

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 454 724

FL 026 781

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TITLE / Roses Aren't Always Red: Poetry as a Second Language.  
PUB DATE 1998-07-30  
NOTE 32p.  
PUB TYPE Creative Works (030) -- Guides - Classroom - Teacher (052)  
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.  
DESCRIPTORS Classroom Techniques; Curriculum Development; \*English (Second Language); \*Poetry; \*Second Language Instruction; Second Language Learning

ABSTRACT

This document is a compilation of poems and ideas for teaching poetry in the English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) classroom. A list of poetry anthologies is also provided. (Contains 51 references.) (KFT)

# THURSTON



## Roses

### Aren't Always

### Red:

### Poetry as a Second Language

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July 30, 1998

Ed 454 724

### **Marinating Kids in Poetry: Some Ways**

1. Bring in wide range of poetry through out the year, not just when you plan to have kids write it. Genres emerge naturally from the kinds of literature kids are exposed to.
2. Don't analyze poetry; Enjoy it through performances.
  - Act out poems in groups---allow for wide ranges of interpretation.
  - Choral and Echo Readings of Poetry
  - Assign voices (girls/boys, this half of the class/that half of the class, low/high voices)
  - Beat out the rhythm
  - Dramatic Poetry Readings by Individuals
3. Hang Poetry around the room
  - illustrate poems
  - write them on special kinds of paper, with special pens
  - if you have access to computers, play with fonts & type size graphics
4. Have a poetry corner--with poetry books, a listening station, class anthologies, etc...
5. Play recordings of poets reading their own poems; Record students reading their poems and poems by others.
3. Have students create poetry anthologies
  - A collective anthology of class favorites
  - Individual student anthologies of favorites, or poems by one author, or on one subject or theme ( SEE ARTICLE: Poetry is directions for your imagination.)
4. Have students bring in their favorite poem, playground chant, nursery rhyme to share with others.
5. Have kids memorize poetry.
6. Have kids write their own poetry timelines--what role has poetry played at different stages in their lives. This uncovers data for teachers about how students think and feel about poetry.

#### **SOME DO'S FOR DISCUSSING POETRY**

1. Ask about what the poem
  - reminds them of in their own lives
  - tell the words, phrases, images that really stand out for you
  - create their own questions for class discussion

## Poetry: Some Forms

### Limerick (A-A-B-B-A)

An old ESOL teacher from Nome  
Got lost when he started to roam.  
He encountered a moose  
Who said, "Goodness! Great Zeus!  
Don't Juneau that there's no place like home?"  
by Les Greenblatt

### Haiku (5-7-5)

frogs lilyponding,  
ceaselessly croaking 'neath smooth  
satin moonlight--Shhh

### Cinquain

noun  
adjective, adjective  
three word sentence  
four participles  
noun

Ball  
round, smooth  
I grab it  
bouncing, dribbling, passing, shooting  
Basket!

### List poem

Knoxville, Tennessee

I always like summer  
best  
you can eat fresh corn  
from daddy's garden  
and okra  
and greens  
and cabbage  
and lots of  
barbecue  
and buttermilk  
and homemade ice cream  
at the church picnic

and listen to  
gospel music  
outside  
at the church  
homecoming  
and go to the mountains with  
your grandmother  
and go barefooted  
and be warm  
all the time  
not only when you go to bed  
and sleep  
by Nikki Giovanni

58 A Writing Project: Training Teachers of Composition

from Kindergarten to College, (1965). Daniels, H. & Lemelman S. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

VARIATION The diamante is another poetic form that lends itself to this moment in the workshop—mostly because its rules are so rigid. The diamante takes this structure:



Put this model up on the board, explain it, and give people about ten minutes to concoct their own. If people are fearful about beginning, suggest that they fill in the top box with "something you'd never find in a poem." You can also suggest that they work toward some movement or relationship (e.g., opposites) between the top word and the bottom word.

EXAMPLES

Orkin  
 efficient effective  
 spray kill destroy  
 gasping panting kicking dying  
 sneak hide wait  
 clever forever  
 cockroaches

English  
 Alive Vital  
 Reading Writing Discussing  
 Talk Think Debate Listen  
 Lecturing Drilling Testing  
 Numb Hazy  
 Sleep

56 *A Writing Project*

EXAMPLES

*Preposition Poems*

THOUGHTS

In the forest  
Under the tree  
Near the lake  
On my knees

Of faith  
In earnest  
Without doubt  
To God

*Betty Riebock*

DEAR CUSTOMER:

Unless your payment is received  
At our office  
By noon on Friday  
On you go  
In accordance with established procedures  
To our Adjustment Department  
For collection.

