



Do You Hear What I Hear? Can You See What I See? Poetry Explored

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by Lauren Freeman

Introduction and Overview

When you think about the current state of teaching and learning in America have you considered using a critical lens that thoroughly examines all aspects of the process? It is important to point out that the time has come to advance education in a direction that is productive, effective and relevant for all students. As a bit of a juxtaposition, there are no shortage of reports stating that students in the United States have and are struggling; however, today's students are some of the most informed of all time. With technological advances and innovative devices available to them, students have all of the answers at their fingertips. In the past, if a student had access to a laptop, they may have been considered privileged. However, nowadays, school districts across the nation are mostly one to one. According to the U.S. Department of Education (National Center for Education Statistics), in 2022-23, 94 percent of schools in the United States offered digital devices to students. Subsequently, a continuing debate on the effects of technology use with children in early elementary education has led to questions around social-emotional well-being, academic achievement, language development, attention span and more. Because each of these qualities plays a crucial role in writing and creativity, how can we ensure the fostering of students' development in creative writing? How are our pupils supposed to navigate if they are being pulled away from educational norms by the very thing that was supposed to be *educationally innovative*?

As learners, they are expected to cooperate and bring out the best within them. It is the teacher's responsibility to motivate those who do not talk and those who show lack of interest towards their studies. PechKusal, et al. (2009) conducted a study focusing on the causes that lead students to becoming passive: inferiority, unwillingness to study, no sense of belonging, inconvenient lives, family problems.¹ What can teachers, parents and educational institutions, in general, do in order to garner an in-depth and vitalizing experience for students everywhere? Furthermore, what will spark the innate curiosity of young students and lead them toward a rewarding academic journey? A longitudinal study by Liu and Hou (2017) has shown that intrinsic motivation considerably promotes academic performance.² When students make personal connections with the content they are learning, they tend to perform better. In recent times, however, those connections have become increasingly obscure. Vallicelli (2012) cited that they are a population overwhelmed by many influences, ranging from highly entertaining video games, big production movies, and cutting-edge music. Unfortunately, at the expense of these enticing options, students have dismissed books as a form of entertainment more often than not.³ As astute as teachers are in their planning, preparation and practice, the

fact remains that teetering performance in a post-COVID era and the addition of much needed SEL practices requested from districts, have created challenges in the teaching of writing. Vallicelli (2012) also cited that this slippage might be due to more factors than an educator might notice. One fact remains apparent, however, regardless of the cause: literacy rates have been declining for two straight decades (NGA Center for Best Practice, 2006). For many different reasons, literacy has become a struggle for all ages of students, and reading is not enjoyable when it is a hard task to complete.⁴ Identically for levels of study up through higher education, trends have shown lower literacy rates accompanied by faltering writing abilities and skills. The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA, 2008) supports this finding as well, reporting that there has been an 18% decline in college students who are labeled as consistent readers since 1992.⁵

Looking to Poetry

I spoke earlier of the need to look at education in America through a critical lens. There is no doubt that we must constantly find ways to focus on growth in literacy, particularly on a scale that is fair and equitable to a much larger percent than it is now. Unfortunately, evidence from state and national assessments of writing and employer reports present a sobering picture of poor writing skills for children in K-12 schools.⁶

When it comes to the testing that happens from state to state, the required writing varies. Being able to show *comprehension* through writing response is key. The sensible act of writing to show understanding is straightforward enough, but what about writing to express oneself in a matter that brings forth thought and creativity within the same student? In the grade level that I am teaching, the Text-Dependent Analysis is a major focus for the children. I feel that in addition to this, creative and expressive writing could promote outcomes that are prolific, inventive and innovative. Creative and expressive writing could spur the imagination and invigorate students as well as their desire to search within, and be more resourceful and confident, therefore elevating the outcomes. Poetry and the study of such on a deeper level than is normally studied at young ages can be such a catalyst. Similarly, Applebee (2000) also points to poetry as a vehicle that can raise literacy.⁷

Background

Our school is one that is quite unique, in that it is a magnet school that has a “neighborhood” feel. Located in the heart of Highland Park within the city of Pittsburgh, we draw students from all areas in the city limits. Students come from near and far to our institution which has a focus on the arts and humanities. Many of the children move on to the CAPA 6-12 school downtown upon completion of the fifth grade.

Pittsburgh Dilworth Pre-K to 5, as it is known, has approximately 430 students and is celebrated for its diversity, highly trained faculty and staff, and an amazing parent/teacher organization that works tirelessly to provide for our students. With strong and supportive administration, we have been able to see results through advocating for the students’ well-being and academic achievement.

In teaching elementary children for 24 years, I have observed that when students are able to tap into their individual subconscious and persona, highlight ideas or wonderings, or bring forth new thoughts to share with classmates, they find that they surprise themselves with their academic ability and a newfound sense of satisfaction that is rarely rivaled. As previously stated, this unit will provide that *wealth of opportunity to*

search the soul and strengthen imagination, individuality and unabridged creativity. Children will seek moments-past or present-that resonate with them based on sound, object and nature. To procure these actions and abilities, the unit will take a deep dive into poetry of many forms. Examples of a few of the forms students will explore are Haiku, Limerick and Sonnet. Teachings include a thorough examination of these poetry genres with examples aimed at striking a chord in students and helping them to decide how they would like to express themselves creatively. Students will keep a poetry journal and participate in several activities designed to exhibit and celebrate their work. Additionally, the use of the educational philosophy known as place-based education will be implemented throughout. This style of teaching invites student-led learning that is focused on their physical environment, community and cultural awareness/history. Students are encouraged to take in their local surroundings including beloved parks and green spaces. Universities, schools, local businesses and museums are also examples of the students' environment available for a rich catalyst toward their creative discovery. Because the children are immersing themselves in their communities and culture, there tends to be a deeper sense of learning, engagement and achievement as a result.

