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From the Thoughts of Another: Comprehension through the Genres of Poetry

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Rationale

"My child is starting school," exults many a parent during the summer before students enter kindergarten. This is the moment in time that they have awaited for five years in some places and six years in others. Children are often excited, as this marks their official status as a "big girl or boy", together with the completion of potty training and sleeping in their own beds. From then on, they go through their schooling each year, layering concepts on to the foundations that were laid even before coming to school. In kindergarten students are taught to recognize the letters and the sounds that these make and attempt to put letters together to form words. In first grade the primary goal in language arts is to get students to strengthen their knowledge of the letter sound combinations and really become familiar with those sounds. First grade is also where they learn what blends are, and to identify some of the common words that are usually found everywhere. As students move on to second grade, the primary goal is to expand upon those things that they learned in first grade by adding letters to the units they have learned to call words, and to make those words even longer. Students are moving on from three and four letter words to words of five or more letters and then learning that every word has a purpose. These purposes are called parts of speech, so these units of letters put together to make words now have jobs. Students are also learning to understand the meanings of words when put together into sentences, and that these sentences tell stories.

By the time students reach me in the third grade, they have to not only learn that words have jobs, but that they change based on their circumstances--nouns change if there is more than one and verbs change based on tense. In addition to all of this "madness" of language students learn about, I have the audacity to ask them to use these rules that they have been learning, and henceforth to guide their own knowledge in the content areas -- be it math, science, or social studies. Also, I cannot forget to add to their knowledge that the English language is not only written in sentences but obeys other rules as well. For students, this scaffolding only continues the older they get and the higher up the education ladder they go, a continuous line that to some seems to never end. What I have seen among the third graders I teach is that their excitement for school has dwindled down; they no longer see it as a badge of honor to be worn, but a prison from which they cannot wait until the end of the day to be let loose.

It is with this knowledge that I choose to teach my children to write and interpret poetry in language arts as a

means not only of comprehending but enjoying what they read. As Fountas and Pinnella i remark, written language can be placed into just two categories– prose and poetry. It is under the heading of prose that fiction and nonfiction are found, and prose continues to be broken up even further into the specific genres of narrative and informational literature, though of course poetry can contain these elements as well. Poetry is usually more compressed than most prose and often times has multiple hidden meanings in its content. Poetry often asks for an interaction with its reader, and much of the time opens itself up to interpretation by each reader in turn. Unlike most written texts, poetry does not appear to have a single frame of reference, and from generation to generation and time to time, meanings and understandings can change. This is what is so unique about poetry and makes it such a valuable interpretive tool in its own right.

My third grade state-wide objectives in language arts ask me to teach students basic reading and interpretation skills that show comprehension of texts. In my classes over the years, I have found that my students have the most problems with readings texts for comprehension. They often overlook details that are clearly given to them in the text, and rarely allow thought to venture past the surface level of meaning. Upon first beginning to teach third grade, I thought that a lot of interpretation was just common sense, like reading a sentence that says "The girl said good night to her father," and knowing that this sentence implies, though without saying, that this would take place at night. Yet, in the past five years, many of my students have taken a guess at an answer to this question about the sentence, and have not known when or where the sentence would take place. Only gradually did I realize that students, young in age, must be taught the common things in order for anything to become "common sense" for them. Poetry fits into this goal so well because most poetry takes more than one look to understand and interpret its meaning, and also causes people to think critically about the author's meaning and implications.

Specifically students need to learn the art of drawing conclusions, making inferences, using context clues to examine meanings of words, noting details, and identifying the author's purpose--among other skills. I am focusing on these tasks because they are a part of the Standards of Learning that I am required to teach. They also arise from the concepts that I find especially hard for students to grasp, and they make a difference in the understanding of texts. This is why I think teaching poetry accurately involves these major objectives that are otherwise hard to teach. Poetry, when you read it, understand it, and interpret it verbally, pulls these skills out.

School Background

I teach at a school in an inner-city school district. Though the majority of the schools in the district are located in the inner city, my school is located in a middle class suburban area. It is an open enrollment school that allows any students from the district to attend. In the last two years the funding for school buses has been limited. For this reason more than half of the students that attend the school get to school by way of personal transportation and daycare vans, with a minority of the students using the city resources of school buses. A small percentage of children who attend our school live in the area. We do have an after school program, but this program is very small. My school is composed of mostly African American students, a small percentage of white, and an even smaller percentage of Hispanics, though the numbers of the latter have increased in the recent years. It is with these dynamics in mind that I approach the subject of poetry in a way that best serves my third grade students. Though we have behavioral problems and hard home situations for some of the students, this is not the norm. From the third grade to the fifth grade, each grade level is departmentalized. There are three teachers at each grade level. All three teachers teach language arts, and each of the other subjects is divided among science, social science, and math --with each teacher--specializing in a specific area.