In the morning, dunning letters  
At work, chats with your supervisor  
At night, annoying phone calls.

Around you, beside you, behind you  
Everywhere  
After your money  
On your case  
Without mercy  
Until you pay.

Have a nice day.

*Col Cutler*

Headline Hunting works fine as either an individual or a group game. The idea is to cut out a lot of newspaper headlines and play around with them until you get words that say something to you. These steps will work:

### Getting Ready

- 1 Find out whether Headline Hunting is to be done in class or out of class. (We recommend you play this at home.)
- 2 Find a bigger working space than you think you will need.
- 3 Allow more time than you think you will need.
- 4 You will need (a) scissors; (b) glue, paste, or tape; and (c) one complete newspaper.

### Working

- 5 Cut and trim forty or more headlines that have something interesting in them—including just good single words. ("Seeing Double?" on page 32 began from sixty headlines.)
- 6 For convenience, use mainly headlines that measure under one half inch in height.
- 7 Before cutting any headline, check the back side of the page to see what other headline you may be cutting into.
- 8 In addition to headlines, use picture captions, if you want to. But do not use ads. None!

### Making the Poem

- 9 Allow plenty of time to discover connections and surprises in the headlines. Arrange them in many different ways. Use single words or phrases or both.
- 10 When you have figured out the arrangement of your poem, trim the pieces you plan to use and arrange them on page 34. Then stick them on.

## Headline Hunting **7**

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 Seeing  
Double?

**800-Pound Soprano**  
With Big Eyes, And Knickers  
*Wants To Reduce*

Florist Finds Solution

**Eat Likely Surprises**

Young **Roots And Tree Leaves**

Hurt **Horsemeat**

**Big Physical Trout**

Cool Chile

**Dead Garbage**

And Trolls

By **Starving** Tonnage Shows Decrease

**So Hang On**

—Stephen Dunning

## PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE POEM

I am	(an adjective & noun)
I wonder if	(something you wonder about)
I hear	(imaginary sound)
I see	(imaginary sight)
I want to be	(your goal)
I am	(an adjective & noun)
I pretend	(what you pretend to do)
I feel	(your feelings)
I touch	(imaginary thing to touch)
I worry	(what you worry about)
I cry	(what makes you sad)
I am	(an adjective and noun)
I understand	(something you know)
I say	(something you say)
I dream	(something you dream about)
I try	(something you try to do)
I hope	(something you hope for)
I am	(an adjective and noun)

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

**FIVE-SENSE POEMS**

Describe an emotion by using your senses. First give the emotion a color (sight). Then tell how it smells, tastes, sounds, and feels.

Loneliness is grey.

It sounds like a vacant room.  
It feels like a toothache.  
It smells like an empty house.  
It tastes like liver.

Success is red.

It sounds like claps and cheers.  
It feels like a pat on the back.  
It smells like flowers in the spring.  
It tastes as sweet as a mother's kiss.

Now you try it. Here are some suggestions for topics: embarrassment, fear, love, humor, boredom, or hatred.

\_\_\_\_\_ is \_\_\_\_\_  
 (emotion) (color)

It sounds like \_\_\_\_\_

It feels like \_\_\_\_\_

It smells like \_\_\_\_\_

It tastes like \_\_\_\_\_

Here is space for you to try a second one. Perhaps you would like to rearrange the order this time.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

From Writers Express, Kemper, D.,  
Nathan, R. & Sebrenek, P. (1995).  
Burlington, WI: Write Source.

## I V T E

Poets have fun inventing new forms of poetry. Here are some invented forms to try.

**Alphabet Poetry** ● An alphabet poem uses a part of the alphabet to create a funny list poem.

Cats  
Don't  
Ever  
Fly (willingly)

**Concrete Poetry** ● This is poetry in which the shape or design helps express the meaning or feeling of the poem.

The way to school is *d*<sub>o</sub>*w*<sub>n</sub>  
W I D E streets  
FULLOFBIGPEOPLE!!!!

