From the Page to the Stage
From the Inside Out

A Curriculum Guide to
writing, performing, and experiencing poetry

by Allan Wolf

Note: The following curriculum guide for educators is designed to complement Allan Wolf's activities and presentations. Because it is meant for teachers of all grades it may require adaptation. Allan's book, *Immersed in Verse: An Informative, Slightly Irreverent & Totally Tremendous Guide to Living the Poet's Life,* covers the writing of poetry in a very detailed way. For a more in-depth treatment of poem performance refer to Wolf's *It's Show Time* or *Something Is Going To Happen.* (See **Allan Wolf—Books**)

Allan has also written specific "Curriculum and Reading Guides" to accompany *New Found Land: Lewis and Clark's Voyage of Discovery* and *The Blood-Hungry Spleen and other Poems About Our Parts.*

Why Poetry?

Poetry encourages the word play that builds vocabulary and fluency.

Writing poetry helps writers to find their individual writing voices.

Reading and writing poetry teaches precise word choice.

Poetry is fun—and involves students with language.

Poetry offers concentrated, language-rich, quick-read texts that can augment any existing content lesson.

Poetry is part of most learning standards and assessment testing in Communication Arts.

Poetry builds students phonemic awareness and sense of rhythm in language.

Mastery of language devices commonly found in poetry (such as repetition, internal rhyme, assonance, consonance, refrain, pattern, sequencing, active word choice, etc) empower students with the widest possible range of writing tools to execute all writing tasks.

Why Performance Poetry?

Performance poetry incourages repetition and memorization which enables even the most reluctant students to internalize language.

Performance poetry allows students to move through progressively deeper levels of understanding, as they make meaning through direct authentic experience with the text.

Through ensemble work and performer/audience interaction, performance poetry provides natural opportunities for collaboration, community building, and purposeful, student-centered learning.

Performance poetry accommodates (and celebrates) multiple learning styles as defined by Howard Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences.

Performance poetry can be used as an alternative assessment tool to determine students' competency and understanding (of vocabulary, meaning, context, or other specified concepts).

Performance poetry allows even non-readers and emergent readers to successfully demonstrate a mastery of language and understanding of meaning.

Performing Poems

Transforming Your Students into Poetry S.T.A.R.S.

Introduction: Personal Meaning versus Thematic Meaning

Simply put, poem performance has been the key to my love and understanding of poetry. I earned a Master's Degree by reading, studying, and writing all kinds of poetry. When I began memorizing poetry and performing it I began to see a different side of poetry —the Inside. Suddenly poetry was something not simply to be studied, but to be experienced, celebrated, and lived.

I do NOT think that poem performance is a subsitute for the more traditional approaches of reading (silently and aloud), discussion, and analysis. I DO think that poem performance can be a great way to hook young people who so often think that poetry is inaccessible and dull with nothing to offer them. Too often young people (and adults) see poetry as something that is "done to them," like a 6-month dental cleaning. Poem performance activities place students at the center of authentic learning and allow young people to discuss poetry using terminology that is already familiar to them.

Only when students are engaged with the poetry will they truly care about matters of form and meaning. I routinely advise teachers not to ask young people what a poem means. I've found that most of us, young *or* grown, don't really *care* what a poem means. But we do want to know what a poem means *to us*. The difference is not so subtle. The first question regards "thematic meaning" and implies that there is a definite, authoritative answer that lives within the pages of the "teacher's manual." The second question regards "personal meaning" and implies that the reader and the poem are somehow connected.

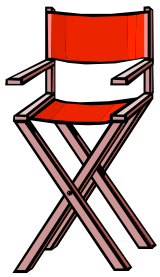
Most often when adults claim to know what a poem means, they are really saying that their life experiences have allowed them to find "personal meaning" in the poem. More than likely any "thematic meaning" has been derived through their extant knowledge of literature (and sometimes their extant knowledge of what the Teacher's Manual says the poem means). But young people don't have this pre-existing knowledge base. At best their knowledge of "thematic meaning" is not fully formed; at worst it is nonexistent.

Performance Poetry allows students to make meaning (personal meaning) on their own terms through their experience of transforming the poem's text into a presentation piece. After making this personal connection the academic matters of theme, symbolism, form, and poetic devices suddenly matter.