Teaching Approach

The first four steps that will be used in this curriculum unit work with each other. Students will be engaged in four beginning phases that will guide them through their comprehension of poetry. To begin, I will allow students to make a poetry book of their own. Students will ultimately make their own poetry anthologies, but it will be a step by step process. The first two pages of their book will be reserved for a dedication page and table of contents to be completed after the book is done. This process may begin at the beginning of the year so that students can begin interacting with poetry from the very start. ii

Mirror Images

To begin, I will allow students to look through several books and choose two poems that mirror or reflect their own lives. Students can use any variety of poetry books that I gather from the library. A few of those resources will be Poetry Speaks to Children edited by Elise Paschen, *Honey, I Love and Other Love Poems* by Eloise Greenfield, Ralph Fletcher's *Relatively Speaking: Poems about Family*, J. Patrick Lewis's *Doodle Dandies: Poems That Take Shape*, *The Same Sky: A Collection of Poems from Around the World* edited by Naomi Shihab Nye, *Heart to Heart: New Poems Inspired by Twentieth Century American Art* edited by Jan Greenberg, and Janet Wong's *A Suitcase of Seaweed and Other Poems*. Whatever poems the students choose, they will write these poems in their books exactly as they find them in their resources. Students are allowed to illustrate their poems as well. By doing this, students will be expressing themselves in the voice of another, and gain a sense of personal ownership of the poems. In addition, they will be able to relate themselves to pieces of poetry and develop an appreciation for what they have chosen. In an abstract way, and without even realizing it, students will also be comprehending the poetry, using inferences and context clues. In addition to this, students must write a short reflection as to why they chose the poem that they selected. I will not dictate the length of these responses because I do not want the students to feel like they have to write just to reach a certain quota.

Tell Me Something Good

When students have finished with their mirror images they can move on to responding to poetry. I will read aloud at least twice a variety of poems that I enjoy, and students must focus on two main comprehension questions: 1) How does the poem make you feel? 2) Is there any particular way the poet wrote the poem? As students are responding to these poems and answering the questions, we will keep a classroom chart of the unique attributes that they notice about the poems. Students may also choose to add some of these poems to their own poetry books. As students add these different poems to their own books, they must also write a response explaining why they like these poems, and what attracts them to the particular poem. As students are responding to the poems they are working on the skills of noting details and, again, comprehension. I will read to students the poems "At Last" by James Stevenson, "Lies, All Lies" by William Cole, "The First Book" by Rita Dove, "Gas" by C.K. Williams, "American Flamingo" by Greg Pape, and "Van Gogh's Bed" by Jane Flanders. These are all poems that I enjoy, but also cover topics that students can identify with.

It's All About the Connection

After having students respond to poetry I will allow them to find common threads. In this phase students choose a poem from any of the poetry books that we have and explain what the poem says to them. In other words, they will summarize and interpret the poem through their own eyes. Students will examine the structure of the poem, how it is set up, how it is written, and the general voice and tone of the author. They will copy the poem down in their personal anthology book and make their comments about the poem on the same page. When they have finished this assignment students will then write a poem that connects to the

poem that they chose. It may be that the poem students write has the same topic, the same pattern, contains the same tone, uses a favorite line or phrase, poses some of the same ideas in a different way, or even becomes a beginning or an ending to the poem that they chose. It does not matter how the student approaches it, as long as it is in sync with the poem selected. In the students' personal anthology, they will have the poem that they chose to analyze on one side of the page and their own poem on the next page. Students may also add visual interest to their poems by way of drawings.

Breathing Life

The final phase of this first half is adding life. It is in this part that students become independent writers. Students will write their own poems based on whatever topics they want to share. Students will mimic any of the poems that we have examined or that they found in the poetry resource books. The first part of their drafts should be done on notebook paper, and will continue to be edited before being added to their books. It is through poetry that the students will journal and reflect on their own lives and what is important to them. To help students gather ideas about what to write, in the back of their poetry books they will draw a picture of the globe. Allow students to draw or write anything that happens in their own world, with all that this entails. It is on this globe that students can write or draw things that consume their attention, or things that they just enjoy. Use this piece later for ideas and inspiration that students can pull from when writing their own poems.

Purposes

Using these first four approaches should get students into an enthusiasm for poetry that was not present before and it is after this that I can begin to teach them about the formal choices of poets, and help them identify various poetic genres. Once they catch the bug, students can see how useful and important poetry is, so it is no longer just a hurdle in a grading period task, but something that stays with them indefinitely.

As I guide students through the interpretation of each kind of poetry, they will use an adaptation to the SOAPStone or TPCASTT model of questioning, both of which were shared in our seminar classes (see Appendix A). These questions not only bring the basic comprehension of the text to the forefront, but guide students toward the main ideas of the text.