As the children embark on their journey of creativity and discovery, they will take part in a multitude of lessons and activities that will assist in the writing of poetry pieces. As a major component of the unit, journal writing will take place daily. The children will take time to write thoughts, ideas, and poetic works which they can look back upon in order to measure their growth on the topic. This will happen in the classroom, the school's garden or at any of the field trip locations visited during the implementation of the unit. Lessons that delve into all six of the poetry genres and their components will be reviewed during an eight-week period. This specific amount of time allows for teaching, learning/exploring, student outings and sharing.

Due to the experiential aspect of Place-Based Education, the students will spend a significant amount of time outside of the classroom. Activities include traveling to local green spaces, and field trips that allow the children to "get lost" in nature, such as the zoo, aviary and local garden conservatory. In these locations, students will find a quiet space to absorb the sounds and happenings of the environment. They can tap into snapshots of their lives that stand out. They can think deeply about celebrations and time with friends and family as well as moments that were monumental to them for reasons of their own. Each writing opportunity will be planned to coincide with one of the six poetry genres (Haiku, Limerick, Ballad, Sonnet, Lyric and Free Verse) they will be studying.

With the implementation of lessons and each activity, it is the focus of this eight-week unit to foster a true learning experience within the world of poetry and creative writing. Students at this particular grade level are still honing the skill of writing in varying genres. As mentioned earlier, their efforts can sometimes be hampered by the sheer inundation of information from technological exposure. Instead of being *fed* information and ideas, it is my hope that the children will be able to *pick up on and discern* their own information and ideas. By disconnecting and allowing students to search the silence for inner peace and discovery, they will ascertain unmeasurable progress and refinement in their writing ability. Moreover, growth in critical thinking on an individual basis will be acquired. Furthermore, with the components of presentation and publication, each student will be able to celebrate their learning and growth with pride, validation and acknowledgement from their peers, families and instructors. They will have multiple artifacts to refer to as they further their writing and educational advancement, which is crucial in these changing times. The importance of each of these factors in child growth and development is part and parcel in this discipline. Therefore, a healthy mixture of inquiry, expression, feedback and sharing/publication is precious. With the successful completion of this unit, the students will not only become contributors to the genre, but also contributors to their community, environment and culture.

Rationale

Educators who exercise best practices often take the time to reflect on the effects of their teaching. We are constantly monitoring and checking for understanding as well as evidence that the students are applying what they have learned from the multitude of lessons taught over their time in our classroom. Formative assessments and other data drive our planning and implementation. In our reflection, it is important that we review past student performance to check for patterns of not only growth but struggle as well. I experienced a recent moment of shock as I did just this. Among a grouping of student portfolios from pre-COVID, I was able to note a drastic difference in the students' overall writing performance. The organization, integrity and skill were evident. Additionally, the work was completed in the *earlier* portion of the school year (October). Student work exhibited a clear process as well as conventions that were in line with the lessons that had already been delivered. By contrast, more recent work, completed post-COVID and within the same grade-level, showed signs of a bit of disarray or straying from the task, such as a lack of conventions applied within the work and missing components. Moreover, these observations were noted to be in work from the *latter* portion of the school year (second semester). So, what is the conclusion of this observation? It seems that in the years since the COVID-19 pandemic students are experiencing hardships that are quite evident in their writing. These hardships occur in many forms such as lack of foundational skills, creativity, stamina and more. Because reading and writing occur in tandem, foundational reading skills are paramount to working toward a solution. One issue for English teachers who wish to advance the skills of their students has become figuring out which genre of literature is best to improve reading comprehension.⁸ A delicate balance of planning, implementing, differentiating and monitoring, through frequent formative assessments needs to occur. Even still, keeping students engaged and invested must be at the forefront as well. Which vehicle should be implemented in order to achieve this level of academics and motivation for the children? Furthermore, motivational beliefs are very essential to the academic achievement of students because they help to determine the extent to which students will consider, value, put in effort, and show interest in the task.⁹

When turning to curriculum mixed with best practice, the pathway becomes even more of a conundrum. Even though we, as educational professionals hone our core knowledge and practice, certain obstacles can hinder our progress. Having to administer specific district mandated materials or assessments with fidelity as well as keeping up with scope and sequence throughout the school year can be difficult to navigate successfully. Creativity may be lost and the act of injecting information and knowledge could occur rather than a more organic form of teaching and learning that offers agency and growth on higher levels. District or state curriculum mandates, coupled with textbooks written for a national market, tend to focus on definitions and general principles rather than on questions drawn from children's immediate experiences.¹⁰ Therefore, the idea of making connections and the importance to student performance feels lost. It is imperative that these connections are made in order to compound our teaching and learning efforts. The classroom needs to be extended, if you will, to become a resourceful tool with access to the rest of the students' world. Using surroundings (familiar and unfamiliar), interacting with the environment and communicating with individuals fires the synapses and leads to connections that propel learning. Smith (2002) states that real-world problem solving, like cultural or nature studies, gets children out of the classroom and into their school, the schoolyard, and their neighborhood. It can result in as many different projects as there are classrooms and students.¹¹

