

There Once Was a Poem that Knew Facts: The Unlikely Love Affair Between Poetry and Nonfiction

**presented by
Allan Wolf**

Description:

One part poetry across-the-curriculum, one part text-to-text connection, and three parts fun, this wildly entertaining session will explore what happens when Nonfiction and Poetry meet by chance and fall madly in love.

About Allan Wolf:

Allan Wolf is a performance poet and author of poetry picture books like *The Blood-Hungry Spleen* and young adult verse novels such as *New Found Land* (Candlewick Press), an American Library Association Best Book for Young Adults. Two of his books have been named *School Library Journal* Best Books of the Year, including *Immersed in Verse: An Informative, Slightly Irreverent & Totally Tremendous Guide to Living the Poet's Life* (Lark/Sterling). His latest title is an interactive book for young writers titled *One Hundred Haiku to Write and Leave Behind* (Lark/Sterling). Another young adult verse novel, *Zane's Trace*, will be released in the Fall. He lives in Asheville, NC.

NOTE:

The examples, descriptions, ideas, and activities in this handout are meant for classroom use only. Professional consultants, workshop presenters, publishers and circus performers must all get permission first and use proper citations.

Play With Poetic Structure

Don't be afraid to let our words play on the page. Let them line up like soldiers on parade. Let them dash down stairs. Let them fall fast and crash on the grass. Or skip from rock to rock across a stream. To emphasize a word, make it live alone on its very own line. Add stanza breaks or dashes to make the reader stop. Play with punctuation. Ellipses make the words trail off. Parenthesis add afterthought to a sly aside. Indent a line to expand on the thought of the line that came before. Let your words build and explode. Let them linger in the air. Let them slink away slowly till they are barely even there.

from *Immersed In Verse* by Allan Wolf (Lark Books, 2006).

Note the author's use of poetic language (rhyme, rhythm, assonance, consonance, personification, etc.) in the nonfiction prose above. Prose and poetry share much in common.

Don't Be Afraid

to let your words
play on the page.
Let them line up
like soldiers on parade.

Let
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Let
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Or skip fromrock torock across a stream.

To emphasize a word, make it live
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Add stanza breaks

or dashes to make the reader—stop.
Play with punctuation:
Ellipses make the words trail off . . .
Parentheses add afterthought (to a sly aside).
Indent a line

 to expand on the thought
 of the line that came before.

Let your words build and explode!

 them in air.
Let linger the

Let them slink away
s l o w l y
till they're barely even there.

Note how this “poem” still relays the same information as the prose form. In fact, verse allows the text to actually demonstrate the concepts it is attempting to explain.

You Can't Write a Poem About THAT! Finding Significance Within the Mundane

Mundane: from the Latin *mundus* (world) thus *mundanus* (of the world)

Well-known poems that celebrate the mundane:

Something Is Going to Happen (from *Delight*) by Robert Penn Warren

The Road Not Taken; *Dust of Snow* by Robert Frost

The Red Wheelbarrow; *This Is Just to Say* by William Carlos Williams

Fog by Carl Sandburg

Miracles by Walt Whitman

Write Your Way Through the Phases of Mundane Observation

Confining your field of focus to only what exists within a ten-foot circle around you, choose a suitable mundane subject, such as a pencil, ceiling fan, book, (Note: If you *must* look beyond a ten-foot circle, then confine your observation to the space of the room.) Writing continually, move through these phases of observation in order to generate descriptions and brainstorm ideas for further writing.

Describe

Describe, in detail, the subject's appearance, various parts, materials, size, weight, etc. Describe what it does. How does it move? What is its energy source? What does it sound like? Can you hold it? How does it feel?

Evaluate

What is its purpose? How does its existence make the world better? How does its existence make the world worse? Describe the subject's positive impact as well as its negative impact. Does it have a personality?

Radiate

Look around your ten-foot circle. Are there others? Now look as far as your eyes can see. Are there others there? Use your imagination. Are there others outside of your field of vision? Within the building where you are? Beyond the block? Across the city where you reside? The country? The world?

