to see Heaven (See Figure 12), Peter needs a best friend and fears nothing (See Figure 13), Jose thinks he has crazy legs and needs Spanish food (See Figure 14), Tami fears to live alone (See Figure 15), and C. J. thinks of himself as ugly, boring, and unfun and wants to see his dad (See Figure 16). Students were incredibly honest in their poems. I noticed that Kristi helped C.J. draw the self-portrait on his final draft of his poem. Even though not as many students shared their poems I believe this poem was the first opportunity for many students to start self reflecting in their writing. I also believe this poem was the beginning of community building within the classroom because students were honest about their feelings. Students may not have felt comfortable to share their poems due to the apprehension and insecurity of starting to build new relationships in the classroom by sharing their feelings. I did not expect students to be honest in personal ways that could make them feel uncomfortable sharing.

 Linda
 I am: nice careness smart
 sibling brother Khang
 who feels happy sad mad
 who needs careness fun safe and friend
 who gives cards gifts happiness
 who fears snakes bears live alone
 who would like to see heaven lots of
 flowers

Figure 12. Linda's Personal Poem

 Peter


 9 years old, playful, good
 sibling of Ventura
 Lover of Thunder, fire, Pokemon
 who feels strong
 who needs A Best Friends Mom
 who gives home work
 who fears nothing
 who would like to see TV, Mai

Figure 13. Peter's Personal Poem

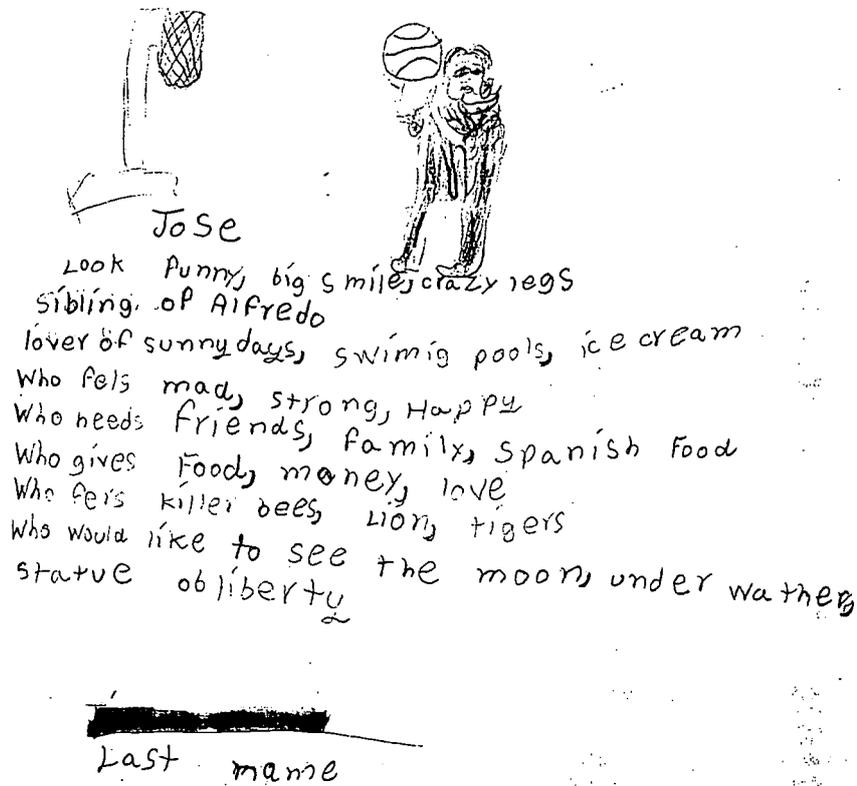


Figure 14. Jose's Personal Poem

PERSONAL POEM

This is a good way for others to get to know you. To begin, fill in the blanks below. Then, on the poem frame on the next page, write your personal poem. Be sure to illustrate it and maybe even include a self-portrait.

First name _____ Tami

List three adjectives that describe you funny, smart, pretty.

Sibling (or Child/Grandchild) of Irina, and Sergey.

Lover of Pets, Mrs. Buss, Miss Mabley, Mrs. Riley, Ice cream, Beach

Who feels happy, normal

Who needs Friends, my sister, My Grandma and Grandpa

Who gives love, careness, flowers, cards friendship,

Who fears snakes, Big Dogs, Spiders, live alone,

Who would like to see a very happy and sunny day.
A good water at the Beach. A good
Day. A day when you can Run with
out shoes and buy lots of Icecream

Last name

Figure 15. Tami's rough draft of The Personal Poem



C.J.
 ugly boring uneng.
 love of mom sister brother
 who feels sad happy shy bald
 who needs friends joy love
 who likes many joy love
 snakes bears alligators
 who would like to see my dad
 love

ugly, boring, unfun
 mom, sister, brother
 sad, happy, shy,
 friends, joy, love
 money, joy, love
 snakes, bears, alligators
 my dad

Figure 16. C.J.'s Personal Poem

During the second week of the study I started noticing an increase in friendships within the classroom. Kristi was now walking to school with C.J. and Andy. Jose was also forming new friendships with C.J. and Adam. Recess dynamics were beginning to change too. Previously students were doing individual activities such as hula-hoping, solo basket ball, swinging, jumpropping, but now they were playing the cooperative game Red Rover, football, intramural football and Barbies. They either found things to do together or brought in things such as a football or Barbies that encourages students to play together.

The Name Poem was one of the activities during the second week of the study. My collaborating teacher informed me that most students like acrostic poetry, so I was expecting success with this activity. Again, many students were honest with their feelings in their poems and more students decided to share. I changed the environment for sharing in the classroom by having the students meet in a circle on the floor rather than share from their

desks. It took much time to settle to begin the sharing and Sean began fighting with C.J. Despite this disruption we reformed a circle together and began sharing poems. Almost everyone around the circle wanted to share. Jose read his poem in Spanish (See Figure 17). He surprised everyone because he had never read anything in Spanish in class before and the class applauded him. As students read, everyone listened to each poem. Many students expressed positive things about themselves. Jessica wrote about how she wants to be treated in class (See Figure 18). This activity inspired the excitement of the first activity and helped us move into the next activity.