Poem Performance 101

Poem performance encompasses a wide variety of presentation models. Students can work separately, in pairs, or in teams up to four. (In my experience teams of four kids make for the best collaborative learning experience, and the most interesting performances.) From a collection of poems assigned by the teacher, or found on a "poetry search" through classroom and library resources, students choose one poem. The goal for the students is to memorize the lines of the poem and stage it for presentation to the rest of the class. Performance teams of two or more, can divide the lines into speaking parts to create a script. Poems can be delivered "straight up" in the manner of a storyteller sharing a tale or "theatrically" with gestures, movements, blocking, and characters. Participants are urged to match the mood of their presentation with the mood of their chosen poem. No scenery or props are necessary—except what can be "suggested" by use of a couple chairs. Your stage area can be the front of the classroom. A simple show can be "thrown together" within a 50 minute class period. An elaborate show can be staged and polished with a week or more of preparation and practice.

Poetry Performance S.T.A.R.S



This is a simple way of linking your students' presentations so they flow efficiently from one poem to the next to create a seamless poetry extravaganza.

Set the stage. After being announced, the presenting team quickly enters the stage area to place any necessary chairs in their starting positions.

Title and Author. Standing in a neat line, the performers say the poem's title and author, then pause for a count of two, before quickly getting into starting positions.

Action! The team performs the poem.

Receive Applause. After the presentation is complete, performers line back up and bow, respectfully and in unison.

Strike the set. Any remaining chairs or props should be quickly cleared away. Performers then take their seats as the next group is called forward.

C.A.S.T: From Poem to Play in Four Easy Steps

Taking poems from the page to the stage is all in the C.A.S.T. This is a series of four steps you can take to begin speaking about a particular poem in theatrical terms. These terms (i.e., character, action, setting) tend to be more familiar and less intimidating than our traditional poetic terms (i.e., theme, mood, symbolism).

Character. Make a list of all the specific characters within the poem. Start with the "major" characters—those that are mentioned directly. They may be human, animal, or even non-living things. Then find the "minor" characters—nouns within the poem that may not be directly important to the story.

Action: Make a list of all the action in the poem. Look carefully for the verbs, the action words. Be sure to make your list in the order (sequence) that it happens in the poem. This list will come in handy as you decide what actions to use to stage the poem. Some poems have a lot of physical action. Other poems contain only thoughts, or "mental" action.

Setting: Where does the poem take place? If the setting is not specified, look for clues in the text that might help you to invent something appropriate.

Transform the text into a script: Determine what characters are the most important and then assign those characters speaking parts. The line of the poem must be appropriate to the character who says it. Lines may be spoken simultaneously by two or more different characters. You can even split a line in half, assigning each half to a different character. Play with the sound of the poem. Use your imagination.

Some poems work better than others when using this approach. I've included a few famous examples on the next page.

There is no standard way to present a poem. The students' aesthetic choices should be based on the needs of the poem and the comfort level and ability of the performers. Sometimes simplicity works best. Sometimes a poem is best left to speak for itself. I've seen performers stand motionless as they recite a poem to good dramatic effect. Ultimately what makes a poem performance effective is the amount of heart the presenter puts into it.

Now You Try It!

In groups of four, try acting out the poems on this page.

- Read them aloud and clarify any confusing words.
- Pick which poem you will perform.
- CAST: List **C**haracters, **A**ction, and possible **S**ettings. **T**ransform the poem into a script by assigning speaking parts.
- Come up with staging ideas and practice. Memorize the lines if you can.
- Use S.T.A.R.S to present your poem to the rest of the class.
- As a class discuss what you observed from this activity.

Poem by Langston Hughes

I loved my friend.
He went away from me.
There's nothing more to say.
The poem ends,
soft as it began.
I loved my friend.

Sammy by Elizabeth Ripley

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."

The Termite by Ogden Nash

The termite knocked upon the wood.
Tasted it and found it good.
And that is why your Auntie May.
Fell through the parlor floor today.

We Real Cool: Pool Players, Seven at the Golden Shovel
by Gwendolyn Brooks

We real cool. We
left school. We
lurk late. We
strike straight. We
sing sin. We
Thin gin. We
jazz June. We
die soon.