Connect

What other kinds exist? What other objects are related to it? What things have a similar look, function, movement? What other objects, mundane or otherwise, have a similar effect? Imagine if the subject of your study should disappear. What would happen? How would the world be changed? Why is the subject important to your own life? To the world?

Poems that Celebrate the Mundane

The Red Wheelbarrow

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens.

William Carlos Williams

from A Bird Came Down the Walk

A bird came down the walk.
He did not know I saw.
He bit an angle-worm in halves
And ate the fellow, raw.

And then he drank a dew
From a convenient grass,
And then hopped sideways to the wall
To let a beetle pass.

Emily Dickinson

Dust of Snow

The way a crow
Shook down on me
The dust of snow
From a hemlock tree

Has given my heart
A change of mood
And saved some part
Of a day I had rued.

Robert Frost

Fog

The fog comes
on little cat feet.

It sits looking
over harbor and city
on silent haunches
and then moves on.

Carl Sandburg

Hamburger Haiku

Fast food Happy Meal.
Everybody is happy.
Except for the cow.

Allan Wolf

Writing Prompts that Exercise Observation Powers

Snapshot Safari

In your notebook collect a variety of images from an “outing” around your house or school. Include sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and textures. Be sure to keep each entry short (a single phrase will usually do), and don’t dwell on the significance of the image. Your object is simply to collect the images as a sensory record of your experience. Remember that poetry is not always confined by matters of narrative or logical continuity; seemingly disjointed images and sensations can sometimes provide a clarity and illumination which linear thoughts cannot.

Sound Safari

Like the Snapshot Safari but with sounds alone. Just walk, listen, and write. The most challenging part of this exercise is to figure out how to spell the sounds.

Treasure Box of Priceless Things

The teacher places a variety of “everyday objects” in a box (eraser, paper clip, wash cloth, shoe lace, chicken bone, button, house key, etc.) As the box is passed around, students are asked to reach into the box and feel around until they feel an object they want to write about.

Walk a Mile in Something Else’s Shoes

Imagine what it would be like to be some mundane object, like a shoe or a coffee cup.

Thirteen Ways of Looking at Your Elbow

Come up with thirteen different ways of looking at a mundane subject. You may slow down by way # seven, but don’t give up.

Treasure Hunts and Riddles

The teacher hides an object somewhere in the room and then describes its location in the form of a riddle. Students can also simply play a form of I-Spy by creating

riddle poems about the everyday objects in the room. The emphasis should be more on choice of details rather than literary quality.

Everyday Object As Self Portrait

Generate a list of characteristics of yourself. Include internal and external characteristics. (Be honest, this list is just for brainstorming, and you won't be required to share it unless you want to.) After your list is complete, choose an everyday object that you feel shares a common characteristic(s) with you. Make a list of other characteristics of the object. Now write a poem that illustrates your comparison. You may start by simply saying, "I am like"

Inquisition

Write down a list of questions to ask of some mundane subject. You can speak directly to the subject or else ask the questions generally. This list of questions might prove to be a poem in itself, or it may trigger a poem that provides an answer to one or more of the questions.

Multi-Voice Dialogue Poem

Similar to Inquisition, except this time your object actually answers back! Write a dialogue poem in which you conduct an interview or carry on a conversation with a mundane object. Your two (or more) voices can speak simultaneously or alternate, passing the lines back and forth.

METRICAL FEET
Lesson for a Boy

Trochee | trips from | long to | short;

From | long to | long in | solemn | sort

Slow | Spondee | stalks; strong | foot, yet | ill able

Ever to | come up with | Dactyl tri | syllable

Iamb | ics march | from short | to long;

With a leap | and a bound | the swift An | apests throng.

by Samuel Taylor Coleridge

A SIMILE IS LIKE A SONG

A Simile is like a song,

It's as easy to remember.

A metaphor makes soft white snow

Sifted sugar in December.

A little alliteration

lets the lesson lilt and linger.

A rake that's been personified

scrapes its bony fingers.

Hyperbole exaggerates:

“Her crying caused a flood!”

Onomatopoeia imitates:

“Kabang, Kerplunk,. Kathud.”