If we hover much longer, valuable time, effort and most importantly student success could be lost. No child or young adult should flounder due to the act of trying to figure things out in education. The National Governors Association points out that one fact is certain: while educators mull over how to get their students to identify

main ideas in any genre of literature, student reading ability continues to decline.¹²

So, the intent of this unit is to do what I can, on my part to increase not only the academic achievement of my students, but also the inner and more personal schema that uses the additional surroundings in their lives and draws from them as free and invested thinkers. Hopefully this will aid in a trend that will take away from the statistics of low reading and writing ability in this nation. In recent decades, Vallicelli (2012) shared that in fact, the level of 13-year-olds reading daily is at only 33% (The National Institute for Literacy, 2009). Equally alarming is the ability level of high school seniors, a group of students that has nearly 60% reading below the nationally recommended proficiency levels.¹³ Additionally, evidence from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) shows that only 33% of grade 8 and 24% of grade 12 students performed at or above the “proficient” level (defined as solid academic performance) in writing.¹⁴

By working innovatively toward new and effective teaching outside of the mundane, I feel that the ball can get moving in a more positive direction. Finding continuous resources to implement this process will take hard work and open minds. Vallicelli (2012) states that one potential resource to improve reading skills that remains relatively untapped is poetry. While reading might be on the decline and young adults tend to read less, certain research shows that poetry might be a genre that could reinvigorate a new generation of readers—or at least change the trend of the current generation.¹⁵

I have become a proponent for utilizing resources and practices that challenge my students. It is important to constantly look to new trends that effectively accomplish lifelong learning attitudes. Place-Based Education (PBE) is especially notable in this endeavor. In this teaching practice students are able to explore a vast landscape of potential resources that will only add to their knowledge base. Community, culture, nature and the environment are some of the main tenets of this teaching and learning style. In a study by Jaramillo and Malagon (2019), findings show that Place-Based Education has as an aim to connect classrooms to the places in which the learning process takes place. By using PBE when teaching English, students played a remarkable role by connecting themselves towards their surroundings, creating a special bond to know their rural place and to take care of it.¹⁶

Content Objectives

In this unit, I will use Place-Based Learning as well as Inquiry-Based/Line of Inquiry to focus on the positive effects of implementing poetry at a deeper level and earlier in the school year for grade levels four and five.

Although poetry is touched upon at varying intervals throughout the school year in grades three four and five, what is lacking is the in-depth exploration of the topic and correlating examples along with practice that produce artifacts and learning outcomes which speak to its invaluable significance. The main objectives are to introduce students to this artform earlier in their academic journey and connect it to a larger schema that will, in turn, aid in the ability, skill and desire to read and write at higher levels. This will be framed through Place-Based and Inquiry-Based Learning. The creative and expressive nature of poetry along with the liberties afforded to tap into self and place as a way to move forward academically is the catalyst meant to bring forth success.

Content Objectives include an early introduction to poetry, daily journal writing, daily sharing (thoughts and

ideas, student-generated individual words to place on magnets, magnetic poems from class whiteboard, etc.). Additionally, papermaking and a deep dive into multiple poetry styles, including a guided examination into the structure/form of haiku, sonnet and limerick. This includes their history, and specific components such as the kireji and enlightenment aspects of the haiku as well as the rhyme scheme, volta, couplet, etc. of the sonnet. Therefore, the use of PBE and Inquiry to scaffold this process is key. An understanding of why this pairing is a monumental angle is pertinent to the effectiveness and success of the unit.

Gregory A. Smith, a leading proponent for Place-Based Education discusses the more profound structure and approach of this philosophy of teaching and learning. In his discussion on PBE he shares the background and approach to this format.

A review of place-based learning efforts, however, reveals five thematic patterns that can be adapted to different settings. A second critical characteristic of place-based education is its emphasis on learning experiences that allow students to become the creators of knowledge rather than the consumers of knowledge created by others. A third approach to place-based education involves engaging students in the identification of school or community issues that they would like to investigate and address. Called real-world problem solving, this orientation to curriculum development is deeply grounded in particular places and highly democratic in its processes. Students play a pivotal role in identifying problems, selecting one as a class focus, studying its characteristics and dynamics, developing potential solutions, and then organizing and participating in efforts to solve the problem. (Smith, 2002).

Teachers must become the creators of curriculum rather than the dispensers of curriculum developed by others. They must become able to make the link between the unpredictable activities that can happen beyond the classroom and student performance standards set by the district or state. Educators and community members must set aside the assumption that what now passes for legitimate learning — the kind necessary to score well on standardized tests — happens only in classrooms. For place-based education to work, teachers will have to relax their reliance on academic disciplines as the primary framework for making curricular decisions, and parents will need to accept more ambiguous measures of student learning that are tied to the completion of projects that integrate rather than separate school subjects.¹⁷

Through the use of this highly engaging and innovative practice, students' investment and subsequent artifacts are likely to be highly impactful not only in their current endeavors but throughout the rest of their learning paths. As the children continue past this grade level, they will be able to work intrinsically to claim the edification and enlightenment that comes along with their experience. Other studies have also demonstrated that academic achievement motivation was significantly related to academic performance (Awan et al., 2011). Alderman (2004) claimed that students who had optimum motivation had an edge because they had adaptive attitudes and strategies, such as maintaining intrinsic interest, goal setting, and self-monitoring.¹⁸