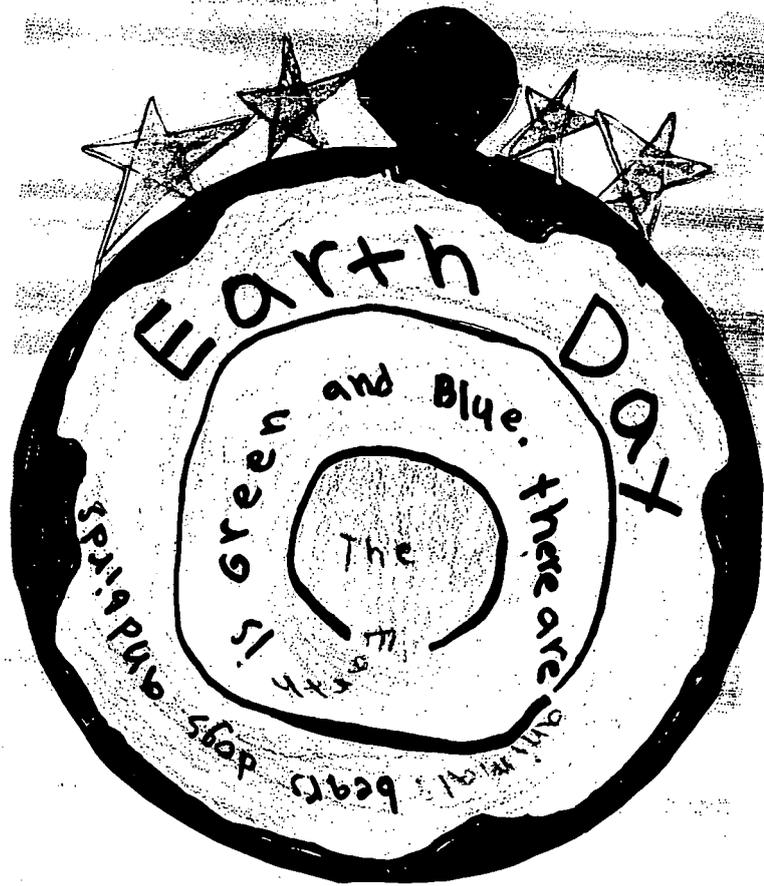
JOSE le gusta el numero
 seis y le gusta los leones
 Oso es un animal muy bonito
 Seis es un numero bajo
 Es de animal me gusta que
 se llama leon

Figure 17. Jose's Name Poem.



Figure 18. Jessica's Name Poem

The third activity, The Earth Poem, was successful I believe because it was creative and visually interesting. Most students liked the examples of the shape poems I displayed and were on task when they began writing their poems. As they wrote I stopped the class and showed them examples of students' work that I thought was good. Many students created poems of ideas I had not discussed and did an excellent job at illustrating. They were very pleased with their poems.



The next day the entire class shared their poems with the class across the hall. This class came into our classroom and became our audience for sharing. I gave the students the option of saying “pass” if they did not want to share their poems. Suddenly if a student did not want to share and said “pass” their friend usually did the same. I realized I had created a community of students who supported each other and were now too shy to share beyond their comfort level. Where once they had been upset if there was not enough time to share, they were now passing at the opportunity where time was available. The next activity I was determined to change the requirements for sharing.

Week three was a difficult week in the classroom. Many students were angry with one another and were fighting over games during their free time. Some students though, were starting to write poetry on their own and in their journals at school. Jessica, Keri, Darren, and Linda wrote poems in their journals during journaling time, an activity many students indicated on Survey #1 was of minimal interest. Linda and Darren brought poems they had written at home to share on their sharing day. Linda was so nervous that she asked me to read it for her while she stood next to me in front of the class. Keri and Lisa checked out poetry books at the library that week and were also volunteering to read them to the class too. It seemed students were trying to find new comfort zones within the classroom.

I thought the poetry activity during the third week would be fun because they were enjoying the book Charlotte's Web by E. B White read during story time. The idea of The Found Poem was confusing to students. They did not understand how the five sentences could become a poem. Many students said, "This doesn't sound like a poem!" I became disappointed because they would not stop complaining and try to complete the activity to see the end results. I tried to persuade them it would make sense when we finished, but they were not convinced. Consequently, as a class we never wrote group poems in the way I envisioned. I typed the poems that were completed and told the class that next week we would be writing color poems. Later to my surprise, several students were happy to see their poems in their poetry book and decided to read The Found Poem in The Poetry Slam.

At the beginning of the fourth week I chose a funny poem for the class to copy in their poetry notebooks that they had kept since the beginning of the year. Every Monday, students copied a poem off the overhead projector to practice their handwriting. I asked if anyone

would like to read the poem out loud to the class and everyone volunteered. I chose C.J. to read the poem (See Figure 19).

Wiggly Giggles

I've got the wiggly-wiggles today,
And I just can't sit still.
My teacher says she'll have to find
A stop-me-wiggle pill.

I've got the giggly-giggles today;
I couldn't tell you why.
But if Mary hiccups one more time
I'll giggle till I cry.

I've got to stamp my wiggles out
And hold my giggles in,
Cause wiggling makes me giggle
And gigglers never win.

*Stacy Jo Crossen
and Natalie Anne Covell*

Figure 19. "Wiggly Giggles" from The Random House Book of Poetry for Children.

Later that day during math, we all burst out giggling when an example I had given them did not make sense. At this point I realized the power a poem can have. The only explanation I could give at the time was, "I guess we all have the giggles." Their response was a more welcomed response than the usual "I don't get it!" Other responses were also changing in the class. Aly, who had been fighting with Lisa over a game the previous week, was now becoming friends with her again. Janet chose Sean to be her lunch helper, a favorite class job, which amazed everyone because Sean often gets in trouble. Sara asked Adam and C.J., "I'll tell you who I like if you tell me who you like." Jose decided to read aloud with the class the bilingual story The Woman Who Outshone The Sun by Alejandro Cruz Martinez in Spanish during a guided reading lesson I taught. After I read each page in English with the

class, I waited until he finished reading his page in Spanish. The class admired his ability to read in Spanish. Relationships seemed to be improving until I introduced The Color Poem.