Note:
The author of this little verse is “unknown.” I’ve seen variations. I may have altered it slightly for my own purposes over the years. *AW*

**Before You Rhyme,
Please Take The Time
To Read These Wise Didactic Lines**

The *masculine* is bright and light.
The *feminine* is brighten, lighten.
Triple rhyme is brightening, lightening.
Forced rhyme to the ear is frightening.

External rhyme comes at the end.
Internal brightens light within.
“Within and end don’t rhyme,” you say.
But that’s the way some poets play:
The *perfect* rhyme sounds right on time;
The *near* rhyme, though, is not quite home.

Unless your aim’s the funny bone
Best leave the *multi*-rhymes alone.
The reason multies humor us is
They batter us like blunderbusses.

Beware young poets. Take your time.
Lighten, brighten, light or bright;
Don’t use a word because it rhymes;
Choose a word because it’s right.

Allan Wolf

Arithmetic

by Carl Sandburg

Arithmetic is where numbers fly like pigeons in and out of your head.

Arithmetic tells you how many you lose or win if you know how many you had before you lost or won.

Arithmetic is seven eleven all good children go to heaven—or five six bundle of sticks.

Arithmetic is numbers you squeeze from your head to your hand to your pencil to your paper till you get the answer.

Arithmetic is where the answer is right and everything is nice and you can look out of the window and see the blue sky— or the answer is wrong and you have to start all over and try again and see how it comes out this time.

If you take a number and double it and double it again and then double it a few more times, the number gets bigger and bigger and goes higher and higher and only arithmetic can tell you what the number is when you decide to quit doubling.

Arithmetic is where you have to multiply— and you carry the multiplication table in your head and hope you won't lose it.

If you have two animal crackers, one good and one bad, and you eat one and a striped zebra with streaks all over him eats the other, how many animal crackers will you have if somebody offers you five six seven and you say No no no and you say Nay nay nay and you say Nix nix nix?

If you ask your mother for one fried egg for breakfast and she gives you two fried eggs and you eat both of them, who is better in arithmetic, you or your mother?

And don't forget:

Math Lesson. From *Upside Down and Inside Out* by Bobbi Katz (Boyd's Mills Press, 1992)

The Green Basilisk Lizard

The green basilisk lizard is also called a plumed or double-crested basilisk; but its amazing ability to run on water gives this species its most recognizable moniker: the Jesus Christ lizard.

Abundant in the tropical rain forests of Central America, from southern Mexico to Panama, green basilisks spend much of their time in the trees and are never far from a body of water. When threatened, they can drop from a tree into the water and sprint, upright, about 5 feet (1.5 meters) per second across the surface.

To accomplish this, they have long toes on their rear feet with fringes of skin that unfurl in the water, increasing surface area. As they rapidly churn their legs, they slap their splayed feet hard against the water, creating a tiny air pocket that keeps them from sinking, provided they maintain their speed. They can move along the surface like this for 15 feet (4.5 meters) or more. When gravity eventually does take over, the basilisk resorts to its excellent swimming skills to continue its flight.

Part of the iguana family, green basilisks grow to about 2 feet (61 centimeters) in length, including their long, whip-like tail. Males have distinctive, high crests on their heads and backs, which they use to impress females.

Pregnant females prepare a shallow trench where they lay up to 20 eggs. The mother then leaves the eggs to hatch on their own. Hatchlings are born with the ability to run (on land and water), climb, and swim.

Green basilisks are omnivores, surviving on a diet of plant material, insects, fruit, and small vertebrates. They are common throughout their range and have no special status, but abundant natural predators like snakes and birds keep these amazing lizards on their toes.

National Geographic Website

Basilisk

by Simon Wolf

I am a green basilisk
sleeping on a rock in a Central American
rain forest next to a pool.
Eee-ee-ee-eeck!
The shrill cry of a hawk rents the still air
like a knife wakening me.
I stay stock still
not daring even to breathe.
But the hawk's sharp eye still spots me.
As it dives I jump up
my strong hind legs granting me speed
as I scamper towards the water. A searing pain
shoots up my tail as the hawk's curved beak
clips it. Finally I reach the water's edge
and jump into it. For a moment I am engulfed
by cold clear water then I bob up like a cork.
I put one foot on the surface and push,
my foot flaps opening.
The water goes up to my ankle but I swing
my other leg in a smooth downward
arc and don't sink. The hawk is still hard
on my bleeding tail. Solid ground is only
four feet away. Three now. Two. One.
Now I'm on dry land in the shelter of the ferns.
The hawk lets out an agonized skree
and flies off.
I
 am
 safe.