**Definition Poetry** ● This is poetry that defines a word or an idea creatively.

FRIENDSHIP  
Friendship is like stars in the  
sky. Like going  
to fly with Peace,  
and the moon shines  
on us while we fly. We walk  
through the sky and clouds. And we  
share the future in a treasure  
chest, topped with diamonds. —Jessamyn Ansary

**Five W's Poetry** ● Each line in this type of poem answers one of the 5 W's (who? what? where? when? and why?).

I  
Love to 'blaze  
Along Venice Beach  
In the middle of the day  
Because people are friendly and get out of your way.

-Sandy  
Lyne

POEM SKETCHING: This is a technique for collecting and combining words into sentences that "feel" like poems. In a Poem Sketch, we take the four words in a word-group and put them into sentences that fit together and make sense. Guidelines: 1) Re-combine the word-groups if you like. 2) Change the forms of the words if you like. 3) Get the four words into three or more sentences. 4) Do not rhyme.

Example:

	coins	hours	shore
	leaves	private	robes
frog cloud pond morning-glories	heart	life	king
	sky	dream	lake
Clouds open up like			
huge, white morning-glories.	gardens	love	elf
Reflected in the pond,	roots	spirit	snow
they make a path of lily-pads--	silence	energy	log
some green, some white,	wind	night	alone
some real, some not.			
Look carefully, little frog,	roses	God	book
before you leap	light	ocean	woods
on the Springtime morning.	touch	cloud	moss
	wall	prayer	dream

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blind	breath	berries	harvest	dragon	sleeve
fingers	sunrise	stones	friends	leaves	hut
mirror	words	Summer	wind	smoke	bowl
wait	green	path	field	rake	tears
father	silver	shadow	rain	ladder	supper
hoe	moth	blossom	river	heaven	bread
sundown	candle	window	cattails	barn	water
dust	wings	hush	boys	hay	kiss
mountain	purple	lamp	moon	geese	pencil
gold	year	slave	tired	rowboat	paper
water	Emperor	gate	fireflies	chill	breeze
life	joy	grave	jar	south	poem
pin	town	faucet	orchards	snowflake	ditch
needles	roads	rainbow	heavy	bamboo	rat
notes	hill	sparrow	apples	listen	soul
mist	goodbye	song	frost	awake	moon
girls	rooster	pond	sidewalk	weeds	canoe
sleep	legs	rain-drop	wagon	secrets	rope
forest	restless	circles	insects	mice	heron
beauty	grass	frog	glory	nests	dawn
pinecone	floor	childhood	melodies	creek	
owl	homesick	snow	mother	whispers	
twilight	bed	fence	pillow	butteflies	
star	dark	gate	face	fish	

POEM-SKETCHING--STUDENT SAMPLES:

elf log snow alone

HAPPY

Happy by myself sitting by a car.  
Being alone in the snow sitting by a log.  
I feel like an elf,  
a peasant who knows nothing.  
I am the smallest one around.

-Kevin Hammond, grade 5

field fox butterfly wall

SHORTCUT

The shortcut takes me through fields of flowers,  
And past walls of trees where foxes live,  
And flitting butterflies.  
Past all these things I hurry by.  
I ignore all of them, each and every one,  
Not so sure I'm glad I took  
The shortcut to adulthood.

-Alex Shangraw, grade 6

freckles beauty sundown world

THE BEAUTY OF THE NIGHT

Beauty does not bless those with freckles on their nose.  
I'm no exception to the rule.  
But at sundown the sky transforms into the darkest shadow.  
Under it I hide and the world can't see.  
With the night on my nose I possess beauty.

-Jennifer Sadler, grade 11

trees roots death rain

ROOTS

The trees are crying  
So is the girl under them  
The roots of both have been torn  
A death in her family  
And another rainforest gone

-Tiffany Ione Scholes, grade 7

Carolina  
Lucero

anti, planifon, orca, ocean, migrate, humpback, flute, echolocation  
bull, breach, blow, blubber, bale  
photo, beach, bay, fin, whale, white, spout, idonzerous, kill whale, migration, baleen, teeth, song  
diverse, 2014, 2015, 2016

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## "I Am" Poem

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The "I Am" poem is not only appropriate for adolescents but often very revealing to both themselves and their teacher. Because it is a patterned poem, they can concentrate on the content without having to worry about form.

