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# Experiencing Poetry Daily in the Classroom: Listening, Reading, and Writing

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## Abstract

A second grade teacher provides students with daily poetry experiences based on research of the benefits of using poetry in the classroom. Poems were read for the enjoyment of the words, to further develop topics of study, to notice the use of writing conventions, to improve students' reading skills, and to improve the writing skills of students.

EXPERIENCING POETRY DAILY IN THE CLASSROOM:
LISTENING, READING, AND WRITING


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Experiencing Poetry Daily in the Classroom:
Listening, Reading, and Writing

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# Experiencing Poetry Daily in the Classroom: Listening, Reading, and Writing

A second grade teacher provides students with daily poetry experiences based on research of the benefits of using poetry in the classroom. Poems were read for the enjoyment of the words, to further develop topics of study, to notice the use of writing conventions, to improve students' reading skills, and to improve the writing skills of students.

Experiencing Poetry Daily in the Classroom:
Listening, Reading, and Writing

The idea of using poetry daily in my second grade classroom began to interest me when I realized that it was an area I naturally seemed to avoid. I began to wonder if poetry should become a part of my regular teaching instruction so I began reading about the use of poetry in the classroom. The following literature highlights helped me to understand the value and impact poetry can have on young readers and writers.

"Poetry is an experience, and its value is in one's response to it" (Weiger, 1975, p.105). Poetry allows children to use language as a method of self expression (Shapiro & Shapiro, 1971). Research has shown that the quality of children's responses to literature and their development of language increase when they are provided with regular opportunities to respond to literature (Hickman, 1981; Kelly, 1990). Poetry is one way to provide children with opportunities to respond both aesthetically and efferently (Rosenblatt, 1980). Children who are provided with poetry experiences see that poets carefully choose their words to create meaning with a rhythmic flow.

When students are allowed to make connections between their life and the poems that they experience, they begin to use poetic language in their writing, seeing themselves as potential poets (Siemens, 1996). Earlier poetry research (Shapiro & Shapiro, 1971) concluded that children given poetry instruction improved in their ability to write both poetry and prose. Fawcett (1995) observed that students who were initially reluctant to experience poetry began to write their own poetry after having poetry read to them daily. The key is to immerse children in poetry experiences

and to provide them with opportunities to experiment with poetry on their own (Strickland & Strickland, 1997).

Immersing children with poetry helps students to develop as readers as well as writers (Duthie & Zimet, 1992). Lenz (1992) discovered that her students prepared to read poems aloud using a recursive process that was similar to their writing process. Children of all reading abilities can benefit from reading poetry and having poetry read aloud to them (Strickland & Strickland, 1997).

The benefits of providing daily experiences with poetry are clear and so are the implications for teachers. Teachers must know the needs and interests of their students in order to choose poems that are appropriate (Duthie & Zimet, 1992; Kormanski, 1992; Lukasevich, 1984). Teachers need to be aware of children's poetry preferences, but should not let their selection be limited to these preferences (Kutiper & Wilson, 1993). They must also consider their own preferences during selection so that their personal excitement will be evident to the students (Kormanski; Lukasevich). Teachers must also provide children access to a wide variety of poetry for self selection (Duthie & Zimet; Lukasevich; Rosenblatt, 1980; Weiger, 1975). In general, teachers must immerse children in a wide variety of rich poetry experiences that provide opportunities for response (Lukasevich; Strickland & Strickland, 1997).

After reading the benefits of using poetry, I was convinced that I wanted to include poetry in my classroom on a daily basis. I began compiling a collection of poems with a goal of gathering about 200 so that I could read one poem a day. I chose poems that were related to the topics that we studied across the curriculum. I wanted to use poetry to enrich all the subjects, not just language arts. I tried to look for poems that

represented varying points of view and varying tone that would allow for discussion and expression when read aloud.

I searched poetry anthologies looking for poems relating to general topics like weather, animals, holidays, school and family. As I began gathering poems, I soon discovered that I could group them into very specific areas that would allow me to select the most appropriate poem for any given day. I found poems that described quite, gentle snows and poems that described blizzards. I kept the poems in a large binder so that they were all in one place and so that I could keep adding to my collection. Other subjects that I included were: food, oceans, fire safety, and teeth.

Once I had a collection of poems, I typed a copy of each one and made an overhead of each. Every day I presented one poem to the class on the overhead so they could see the words as I read the poem. After I read the poem, we would read it together. Sometimes we would read the poem several times experimenting with different expressions - should we sound sad? or happy?, etc. We would discuss what the poem described and how it was described by the poet. These discussions helped us decide which expression seemed the most appropriate. The students would then tell me what they remembered about the poem and what it reminded them of by relating the poem to their life experiences and to their prior knowledge.

After we focused on the meaning of the poem, I would ask the students to examine the way the poem was written. The overheads provided the opportunity for students or myself to mark the conventions that we noticed in the poems without permanently changing the poems. Students used markers to circle punctuation, capital letters (or lack of them), rhyming words, adjectives, or simply favorite lines. The overhead was a way for students to become involved with the poems. Even students who were not

naturally interested wanted a chance to leave their mark. Highlighting repetitive words and rhyming patterns helped the students to see that poets carefully select their words.