Free Verse

To start, I will introduce students to the idea of free verse. Fontas and Pinnell ⁱⁱⁱ share their thoughts about having students first learn free verse because it helps them develop an ever growing desire for writing poetry. Free verse, by their definition, allows the writer to make their own rules about how the poem should be written, how it should appeal to the senses, and what it wants the reader to feel. ^{iv} During this section I will share with students a poem by Langston Hughes titled "Mother to Son." We will also look at the poems "Magic Words" by an Anonymous Inuit Poet and "Halfway Down" by A.A. Milne. All of these poems have a common theme of openness, indicating that the authors made their own rules for writing and, because of this, shared their thoughts as created by their own boundaries. After examining these poems and comprehending their meanings, students will add to their anthologies, under the heading "free verse," a new poem that they like in addition to a self written poem of their own. If students need topics to write about they can again use the globes in the back of their books.

Couplet

Couplets can be self-contained pieces of poetry. They allow students to be creative but are very short. Many

poems are comprised of groups of couplets, so when students learn what a couplet is, they will be able to identify it when they see it in any context. Not only is a couplet a unit of meaning, it also allows students to work on rhyming, which in third grade they still have trouble with. I will introduce students to some of Shakespeare's couplets, and allow them to search our stack of classroom anthologies to copy examples of couplets into their own anthologies under that heading. They will also look at poems by Denise Rodgers titled "Silly Sally" and "Sudden Baldness." Students may also try their hand at changing around words of one of the couplets they copied and forming a new couplet of their own. The use of couplets can also turn into a mini-lesson on root words. "Couple" means two, and there are a variety of other words that are relatives in their meanings, like quatrain, whose prefix means four.

Quatrain

I find that quatrains are interesting because they must follow a sequenced rhyme pattern . Students will enjoy playing with this form because there are no rules as to how the words rhyme, they just have to follow whatever sequence the author chooses. Patterns can range from AABB to ABCB. If students will take notice they can also determine that a quatrain is made up of four lines, and can contain two couplets. These two kinds of poems work well together because they build on each other and hence form relations. Again students will add this form to their personal anthologies. We will analyze a part of H.W. Longfellow's "Autumn Within."

Devices

Students will then be taught some literary devices such as alliteration, metaphor, simile, hyperbole, and onomatopoeia. These are literary devices that add color to writing, and can be identified as aspects of any type of writing whether it be prose or poetry. Alliterations are used to stress the same sounds at the beginning of words when the words are close together. The after effect of this according to Lipson ^v , has a dramatic effect on the listener and makes the sound of an echo. Metaphors compare two items that are totally different yet share a commonality in some form. Students use metaphor a lot in their own speech but often do not recognize it when they read it. This is one of the reasons why I will teach it. Similes do the same as a metaphor but use the words like, as, than, and similar to. Both metaphors and similes are common tools used in the English language. Students hear them in a lot of the songs that they sing, movies that they watch, and even video games that they play. A great majority of the common sense factors in our culture derive from these two devices. Common phrases such as, "This weighs a ton" or "Beating around the bush," are examples of these two devices, which students don't really comprehend unless they are taught to notice them. Onomatopoeia is another device that is used in everyday language that students don't quite grasp unless they are taught it. These are words that sound like what they name and are often heard on the playground and in our classrooms daily. "Pow," "Meow," and " Woof" are common examples that students use but have no name for. By understanding this concept, students will be better able to read orally because they identify these words as saying what they name. Teaching the students these devices can allow them to identify more features of different poems and prose, but also add different tools to their own writing.

Sonnet

I would like to teach children to read and understand sonnets to stretch their minds, once they have grasped some basic forms of poetry. According to Routman ^{vi} , teachers should raise their expectations for students. He explains that in his visits to schools that teach mostly minorities, but also in schools with privileged students, teachers have mediocre expectations for students. In teaching poetry, I do not want to dumb my students down to the simple constraints of rhyming schemes and the openness of free verse, but think rather

that it would be valuable for students to stretch their minds, hence the reason for sonnets. Because sonnets are harder than all the other forms of poetry that the students will learn in this unit, this section will take a little longer than the others. The basic units of a sonnet are quatrains and couplets, both of which students have learned how to write. Sonnets are also a good way to teach students the basic elements of telling a story. Sonnets open with a good beginning verse, while the middle verses are like the body of the paragraph and the last couplet is the closing argument. The basic principles of the sonnet can be compared to that of writing a paragraph. Students will be read the poems "I'm Not a Baby Anymore" by G.B. Lipson and "School Work" by Scott Ennis.