Mystery Poem

Write a “Who Am I?” or a “What Am I?” poem in which the speaker only gives descriptive clues to the reader who must guess who, or what, the speaker is. This answer can be given as part of the poem’s ending or not at all. The poem can take whatever form you choose.

Examples

The Mountain Chicken

I’m called the Mountain Chicken
but I never, ever cluck.
You’ll find me in Dominica
if you have any luck.
I do not peck. I do not scratch.
My name must be a joke.
I do not strut. Instead I hop.
I do not cluck. I croak.
Don’t look inside the chicken coop.
I’m underneath this log.
I’m really not a chicken, see
I really am a . . .

Allan Wolf

Who Am I?

I played a sport, Round Ball the game.
I flew through the air, and all knew my name.
To the greatest heights, I did reach,
When playing with the dream,
this—no one could teach.
The size of the ball did change but once,
And to the larger did I return.
From fame and glory did I retire,
Wearing red and black attire.
Who am I?

P.J. Purdy and Tammy Roberts

Metaphors

I’m a riddle in nine syllables,
An elephant, a ponderous house,
A melon strolling on two tendrils,
O red fruit, ivory, vine timbers!
This loaf’s big with its yeasty rising.
Money’s new-minted in this fat purse.
I’m a means, a stage, a cow in calf.
I’ve eaten a bag of green apples,
Boarded the train there’s no getting off.

Sylvia Plath

Riddle

We are little airy creatures,
All of different voice and features:
One of us in glass is set,
One of us is found in jet,
One of us is set in tin,
One a lump of gold within;
If the last you should pursue,
It can never fly from you.

Author unknown

Limerick

A limerick is a five-line poem, usually humorous in nature, arranged in a A-A-B-B-A rhyme pattern. Lines one and two consist of eight or nine syllables. Lines three and four consist of five or six syllables. The last line (which rhymes with the first two) consists of from eight to ten syllables. Limericks can be used to tell brief stories or to describe the characteristics of something being studied in class.

Examples

Biology

A chameleon when he's feeling blue,
Can alter his glum point of view.
By changing his hue
To a color that's new:
I'd like to do that, wouldn't you?

Eve Merriam

Ecology/Social Issues

Said an envious, erudite ermine:
"There's one thing I cannot determine:
When a man wears my coat,
He's a person of note.
While *I'm* but a species of vermin!"

Oliver Hereford

Physics

There was a young lady named Bright,
Whose speed was much faster than light.
She went out one day
In a relative way
And returned on the previous night.

A.H. Reginald Butler

Sammy

There was a young hopeful named Sam
Who loved diving into the jam.
When his mother said, "Sammy!
Don't make yourself jammy."
He said, "You're too late ma, I am."

Elizabeth Ripley

Diamante

The diamante (pronounced DIE-uh-MON-tay) is a perfect poem form to illustrate the contrast between two different subjects. The seven lines of this poem are in the shape of a diamond, with the different subjects acting as the top and bottom points of the diamond.

Line One: Noun "A."

Line Two: Two adjectives describing the noun "A."

Line Three: Three "ing" or "ed" words describing noun "A."

Line Four: Four nouns. Two describing the noun "A". Two describing noun "B."

Line Five: Three "ing" or "ed" words describing noun "B."

Line Six: Two adjectives describing the noun "B."

Line Seven: Noun "B"

Note that immediately after writing Noun "A" in line one, the writer may want to go to line seven and enter the contrasting noun "B" there. Then the writer can go back and fill in the rest of the poem.