When we finished experiencing the poem on the overhead, I gave all the students their own copy to keep. I waited to give the students their own copies so that we would all be focused together on the overhead. At first, I had the students keep their poems in folders, but soon discovered that the poems fell out and were easily lost or damaged. Since my goal was for each student to have a collection of poems to take home at the end of the year, I decided to have the students keep the poems in binders. Once we established the "2 click" rule (1 to open and 1 to close the binder), this system proved to be successful.

Keeping the poems in binders allowed us to revisit favorite poems and make comparisons throughout the year. The students began to recognize familiar poets. They would search through their binders to find other poems that the author of the poem for the day had written. The students would also look for poems that reminded them of that day's poem. The binders were kept in the students' desks so the poems were available for independent reading during the day. The students enjoyed reading the familiar texts. Some struggling readers chose to read from their poetry binders because the poems were something that they could read with confidence and expression. The students also took their poetry binders home once a week to share with their families. I also encouraged the students to create illustrations for the poems to help demonstrate their individual comprehension of the poems.

I was pleased with how the 15 to 20 minute daily poetry experiences were going. The students enjoyed getting new poems and were impressed to

see how many they accumulated (we numbered each poem for future reference).  The comments made by parents during fall conferences reinforced the value of using poetry regularly.  The parents told me that they took the poems with them in the car to read on family trips and even had some memorized.  I have had parents of last year's students tell me that they still have the poetry binders.   Comments like these make the hours of searching and typing seem worthwhile.

Our poetry routine continued and became just that - routine. I decided to move this activity to the end of the day.  With the Christmas rush, I found myself running short on time so the poetry was postponed.  My students (not my knowledge of the research benefits) made me go back to starting the day with a poem.  They missed the experiences.  They continued to ask me when we were going to add more poems to our collection until I once again began providing the daily poem.  I learned that they wanted and enjoyed the routine of starting each day with a new poem and the opportunity to read a few favorites  together.

As spring approached, I realized that I wanted to provide my students with opportunities to write their own poems.  I wanted my students to enjoy writing poetry, seeing it as a way to express themselves.  As soon as I mentioned writing poems, my students let me know that they were more than willing and eager to start writing.  I was pleased with their desire to write, but the end results did not match my expectations.  The students' poems did not have a focus and their words did not have a rhythmic flow.  The students use of writing conventions was the same as when they wrote stories.  The poems did not look or sound like poems.

To help my students make the connection between reading and writing poetry, we referred back to our collections for models of poems.   The

students reread the poems that they liked and knew well. They discussed what each poem was describing, noticing the sound of the words, and the various ways poets used conventions within each poem. To help my students write their poems with a focus and with vocabulary appropriate for the focus, I developed a guide that they used as they wrote. The guide had a place for the students to write what their poem was about and words that they might want to use in their poems (see appendix).

This guide was used for the first draft and throughout the poetry writing process. I used the guide when I conferenced with students about their poems. I referred the students back to their focus statements if there were words that did not seem to match the intended focus of the poems. The students also used the guide to conference with each other about their poems. In these student-to-student conferences, they talked to each other about their poems, seeking opinions and advice. Everyone in the class was considered a poet with knowledge to share. The interaction between students allowed each child to take the role of advisor or critic. Through this process, the students became more critical in positive ways. Their comments were focused on the poem and how to improve it in some way or expressing what they thought was good. The writing experience became a very interactive process.

The students also began using the computer to compose their final copies. This allowed the students to easily change the placement of words and the size of the font. The students really began to think and plan how they wanted their poems to look. They read their poems as they typed noticing how the placement of words affected the flow when the poems were read.

The best motivation for writing by far came from the students

themselves.  When students finished a poem and had it published, they read it to the class.  I made an overhead of their poem to keep with our routine for introducing new poems.  The class definitely took note of the styles and topics presented.  When writing time came, the students were quick to come up with their own versions.  Writing poetry was an area where even students with low ability could achieve success and become a model for the class.

The following poem is an example of this kind of success.  Lynnette wrote her poem at the end of our reading unit on beaches.  She was a child who struggled with the traditional reading and writing activities and she usually looked to her classmates for support and guidance.  After writing her poem and presenting it to the class, she became a model poet in the eyes of her peers.  The other students praised her work and wanted to try to create their own versions.

### THE BEACH IS SOMEWHERE I LIKE

I am in the water,
It is cold and wet.
       My sister is in the sand,
       It is warm and dry.
I am in the water,
I am floating in the water.
       My sister in the sand,
       She is rolling in the sand.

Lynnette

The poem below is one poem that was modeled after Lynnette's poem. Stacey's poem followed the idea of a family beach experience, but she extended it to include all the members of her family.  Her poem also shows how the computer was used to make her poem unique and personal (she

chose to indent the every other line and gave a personal look to her name).

<div align="center">

The Beach

</div>

When my family goes to the beach
        I build a sand castle with my brother.
When my family goes to the beach,
        I lie on the sand with my mom.
When my family goes to the beach
        I go swimming with my dad.

<div align="center">

by
StAcEy
LyNn
WeBer

</div>

My students helped me to discover how daily experiences with poetry were worth the time and the effort. The experiences provided opportunities for growth in reading, comprehending, vocabulary, spelling, writing conventions, and most importantly the enjoyment of poetry. I will continue searching for poems to add to my own collection so that I can provide my students with new daily poetry experiences.

## Appendix

Name _____

Why am I writing this poem?

_____

_____

Title of poem _____

Words I might use in my poem: _____

_____

_____

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