Ekphrastic Poetry

The last kind of poetry I want students to focus on is ekphrastic poetry. This kind of poetry arises from a reflection on a piece of artwork. In learning this kind of poetry students will be using their powers of observation, practicing making inferences, and also using context clues. Bosveld explains that writing ekphrastic poetry brings a greater appreciation for art. With this kind of exercise, she explains that in order to really comprehend, you must take your time and use your senses to understand the art work. When you are writing this kind of response you must put yourself into the frame and ask yourself not only what you see, but what you smell, and what you feel. This kind of poetry, like the sonnet, will take students a little longer to comprehend and understand as a form. Though it is easy to make inferences about what the painting seems to be about, it is still hard for third graders to put themselves in an unfamiliar role. This will be a challenge, but will expose them to something they have not been exposed to before. When teaching this kind of poetry, I will show students the visual images first and then allow them to make observations about it. What do you see? What do you notice? What is happening? Is there anything unusual about the picture? After this we will read the poems and evaluate the interpretations of the poets about the picture and ask ourselves if the painter is correctly interpreted in the poem. With ekphrastic poetry students will come to know that there is no right or wrong answer as far as comprehending the poems. This students will really find interesting, but it will actually allow them to think critically about the poems and the artwork itself.

With ekphrastic poetry it is also important for the students to know the background of the artists because many times this has an effect on their artwork. This is definitely the case in the poem by Greg Pape, "American Flamingo," based on John James Audubon's painting "American Flamingo." Understanding Audubon's habit of painting dead things that he shot with his gun is integral in understanding the poem written by Greg Pape. The flamingo is our school's mascot, and there is a painting similar to Audubon's painting in the hallway at our school. I will also use the poem "Van Gogh's Bed" by Jane Flanders based on the painting by Vincent van Gogh titled "Vincent's Bedroom in Arles." Van Gogh wrote to his family about the painting in letters and this information will be shared with the students to let them know how the artist felt about the picture himself. I will also share with the students "Number 1 by Jackson Pollock" by Nancy Sullivan based on the piece of the same name and artist. I think it is important to note that Jackson Pollock introduced his "drip" paintings later in his life and was one of the first to do this instead of using the traditional strokes of painters. All of these poems appeal to the children in some way and touch upon aspects of life that students can relate to.

Students will also write their own ekphrastic poems based on pieces of art work, but also photographs, specifically relating to the Civil Rights Movement. Students in the third grade learn about how people of monumental importance changed the history of the United States. They must learn about the contributions of Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King Jr., and Thurgood Marshall. When students learn about these figures, they are often taught about them in conjunction with the Civil Rights Movement. Though I do not teach history but

language arts, I thought that following this approach was a good way for students to use what they know about the Civil Rights Movement--to not only learn about these specific three people but to get a broader view of the situation and times that they lived in by examining the Civil Rights Movement. After all, when literature is approached as an eye-witness to history, one should not ignore its connection with the visual. The Civil Rights Movement is often a subject that gets students' attention, and keeps it very successfully.

Resources like *Remember* by Rita Dove are pivotal pieces for this unit. This book includes a host of great pictures for students to respond to. Students will also be shown the statue in Kelly Ingram Park in Birmingham, Alabama, of three pastors praying. "The statue was based on the Revs. N.H. Smith Jr., A.D. King and John T. Porter, who led a march in downtown Birmingham on Palm Sunday 1963 to support the Revs. Martin Luther King Jr., Fred Shuttlesworth and Ralph Abernathy, who had been jailed." ^{vii} Students will be able to choose any kind of poem that they want to write now that they have a small variety of forms to work with. In addition, it is during this time that students will also be given the opportunity to respond to poems through the visual arts. Students will be given clay to make a sculpture based on poems like Maya Angelou's "Still I Rise" and Langston Hughes' poem "Words Like Freedom." They will also make paintings based on Langston Hughes' "Merry-Go-Round" and Pam Chude Allen's "For Justice and Love."

As an ending to this entire lesson, I will take students on a field trip to the Visual Arts Center. Students will be able to look around the museum, now with a different set of eyes, and take in the different sculptures and paintings that are found there. I will first show the students how to look at the different pieces of artwork found at the museum, which means examining it for more than thirty seconds. This is the average amount of time, according to the Getty ^{viii}, that most people look at a piece of artwork. As the children tour the gallery they will be able to examine the artwork and ultimately choose a piece that they want to write about. According to Bosveld ^{ix} students should "feel the tug toward a particular piece of art." This pull will lead them to an image that they can write about.

At the end of this unit, students should have an anthology of poetry. This poetry can be added to the classroom library, shared with parents on back to school night, or even submitted in writing celebrations of the kind we have in our district. Though this unit is only for three months, the evaluation of poetry can continue throughout the school year or for as long as you want.