Teaching Strategies

Place-Based Education

The use of this noted practice is substantial to the pedagogy of this unit. By incorporating this scaffold, it is the hope that a major shift in reading and writing will occur as well as a newfound confidence in overall academic performance through experience and inquiry. Children often demonstrate a seemingly inborn curiosity about the physical world, but this curiosity is rarely tapped or satisfied in schools.¹⁹

A teacher can use cultural knowledge, held by the community, to make new information more accessible for students. PBE also emphasizes the engagement of the community through community and school partnerships.²⁰

Inquiry Based Learning/Line of Inquiry

Essential questions and a line of inquiry. Teacher derived question (what is a poem? How do you write a poem? Etc.) That leads to lines of inquiry that are student driven and generate learning. Guided by teacher, these lines of inquiry promote interest and investigation for students to explore and grow. Legions of schools, on varying levels have employed this style of teaching and learning and have found great success.

Field Work/Field Trips

The importance of taking field trips and creating opportunities for student experiences within their community is pertinent for this particular unit. Because Place-Based Education is a foundational part of the pedagogy, students must build knowledge through their lived experiences and form connections to the classroom. In the form of field trips, experiential education has been shown to positively influence the achievement of children and youth, such as helping students learn multiple perspectives and access content in novel ways.²¹

There is intent in pairing PBE with poetry as the objective is to bring out creative ideas that the students can disseminate amongst each other and outside of the school walls. By delving deep into their own musings while exploring the world around them-physical and cultural-they will develop a more substantive ability to write and express. The overall *experience* of each student is an imperative part of the processes of this unit. Experiential learning is a teaching strategy that provides concrete experiences to learners to aid their understanding of content, ideas, and concepts.²²

Through the multiple outings, brainstorming sessions, observations and discussions with their peers it is the hope that each child will experience immense intrinsic growth that will boost their academic approach to writing. Moreover, field trips provide children a unique context within which to transfer previous knowledge and acquire new knowledge.²³ This is key to the development of a myriad of skills and practices. Such learning contexts help children recall material learned and provide a high level of engagement and enthusiasm.²⁴

Guest Speaker/Poet

The privilege of a guest speaker within the field of study we are examining will pose a wonderful chance for students to fuse all aspects of their learning and inquiry. The ability to have questions addressed or resolved in real time by an expert enhances the experience and allows for positive outcomes. Because the unit spans

an eight-week time period, access to more than one “instructor” opens the playing field for the children and attempts to break the monotony in teaching styles that might exist. There is a delicate balance when it comes to in-depth teaching and learning that needs to occur. In creative writing and poetry especially, the students’ creative pathways must be kept open and free from the direction of the teacher. Careful scaffolding versus sheer requirement or regulation of their thoughts and process is germane. Just as our students may find it difficult to switch to different writing styles and formats, teachers must realize that it may be equally difficult, though highly necessary to change our teaching approach as we guide each child to a meaningful and evocative result with their writing. As instructors, we often get so caught up in trying to get the content of our courses across to our students that we forget that in order for our students to learn they have to feel comfortable sharing their experiences with us. If an instructor thinks that the only way to teach is to walk into the classroom and provide declarative knowledge than that instructor has missed the opportunity to make a difference in their students’ lives.²⁵ Consequently, the simple addition of a guest speaker and true teaching partner reinforces the goal of not only student achievement, but also the theory of PBE and Inquiry Based learning.

Journal Writing

Daily practice by students and teachers as part of a writing portfolio that will act as a resource as well as inspiration for other students. This ongoing journal will also act as a guide for reflection and a musing for future works by the children. Writing skills are constructed through consistent exercises and sharing. Students can build off of their ideas and other entries for use in later publications. Journals are kept in an individual bin that the students can access easily as they enter the classroom. They can also keep a preferred writing utensil for use during the journaling periods. Using journal writing as a teaching strategy is akin to several benefits for teachers and students alike. Students know that their journal a safe space to store their thoughts and ideas, and it also acts as a guide and reference throughout the entire unit. It plays a role in the kinesthetic learning process as well.

Written Notes/Kinesthetic Learning

Teachers are well aware that students have a multitude of learning styles. What works for one child may be the downfall of another. As there are multiple intelligences, there are multiple ways to learn. As students go forth into the unit, they will be asked to take notes on the lessons. These notes are not only a way to keep a reference but also to ingrain the messages of those lessons as a part of the schema. Visual learners learn best when they see something; auditory learners prefer to process information through oral/aural modes; and kinesthetic learners prefer to learn through activities that require total physical involvement.²⁶ It has long been discussed that this sensory learning experience can prove beneficial to many children as they make lasting connections in and outside of the classroom. Without abandoning the principal tenets of the process approach to writing, I argue that instructors should attempt to diversify their writing pedagogy to include all learning style preferences.²⁷

Think Pair Share

The use of the Think-Pair-Share strategy is one that is tried and true for many reasons. Prompting students to think individually is a way to allow them the time needed to process thoughts on a topic and organize a way to communicate those thoughts. By working with a student partner, children gain confidence and remain engaged in the activity. Retaining information also comes from not only thinking individually on the prompts, but also in engaging in discussion with a peer. Speaking skills are also developed while using the Think-Pair-

Share strategy. The confidence that a student can gain is a positive result as well. *The McCormick Excellence Teaching Institute of Cornell University* states that the reasoning behind the effectiveness of Think-Pair-Share is that the thinking time causes students to practice recall of information, thus strengthening their ability to do so again in the future. The pairing time causes students to practice explaining ideas to others, which better reveals to them what they do and do not understand. The sharing time gives you an opportunity to comment on common misconceptions or mistakes, and to present subtleties students might not have considered.²⁸

Listening Sessions

Listening sessions are carried out in person through teacher, guest and student readings. Additionally, various recordings and videos will be included. They play a key role in unlocking understanding and interpretation of poems. It is the hope that the listening sessions will evoke emotion from the students and act as inspiration for their growth.