Examples

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Younger, easier

Old friends, one teacher, one class

Bonner, Holly Hill Elementary / Holly Hill Junior High, Campbell

Changing classes, changing teachers, finding new friends

Older, harder

JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

*Group Poem, 6th graders
Bonner Elementary School*

DEMOCRACY

Many, representative

Self-governed, elected, tolerating

Legislature, constitution / despotism, absolutism

Inherited, exploiting, oppressing

Machiavellian, single

AUTOCRACY

*Group Poem, 11th graders
Spruce Creek Senior High*

Note: I picked up these diamante examples from an unknown presenter to whom I owe thanks.

(Diamante continued)

You can adapt the diamante to reinforce vocabulary or concepts that you have been studying in any content area.

Adapted for Earth Science

Line one: Write the word "SWAMP."

Line two: Write the names of two famous swamps.

Line three: Three words that describe swamp geography or climate.

Line four: Name a swamp plant, a swamp animal, a desert plant, a desert animal.

Line five: Three words that describe desert geography or climate

Line six: Write the names of two famous deserts.

Line seven: Write the word "DESERT."

Example

SWAMP
Okefenokee, Everglades
wet, spongy, low-lying
fern, egret / cactus, lizard
hot, dry, sandy
Sahara, Mojave
DESERT

Note: I picked up these diamante examples from an unknown presenter to whom I owe thanks.

Adapted for Environmental Science

Line one: Write the word "POLLUTION."

Line two: Write two adjectives which describe pollution.

Line three: Three verbs which tell how humankind pollutes the earth.

Line four: Two specific examples of pollution / Two specific examples of conservation.

Line five: Three verbs which tell how humankind conserves the earth.

Line six: Write two adjectives which describe conservation.

Line seven: Write the word "CONSERVATION."

Example

POLLUTION
foul, noisy
stripping, exhausting, contaminating
clear cutting, dumping poisonous chemicals / treating wastes, banning dioxin
recycling, replenishing, preserving
clear, unspoiled
CONSERVATION

Cinquain

A cinquain (pronounced SEEN-cane) is a five-line unrhymed poem. It is easy to write and can be used in a variety of subject areas. Cinquains can be useful in helping students to gain new insights into a topic being studied. Although there are variations, the cinquain generally takes the following form:

Line One: *One noun* that introduces the poem's subject.

Line Two: *Two adjectives* that describe the subject.

Line Three: *Three verbs* (or verbals) related to the subject.

Line Four: *Four-word phrase* telling feelings of the writer or describing the subject.

Line Five: *One noun* (different from line one) that sums up the previous four lines.

Examples

Spiders
Tiny, busy
Spinning, moving, floating
Building fragile wispy nests
Artists

Tree frogs
Brown, glistening
Prowling, leaping, hanging
Stretching throats to sing
Woodsprites

Jennings and Telfer

Grackles
Iridescent, black
Splashing, hopping, dunking
Fluttering feathered creek communion
Bath time

Allan Wolf

Orangutan
Playful, busy
Climbing, swinging, chewing
Getting into everything, everywhere
Toddler

Karen Rose

Heron
White, long-necked
Watching, wading, eating
Segregated from the others
Fisherman

Joy Ray

Acrostic Poem

An acrostic (pronounced uh-CRAW-stick) poem is an easy way for students to summarize what they know about a topic by gathering together thoughts, facts, ideas, and details into a poem in which the first letters of each line spell out the topic at hand. Add an extra degree of difficulty to this form, by also arranging the last letters of each line so that they spell out a word or phrase that is appropriate to the topic.

Examples

Wishing for freedom
Hughty look in your eyes
Isolated in your too-small space
Tundra dweller
Ermine-colored
Furry and fuzzy
Out of place in a St. Louis summer
Xtremely quiet

Joy Ray

Editing the Chrysalis

“At last,” cried Butterfly,

Poised
Over its
Emy chrysalis,
“My final draft!”

Avis Harley

from Avis Harley’s
excellent book titled
*Fly With Poetry: An
ABC of Poetry*
(Wordsong/Boyds
Mills Press).

Forgotten Giants

Ancient
Bogs
Contain
Dinosaur
Eggs,
Forgotten
Giants
Hidden
Inside
Jurassic
Kingdoms.