The Color Poem was difficult for students because it required them to think abstractly about a color. They appeared to understand the example I gave them and were excited to pull a color out of the box. When I asked them to pick a partner problems began. Some students wanted to work together with three people, some people wanted to work alone, and others were mad that their friend had chosen someone else to work with. I was not expecting this to occur, so I let them form groups in the way they wanted. I also thought maybe I should have introduced simile differently, for instance by writing about themselves (My hair is like... My teeth are like... My legs are like... My arm is like...) At their desks, students were off task and complaining. I began to walk around the classroom and help students. I was surprised that many students wrote great color poems. Lisa and Darren wrote about how the color made them feel (See Figure 20), Tami wrote together with Kristi about how the color changed their idea of seaweed and Peter wrote about how his color reminded him of the sky in Samoa (See Figure 21). Students were following directions but were complaining that it was hard. I told them, "Poetry is not always easy and fun."

Lisa
Blue Island
 by [redacted]

Blue Island as blue as the ocean
 It is as clear as a swimming pool
 Blue Island as lovely as the world from space
 When you see it you feel like flying
 Oh it would be cool to be Blue Island

moccasin yellow [redacted] **Darren**

It makes me feel like in a Indian
 It is as bright as the sun
 when its hot the grass is dead
 in the fall the leaves are red
 and when I'm waiting for the bus
 it is as yellow as a bus
 and when I'm eating a hot dog
 it is as yellow as mustard

Figure 20. Lisa and Darren's Color Poems.

By: **Tami** and **Kristi**
Seaweed

1. Sea weed is like Black.
2. Seaweed is as Black as a Rock
3. I thought seaweed was like green
4. But it was like Black
5. I like seaweed like it is.
6. It reminds me like green seaweed.

Tidewater
 by **Peter**

Tidewater is as blue as water
 it is like coke in the soda
 it is like a sky in Samoa
 it is like the blue Earth
 Tide water is as stars.

Figure 21. Tami and Kristi and Peter's Color Poems.

The next poetry activity was fun. Earlier the day before I introduced The Poem for 2 Voices, I chose a student to practice reading the “Fishes” poem with me in front of the class. Jessica read the poem with me to the class and everyone was speechless. The first comment was, “Hey, that’s cool!” by Keri. Every student was on task practicing reading poems for 2 voices. The next day I was greeted at the door before class by Lisa and Jessica who wanted copies of the poems for 2 voices to audition with for the school talent show. That day we began to write our own poems for 2 voices. Many students chose to write about animals and things they liked such as food (See Figure 22). Two pairs wrote about being friends (See Figure 23). When it was time to share at the end of the day Adam, Peter, and C.J. begged me to let them share first which was a big change from the first activity when they told me they were not going to share. I told everyone they would get a chance to share but they got upset, anxious, and competitive to share.

| | | | |
|---|---|--|---|
| <p>Linda by [redacted]</p> <p>Slower than a turtle.</p> <p>Very lazy.</p> <p>Inch by inch.</p> <p>He likes to eat</p> <p>He likes to swim</p> <p>No one can see him in the jungle.</p> <p>A sloth spends most of his time</p> | <p>Sloth</p> <p>Darren and [redacted]</p> <p>Slower than a turtle.</p> <p>Hanging off a branch like a monkey.</p> <p>Inch by inch.</p> <p>a nice green leaf.</p> <p>to cool off.</p> <p>No one can see him in the jungle.</p> <p>in a tree.</p> | <p>Tami by [redacted]</p> <p>I like ice cream.</p> <p>My favorite thing to eat is ice cream and</p> <p>My favorite thing to eat is ice cream in the whole world.</p> | <p>Favorite Things to Eat</p> <p>Darla and [redacted]</p> <p>I like candy.</p> <p>candy.</p> <p>My favorite thing to eat is candy in the whole world.</p> |
|---|---|--|---|

Figure 22. Poems for 2 Voices about animals and things students like.

| | | | |
|--|---|--|--|
| <p>We are Best Friends</p> | | <p>Friends Forever</p> | |
| <p>Elaine by [redacted]</p> <p>Me and Macy are best friends.</p> <p>We are friends forever.</p> <p>Me and Macy.</p> <p>We are kind and responsible.</p> <p>We love each other.</p> | <p>Mary and [redacted]</p> <p>Me and Elizabeth are best friends.</p> <p>We are friends forever.</p> <p>Me and Elizabeth.</p> <p>We care and share.</p> <p>We love each other.</p> | <p>Jessica by [redacted]</p> <p>Friends. Cool.</p> <p>Beautiful.</p> <p>They're friends forever.</p> <p>Playmates</p> <p>They're best friends.</p> <p>Friends forever.</p> | <p>Lisa and [redacted]</p> <p>Friends.</p> <p>Nice.</p> <p>They're friends forever.</p> <p>on the playground.</p> <p>They're best friends.</p> <p>Friends forever.</p> |

Figure 23. Poems for 2 Voices about friends.

During the week of The Poem for 2 Voices several interesting results in class occurred. Jose and Peter put down their Pokemon books during silent reading and asked if they could read the "Fishes" poem for 2 voices. Sean, who was absent on the day we read poems for 2 voices, agreed to copy one of his favorite poems while others wrote their poems. He rarely completes assignments in class and is usually off task. When it was time to share he read his poem four times and asked if he could read it again the next day as his sharing. The next day we participated in an activity called morning assembly where a selected class "teaches" to five other classes at the beginning of the day. The class unanimously chose to read their Poems for 2 voices they had written. Everyone who had participated the day before in class was now reading their poems to an audience of over 100 students. Only one student became embarrassed and I substituted for her.

The last week of the poetry unit, students were feeling very confident. We spent one day practicing for The Poetry Slam. I gave students their poetry books and they reread their poems to themselves and others. Everyone easily found three people to practice reading their poems to and some students read to the videocamera when previously they had made immature gestures or were intimidated by the camera being in the room. The following day we had the final activity, The Poetry Slam. Prior to the activity Jessica drew a picture of how she envisioned the activity (See Figure 24). At The Poetry Slam everyone was respectful and supportive of each other. My placement teacher said to me, "This is something they'll never forget in their lives." This comment made me realize the impacts poetry can have on people. It was apparent to me that poetry had made us a community.