Vocabulary

The bones of the poem are an important piece for students to grasp as they learn the six different poetry forms over the eight-week period of the unit. Specific and intentional vocabulary will be introduced to the students and absorbed for future comprehension and academic expansion. Words that are content specific such as stanza, meter, verse, couplet, etc. are to be continuously accessible for students to refer to as they produce their own individual works. Paired with strong examples and thorough word study is strategic and essential.

Performance/Presentation and Publication

One of the culminating components to this unit is the publication and performance of the student works. A myriad of activities and events will provide students with the opportunity to share and perform their writings with peers, family and the community. The aspect of publication and performance delivers the chance for the children to validate their own learning and processes, paving the way for a true celebration of achievement. Retention of experience plays a substantial part in sealing the pedagogy of Place-Based Learning as a foundational portion of this unit.

Students will be able to immortalize their work in an artifact that can be shared with family and friends as well as other classrooms in the building to add to an additional learning experience for peers. A complete, hardback book of poetry will be published for each of the grade levels partaking in this unit. Furthermore, A Poetry Slam (sans competitive aspect) will occur during the last week. Held in the auditorium with a microphone, the students, their families, and classmates will celebrate by listening to and enjoying each completed work.

Classroom Activities

Overview

An exciting aspect of this unit is that it can be molded to fit your schedule and timeline. There are a mix of daily exercises and activities that act as consistent anchors throughout the students' experience and learning.

A framework is provided that uses daily skill building and focused activities that tie into the lesson being taught. The six forms of poetry that are at the heart of this unit guide each week of teaching and learning. Students will be encouraged to place themselves into a mode of absorption. They will become more alert and open to their surroundings, community, family/culture and their environment. As the children absorb information around them, they will strengthen their knowledge base, expand their vocabulary and develop skills in writing, communication and more.

The organization and planning for the unit is based on state and district standards and the requirements of both. The district requires a “Reading Block” consisting of three 45-minute periods that are inclusive of the Language Arts (Reading, Spelling, English-Writing & Grammar, and Handwriting). The Reading Block must be at least 90 minutes, leaving us with one 45-minute period, three times a week, to designate as our “poetry period.” During the eight weeks of the unit, the students will partake in the activities listed. The structure of the lessons will follow a simple template with daily anchors (called “dailies”) as well as interchangeable activities.

Grade Four	Poetry Period 1	Poetry Period 2	Poetry Period 3
Weekly Focus	Limerick	Limerick	Limerick
Dailies	Journaling Mag-Board Guest Poet Reading	Journaling Mag-Board Teacher Reading	Journaling Mag-Board Teacher Reading
Focus Activity	Triple S-Outdoor (Garden)	Author Study (Thomas Nelson)	Golden Eggs
Resources	Limericks for Kids (Birchall Publishing)	Classic Nursery Rhymes: A Collection of Limericks and Rhymes for Children	The Book of Limericks (Finchley)

Fig. 1-Example of grade four activity table to use for planning during the unit. To be filled in weekly with focus, daily anchors, varying activities and resources.

Grade Five	Poetry Period 1	Poetry Period 2	Poetry Period 3
Weekly Focus	Freestyle/Free Verse	Freestyle/Free Verse	Freestyle/Free Verse
Dailies	Journaling Mag-Board Teacher Reading	Journaling Mag-Board Teacher Reading	Journaling Mag-Board Guest Poet Reading
Focus Activity	Golden Egg-Outdoor (Recess Area)	Triple S-Indoor (Auditorium)	P2
Resources	Whitman-“Song of Myself”	Jess-“Blind Boone’s Pianola Blues”	Hughes-Poems from Black Misery

Fig. 2- Example of grade 5 activity table to use for planning during the unit. To be filled in weekly with focus, daily anchors, varying activities and resources.

Guest Poet (Week one, four and eight)



Fig. 3-Poet and author, Cameron Barnett. Photo credit: Autumn House Press

Throughout the unit, a guest poet from the community will work with the fourth and fifth grade students in an effort to guide them through their musings as they complete lessons and activities. We must remember that the teaching of declarative knowledge is necessary but so is procedural knowledge. There needs to be a combination of both in order for students to actually learn what we are teaching them.²⁹ Cameron Barnett, is a lauded poet and author from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He is the winner of the Autumn House Press Rising Writer Contest and finalist for the 49th NAACP Image Awards for Outstanding Literary Work. He is currently the Emerging Black Writer in Residence at Chatham University's MFA Program and the winner of the Carol R. Brown Creative Achievement Award. Mr. Barnett will join the student group for introductions and conversations on writing and creativity. Discussions regarding the writing process as well as his own, personal journey with writing and publishing will occur during his visits. With this focus, students will gain knowledge of the subject of poetry and its varying subsets, skill building, and confidence in speaking, listening and sharing. He will join the group on weeks one, four and eight. Students will ask questions, share readings and perform their works.