### Pattern

#### 1st stanza

I am (two special characteristics you have)\*  
I wonder (something you are curious about)  
I hear (an imaginary sound)  
I see (an imaginary sight)  
I want (an actual desire)  
I am (the first line of the poem repeated)

#### 2nd stanza

I pretend (something you actually pretend to do)  
I feel (a feeling about something imaginary)  
I touch (an imaginary touch)  
I worry (something that really bothers you)  
I cry (something that makes you very sad)  
I am (the first line of the poem repeated)

#### 3rd stanza

I understand (something you know is true)  
I say (something you believe in)  
I dream (something you actually dream about)  
I try (something you really make an effort about)  
I hope (something you actually hope for)  
I am (the first line of the poem repeated)

### Student poem

I am a carefree girl who loves horses.  
I wonder if there is a horse that can fly.  
I hear the stomping of a hundred mustangs on  
the desert in Arabia.  
I see a horse with golden wings soaring into  
the sunset.  
I want to ride swiftly over a green meadow.  
I am a carefree girl who loves horses.

I pretend to be an Olympic jumper.  
I feel the sky pressing down on me as I ride  
along a sandy shore.  
I touch the clouds on a winged horse.  
I worry that I'll fall off and become paralyzed.  
I cry when a colt dies.  
I am a carefree girl who loves horses.

I understand that I will not be able to ride  
every day of my life.  
I say let all horses roam free.  
I dream about the day when I have a horse of  
my own.  
I try to be the best rider in the world.  
I hope to ride all my life.  
I am a carefree girl who loves horses.

\* avoid the obvious and the ordinary such as "I am a 13-year-old boy with brown hair." That doesn't make you distinctive since there are millions of 13-year-old boys with brown hair. "I am a girl who bruises easily and believes in astrology . . . when the stars are right." That's better because it gives a sense of the speaker and how she is different from other people.

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## Hero Poem

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The hero poem describes a person rather than an image or feeling though it includes images and feelings. The hero selected may often provide insight into an adolescent's interests and aspirations.

### Pattern

- Line 1: A person you admire  
Line 2: Three words to describe the person  
Line 3: Place, group, or activity identified with the person  
Line 4: Three action words (-ing words) for the person  
Line 5: When or where the actions take place  
Line 6: Thoughts or feelings about the person

### Student poems

Anne Frank  
Young, pretty, happy  
Teenage writer  
Hiding, growing, learning  
During World War II  
Her words will live forever.

Gloria Estefan  
Pretty, dark, Latina  
Singer with Miami Sound Machine  
Dancing, smiling, singing  
On stage  
Talented and strong.

Nelson Mandela  
Proud, kind, strong  
South African  
Struggling, leading, surviving  
In his homeland  
A role model for all people:

Mother Theresa  
Mature, loving, holy  
Nobel Peace Prize winner  
Serving, helping, healing  
In Calcutta, India  
She is filled with goodness.

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## Blotz poem

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The Blotz poem takes a vivid imagination and can help students develop a working knowledge of both the use of a thesaurus and alliteration. Middle school/junior high students can have fun with it and practice a skill at the same time.

### Pattern

- Line 1: Name your creature. (This is a . . . )  
Line 2: Tell where your creature lives (using words—4 or more—that begin with the same beginning sound of the creature's name).  
Line 3: Tell what your creature eats (using words—4 or more—that begin with the same beginning sound of the creature's name).  
Line 4: Tell what your creature likes (using words—4 or more—that begin with the same beginning sound of the creature's name).  
Line 5: Tell something about your creature (using words—3 or more—that begin with the same beginning sound of the creature's name).  
Line 6: Tell something about what your creature did to you (using words—3 or more—that begin with the same beginning sound of the creature's name).

### Student poem

This is a teacherian.  
Teacherians live in Turkish towers on top of telegraph transmitters in Tibet.  
Teacherians eat tortoise toes, tangy tarts, tender toast, and tuna.  
Teacherians throw temper tantrums, torment students, try on toupees, and twiddle their thumbs.  
Teacherians teach trigonometry, enjoy tapestry, and like tanning their temples.  
This teacherian told me to tape up my mouth. It tortured me and tore out my teeth.

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## I wish

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Wish poems usually have a theme such as colors, foods, animals, places, weather, gifts, etc. They can be any length and are appropriate for all ages. They are unrhymed and every line begins "I wish."

### Pattern

Line 1: I wish ...  
Line 2: I wish ...  
Line 3: I wish ...  
etc.