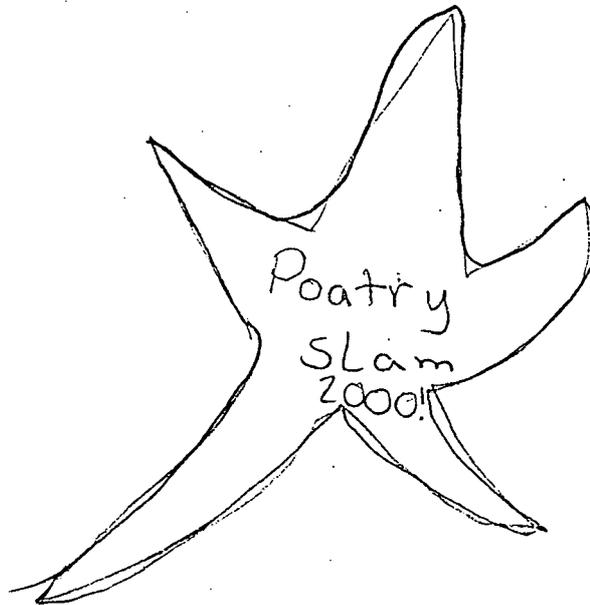
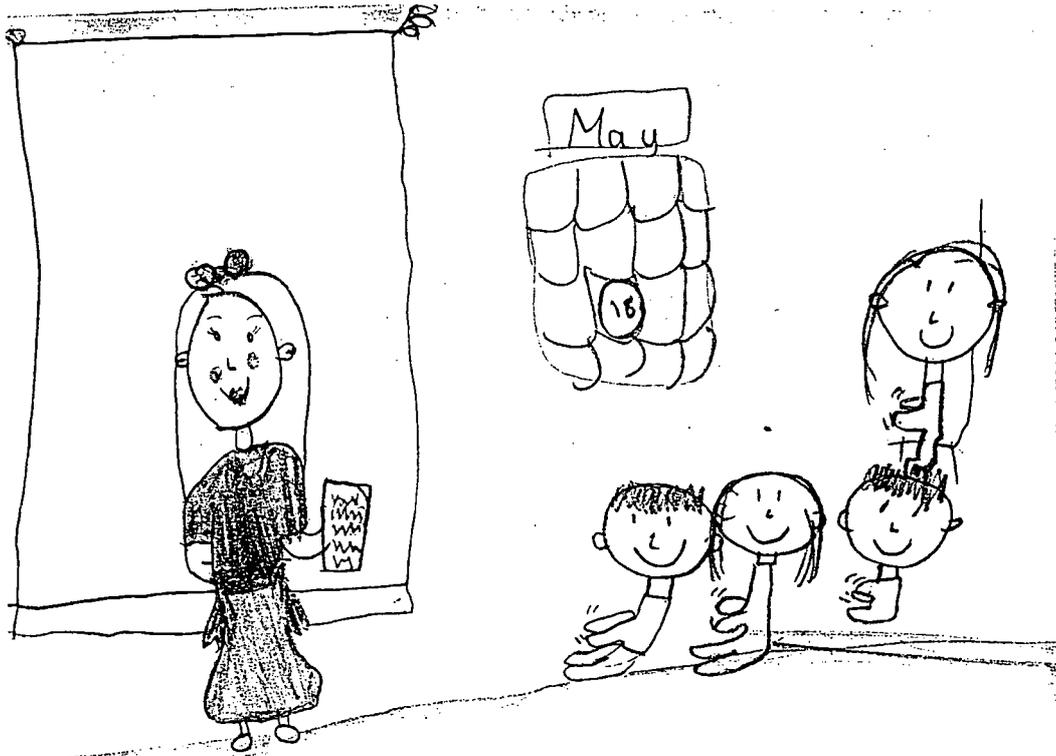


Figure 24. Jessica's picture of The Poetry Slam.

Quantitative Results

Throughout the study, I gave students fill-in-the-bubble and short answer surveys to measure information about their thoughts on poetry and community building in the classroom. At the end of the study I also gave a comprehensive final survey. The first survey was given prior to the first activity (See Figure 25).

| Name _____ | | Survey results Of 22 students | Final survey results Of 17 students |
|---|-----------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| 1. Do you like working: | | | |
| With a friend | <input type="radio"/> | 18 | 15 |
| Working in a group | <input type="radio"/> | 4 | 2 |
| 2. What is your favorite kind of reading: | | | |
| Reading groups | <input type="radio"/> | 2 | 1 |
| Silent reading | <input type="radio"/> | 2 | 1 |
| Friend reading | <input type="radio"/> | 8 | 7 |
| Teacher reads | <input type="radio"/> | 10 | 8 |
| 3. What is your favorite kind of writing: | | | |
| Journaling | <input type="radio"/> | 2 | 3 |
| Writer's Workshop | <input type="radio"/> | 12 | 5 |
| Poetry | <input type="radio"/> | 8 | 9 |

Figure 25. Survey #1

From Survey #1 I discovered who enjoyed working with a friend and who enjoyed working in a group. The four students who enjoyed working in groups also scored low on the sociograms indicating that they had weak friendships in the class. I also discovered what type of reading and writing students preferred. The results of the final study show that some students changed their preference of writing to poetry.

The second survey was given on the day of the first poetry activity to measure students' interest and knowledge of poetry (See Figure 26). Survey #2 indicated that most

students thought poetry was easy however, on the final survey the more students thought poetry was hard. I divided question 1 from survey #2 into two questions on the final survey to provide a more adequate measure of interest in poetry. This survey showed that students' ideas about poetry had changed. On the final survey only one student thought poems had to rhyme and many more responses were given about what students believed poems were usually written about.

| Name _____ | | Survey results Of 19 students | Final survey results Of 17 students |
|--|-----------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| 1. Is poetry? | | | |
| Hard | <input type="radio"/> | 1 | 3 |
| Easy | <input type="radio"/> | 0 | 14 |
| Fun | <input type="radio"/> | 13 | 11 |
| Boring | <input type="radio"/> | 5 | 6 |
| 2. Do poems have to rhyme? | | | |
| Yes | <input type="radio"/> | 3 | 1 |
| No | <input type="radio"/> | 16 | 16 |
| 3. What are poems usually written about? | | | |
| _____ | | seasons | seasons |
| _____ | | life | holidays |
| _____ | | | friends/people |
| | | | anything |

Figure 26. Survey #2

Survey #3 was given half-way through the poetry unit to measure student satisfaction, which activities students thought they were learning about others, and what poems students were willing to share (See Figure 27). This survey indicated that only one person preferred The Personal Poem and on the final survey no one preferred the poem. As activities changed

to include working with another person, students unanimously changed their preferred poem to one of the poems involving working with another person. In The Poetry Slam students also preferred to share poems written with another person.