Like
Memories
Never
Opened,
Prehistoric
Quagmires
Retain
Secrets.

This
Unknown,
Vanished
World,
X-tinct:

Yesterday’s
Zoo.

Abecedarian
by Avis Harley

Tanka Talk:

Students create a classroom dialectic in verse by writing tankas (5 lines of 5,7,5, 7, and 7 syllables respectively) about a variety of topics (shopping, sorrow, hair, victory, cars, friendship, peer pressure, anger, math, a historical figure, a scientific fact, etc)

Depression is not
a sour look on my face.
Looks are a symptom
that my heart is deflated,
trust and hope have gone missing.
S.H

Depression is not
my voice becoming silent.
My silence is a symptom
of the look on your face,
Trust? Hope? Missing all along.
A.W.

Fun is a giggle,
pink lipstick, blue nail polish,
whispering girlfriends,
a good cry at a movie
then laughing all the way home.
S.H.

Fun is a joy ride,
a spitting competition
telling raunchy jokes
laughing till our stomachs ache
knowing that we all belong.
A.W.

Underwear in brief:
Mostly equipped with front flaps;
Underoos; jock straps;
Low-rise; boxer; bikini;
Jumbo or teeny-weeny.
A.W.

Persona Poems, Monologue Poems

- offer a student-centered approach to learning.
- lend themselves to performance and presentation.
- are handy content memorization tools.
- reinforce audience awareness.
- place young perf-poets in the role of teacher by intrinsically asking, “What do I want my audience to learn?”
- help students to organize, prioritize, and categorize content.
- require close reading of any primary texts.
- encourage the use of specialized vocabulary in context.
- encourage text-to-self connections.
- promote independent, supplementary research.
- are useful across the curriculum.
- provide a fun, engaging, and authentic way to assess learning.

**Private Patrick Gass, the Carpenter,
Makes His Case to Lewis and Clark**

Welcome to Fort Kaskaskia, Sirs.
I know that you've had a rough journey thus far,
and I know that you have plenty soldiers to see
so I thank you for taking the time to see me.
Now Captain Bissell claims he can't spare me
but with all due respect I'd like to plead my case.

Do I have any special skills?

Well, I'm a right handy carpenter.
With the proper tools and a few hands
I can clear you a field of trees in a week
and build you a cabin to boot.
Give me a broadax and a hewing dog
and I'll square the logs if you choose.
Give me a froe
and I'll build you a clapboard roof.
Give me a wedge and a maul
and I'll split a hundred rails in a day.
I can saddle notch a log
or make a saddle for your horse.
Or a bed for to lay on or a bench for to sit on.
I know the ins and outs of raising a fort
which I know you'll be needin' up north
and with your permission, sirs, I've an idea or two
to expand the capabilities of your keelboat.
I can row and push a setting pole.
I can shoot a gun and throw a hawk.
I can swim like a fish. I can run like the devil.
I'm strong and I'm fit.
I'm a soldier's soldier, Sirs.
I never shirk and I do my work.
And I do the other feller's too.

What's that? *Why* do I want to join?

I mainly . . . Mainly, I want to see the trees.

from *New Found Land: Lewis and Clark's Voyage of Discovery* by Allan Wolf.
Candlewick Press (Cambridge, 2004), pp 77-78.

Multi-Voice Poem

Write a two-voice poem, *a la* Paul Fleischman's *Joyful Noise*. Perhaps a conversation between two (or more) speakers. Your two voices can speak simultaneously or alternate, passing the lines back and forth.

Example (from *Math Talk: Mathematical Ideas in Poems for Two Voices* by Theoni Pappas, see bibliography.)

One

One.

The numbers that is.

I was the

Counting

started with me.

One

Every number

I can multiply any number

One

I can divide any number

and leave it

And when you think you've

just add me to the last

I'm number one,
the first.

I was the first of them.

The numbers that is.

initiator.

and computation

One

has me as a factor.

and amazingly leave it unchanged.

that's me.

you name it

the same.

reached the end of the numbers,

and the list goes on.

the first.