Dailies

The “dailies” are a group of activities that occur each day (“poetry period”) during the eight-week unit. The objective is to exercise consistency and build skills in writing, reading, comprehension and communication. They are a part of best practice and intended to be shared.

Dailies-Journaling (Students-ten minutes)

Students will enter the classroom, retrieve their poetry file box and begin entries in their individual journal.

They can record ideas, organize their thoughts, write an actual poem, list favorite poems/poets, etc. They will have an option to share on a daily basis. The journal will be an accessible source throughout the unit and a point of reflection as well as a lifelong artifact of their experience and works during this time.

Dailies-Readings (Teacher-five minutes)

Readings will be conducted by the teacher as an exercise in listening and building comprehension skills. In addition, various books and authors will be introduced and shared during this activity. Readings can focus on vocal intonation, volume and diction as to be an example. Students can respond through writing, asking questions, or discussion in small groups. Opportunities for students to read are not forgotten and will occur during the “student speaker series” activities.

Dailies-“Mag-Poem” and Board Share (Students-five minutes)

In this activity students will have access to a magnetic board upon which small magnetic strips with words are placed. Upon entering the room, or as an early finisher activity, they can arrange the words to form phrases, sentences or short poems. They can also just isolate a word or two that intrigues them, after which classmates can offer suggestions or brainstorm ideas. The students are assigned a specific day (or can be pulled randomly) to read what individuals have arranged or simply share their own creations from the board. Blank strips will be included on the board so that students can write in their own words if they don’t see them on the board.

Student Speaker Series

In the Student Speaker Series students have the opportunity to read works of poetry to their classmates. Additionally, this activity allows students to share their completed works or those that are in progress. It also provides the students with feedback from their peers if desired. Students can let their classmates know if they want to receive feedback or not. The objective is that the students will be able to read aloud while showing inflection in their voice and conveying the feeling of the poem to their classmates for interpretation and comprehension

Author Studies (Inquiry Based)

These activities include a look into the works of poets and authors that span generations as well as recent standouts. Each week under different forms of poetry focus, an author will be discussed and highlighted during one of the three poetry periods. Their works will be made available for students to peruse and share. The school librarian as well as the local libraries will be resources and destinations for the students in order to ensure that they are fully immersed. An example of one such author is Shel Silverstein. We will examine *Where the Sidewalk Ends*, *A Light in the Attic* and *Falling Up* in addition to several works outside of those publications such as “Growing Down” from *Every Thing On It* (a book published posthumously in 2011).