| Name _____ | | Survey results Of 19 students | Final survey results Of 17 students |
|--|-----------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| 1. Which poem was your favorite? | | | |
| The Shoe Poem | <input type="radio"/> | 6 | 0 |
| The Personal Poem | <input type="radio"/> | 1 | 0 |
| The Name Poem | <input type="radio"/> | 7 | 1 |
| The Earth Poem | <input type="radio"/> | 5 | 0 |
| 2. Which poem did you learn the most about someone else? | | | |
| The Shoe Poem | <input type="radio"/> | 8 | 9 |
| The Personal Poem | <input type="radio"/> | 5 | 3 |
| The Name Poem | <input type="radio"/> | 6 | 2 |
| 3. Which poem did you want to share with the class? | | | |
| The Shoe Poem | <input type="radio"/> | 4 | 5 |
| The Personal Poem | <input type="radio"/> | 2 | 4 |
| The Name Poem | <input type="radio"/> | 4 | 4 |
| The Earth Poem | <input type="radio"/> | 9 | 3 |

Figure 27. Survey #3

Survey #4 indicated that some of the students' favorite part of poetry unit was the camera, the 'fun', the teacher, and The Personal Poem (See Figure 28). Some of the least favorite parts of the poetry unit were The Found Poem, the 'hard work', the reading, and the loudness.

| | |
|--|------------------------------------|
| Name _____ | Who did you read your Poems to? |
| What 2 poems are you choosing for The Poetry Slam? | |
| 1. _____ | 1. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 2. _____ |
| | 3. _____ |
| What was your favorite part of poetry? | |
| What was your least favorite part of poetry? | |
| What grade do you think you should get in poetry? | |

Figure 28. Survey #4

I used Survey #4 to record what poems to print on the program for the poetry slam. Thirty two poems were read by 17 students at the Poetry Slam. Five Shoe Poems, four Personal Poems, four Name Poems, three Earth Poems, six Found Poems, two Color Poems, one "Fishes" poem, and seven Poems for 2 Voices were read at the Poetry Slam.

I also wanted to discover who students were choosing to read their poems to as they practiced for The Poetry Slam. Several students shared their poems with me and the camera. What was interesting about these results is that many of the students identified as isolates or low scoring on the sociograms were chosen to be the audiences for reading poems to. Students also chose others to share their poems with who were not their best friends.

Results Following the Study

Following this study on May 26, 2000 the students in the classroom gave me a thank you gift for being their pre-service teacher. They bought The Random House Book of Poetry for Children for me and autographed it. They also wrote Thank You cards and gave them to

me. Inside each card students had written an acrostic name poem of my name (See Appendix B). This was the last day that I was their pre-service teacher in their classroom.

On June 6, 2000 I returned to the classroom as a volunteer. During silent reading I moved around the room, sitting with individual students and listened to them read. Anna, a Russian student, was reading a Russian poetry book. She usually chose below grade level English books to read during silent reading. When I began to listen to her read she became excited and started translating the poems into English for me. Many of the poems were about school, spring, and nature.

The following week I returned to the classroom as a volunteer again. While assisting my collaborating teacher I noticed some letters that students had written to their next year's teacher. Each year as part of the language arts curriculum, students are required to write a letter to their next year's teacher to be placed in their school portfolio. Six students indicated in the letters that they enjoyed poetry (See Appendix C). Two weeks after being their pre-service teacher they continued to like reading and writing poems. One student, Miranda, also wrote in her letter, "I hope I can get along with people in the classroom." This sentence written directly after she wrote, "I like poetry" was an indication that she wants to build community in the next class she will be a student in. Her letter and other letters confirm that I made a positive impact on their learning.

Conclusion

A Response to Research Question 1

I believe that poetry can build community in a classroom based on the increase in social status reflected in the isolates and low range students within the class, student

comments, and an overall feeling of increased well being within the classroom. While we may never like each other and some students may always remain within the low range of sociograms, as Perfect suggests, “We have learned to love the people and places that poetry has brought us to” (Perfect, 1999, p. 736). Together we became a community within our classroom and outside the classroom through the poetry we read, wrote, and shared with others.

I am not convinced that poetry alone builds community in the classroom. Poetry as a community building activity can only work effectively if activities are fun, challenging, and interesting to the students. A positive atmosphere and a good selection of poems are also crucial for success. I believe I saw some results of poetry building community in the classroom. In this short time, poetry allowed students to be creative, reflective, and contemplative within the literacy requirements placed by the school. Students began to express how they felt, what they wanted, and what they were afraid of. Many students became effusive in their efforts to create poetry. These expressions of emotion were the beginning of the community building process in the classroom. I believe that a future study including the entire school year would be more substantial and conclude strongly that poetry builds community in a classroom.

A Response to Research Question 2

The effects poetry had when taught to build community in the classroom were numerous. Many students went from not wanting to share their poems to fighting over who could share first. Poetry created a time for students to communicate about themselves. Students began to read poems written by other students and realize what they had in common

with each other. Many students began sharing their own poetry on their sharing day and read poems from books when previously they had brought in pictures or stuffed animals.

Another effect that poetry had on students was it enabled students to finish their work and feel proud of what they created. Jessica asked me after The Poetry Slam, “When are we going to start Writer’s Workshop again?” Later I asked her why she wanted to start writing stories again in Writer’s Workshop. She replied, “So I can finish and publish my Titanic story and share it with the class.” I asked her if she liked poetry and she said, “Yes, I like both.” I also asked her what she liked the best of both and she said, “I get to write my own poems and stories.” It is evident that poetry is fun, easier to finish, publish and provides closure when six weeks later Jessica still wanted to finish a story she had started. The effect poetry had on her was that she wanted to finish something she started to write and share it with the class.

I believe writing poems and stories interchangeably is important, especially since poems encourage students to increase their writing and use the styles and conventions of a different form of writing. I strongly believe however, that poetry provides the closure that is important for students to have the desire to start new activities. Poetry builds students’ confidence that they can finish their assignments because poems are short, structured, and easy to revise and edit. In poetry there is little mediocrity because poems are a unique, individual production with no correct answer, only correct form. Many diverse students cannot write long stories and complete the steps required to write stories in Writer’s Workshop. They become frustrated and quit writing when asked to develop a story. Poetry provides the framework for expressing students’ ideas and enables students to succeed and feel positive about their writing experiences. Poetry, however, should be taught alternately

with Writer's Workshop instead of replacing it so the effects of poetry occur in other forms of writing.