Teaching Strategies

During this unit, there should be an allotted time of at least twenty to thirty minutes each day. The interpretation of the poems can be used as basic comprehension time, while the writing of the poems can be allocated to a single day during the week of writing workshops. A variety of teaching strategies can be used to help the students understand the poems, make them applicable, and even add mini lessons while teaching the poems.

Mini Lessons

Often times in elementary school classrooms many experiences of misfortune, misunderstanding, or just plain questioning can turn into mini-lessons for teachers. For many they are called "teachable moments," and teachers use such moments to teach an unplanned lesson. Mini-lessons usually range from five to seven minutes and could develop into longer lessons, though making them longer than that is not a built-in intention. This is yet another great part of this unit. Many of these poems have lessons of just about every kind in them. For example in the ekphrastic poetry section, Greg Pape, the author of "American Flamingo",

uses a variety of adjectives to describe the picture. This is optimal teaching time for identifying how adjectives add "color" to writing. Another example can be pulled from the poem "Magic Words." This poem uses a variety of nouns that are non-traditional, and the poem can be used to identify the roles that nouns play in sentences. For most of the poems other lessons can be interspersed as well. In addition, most of the literary devices can be used to teach students about phrases and common expressions in today's society. Examples would be "Beating Around the Bush," and "The Cold Shoulder." Other mini-lesson suggestions are found in Appendix B.

I Spy

Along with mini-lessons the teacher can incorporate the "I spy" game. This game can be adapted to any lesson, anywhere, which is why it has been passed down for so many generations. When introducing these poems, or working on comprehension of the poems, the teacher can announce "I spy a word that is an antonym for the word never," while talking about the poem "At Last" by James Stevenson. Having had students examine the painting by Vincent van Gogh titled "Vincent's Bedroom in Arles" in the ekphrastic poetry section, I will spy something that someone else would not pay attention to- "I spy broken chairs"-- and let students come up to the screen and point them out. This focuses attention and encourages noting details in any poem. In addition, after learning about the literary devices, students can "spy" different literary devices that are found in any of the poems that they read. This can be a continuous exercise that can even be applied to prose. This game can be played with any poem and can be adapted to fit any need in any classroom depending on the content objectives at the time. It's also a game that students love to play, just because it's a game.

Rhyming Games

A natural part of poetry for children is rhyming. Use poetry time as a valuable time to practice rhyming words and phonic skills. After working on the couplet or quatrains, play a game of hot potato using rhymes. Toss around a ball, the potato, and choose a word from one of the poems: students have to catch the ball and say a rhyme at the same time. Students are out if they can't think of a word that rhymes. The game continues at the teacher's discretion. If there are no more words that can go in that rhyme sequence the teacher can change the word to another.

Dictionary Definitions

This unit is a perfect opportunity to practice dictionary definitions with students. It is during this time, and all throughout the year, that you can keep a running vocabulary list. In learning, reading, and memorizing poems you can have the students look up words that may be a little difficult to understand. This theme can also turn into a mini-lesson--or the dictionary game. For instance, in reading the poem "Number 1 by Jackson Pollock" by Nancy Sullivan, students can take a minute to look up the word "murals" or the word "linoleum." Though you could explain to students what these words mean, it is a more valuable experience for children to do it themselves. You also have the option of making a list of vocabulary words for each poem that is read and, during a free span of classroom time, have the students play the dictionary game. This game can be played by individuals or with partners. Give students a word from the list and say "go." The student who finds the definition first is the winner. This can be altered to an advanced lesson where students have to find the proper definition of the word among several: does the poem use the first or third definition, for example? You can also ask students whether the word is used as a noun, verb, adjective, etc.

Think-Pair-Share

This teaching method is commonly used for all aspects of learning. Students are presented with information, given time to reflect on the information, and paired with a partner to generate ideas which are finally shared with the class. This can be done whenever presenting poems to the children. After reading the poem aloud, or allowing them to read it themselves, give students a minute to think about the contents of the poem and what it means. Allow them to share their thoughts with a neighbor, which will allow them to bounce around ideas that they may not have thought of before. Finally, allow the students to share what they have come up with. This process always elicits more comments from students, who feel they can share in a non-threatening environment because they have had time to think it over. Students are more likely to share and answer questions when they are confident in what they have to say.

Response Journaling

During this unit, students will be able to write in a journal, outside of their anthology. This journal will be kept so students can respond to the poems that were shared during the day. Journals are typically assigned as assessable class work but for this purpose will be used just for reflections. If there was a particular poem or phrase from a poem that was talked about students can copy this down in their journals to save for later. Students may also make pictures in their journals in response to a piece of poetry, or just to express a vision or moment in time that a certain poem helped students think of. Students may also choose to use this journal as a vocabulary keeper. If they find new and exciting words in a poem that they would like to remember, they may write them in this journal as well. × An alternative to this is allowing students to share their reflections with a partner and having them to comment on each others' reflections. This journal is strictly to be used by the student without assessment but may be checked occasionally by the teacher.