Fire and Ice by Robert Frost

Some say the world will end in fire.
Some say in ice.
From what I've tasted of desire
I hold with those who favor fire.
But if it had to perish twice,
I think I know enough of hate
to say that for destruction ice
is also great, and would suffice.

Assorted Tips for Memorizing Poetry

from *Immersed in Verse: An Informative, Slightly Irreverent & Totally Tremendous Guide to Living the Poet's Life* (Lark, 2006) by Allan Wolf

Here are a few tips that may help you on the road to memorization:

- **Relax.** Don't worry, be happy. Memorization is a lot easier when you are relaxed.

- **No Background Noise.** I hope by now this should go without saying, but if not, I'll say it now for the record. DO NOT memorize while the television is on! Or the computer. Or loud music.

- **Experience the Poem.** Have a variety of experiences with the poem. Write it down. Read it out loud. Recite it in the bathtub. Recite it on the way to lunch. Discuss it with your friends. Divide the poem into speaking parts. Record it into a tape player and listen to it over and over.

- **Combine Techniques.** Each of us travel the memorization trail riding atop a different pony. Use a combination of memorization techniques—listening to the poem, saying the poem, writing the poem, reading the poem, acting it out, setting it to music, dancing to it, etc.

- **Memorize a Poem You Like.** This may come as no surprise. It's typically easier to memorize a poem that you really like from the start. On the other hand, if you are required to memorize a poem you don't initially like, you may grow to appreciate it more as you memorize it.

- **A Poem in Rhyme, Saves Time.** Poems that rhyme are usually easier to memorize because the rhyming words continually give you clues as to what line follows. Poems with a very consistent rhythm can be easier because of their predictable beat. Not surprisingly rhythmic poems that also rhyme can be easiest of all.

- **Memorize While Standing Up.** Typically you won't be reciting poetry while seated, so why memorize it that way? It is always best to involve your whole body in memorization if possible.

- **Create Memorization Movements.** For each word or cluster of words in the poem, create a body movement that will help you remember what comes next. Many people can remember movements more easily than words.

- **Speak Out.** Speak your poems out loud as you repeat the lines. This gives you experience listening to your own voice and, again, gets your body involved.

- **Memorize Multiple Poems Together.** If your goal is to memorize more than one poem, you are best off dividing your time between them each day. Don't wait until you've finished one before starting on the next.

- **Use A Tape Recorder.** If possible record your poem onto a hand-held tape recorder. Listen to it repeatedly. Gradually begin to recite along. Think how many songs you've memorized like this already, simply by hearing them on the radio or in your earphones.

- **Memorize The Last Part First.** For especially long poems, try memorizing the last half first. We tend to repeat the first part of the poem more when memorizing it and thus, learn the first part better. It is best to know both halves of a long poem equally well, but if you have to choose, it's better to start shaky and finish smooth. Also, for some reason memorizing the first half always seems easier when you've already got the second half down. That way all you have to do is meet yourself in the middle!

- **Carry Your Poem With You At All Times.** Think of all the snippets of time you spend simply waiting for something to happen or someone to show up. Pass that extra time by looking at your poem.

- **Create Your Own Personal Mnemonics.** Conjure up your own pictures, initials, phrases, associations, and movements—anything to help you remember what word comes next. The idea is to hang the strange new words onto well-known old "hooks" which already exist in your head, like hanging your keys on a hook just inside the front door so you never have to go searching for them.

- **Speed-Through Rehearsing.** If you have successfully memorized your poem, but your recitation is still tentative and halting, try "speed-through rehearsing." Say the words as quickly as you can with little to no expression. The idea is to learn the transitions from line to line and from stanza to stanza so you don't stop the flow of your reading. Place 10 dimes on the table before you, removing one every time you complete your poem. Or line up ten M&Ms and eat your way through them as you complete each recitation. If you can complete ten "speed throughs" of your poem, you are probably ready to recite it in front of a live audience.

Writing Poems

Introduction: Of Blooms & Booms & Secret Rooms

from *Immersed In Verse: An Informative, Slightly Irreverent & Totally Tremendous Guide to Living the Poet's Life* by Allan Wolf. (Lark Books, 2006)

There are three essential elements of a poet's life: a bloom, a boom, and a secret room. The bloom is what catches the poet's eye. The boom is what explodes in the poet's mind. The secret room, with its magnificent views, exists in the poet's heart.