### Student poems

I wish I had red hair done up in braids.  
I wish I had velvet brown eyes.  
I wish I had a soft sky blue dress.  
I wish I had a heart of gold.

I wish for taco-flavored ice cream.  
I wish for chocolate-covered bees' knees.  
I wish I had a mint pancake.  
I wish I had maple-flavored fried chicken.  
I wish I could have an ice cream pizza.

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## News Poem

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The news poem calls for an eye for figurative language and an ability to re-order that language. Using a news story, the poet selects the figurative language that tells the story succinctly and then uses those words and phrases in his poem. Because of the level of reading of most newspapers, it is more appropriate for middle school/junior high students.

### News story pattern

East German hit in legs,  
shots thwart escape

Berlin (AP) A would-be refugee was wounded by East German machine gun fire at about noon Sunday as he dashed through border installations toward the Berlin wall, West German police reported.

They said the man was struck in the legs by some of the 20 shots fired and knocked to the ground about 100 yards short of the WALL as he was attempting to cross the control strip some 30 yards wide, that separate East Berlin buildings from the Wall.

Witnesses, including two American military policemen, said East German soldiers dragged the wounded man to a watch tower from where he was later taken away in a jeep.

It was the first outbreak of shooting along the demaraction line since the signing Friday of the Big Four pact aimed at easing tensions in and around the divided city.

### Student poem

He dashed through border installations,  
A would-be refugee.  
Twenty shots fired.  
Knocked to the ground  
One hundred yards short of the Wall.  
Wounded, dragged to a watch tower.  
Taken away in a jeep.

Additional patterned poems from Ruth Devlin, Gene Ward Elementary School teacher

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### Contrast

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A contrast poem is four lines contrasting items found in the environment, in life, in a book, etc. The first three lines are related, and the fourth line is the contrast.

The sky is over my head.  
The birds are over my head.  
The clouds are over my head.  
The ants are under my feet.

The red hen planted the grain.  
The red hen harvested the crop.  
The red hen baked the bread.  
The dog, goose, and cat didn't work.

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### Alphabet

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An alphabet poem is one way to list objects or thoughts. The list must be in alphabetical order, with the item listed beginning with the same letter as the first letter of the line.

A is the ant in my kitchen.  
B is the basketball my son bounces outside.  
C is the cat meowing pitifully at my back door.  
D is the delivery truck rumbling down the street.  
E is the elephant that Katie is drawing for me.  
...  
Z is the zipper I zip on my suitcase when I leave for vacation.

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### Countdown

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A countdown is a poem in which each line starts with a number. The items listed belong together in some way (content area, thematic unit, concept, etc.). An ending line of closure is optional. There is no set number of lines for this poem.

One child picks a long-stemmed dandelion.  
Two birds sing songs in their nest.  
Three mountains glow orange from the sinking sun.  
Four cicadas sing rhythmic songs.  
Five tulips begin to close their velvet petals.  
These evening hours stay close to my heart.

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### Alliterative poem

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Alliterative poems use several identical initial consonants in each line.

The wild wind whirls and whips  
My hair higher than my head  
Making me  
Delightfully dizzy.

Shouting children shake and shimmy to the beat  
Of metal music making boxes  
That they set out on the street.  
The sweltering sun finally makes them sullen  
with the heat,  
So they wade in shallow water which  
Cools their little feet.

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### Fabrication

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A poetic fabrication is a literary device that looks at the truth of things and then alters it. The more fantastic the better the fabrication. There is no particular form to follow.

My quiet street  
Filled with a herd of elephants  
Dancing in green velvet slippers  
And eating carrots with a spoon.

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## Poetic form sentences

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These sentence patterns can form poems.

A \_\_\_\_\_ is \_\_\_\_\_.

I like \_\_\_\_\_.

A \_\_\_\_\_ is \_\_\_\_\_.

I like \_\_\_\_\_.

A \_\_\_\_\_ is \_\_\_\_\_.

I like \_\_\_\_\_.

But a \_\_\_\_\_ isn't \_\_\_\_\_.

But I don't like \_\_\_\_\_.

On Monday I saw \_\_\_\_\_.

Farewell to \_\_\_\_\_.

On Tuesday I touched \_\_\_\_\_.

Hello to \_\_\_\_\_.

On Wednesday I heard \_\_\_\_\_.

Farewell to \_\_\_\_\_.

On Thursday I tasted \_\_\_\_\_.