Memorizing

A major part of making poetry a part of you is by memorizing it. Have students choose a poem, one that has been used in the lessons, and allow them to memorize it. They can practice reading it and making it a part of themselves so that they can draw on it later in life. In an interview, Dana Gioia ^{xi}, a creator of a national poetry competition, states that poetry "allows one to master and possess great language, expressing powerful emotions, ideas, and situations. Memorizing and reciting also helps develop the student's powers of expression and gives experience in public speaking."

Fluency

Elementary students are always working on fluency, which helps them become better oral readers, which in turn enhances their comprehension. As a part of this unit, students will practice reading the poems aloud. Students can practice reading the poems to themselves for a couple of minutes each day, working on expression, and the natural rhythm of speech. It is during this time that students can also have the opportunity to use fluency cards. These fluency cards can be made on plain pieces of paper that can be laminated. On each card there are different ways to practice fluency aloud. These can range from reading like you are sleepy, angry, under water, another gender, a football player, scared, and so on. ^{xii} In addition, students can tape themselves with a tape recorder. They can play back the tape and hear how they sound.

Post It

Another way to keep students interested in poetry is to have it readily available. Have poetry books displayed throughout the classroom so that students can access them at any time. Place books on the front board so that when students have completed their work they may read on their own without having to look for a book.

In addition, post poems on bulletin boards, or on items around the classroom. For example, post poems that talk about a door or what happens behind doors on the front and back of the classroom door. A great example of this is "Whimsy on Doors" by Helen Harrington, which describes the uses of doors and all the great things you can do with them. Another great example is putting the poem "Time?" by Matt Miller next to the classroom clock. This examines the different times on a clock and what happens when the clock reads a certain time. You can even send home a poem for parents to read to their children. One for students to read to their parents is "Bedtime" by Matt Miller. Next to the pencil bin you can place the poem "The Unwritten" by W.S. Merwin about the many things that can come out of a pencil when used. You can place the poem "Crayons: A Rainbow Poem" by Jane Yolen, which talks about the many colors and what they turn into when you use them, near the crayon bin. On a window you can stick a poem that talks about windows or about looking at something, like "Now Close The Windows" by Robert Frost. Near the water fountain put the poem "Water, Water, Everywhere" by Vinay Gupta, near the library area of the class post the poem "Books, books, books" by Mishaal Javed Dawar, near the classroom television share "Television" by Albert Ahearn, and near the book bags post "BACKPACK" by Elaine Magliaro. Students can also have the option of attaching a poem to their desk, be it one about a desk or just a poem that they enjoy and can identify with. By providing a print rich environment, you can always keep students involved in the learning process and the fun of poetry. They will learn that poetry is applicable anywhere. ^{xiii}

Read Aloud

A natural part of this unit will be read alouds. This must be done not only for the purpose of giving students content orally, but to model what reading aloud should sound like. In doing this the teacher models the rhythm of spoken language, but also what it means to follow punctuation marks. In a read aloud, students may either listen as the teacher shares a text, or chime in as the teacher reads. It is usually a good idea for students to chime in, just so they are able to pick up on words that they did not know how to pronounce or just to learn how to pause at certain punctuation marks in a text. Students can also participate in read alouds with popcorn readings. This is where the entire class reads the text with one student reading a line, stanza, or verse at a time. There is no set order on who reads, and once one person stops another person must "pop" into reading next. The flow continues until the text is completed. If two or more students try to read together, one must quickly drop out. Once students understand this technique, they will understand when to back out of reading.

Handwriting

In third grade, students are really beginning to focus on writing in cursive. This is another way to practice their writing. Have students copy their favorite poem on a sheet of paper as a part of their handwriting lesson. This assessment is also a good way to see which students are having the most trouble with certain letters, slants, or connections in cursive.

Comic Strips

Another way to allow students to show comprehension of the poems is to illustrate them using comic strips. Give students blank comic strips and have them break the poems into different segments. These segments can be illustrated with pictures, and the words in balloons can be interpretations based on the poems. This is a great way to reach students who are visual learners primarily. Students can work on these together or individually. When comic strips are finished, they can later be turned into a class book.

Visual Aids

Another means of comprehension, and an integral part of the third grade curriculum, is comparing and contrasting. Students can be allowed to use Venn Diagrams or Comparison Grids ^{xiv} to compare two poems, different genres of poetry, or different works of art. Teachers can also use T-charts to assess students' comprehension of a poem as an alternative to the questioning technique. Story maps can be used while working on sonnets or wherever they apply. Information webs can be used as well to share facts from poems. Any of these tools can be used as comprehension pieces.