Bio-Poem Examples

Seventh Grade Student

Molly

Who is energetic, creative, athletic and short.
Daughter of Sandra and John.
Lover of fun, marine life, and John.
Who feels pessimistic, left out, and sometimes happy.
Who needs love, time, and hugs.
Who fears sharks, death, and homework.
Who gives friendship, advice, and love.
Who would like to see a cure for cancer, Alaska, and my parents back together.
Resident of Mount Air.

McDonald

Character from Literature

Queeny

Angry, defiant, bright, frightened
Daughter of a prison inmate
Cares deeply about her mom and dad
Who feels alone
Who needs someone to see through her defenses
Who gives friendship to those who believe in her
Who fears going to jail
Who would like to see her father
Resident of Cotton Junction, Georgia

Peavy

Historical Figure

Abe

Strong, brooding, witty, compassionate
Husband of Mary Todd Lincoln
Cares deeply about saving the Union
Who feels committed to ending slavery
Who needs the nation's understanding
Who gives freely of himself
Who fears war
Who would like to see North and South as one again
Resident of the ages

Lincoln

“Bio Poem” Example

Sammy

Naughty, happy, hungry, and sly
Son of Mommy
Lover of fun, jam, and mom
Who feels motivated, happy, and guilt-free
Who needs jam, bread, and a chair to stand on
Who gives headaches, grief, and hugs
Who would like to see his mommy happy
 and a swimming pool filled with jam.
Resident of The Kitchen

Jaminsky

“I Am Poem” Example

Mommy of *Sammy* by Elizabeth Ripley

I am a harried mom in a heckuva hurry.
I wonder why my son can't stay out of trouble.
I hear huge lips smacking in the kitchen.
I see mounds of jam everywhere.
I want a vacation!
I am a harried mom in a heckuva hurry.

I pretend not to find my child annoying.
I touch my child's sticky sweet face.
I worry that he will wipe his face on my new curtains.
I cry to think he won't be a child forever.
I am a harried mom in a heckuva hurry.

I understand that children *will* make messes.
I say, Sammy! Don't make yourself jammy.
(I say, I'm thankful that we've food to eat at all.)
I dream of the day that Sammy becomes self-cleaning.
I try to remember that this is just a phase.
I hope when I am old, my *son* will clean up after *me*.
I am a harried mom in a heckuva hurry.

Two poems based on
Sammy by Elizabeth Ripley

Both of these poems—one a “Bio Poem,” the other an “I Am Poem”—show how poem forms can be used to assess how well students understand literary characters or historical figures. The “bio poem” and “I am poem” also make excellent pre-performance character studies for students who may be acting out a character from literature or poetry.

NonFiction Meets Poetry:

Titles of Some of the Poems I Shared

Something Is Going to Happen (from *Delight*) by Robert Penn Warren
The Road Not Taken; *Dust of Snow* by Robert Frost
The Red Wheelbarrow; *This Is Just to Say* by William Carlos Williams
Fog by Carl Sandburg; *Miracles* by Walt Whitman

From *Immersed In Verse: An Informative, Slightly Irreverent & Totally Tremendous Guide to Living the Poet's Life* by Allan Wolf

- *The Red Wheelbarrow* by William Carlos Williams
- *Write About A Radish* by Karla Kuskin
- *Don't Be Afraid* by Allan Wolf
- *Hamburger Haiku* by Allan Wolf
- *A Simile is Like a Song* Author Unknown
- *Where I'm From* by George Ella Lyon

From *The Blood-Hungry Spleen and Other Poems About Our Parts* by Allan Wolf

- *Bone Chart*
- *You Can't Beat Your Heart*
- *Thirteen Ways of Looking at Your Knees and Elbows*
- *etc.*

From *New Found Land* by Allan Wolf

- *Sgt. Patrick Gass, The Carpenter*

Other poems I might have shared:

- *Arithmetic* by Carl Sandburg
- *Math Lesson* by Bobbi Katz

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A (Very) Limited Bibliography of “NonFiction” Poetry

Note: These titles are just to get you going. There are plenty more, but a handout can only be so long before it turns into a book!

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