

Tips for Teaching Poetry

Summary: Poetry can be a topic that teachers feel less confident about teaching than other parts of reading and writing. In a throwback article from *The Reading Teacher*, writing specialist Mara Linaberger gives suggestions and ideas for boosting one's poetry instruction.

Practical Applications

Linaberger explains both a series of instructional strategies, and also a '10-step action plan' for teachers to take. Two of the major instructional strategies (adapted from other authors) are:

- *Have students imitate great poets.* In other words, "begin by reading great poetry to children, discuss it, and then have the children attempt to write poetry afterwards. The fundamentals of writing will come through in the imitation process."
- *Use a "Question the Author" technique.* This means preparing a set of questions ahead of time that will prompt students to dissect why a poet wrote the way he or she did instead of just making meaning from the poem. This technique requires preparatory work by the teacher to develop targeted questions and also follow-up questions to push the students further.

The action plan is as follows:

- 1) *Read great poetry* – choose a poet and try to understand what speaks to you and why
- 2) *Ask questions of the poet* – put yourself in the shoes of the poet you're reading and try to break apart his or her thought process
- 3) *Write a poem* – try to adopt the style of the poet you've chosen, and see what the process of imitation feels like; ask yourself if it would work as a prompt for your students
- 4) *Read your poem to a friend (or to your students)* – this puts you in the shoes of your students
- 5) *Borrow a poetry lesson* – use a fellow teachers' or one from the internet to get started
- 6) *Integrate what you know* – adapt techniques from other parts of your teaching, such as reading comprehension, into your poetry lessons
- 7) *Create your own poetry lessons* – Consider using a poem you've written as a model
- 8) *Share your students' poems* – Create deliberate space for celebrating and sharing student work
- 9) *Share your poetry lessons* – Share them with colleagues along with student work samples
- 10) *Publish!* – Consider publishing your lessons and their results in a journal or magazine

Conclusion and Citation

Teaching poetry to students doesn't have to be scary, but too often teachers rely on rhyming or fill-in-the-blank poetry which misses the heart of the topic. By utilizing great poets and wrestling with why poetry works the way it does, students can surprise you with the excellence and maturity of their work.

Linaberger, M. "Poetry Top 10: A foolproof formula for teaching poetry." *The Reading Teacher*, 58.4 (2005), pp. 366-372. <http://tinyurl.com/3j7raq5> (subscription only).