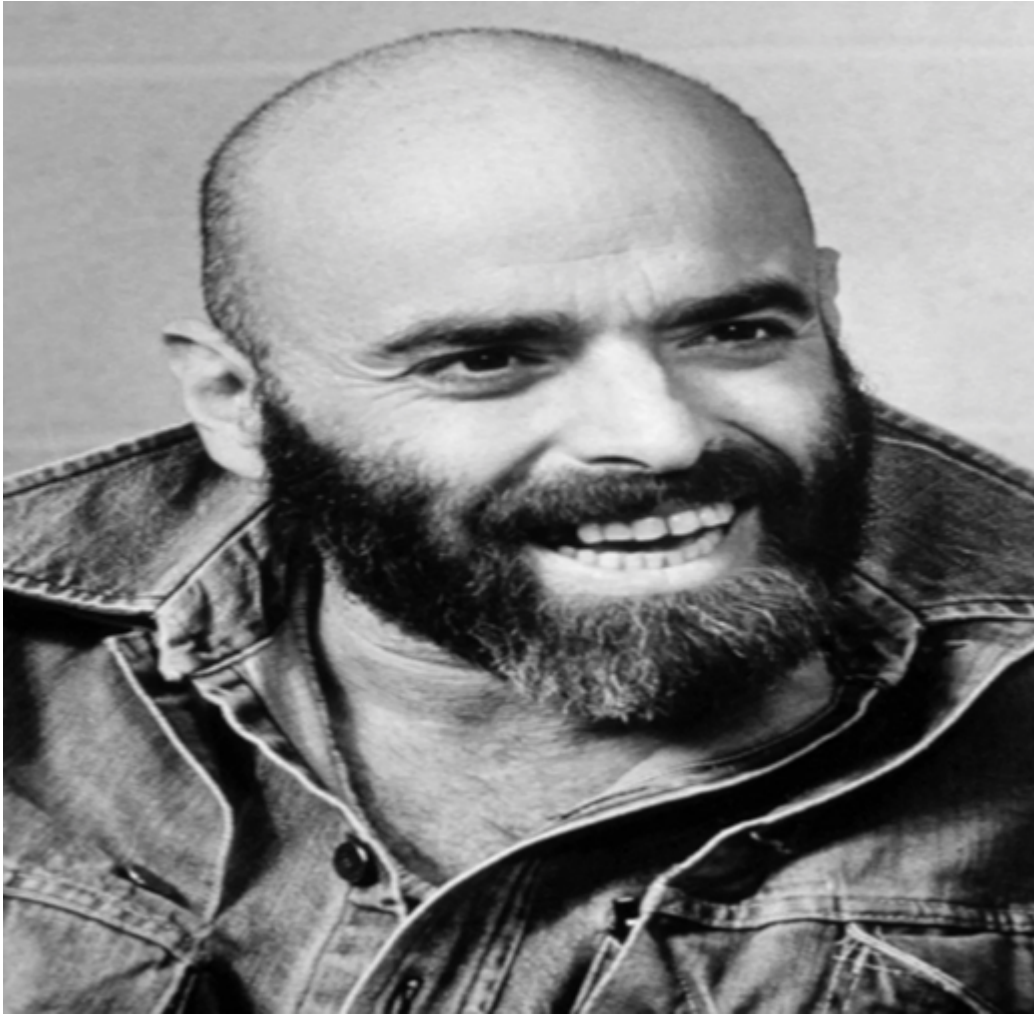


Fig. 4-Poet and author Shel Silverstein. Photo credit: Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Shel Silverstein." Encyclopedia Britannica, June 21, 2024. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Shel-Silverstein>.

Triple S ("sustained silent set")

To be conducted in multiple spaces, indoors and out, combined with students' personal spaces in their homes and community, the "sustained silent set" is a play on SSR (sustained silent reading). During Triple S sessions, students will spread out and spend an allotted amount of time getting themselves "set," as in ready to go and as in placing themselves in a location. Once in their preferred spot, they will use the time to generate ideas, hone thoughts from their journals, write in their journals, reflect upon completed works, read the works of others and more. The session should help to create a bond with the student, their thoughts/reflection and the process. Although this is not one of the "Dailies," this activity will be used frequently.

P² (process and product)

Implemented once a week, and specifically, for sharing and scaffolding student achievement within this unit, the P² activity allows students to vocalize their experience during the writing process. They will be able to speak about the steps they took as they wrote, what worked really well, what didn't work, etc.. Moreover, students can choose to connect their process to their product (finished or not).

Golden Egg Activity

Items of multiple types are placed inside small, golden eggs and made available to students. Each egg contains different components so that students can choose many times and receive a variety of inspiration. The inspiration is meant to spark ideas for journal entries or poetic works. This activity can be implemented alone or paired with Triple S. Additionally, it can be scheduled multiple times during a week of study.

Below, a breakdown of the eight-week teaching and learning period is listed. This configuration is what I feel will work best for my students in terms of the introduction of the unit as well as implementation of activities and events. The delivery and completion of each week is able to be reconfigured to fit the needs of any individual effectuating iterations of this unit.

Implementation of the Unit	Poetry Style
Week One	<i>Limerick</i>
Week Two	<i>Haiku</i>
Week Three	<i>Free Verse</i>
Week Four	<i>Lyric/Ballad</i>
Week Five	<i>Sonnet</i>
Week Six	<i>Sonnet</i>
Week Seven	<i>Publish</i>
Week Eight	<i>Performance</i>

Resources

The following books and works are a sampling of what is to be used throughout the unit.

Title	Author/Poet	Poem	Book	Usage
Black Misery	Langston Hughes		✓	Multiple Poetry Forms, Expression, Author Study
Poetry for Young people	Langston Hughes		✓	Multiple Poetry Forms, Expression, Author Study
An Earth Song	Langston Hughes		✓	Multiple Poetry Forms, Expression, Author Study
Selected Poems of Langston Hughes	Langston Hughes		✓	Multiple Poetry Forms, Expression, Author Study
A Dream Deferred	Langston Hughes	✓		Free Verse Poetry Form

Dreams	Langston Hughes	✓		Ballad Poetry Form
Fairies	Langston Hughes	✓		Free Verse Poetry Form
Winter Sweetness	Langston Hughes	✓		Ballad Poetry Form, Rhythm Author Study
Who Was Langston Hughes?	Billy Merrell & Who HQ		✓	Background Information and Author Study
Where the Sidewalk Ends	Shel Silverstein		✓	Ballad Poetry Form, Free Verse, Rhyme, Meter & Author Study
A Light in the Attic	Shel Silverstein		✓	Ballad Poetry Form, Free Verse, Rhyme, Meter & Author Study
Falling Up	Shel Silverstein		✓	Ballad Poetry Form, Free Verse, Rhyme, Meter & Author Study
No Difference	Shel Silverstein	✓		Limerick, Rhyme, Meter
Grow Down	Shel Silverstein	✓		Ballad Poetry Form, Free Verse, Rhyme, Meter
Olio	Tyehimba Jess			Multiple Poetry Forms, Expression
Blind Boone's Pianola Blues	Tyehimba Jess	✓		Free Verse
Blind Boone's Vision	Tyehimba Jess	✓		Expression
F#	Tyehimba Jess	✓		Haiku Poetry Form
The Hill We Climb	Amanda Gorman	✓		
Hip Hop Speaks to Children	Nikki Giovanni		✓	Expression, Free Verse

My First Book of Haiku Poems	Esperanza Ramirez-Christensen		✓	Haiku Poetry Form
Hardcover Poetry for Young People	Roessel & Rampersad		✓	Multiple Poetry Forms
The Cat in the Hat	Seuss		✓	Rhyme, Meter
Oh, The Places You'll Go	Seuss		✓	Rhyme
Random House Book of Poetry for Children	Jack Prelutsky		✓	
More Than Words	Roz Maclean		✓	
Limericks for Kids	Birchall Publishing		✓	
The Book of Limericks	T.K. Finchley		✓	
There Once Was a Limerick Anthology	Caroll, Frost, Lear, Twain & Others		✓	
You Are Here: Poetry in the Natural World	Ada Limon		✓	
A Red, Red Rose	Robert Burns	✓		Ballad Poetry Form
The Rime of the Ancient Mariner	Samuel Taylor Coleridge	✓		Ballad Poetry Form

Appendix on Implementation of Standards

The state of Pennsylvania makes use of the Common Core set of standards. In addition, the state supplemented those standards with its own, creating a fusion based upon the content of the national standards and focused state amendments that take into consideration the needs of its own students. These additional standards are meant to simultaneously support and challenge students, keeping them at the

forefront of learning in the k-12 segment of their education.