BLOOMS

Poems are everywhere. They lurk at your elbow, waiting for you to discover them. The poet's job is to spot them—to see them for what they are. The poet watches for poetic moments like a bee seeks out a bloom. In fact, the bee and the poet have a lot in common. The bee seeks out a bloom and transforms it into honey; the poet seeks out a moment and transforms it into a poem.

BOOMS

Author Barry Lane urges young writers to "explode the moment" in order to transform it into the stuff of poetry. No, he's not suggesting that poets should exchange their pencils for dynamite. This is Lane's way of urging poets to focus their attention on a single event (the bloom) and then expand on it in a detailed way (the boom). You might say that most poems are simply blooms transformed by booms. The result is always poetry.

SECRET ROOMS

What, then, of the secret room? What, then, of the heart? The heart is where the magic really happens, after all. Every poet's heart has a room with a view, an unobstrcted view of the world. Some call it wisdom. Some call it intuition or empathy. I call it a room because it's a place that feels safe. I call it a secret room, because no one can see it. It's something you feel inside. Call it whatever you want, but rest assured, if you're a poet, then you've got it. And that's good, because although the art of poetry can be taught, the heart of poetry cannot.

How about you? Do you want to be a poet? A poet with a bloom in your eye? A poet with a boom in your mind? A poet watching the world from a secret room held inside your heart?

Well, then, let's start!

The 9 Habits of Highly Successful Poets

(From *Immersed in Verse* by Allan Wolf, forthcoming from Lark/Sterling Books, 2006)

Habit #1: Don't Be a Naked Fashion Designer.

Poetry is a lot like sports. There's more to being a well-rounded athlete than playing the game. To play it better, you might do some weight training. You study the plays and the strategies. You work on your techniques, and maybe even subscribe to a magazine that focuses on your sport. Same with poetry.

Just writing poetry is fine, but if you don't take an interest in poetry in general, then you are in danger of getting stuck on one of the low rungs of the poetry ladder. The more you learn about poetry, the more you memorize poetry, the more you experience poetry, the higher up the poetry ladder you'll climb.

You can simply write poetry if you wish. Many people do and they do just fine. But, writing poetry without experiencing all the poetry around you is a bit like being a fashion designer who doesn't wear clothes. The act of writing is only part of the overall process of poetry. Begin to balance your writing with other poetry experiences. Get to know poetry. Read it. Go to a poetry reading or two. Talk to poetry lovers about poetry.

Habit #2: Get Gonzo Over Words.

A painter loves her paints. A sculptor loves his clay. Skateboarders love their skateboards. And poets love their words. Try these three things.

A) Read.
B) Get a dictionary and use it. Make a mark in the margin next to each word you look up. You may end up with multiple marks next to the same word. You live. You learn. You forget. You learn again.
C) Carry a notebook and pen with you at all times to write down any good words you come across, scenes you experience, or images you see. Become a collector of words, phrases, sayings, clever ideas, and verbal pictures.

Habit #3: Live Life as If Only Two Things Matter.

You:
Enter into a relationship with your Self. We are all works in progress. Be sure to reflect on who you are. Don't become complacent. Socrates said the unexamined life is not worth living, but I really think author Geneen Roth put it best when she said that awareness is learning to keep yourself company. Choosing to spend an evening at home reading a book or working on a poem will NOT make you an

instant geek. Of course if you *are* a geek, then by all means, embrace your geekness. Write your own Geek Manifesto! Whoever you are, get to know yourself.

The World:
Enter into a relationship with the world. Read the newspaper. Find out what's going on, and do your best to form an opinion about it. Get out of the house and get involved. Experience something daily, and then take out your pen and get writing! There is no such thing as a bored poet.

Habit #4: Eat Your Words!

Be sure that your reading diet is well balanced. Little chocolate doughnuts may be an essential part of my personal diet, but I always add variety—chips, beef jerky, goldfish crackers. It's the same with reading. Most of us live within easy reach of an all-you-can-eat buffet of words. Newspapers, novels, non-fiction, *Teen People*, X-Men comics, cereal boxes, and of course, poetry of all sorts.

Habit #5: Do More. Watch Less.