A Response to Research Question 3

The best qualities I discovered to teaching poetry as a tool to build community in a classroom are the teacher's interest and positive attitude towards poetry and a good selection of poems and poetry activities. Teachers must have an interest in poetry and like the poems and activities they choose to be successful in teaching poetry. Success in teaching poetry naturally encourages success in community building because students will feel comfortable if the teacher is knowledgeable about and interested in what is being taught. A teacher's interest in poetry will become apparent in the poems selected to be shared in a classroom.

One of the most important techniques that built community in the classroom was the selection of poems to be used as examples in the classroom. It is hard to teach good poetry with bad examples of poems. I agree with James Conroy that,

Well-chosen poetry can, however, provide not only the afferent point for past and present, for the mundane and the fantastic, for apocalyptic and witty irony, but also a model of moral growth which leads from apparent descriptions of stable states to the recognition that life is complex (Conroy, 1999, p.8).

I believe the selection of poems chosen for the activities not only set a model for moral growth, but also encouraged students to respect each other and consequently build a community in the classroom. I wish however, that I had a larger selection of poems for students to read. I think the students realized this too because they began asking me to read a poetry book my collaborating teacher had and began arguing over who could look at poetry books when I brought them in for students to read. Students later bought me a copy of The

Random House Book of Poetry for Children and signed it as a farewell gift for being their preservice teacher. I agree with David Walders that, "Just as all classrooms should have dictionaries to which students have access, why not add a poetry anthology within reach?" (Walders, 1999, p 35)

As far as reading poetry to students I believe I should have read a short poem each day at the beginning of the day for inspiration. Walders states, "What can't be seen or understood by more didactic methods of teaching may suddenly be clarified by a poem." (Walders, 1999, p.35) Reading a poem each morning would have been easily incorporated with other morning responsibilities. There are several poetry books available with the theme of 'a poem a day'. I also now realize the importance of having a file of poems I like organized by topics ready to use in addition to poetry books. Having a file set up would have made it easy to pull a poem out when needed and when I did not feel like looking one up. For example, I wish I would have read a poem about moving when students were withdrawn from class, a poem about friendship when fights occurred at recess, and a poem about loss when a student's dog died. Poems could have expressed my feelings when I was at a loss for words or feared saying the wrong thing. Just as the "Wiggly Giggles" encouraged a positive reaction from the class, other poems may have encouraged community building in different ways.

One of the most important techniques for using poetry to build community in a classroom is the sharing done by students. I now know to always ensure there is enough time to share or establish a method for sharing that is consistent. The effect of sharing an activity is lost if sharing needs to be continued on the next day. Sharing at the end of the day may give closure to the day even if the poetry activity was in the beginning of the day. I discovered that it was better to share in a circle rather than calling on individuals at their

desks. Often I became overwhelmed by too many students raising and waving their hands to share and missed students who were shy or quiet. In a circle everyone knows whose turn it is, when they get a turn, where their attention needs to be and they are not easily distracted by things in their desks. A teacher can walk around the outside of the circle to talk to individual students if necessary. Prior to sharing, remind students of their expectation to be quiet and respectful. Comments should be saved for the end. Commenting at the end helps to keep the flow of the reading, feelings, and concentration of those reading. I found that sometimes comments intimidated others from sharing because students then believed their poem was not as good as others. As Patrice A. Pittman advises,

ask that no comments be made after a poem is read, this doesn't apply to teachers though. Any positive words I can think of, in fact, go a long way toward giving students the reassurance they need for an activity that deals with their innermost feelings (Pittman, 1999, p. 57).

Recommendations

If I were to complete this study again the techniques I would use to teach poetry to build community in the classroom would be different. First, I would start the study at the beginning of the year and follow a sequence of activities to build students' knowledge of poetry to go hand in hand with community building. I would measure if students knowledge of poetry is increased, does their ability to build community increase at the same rate? To do this I would introduce similes and metaphors and then introduce traditional verse forms of poetry such as couplets, tercets, quatrains, cinquains, limericks, parodies, diamantes, and concrete poetry followed by haiku, senryu, tanka, and sijo poetry. I would develop interesting, age appropriate activities for teaching the various different forms of poetry and

have well-planned mini lessons to teach the concept of the poetry activity so students will not be confused. During the 36 weeks of a school year, I would have a different lesson each week that builds on the prior knowledge of the activity introduced the previous week.

I would also vary poetry activities from writing individual poems to writing poems in pairs or groups. If poems are written in pairs I would have a unique system of pairing students together. I often had problems with students not finding partners on their own and becoming mad if they could not work with a partner who had chosen someone else. Because of absences, I suggest drawing names out of a hat or box, counting off, taping names under desks, or any other fun way to select partners. Whatever method is used it should make partnering easy for students.

After the traditional verse forms of poetry are introduced I would begin free verse poems: thing poems, color poems, picture poems, shoe poems, acrostic poems, shape poems, poems for 2 voices, and any other poems to accentuate the learning of poetry. I would also challenge students by introducing Big Talk: Poems for Four Voices by Paul Fleischman. At the end of each trimester, or before school vacations, I would have poetry slams to celebrate the poems written in addition to sporadic sharing during class. Throughout the school year I would have poems of the month, selected and voted on by students and sponsor a poet of the month during the month of that poet's birthday such as in September honor Jack Prelutsky, in December, Emily Dickinson, and in March, Robert Frost. I would also create a classroom poetry anthology in a binder where poems could be added and taken out. Students would be able to see their own growth and the growth of others in this anthology.

To measure the progress of using poetry as a tool to build community in a classroom I would give a survey each week and be more candid on surveys used to measure information

during the year. I liked the format of students filling in the bubble and short answer responses, but the questions should be frank and specific. The sociograms were a good method of measuring the social structure of the classroom, but needed to be done more often to provide an adequate measurement of the class dynamics. I have definitely concluded that I should teach poetry my first year teaching. I have also discovered that any student can write poetry and benefit from the effects of using poetry as a tool for building community in a classroom.