Hello to \_\_\_\_\_.

On Friday I smelled \_\_\_\_\_.

It's (season), it's (season), it's (season)!

\_\_\_\_\_ is its color.

Line 1 Where it happens.

The \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_.

Line 2 What is happening.

The \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_.

Line 3 When it occurs.

The \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_.

The \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_!

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## Catalogue

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Catalogue verse focuses on listing verbs that describe how something moves or acts or both. The last line tells what the category is.

Jumping  
Running  
Laughing  
Crying  
Skating  
Rolling  
Giggling  
Eating  
Playing  
Growing  
Kids, kids, kids!

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## April Rain Song

Let the rain \_\_\_\_\_ you.

Let the rain \_\_\_\_\_ upon your head with \_\_\_\_\_.

Let the rain sing you a \_\_\_\_\_.

The rain makes still pools on the sidewalk.

The rain makes running pools in the gutter.

The rain plays a little sleep-song on our roof at night--

And I love the rain.

--Langston Hughes

## Line Breaks and White Space

**Line Breaks:** Recopy the poem below onto another piece of paper, putting in line breaks wherever you think they fit. We will ask you why you made these choices.

This Is Just to Say I have eaten the  
plums that were in the icebox which  
you were probably saving for breakfast  
forgive me they were delicious so  
sweet and so cold

^ \* ^ \* ^ \* ^ \* ^ \* ^ \* ^ \* ^ \* ^ \* ^ \* ^

**White space:** Cut the poem below into "chunks" that belong together. Glue them onto a blank piece of paper. Think of the paper as a canvas and you are a painter. You may use any part of the canvas you wish. We will ask you why you made these choices.

Young Woman at a Window She sits  
with tears on her cheek her cheek on  
her hand her child in her lap his nose  
pressed to the glass.

Both poems by William Carlos Williams

START

# HAIKU MAZE

frog  
mole  
gnat  
bear

A  
The  
This  
That

behind  
around  
under  
above

melodic  
terrible  
vermillion  
glistening

trumpet.  
desire.  
lantern.  
hillside.

clock  
star  
tree  
rhyme

awaits  
covers  
launches  
inspires

blue  
red  
green  
white

Like  
With  
For  
In

his  
her  
my  
your

leaves  
chairs  
days  
songs

may  
might  
will  
should

interrupt  
remember  
entertain  
hypnotize

clouds  
drums  
thirst  
bells

art:  
sleep:  
house:  
boat:

soon  
now  
next  
not

That  
This  
Each  
Next

race  
jump  
spin  
twirl

me:  
us:  
you:  
them:

a  
the  
this  
that

season  
evening  
summer  
autumn

Angry  
Splendid  
Heavy  
Winter

tune  
vine  
bug  
joy

really  
briskly  
loudly  
never

past  
on  
the  
like

wings  
gates  
nights  
dreams

morning  
singer  
collie  
garden

We  
I  
he  
she

roosters.  
apples.  
porches.  
voices.

mocks  
fools  
needs  
hides

saw  
felt  
heard  
smelled

Look!  
Wait!  
Ah!  
Shh!

and  
or  
with  
of

our  
your  
her  
his

gathered  
pondered  
rattled  
counted

They're  
I'm  
We're  
You're

are  
were  
aren't  
weren't

passes.  
returns.  
lingers.  
murmurs.

More  
Some  
Those  
These

cups.  
walls.  
hours.  
books.

verse.  
rose.  
eyes.  
lake.

fences.  
branches.  
wagons.  
turtles.

breaking  
wasting  
lifting  
finding

ducks.  
pools.  
storms.  
words.

it.  
that.  
Them.  
Those.

frogs  
moles  
gnats  
bears

arrived.  
whistled.  
carouse.  
hurry.

here.  
deep.  
cracked.  
lost.

FINISH

## **"You Have To Live in Somebody Else's Country to Understand"**

What is it like to be an outsider?

What is it like to sit in the class where everyone has blond hair and you have black hair?

What is it like when the teacher says, "Whoever wasn't born here raise your hand."

And you are the only one.

Then, when you raise your hand, everybody looks at you and makes fun of you.

You have to live in somebody else's country to understand.

What is it like when the teacher treats you like you've been here all your life?

What is it like when the teacher speaks too fast and you are the only one who can't understand what he or she is saying, and you try to tell him or her to slow down.