The unit will be taught to fourth and fifth graders in two separate sections, therefore the standards addressed will be grade-level appropriate with subtle differences at each level. The standards that will be focused on in this unit are drawn from three specific sections, including Reading Literature, Writing and Speaking and Listening.

Fourth Grade Standards

1.3-Reading Literature:

Students read and respond to works of literature-With emphasis on comprehension vocabulary acquisition and making connections among ideas and between texts with focus on textual evidence.

Grade 4 CC 1.3.4.A-Key Ideas and Details; Theme

*Determine a theme of a text from details in a text; summarize the text.

Grade 4 CC 1.3.4.B-Key Ideas and Details; Text Analysis

*Cite relevant details from text to support what the text says explicitly and make inferences.

Grade 4 CC 1.3.4.E

*Explain major differences between poems, drama, and prose and refer to the structural elements of each when writing or speaking about a text.

Grade 4 CC 1.3.4.F-Craft and Structure Vocabulary

*determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in grade-level text, including figurative language.

Grade 4 CC 1.3.4.G-Integration of knowledge and Ideas; Sources of Information

*Make connections between the text of a story or drama and a visual or oral presentation of the text, identifying where each version reflects specific descriptions and directions in the text.

Grade 4 CC 1.3.4.K-Range of Reading

*Read and comprehend literary fiction on grade level, reading independently and proficiently.

1.4-Writing:

Students write for different purposes and audiences. Students write clear and focused texts to convey a well-defined perspective and appropriate content.

Grade 4 CC 1.4.4.S-Responding to Literature

*Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research, applying grade-level reading standards for literature and informational texts.

Grade 4 CC 1.4.4.U-Technology and Publication

*With some guidance and support, use technology, including the internet to produce and publish writing as well as to interact and collaborate with others; demonstrate sufficient command of keyboarding skills to type a minimum of one page in a single sitting.

Grade 4 CC 1.4.4.X-Range of Writing

*Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

1.5 Speaking and Listening:

Students present appropriately in formal speaking situations, listen critically and respond intelligently as individuals or in group discussions.

Grade 4 CC 1.5.4.A-Comprehension and Collaboration-Collaborative Discussion

*Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions on grade-level topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

Grade 4 CC 1.5.4.F-Integration of Knowledge and Ideas-Multi-media

*Add audio recordings and visual displays to presentations when appropriate to enhance the development of main ideas or theme.

Fifth Grade Standards

1.3-Reading Literature:

Students read and respond to works of literature-With emphasis on comprehension vocabulary acquisition and making connections among ideas and between texts with focus on textual evidence.

Grade 5 CC 1.3.5.A-Key Ideas and Details; Theme

*Including how details in a story or drama respond to challenges or how a speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic, summarize the text.

Grade 5 CC 1.3.5.B-Key Ideas and Details; Text Analysis

*Cite textual evidence by quoting accurately from the text to explain what the text says explicitly and make inferences.

Grade 5 CC 1.3.5.C-Key Ideas and Details Literary Elements

*Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text.

Grade 5 CC 1.3.5.E-Craft and Structure Text Structure

*Explain how a series of chapters, scenes, or stanzas fits together to provide overall structure of a particular

story, drama, or poem.

Grade 5 CC 1.3.5.F-Craft Structure and Vocabulary

*Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in grade level text including interpretation of figurative language.

Grade 5 CC 1.3.5.G-Integration of Knowledge and Ideas; Sources of Information

*Analyze how visual and multimedia elements contribute to the meaning, tone, or beauty of a text (e.g., graphic novel, multimedia presentation of fiction, folktale, myth, or poem).

Grade 5 CC 1.3.5.K-Range of Reading

*Read and comprehend literary fiction on grade level, reading independently and proficiently.

1.4-Writing:

Students write for different purposes and audiences. Students write clear and focused texts to convey a well-defined perspective and appropriate content.

Grade 5 CC 1.4.5.S-Responding to Literature

*Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research, applying grade-level reading standards for literature and informational texts.

Grade 5 CC 1.4.5.U-Technology and Publication

*With some guidance and support, use technology, including the internet to produce and publish writing as well as to interact and collaborate with others; demonstrate sufficient command of keyboarding skills to type a minimum of two pages in a single sitting.

Grade 5 CC 1.4.5.X-Range of Writing

*Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

1.5 Speaking and Listening:

Students present appropriately in formal speaking situations, listen critically and respond intelligently as individuals or in group discussions.

Grade 5 CC 1.5.5.A-Comprehension and Collaboration-Collaborative Discussion

*Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions on grade-level topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

Grade 5 CC 1.5.5.F-Integration of Knowledge and Ideas-Multimedia

*Include multimedia components and visual displays in presentations when appropriate to enhance the

development of main ideas or themes.³⁰

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Notes

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