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APPENDICES

Results from Sociogram #1 October 28, 1999

Student Answer Question: Which 3 people do you want to play with on recess?

First choice = 3 points Second choice = 2 points Third choice = 1 point

| STARS | MID RANGE | | LOW RANGE | | ISOLATES |
|------------------|---------------|----------------|--------------|---------------|------------|
| Jessica (23, 10) | Janet (8, 6) | Miranda (5, 2) | Linda (4, 2) | Kristi (1, 1) | Sara (0,0) |
| Keri (17, 8) | Elaine (8, 6) | Devin (5, 3) | Darla (3, 1) | Tami (1, 1) | |
| C.J. (11, 5) | Grant (7, 3) | | Aly (3, 1) | Carol (1, 1) | |
| Darren (9, 4) | Rick (6, 3) | | Anna (3, 1) | | |
| | Adam (6, 3) | | Sean (2, 1) | | |
| | Mary (6, 3) | | Andy (1, 1) | | |

First number in parentheses indicates total points. Second number indicates the number of students who chose the individual.

Results from Sociogram #2 March 27, 2000

Student Answer Question: Which 3 people do you want to play with on recess?

First choice = 3 points Second choice = 2 points Third choice = 1 point

| STARS | MID RANGE | | LOW RANGE | | ISOLATES |
|----------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|--|------------|
| Lisa (14,7) | Keri (9,5) | Darla (5, 3) | Adam (4, 2) | | Sara (0,0) |
| Mary (13,8) | Linda (9,4) | Carol (5, 3) | Andy (3, 2) | | Sean (0,0) |
| Jessica (12,6) | C.J. (8,4) | Darren (5,3) | Janet (3, 1) | | |
| | Kristi (7,3) | Peter (5,3) | Aly (3, 1) | | |
| | Tami (6,3) | Miranda (5,2) | Anna (3, 1) | | |
| | Elaine (6, 3) | Curtis (5,2) | | | |
| | Jose (6,3) | | | | |

First number in parentheses indicates total points. Second number indicates the number of students who chose the individual.

Results from Sociogram #3 May 17, 2000

Student Answer Question: Which 3 people do you want to play with on recess?

First choice = 3 points Second choice = 2 points Third choice = 1 point

| STARS | MID RANGE | | LOW RANGE | | ISOLATES |
|----------------|------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|----------|
| Lisa (16,7) | Mary (8,4) | Elaine (5, 3) | Aly (4, 2) | Anna (3,1) | |
| Keri (15, 7) | Adam (6,2) | C.J. (5,2) | Darla (4, 2) | Sean (2,2) | |
| Linda (10,7) | Jose (6,2) | | Darren (3,3) | Sara (2,1) | |
| Jessica (10,5) | | | Tami (3,1) | Kristi (2,1) | |
| | | | Miranda (3,1) | Janet (2,1) | |

First number in parentheses indicates total points. Second number indicates the number of students who chose the individual.

Sociogram Tally Sheet for October 28, 1999

| | Darla | Rick | Janet | Linda | Adam | Andy | Kristi | Grant | Aly | Tami | Ken | Jessica | Carol | Miranda | Elaïne | Sara | C.J. | Sean | Devin | Anna | Mary | Darren | |
|----------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Darla | | | | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Rick | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Janet | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Linda | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Adam | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Andy | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Kristi | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Grant | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Aly | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Tami | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Ken | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Jessica | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Carol | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Miranda | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Elaïne | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Sara | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| C.J. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Sean | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Devin | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Anna | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Mary | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Darren | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| TOTALS: | 3 | 6 | 8 | 4 | 6 | 1 | 1 | 7 | 3 | 1 | 17 | 23 | 1 | 5 | 8 | 0 | 11 | 2 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 6 | 9 |

| Sociogram Tally Sheet for March 27, 2000 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|-------|-------|-------|------|------|--------|-----|------|------|---------|-------|---------|--------|------|------|------|------|------|--------|------|------|--------|-------|---|--|
| | Darla | Janet | Linda | Adam | Andy | Kristi | Aly | Tami | Keri | Jessica | Carol | Miranda | Elaine | Sara | C.J. | Sean | Anna | Mary | Darren | Lisa | Jose | Curtis | Peter | | |
| Darla | | | | | | | | 3 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Janet | | | | | | | | | 1 | | 2 | 3 | 2 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Linda | | | | | | | 3 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Adam | | | | | 2 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Andy | | | | | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Kristi | | | | | | 3 | | | | | | | | | | | | 3 | | | | | | | |
| Aly | | | | | | | | 1 | | 2 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Tami | | | | | | | 2 | | 1 | | | | | | | | 3 | | | | | | | | |
| Keri | | | | | | | | | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Jessica | | | | | | | | | | 2 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Carol | | | | | | | 2 | | 3 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Miranda | | | | | | | | | | 1 | | 2 | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Elaine | | | | | | | | | | | 2 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Sara | | | | | | | | | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| C.J. | | | | | | | 3 | | | | 3 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Sean | | | | | | | | | | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Anna | | | | | | | | 2 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Mary | | | | | | | 3 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Darren | | | | | | | | | | | 3 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Lisa | | | | | | | | | 3 | | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Jose | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Curtis | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Peter | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| TOTALS: | 5 | 3 | 9 | 4 | 3 | 7 | 3 | 6 | 9 | 12 | 5 | 5 | 6 | 0 | 8 | 0 | 3 | 13 | 5 | 14 | 6 | 3 | 5 | 5 | |