Know the difference between doing and watching. Unlike watching, doing resonates in your soul, sticks to your ribs, and satisfies you longer once you're done doing it. Most TV and movies are a waste of your valuable poet time. Because I think television is evil, I don't watch it or even have one in my home. But I am also super weird. Just be sure to balance your doing and your watching in healthy proportions.

Habit #6: Realize Poetry Ain't Always Pretty.

Show me a picturesque pond with regal swimming swans, and I'll show you a muddy bank full of swan poop. Without ugly, there would be no beautiful. Likewise, the subjects of your poetry need not be huge and important (divorce, death, world hunger). Don't forget that there are worlds of wonder within a robin's egg, a cast-off shoe, or the contents of your pockets. So train yourself to be a hunter of the small and insignificant. And while you're observing the "good," don't forget the "bad" and the "ugly." They come as a set. The rainbow and the rain go hand in hand. The mighty oak was once an acorn. Note the *grace* of the swan on the water as well as the *trace* of the swan on the land—the poop.

Habit #7: Learn to Love Your Gorilla Words.

I guarantee that nearly *every* professional writer has looked back at his or her first draft and winced in pain. "Ugghh! Did I write *that?* I must have been writing in my sleep! It looks like a four-year old wrote that—a four-year-old gorilla—a *stupid* four-year-old gorilla who is one banana shy of a bunch." In fact I said it myself—just now.

The point is that's how it's done. You need to get the gorilla words down first. Most "writer's block" is created by unreasonable expectations. If you sit down and decide that you're going to write an award-winning, perfect, awesome poem, you'll likely fail. Writers who approach the blank page (or computer screen) this way are being unfair to themselves as well as to their poor unborn poems. Don't be afraid to generate a lot of gorilla words on your way to creating a top-banana poem. So write a little bit at a time. Take baby steps. Two lines here. Two lines there. And don't concern yourself with the quality of these early attempts.

Habit #8: Read and Write Every Day.

I'm not saying you need to squander the ever-fleeting moments of your youth hunkered over your desk, ruining your eyes and developing a callused, leathery bump on your finger. But write every day. Read every day. Even just a little. Even just a couple words. Find a good sturdy notebook and set yourself a reasonable goal: two sentences every day. Be sure to date each entry. It doesn't matter what you write. And you're more than welcome to go over two lines. But set it up so you're not allowed to write FEWER than two.

"But what will I write about?" you cry. Write about your day. You don't have to get deep (although you can). The object is to write automatically. It's enough to simply jot down an outline of how you passed your day. After a month you'll be surprised by how much life there is in a simple accounting of your normal routines. Your journal will become an honest and beautiful display of boring little miracles. You'll also begin to understand that your writing and your life are works in progress.

Habit #9: Play!

Unlike your food, it's perfectly okay to play with your words. Spell them wrong on purpose. Turn them upside down. Read them backward. Rhyme, don't rhyme, repeat. It's good to know the rules. Why? Because it's fun to break them. Whether the poems you like to write are serious, playful, mournful, or silly, playing and experimenting with your words will help fill your poem with life and vitality.

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

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 really 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?

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 (See *Thirteen Ways of Looking at Your Knees and Elbows* by Allan Wolf).

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 . . . "

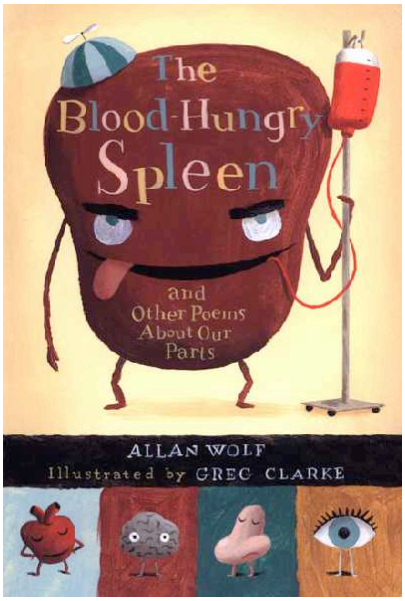
Inquisition

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.

The Blood-Hungry Spleen by Allan Wolf, illustrated by Greg Clarke (Candlewick Press)



Helpful "Mundane" Forms

Acrostic

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.