Then when you do, everybody says, "If you don't understand, go to a lower class or get lost."

You have to live in somebody else's country to understand.

What is it like when you are an opposite?

When you wear the clothes of your country and they think you are crazy to wear these clothes and you think they are pretty.

You have to live in somebody else's country to understand.

What is it like when you are always a loser?

What is it like when somebody bothers you when you do nothing to them?

You tell them to stop but they tell you that they didn't do anything to you.

Then, when they keep doing it until you can't stand it any longer, you go up to the teacher and tell him or her to tell them to stop bothering you.

They say that they didn't do anything to bother you.

Then the teacher asks the person sitting next to you.

He says, "Yes, she didn't do anything to her" and you have no witness to turn to.

So the teacher thinks you are a liar.

You have to live in somebody else's country to understand.

What is it like when you try to talk and you don't pronounce the words right?

They don't understand you.

They laugh at you but you don't know that they are laughing at you, and you start to laugh with them. They say, "Are you crazy, laughing at yourself?"

Go get lost, girl."

You have to live in somebody else's country without a language to understand.

What is it like when you walk in the street and everybody turns around to look at you and you don't know that they are looking at you.

Then, when you find out, you want to hide your face but you don't know where to hide because they are everywhere.

You have to live in somebody else's country to feel it.

**Noy Chou, Ninth grade,**

Reprinted from

*Locked In/Locked Out, Tracking and Placement Practices in Boston Public Schools,*  
Boston, 1990.

# Chronicles

## Untitled

KARI LARSEN

*Sophomore, Cambridge Rindge and Latin High School, Cambridge, Massachusetts*

*In the poem below, Kari Larsen expresses the pain and sense of loss felt by a child whose country has been ravaged by war. Kari was born in Vietnam sometime in 1971. In the fall of 1973, her village was destroyed. Only a few small children survived the attack; Kari, then known as "Hang," was among them. She was adopted by her new family in 1974. Ms. Larsen searches for a remembrance of her heritage through a poetic vision of her birth mother and expresses her hope to be remembered in return.*

this is a poem to my birth mother  
whom I never knew

whose sorrow filled Asian eyes,  
lovely golden brown complexion,  
and raven black hair  
are all a figment of my imagination;  
for I was too young then,  
to now recall your face

I have felt your presence and love often  
and you will never be forgotten,  
I am a part of you  
and I hope you haven't forgotten me

the Vietnam War, the war that separated us,  
the war that killed millions  
the war that left millions lonely and homeless

it's about you, mother,  
about how I wondered  
how you are  
if you're content, sad, or lonely

I wish that I had a memory of you  
a memory of you and I together  
so I write this poem to you,  
my birth mother whom I never knew

*Harvard Educational Review* Vol. 58 No. 3 August 1988  
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## 13 Poetry Is Like

An image is a group of words in which the sum is greater than the parts. Any use of figurative language can be considered an image, which generally uses visual and physical language to achieve an effect.

*Complete the simile "poetry is like" with an image that conveys any aspect of the possibilities of poetry or your feelings about poetry. Write as many as you can in ten minutes. Since the possibilities for poetry are limitless, so are the responses to this assignment. Don't hesitate to contradict yourself from one image to the next, since one's attitude toward poetry can change from one moment to the next.*

Read the responses out loud; usually, several will elicit laughter, especially from younger students. This exercise is quick, easy, and fun. It can set the stage for future activities by letting students know that creative writing is a wide-open field. Also, it is good practice at image-making, without the pressure of finding contexts for the images.

As the students are writing, I scamper around the classroom, reminding them to be specific. For example, the response "poetry is doing something you can't really do" is not an image; it is abstract, with no appeal to the senses. I asked the author to be specific about something he couldn't do, and he wrote "poetry is like tunneling through a rock with bare hands."

When students are stuck, you can use this formula to bail them out: ask them to tell you something they hate and something they love. Then suggest they combine the two somehow. One student responded by saying she loved spaghetti and hated spinach. Then she wrote: "Poetry is like eating all the spaghetti in the world and dumping the spinach into the Atlantic Ocean."

When results are being read aloud, pause to discuss images that say something important about poetry, thus introducing notions that might be helpful later. "Poetry is like mixing a color with another one" makes the point that writers combine words to create new entities.

Students should allow some of the images to form themselves, without consciously trying to say something about poetry. If an image is beautiful or disturbing or in any other way compelling, that in itself makes a point about poetry.