Writing Conference

As a natural part of this unit, the writing conference will be important. Each time students write their own poem, students can go through the writing process of writing and editing. This is a time for the teacher to conference with students and help them with their writing. Students can make appointments with the teacher, or the teacher can make appointments with the students. The teacher can talk about the students' writing, grammar-wise, and also make sure that students are appropriately formatting their poems.

Cross-Curriculum Teaching

In elementary school teachers must use every experience as a learning lesson, and also make learning as comprehensive as possible. This poetry unit can extend beyond language arts into just about any content area. Students can also work on and analyze poems in science, poems such as Greg Pape's "American Flamingo," which touches on the behavioral and physical adaptations of animals. Poems about properties of water and the water cycle can be found in *101 Science Poems & Songs for Young Learners* by Meish Goldish. In social studies students learn about the Civil Rights Movement. The ekphrastic content of the book *Child of the Civil Rights Movement* by Paula Young Shelton & Raul Colon is a help in this area. This book is a series of different kinds of poems that describe different aspects of the Civil Rights Movement. Math also appears in poetry. "Odd - Even Poem" by Shel Silverstein targets the odd/even objectives taught to students in third grade. *Marvelous Math: A Book of Poems* by Lee Bennett Hopkins and Karen Barbour (Illustrator) is another great resource. Showing students that poetry is everywhere and can apply to anything will provide a richer environment for students to grow and mature as the poets this unit was designed to make them.

Classroom Activities

Because this unit focuses on teaching different kinds of poetry, all of the classroom activities can be adapted and changed to fit any kind of poem that is going to be taught.

Free Verse Classroom Activities

Day 1- "Mother to Son" by Langston Hughes

To begin this lesson, as a class we will brainstorm words of advice that parents give to their children. Ask students to share some advice that their parents gave them about life. Share with students that everyone goes through times where things do not always work out as they planned, and ask them what kinds of things their parents tell them when these things happen. Write these on the board as they list them. Pass out the poem "Mother to Son" by Langston Hughes to each child. Have them read it to themselves, and then read it aloud as a class. To help students with comprehension, go through the SOAPStone questions (Appendix A) and

have students come to the general knowledge of the poem. 1. What is the subject of the poem? The mother is giving advice to the son. What is it talking about? The mom has had a hard life with a lot of obstacles, but she continued going and working harder. Life was not easy for her. 2. What would make the poet write the poem? To share wisdom to others. Or to share the information that his mother shared with him. When would someone read this poem? When they have gone through a hard time and need some advice whether to give up or keep on going. 3. Who is the author writing for? Anyone Who does he want to read his poem? Anyone who needs encouragement to not give up. 4. Why did the author write the poem? To persuade people to keep trying and that life is not going to be easy. 5. Who is the speaker in the poem? The mother is speaking. 6. What is the tone of the poem? It is very serious, encouraging us to take things seriously.

After going through the questions, have students practice reading the poem out loud with fluency, to see how it should be read, and in what kind of voice. Let students practice this with a partner.

Day 2- "Magic Words Inuit Poet" after Nalungiaq

Begin lesson by asking students to remind us of the poem we talked about the day before. Who was the author? What was the poem talking about? Who might want to read the poem? Inform students that today we will talk about a different poem. A poem that describes the power of words.

Begin by asking students to say why words are important. What do words do? Students can share responses and also look for the answer to this question within the poem. Display the poem on the overhead, or opaque projector. Read the poem out loud to students two times. Again take students through the SOAPStone questions for comprehension. What is the subject or object the poem focuses on? Words: what happened when people and animals spoke. What would make the poet write the poem? To make people think about what they say. Who is the author writing for? Anyone who wants to read. Who does he want to read his poem? People with an imagination. Younger people. Why did the author write the poem? To entertain. This probably not real. Who is the speaker in the poem? Maybe the author. What is the tone of the poem? Is it funny and very playful. What is the author trying to make the reader feel? The author is trying to get the reader to think outside the box and use their imagination. What is the theme of this poem? After we have finished the questions, ask students to think about any other meanings that this poem could have. Did the poet really mean that people could be turned into animals and animals people? Could the poet have been saying that sometimes people behave like animals?

Give time for students to reflect on this poem in their reflective journals. Students can write their thoughts about this poem, or draw an illustration of the poem. Students can paste a copy of this poem into their journals as well.

Day 3-"Halfway Down" by A.A. Milne

Ask students if they have a special place where they like to go that no one else goes to. Discuss their special places and have students keep this in mind as we look at the poem. Begin taking students through the TPCASTT series of questions. Look at the title, predict what you think this is going to be about based on its title. Pass out the poem to each student. Allow students to read the poem to themselves and then read the poem out loud as a class. Ask student to paraphrase the poem, telling what the poem was generally about. Talk about the poem with students. Have students share their thoughts about its meaning and why the last line says " It isn't really anywhere, it's somewhere else instead!" See if students understand the playfulness in the author's tone. Is there a shift in speakers? How many are there? What does it mean now that the poem is read? What is the poem's overall theme? What is the author trying to tell you about the place on the stairs?