Sociogram Tally Sheet for May 17, 2000

| | Darla | Janet | Linda | Adam | Kristi | Aly | Tami | Keri | Jessica | Miranda | Elaine | Sara | C.J. | Sean | Anna | Mary | Darren | Lisa | Jose |
|---------|-------|-------|-------|------|--------|-----|------|------|---------|---------|--------|------|------|------|------|------|--------|------|------|
| Darla | | | | | | 1 | 3 | 2 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Janet | 1 | | | | 2 | | | | | 3 | | | | | | | | | |
| Linda | | | | | | | | 2 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | 3 |
| Adam | | | | | | | | | | | | | 3 | | | | | | 2 |
| Kristi | | | | | | 3 | | | 2 | | | | | | | | | 1 | 1 |
| Aly | | | | | | | | 1 | | | | | | | 3 | | | | 2 |
| Tami | | 3 | | | | | | | | | | 2 | | | | | | | 2 |
| Keri | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 | | | | | 3 |
| Jessica | | | | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 2 |
| Miranda | | 2 | | | | | | | 3 | | | | | | | | | | 2 |
| Elaine | | | | 2 | | | | | | | | | | 1 | | | | | 1 |
| Sara | | | | 1 | | | | | 3 | | | | | | | | | | 3 |
| C.J. | | | | | 3 | | | | | | 1 | | | | | | | | 2 |
| Sean | | | | | | | | 3 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | 2 |
| Anna | | | | | | 3 | | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | 2 |
| Mary | | | | | | | | 1 | | | 3 | | | | | | | | 2 |
| Darren | | | | | | | | | | | 1 | | | | | | | | 2 |
| Lisa | | | | 1 | | | | 3 | | | | | | | | | | | 2 |
| Jose | | | | | 3 | | | | 10 | | | | 2 | | | | | | 1 |
| TOTALS: | 4 | 2 | 10 | 6 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 15 | 10 | 3 | 5 | 2 | 5 | 2 | 3 | 8 | 3 | 16 | 6 |

71.

AH

72

Miss Mobley is very nice

Is a very good teacher

So pretty

So neat

Miss Mobley is her-self

Oh, how cool

Be very nice to her

Like you

Every day she is there for us.

You are very nice

Love Jessica

Miss Mabley is very nice



I'm very glad she is my teacher

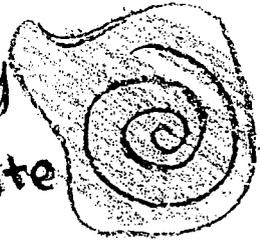
She teaches us very good

See you at the poetry slam

Me and her are best friends

Oh, we had a fun day

Books are her favorite



Looks good

Eating Soshi is her favorite

You're the best Miss Mabley

Miss Mobley I will miss you

It was hard for me when tried to help
But I will miss you

So now you are leaving and might come
Back

So every one in the class will miss you

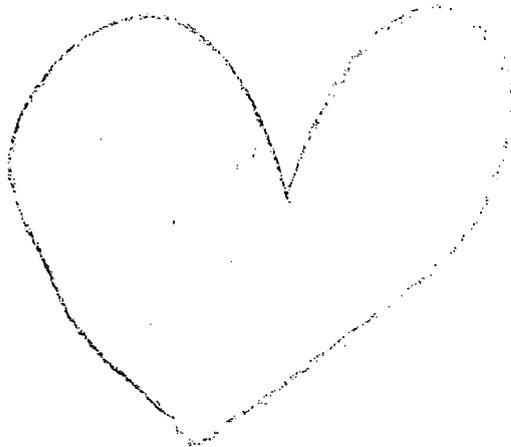
Miss Mobley this Mobley that every
one needed your help

Busy all day doing stuff.

Like you could not stop

ever second I turn and you are doing
something

You are a great teacher.



MISSMOOLEY is nice
 I will MISS MIS MOOLEY
 She is good

She is funny
 MISSMOOLEY is funny

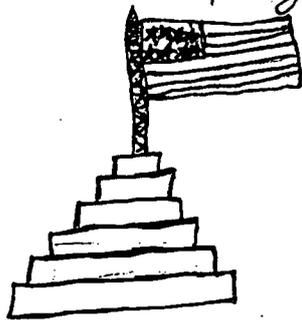
Oh what fun we had
 Beautiful like a rose
 Light like the sun
 Every minute I look at you you smile,
 you are nice

Name Jose

My Letter to Next Year's Teacher

Date 6-7-00Dear Fourth Grade Teacher,

I want to tell you about me as a reader and writer. I Like
To write and I like to read books
in storys and I like to do homework
I can't wait to be in your class
room. Poetry is fun. I like computers
I like to read charlotes web and
I like to watch movies and TV.
I wonder what your name is.
I hope my friends will be in your
classroom. I wonder when your birthday
is I hope your like a old Teacher.



Yours truly,

JOSE

Name

Anna

My Letter to Next Year's Teacher

Date 6/7/00Dear Fourth Grade Teacher,

I want to tell you about me as a reader and writer. I like reading. Because it is cool. I like to read book about Junier B. Jones and That Meanie Jim's Birthday. And I like to writing a poems and storys. I like to play tegs too. And I like to play with my friends too. And I like to play ball, dolls, I like to play houses too.



Yours truly,

Anna



Name [Redacted] Sean

My Letter to Next Year's Teacher

Date 6/12/00

Dear Fourth Grade Teacher

I want to tell you about me as a reader and writer. I like to write poems and read books like three little pigs. I like to go to play at recess. I like to eat pizza. I can't wait to meet you.

Yours truly,

[Redacted]
Sean

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Name [redacted] Mary

My Letter to Next Year's Teacher

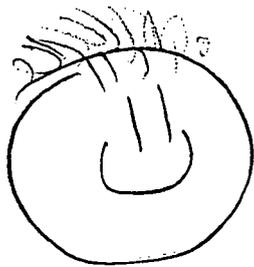
Date June 8, 2000

Dear Fourth Grade Teacher,

I want to tell you about me as a reader and writer. I love to read poem books all my books at home are either a poem book or a Bible.

I don't like writing very much.

I hope your a nice Teacher because i miss Mrs. [redacted] who is already a nice teacher



Yours truly,

[redacted]
Mary

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Name ████████ Adam

My Letter to Next Year's Teacher

Date 6/27/00Dear Fourth grade Teacher,

I want to tell you about me as a reader and writer. I LIKE TO WRITE BUT I DO NOT LIKE TO READ.

I LOVE WATCHING TV AND I KIND OF LIKE DOING HOMEWORK. I LIKE

RECESS AND EXPLORE TIME. I LIKE PLAYING SOFTBALL. I LIKE COMPUTERS.

POETRY IS FUN. I LIKE IT WHEN

PEOPLE READ TO ME LIKE B. JONES BOOKS AND CHARLOTTE'S WEB AND

WATCH THE MOVIE OF IT.

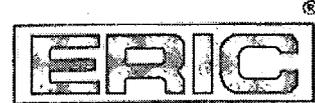
OH I JUST CAN'T WAIT TO MEET YOU.

Yours truly,

████████ Adam



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