These responses make direct comments about poetry or the creative process:

### Poetry is like:

a world in a head  
combing your hair when you're in a rush  
newborn pains in the neck  
closets opening and closing  
when your fish jumps out of the fishbowl to see what it's like out there  
a stick of dynamite that's going to keep blowing up no matter what  
touching a cactus without being stung  
the moon because it floats all over the world  
the times of your sloppy life  
painting without paint  
something falling out of the sky, it's very fragile, you want to catch it  
before it breaks  
when a person runs into another person shopping  
when you feel like your brains have drained down to your feet

The following are good images that would not have been born without this assignment; they can be used in future writings:

a hamster running under a bed  
the sadness when you see a kitten and you're not able to touch it because you're allergic  
a clown sinking in the sand  
smelling the taste of strawberry ice cream  
looking at a puppy in the window of a closed pet shop  
a pizza on the blackboard  
going into the woods and listening to the giggling of the streams  
a leaf dripping off a deer

One of my favorite responses to this assignment is one which, although it doesn't meet my definition of an image, says a lot about the power of poetry: "Poetry is finding out that you're not really dumb."

## 11 Tips for Making a Poem

You don't want to follow rules when you write, but it's helpful to remember certain things before you pick up your pen:

1. Focus on one image or scene. If you try to tell too much of a story, your poem will be difficult to handle. Likewise, not starting with any image means that you'll probably make several false starts.
2. The narrative (what's happening) should be clear to a reader by the time the poem is finished.
3. Try to use language that is colorful, surprising, and musical. For example, apple trees that are heavy with fruit can be described as "apple trees weighed low."
4. Make sure each line is interesting and pulls its weight. Try not to end a line with weak words such as the, and, of, a, or is.
5. Choose a title that adds something to the poem. It could provide important information that isn't given elsewhere, or it may hint at some important themes.
6. Create a mood for the reader.
7. Make sure that the poem is more than just a lot of descriptions. Images should work toward a climax or transformation.
8. Make every word count. Try to avoid repeating words or using more than you need to.
9. Give readers the actual experience instead of summarizing it. Instead of saying that ice is cold, make us feel it on our fingers and tongues.
10. The point of view (who's speaking) and the logic in the poem should remain consistent. If your poem is surreal, don't try to make it sound realistic halfway through. Likewise, don't start out with an inanimate object in a serious poem and then suddenly make it start talking.
11. Don't be afraid to make changes.

- E. L.

## In the Back Seat Was a Poet's Inspiration

ANY subject or image can be the basis for a poem. The one below - in two of its earlier drafts and then its final version - is based on an experience I had on Route 1 in Maine last summer. A station wagon in front of me seemed to be carrying black balloons in its back seat. As I got closer for a better look, I thought I saw a small rubber raft inflating. I sped up, and when I was practically on the wagon's bumper, I saw the outline of a large stuffed donkey. My curiosity burning, I moved beside the car and found myself staring at a live, chewing donkey. The driver offered a feeble grin in response to my laughter, and then she exited the highway. The challenge - and the fun - in writing the poem was deciding what to do with the scene once the narrative had been established.

### First draft

Route One, behind  
a station wagon. The driver's  
head just clears the seat.  
In back, black balloons, or  
a small raft, inflating. Eyes  
don't know the difference. Now  
it's a stuffed donkey. Pass  
the wagon as it exits the long  
gray road. You're one ring of  
a circus: ring two the tiny driver.  
Last the donkey show, twitching  
a little, sneezing, then  
ducking below.

### Third draft

#### Route One, Behind a Station Wagon

The driver's head just clears  
the seat. In back, black balloons,  
or a small raft, inflating. Now it's  
a donkey who twitches a little, star of  
a family show. The tiny ringleader waves  
me along as she exits the long gray road.  
I'm one more hopeful, seeking applause,  
finding my place as I go, but the donkey  
stands, steals my bow, then tucks himself below.

### Final version

#### Route One, Behind a Station Wagon

The driver's head just clears  
the seat. In back, black balloons  
or a small raft, inflating. Now  
it's a donkey who gapes, star  
of a family show. The tiny ringleader waves  
at her exit here on the narrow gray road.  
I'm one more hopeful, seeking  
applause, another ring in the circus.  
But the donkey stands, steals  
my bow, then tucks himself below.

- E. L.

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