Have students write down their special place in their journals, and write one line explaining why it is special to them.

Day 4- Evaluate Free Verse

Have students look at all three poems that we have talked about this week and ask them how the poems are alike, and how they are different. Make a T chart on the board to write down student responses. Students should notice the many differences among the poems, but they should also look at how the poems were written. Guide students into noticing that although these are all poems, they do not follow any particular external rules. The author starts and stops a line wherever they want to. Students can also notice that some words rhyme and others don't. They can also notice how one gives advice, another tells a story, and yet another shares about a secret place. Explain to students that this kind of poetry is called free verse. It doesn't conform to any rules, yet it is clear and concise about sharing what it wants to say. Make sure that students understand that many authors write in free verse and that it is one of the easiest kind of poems to write about.

Have students take some time to look through some of the poetry anthologies in the classroom library and find examples of free verse poems. Have students share and practice reading the poems to the class and as a class, identifying why the poem fits in that genre.

Day 5- Writing

Now that students have a general knowledge and have worked with examples, they can practice writing their own. Have students use their own anthology to get ideas from their "world" in the back of their poetry books, and write a free verse poem about whatever they want. Urge students not to obey the rules of rhyming and explain to them that this is their chance to be free and not follow the rules of perfect grammar and punctuation. At the same time, make sure that students remember that poetry is a short way to express their ideas, and not to use a lot of words. After students are finished their final drafts they can copy them their personal anthology books under the label "Free Verse."

Appendix A

SOAPStone

S- Subject; What is the subject or object the poem focuses on?

O- Occasion; What would make the poet write the poem? What does the author wish to gain from writing the poem? When would someone read this poem?

A- Audience; Who is the author writing for? Who does he want to read his poem? Who is his audience?

P- Purpose; Why did the author write the poem? To persuade? Entertain? Inform? Explain?

S-Speaker; Who is the speaker in the poem? Is there more than one?

T- Tone; What is the tone of the poem? Is it funny, angry, happy? What is the author trying to make the reader

feel?

TPCASTT

T-Title; Predict what the title means.

P- Paraphrase the poem.

C- Contemplate the meaning. Look beyond the literal. Is there anything that can be taken to be a different meaning other than what is plainly stated?

A- Attitude; What is the general tone of the author?

S- Shift; Is there a shift in speakers? How many are there?

T- Title; What does it mean now that the poem is read?

T- Theme; What is the poems overall theme?

Appendix B

Poem	Mini Lesson Ideas
"Lies, All Lies" by William Cole "Gas" by C.K. Williams	Compound words Interesting laws around the world
"American Flamingo" by Greg Pape "Van Gogh's Bed" by Jane Flanders "Mother to Son" by Langston Hughes	Adjectives, Parts of the body Adjectives Homophones
"The Dream Keeper" by Langston Hughes "Magic Words" by an Anonymous Inuit Poet "Halfway Down" by A.A. Milne "Autumn Within" H.W. Longfellow "I'm Not a Baby Anymore" by G.B. Lipson "School Work" by Scott Ennis "Langston Hughes" Merry-Go-Round	Plural nouns, homophones Nouns, verbs, verb tense Contractions, location words Rhyming words Rhyming words, quotation marks Punctuation marks Asking questions, rhetorical questions

Appendix C

Virginia State Standards

3.4 The student will use strategies to read a variety of fiction and nonfiction materials.

- a) Preview and use text formats.
- b) Set a purpose for reading.
- c) Apply meaning clues, language structure, and phonetic strategies.
- d) Use context to clarify meaning of unfamiliar words.
- e) Read fiction and nonfiction fluently and accurately.
- f) Reread and self-correct when necessary.

3.5 The student will read and demonstrate comprehension of fiction.

- a) Set a purpose for reading.
- b) Make connections between previous experiences and reading selections.
- c) Make, confirm, or revise predictions.
- d) Compare and contrast settings, characters, and events.
- e) Identify the author's purpose.
- f) Ask and answer questions.
- g) Draw conclusions about character and plot.
- h) Organize information and events logically.
- i) Summarize major points found in fiction materials.

3.6 The student will continue to read and demonstrate comprehension of nonfiction.

- a) Identify the author's purpose.
- b) Make connections between previous experiences and reading selections.
- c) Ask and answer questions about what is read.
- d) Draw conclusions.
- e) Organize information and events logically.
- f) Summarize major points found in nonfiction materials.

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