Cinquain

A cinquain (pronounced SING-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. There are many variations. Here's one that's pretty popular:

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.

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.

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.

Inquisition

Write down a list of questions to ask of someone (or something) you encounter on your outing. 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 which provides an answer to one or more of the questions.

Examples

White Goat

White Goat, is your name Billie?
What are you thinking as you
Twist your head around the feeding bin?
Do you miss your kids?
Are they crying for you?
Will you be with them ever again?

Cheryl Bromley Jones, teacher

Skyscrapers

Do skyscrapers ever grow tired
of holding themselves up high?

Do they ever shiver on frosty nights
with their tops against the sky?

Do they get lonely sometimes
because they have grown so tall?

Do they ever wish they could lie right down
and never get up at all?

Rose Fyleman

Letter Poem

Write a letter as a poem, addressing someone or some*thing* you encounter on your outing.

Malcolm, My Man

Malcolm (my man!)
You don't know me.
But I know you.
I dream of you.
In your blackness I see myself.
I long to be the man you once were.
What you are.
Who you are.
That is all that matters to you.
You're like no one I've ever known.
I see all in your eyes.
Malcolm (my man!)
Man with no fear,
No boundaries.
show me the way.
Damn!
Malcolm, you had so far to go.
Death, so bloody.
Still it was a gift.
The end was inevitable and so was your memory.
True men live forever.
That is the way it will always be. Forever.
Never forgotten.
That is what I want to be.

Duane Shorter, student.

Foster Student-Centered Assessment Skills

Students compare texts to evaluate proficiency. Give students sample texts along a four point performance continuum and have them rank order them from most to least effective. Working in groups have them develop their own descriptions of each of the four score points and relate these descriptions to proficiency levels designated as *Advanced, Proficient, Needs Improvement*, and *Failing*.

Rank the following versions of the same poem from 1 to 4 with 1 being the least effective and 4 being the most effective. Explain your answers as best you can.

The Boy

The boy put his best toy over his head and
threw it down on the floor
and broke it.
That made him sad so
he started crying.

Mad

He lifts the toy
his favorite one
above his head
He throws it—mad—
He kicks it—mad—
He stomps it—mad—
in to pie ces

His eyes grow wide
He cries
and cries

The Mad Boy

He lifts the toy
his best one
he holds it over his head
and
throws it
kicks it
stomps it
His eyes get wide
and he cries.

The Boy

The boy
broke his toy.

Share Example Poems in a Multi-Modal Way

Be sure to present examples in a "multi-modal" way, appealing to a variety of the senses. For example, you might allow students to *see* the poem on an overhead screen, blackboard, or chart paper. Allow students to *hear* poems by asking them to close their eyes as you recite or read. Students can even *touch* the poem if it is written on some appropriate object (a poem about a pumpkin might be written on a pumpkin). Poems about food can be accompanied by an appropriate snack to appeal to the sense of *taste*. Strike a match to call upon the sense of *smell* as you read a poem about fire.

Students like to listen to poems read aloud, but they also like to *do* poetry as active participants. You might invite students to join you at the front of the class to help act out a poem as you recite it. Encourage students to repeat certain lines or sound out a call-and-response of some sort. If you are illustrating a certain poetic device, you might ask your students to clap when they hear an example as you read aloud. Use your imagination and watch your students begin to use theirs.

Introducing Writing Activities

- Introduce the writing activity, technique, topic, or theme. A verbal introduction can involve group brainstorming or some other prewriting activity.
- Present an example poem(s) by an established adult writer(s). This could be in the form of a reading, recitation, or performance. Example poems should illustrate the technique, topic, or theme. Remember to think "multi-modal."
- Model writing on an overhead, blackboard, or chart paper. Write a group example poem. Allow students to suggest opening lines. Suggest a structure if students get stuck. Keep it flowing. You can create a complete poem or just the beginning of one.
- Present an example poem(s) by a student writer(s) who has participated in the activity in the past. This is a great time to share a poem that you have written yourself.
- Allow students to write on their own. As much as possible, the teacher should write along with the students. This further establishes your class as a "community of writers" and lets your students see that writing is a lifetime pursuit. I like to alternate between "writing and roaming."
- Allow students to share. Share as a large group (always in a circle) or in small teams. "Pair share" if sharing time is very limited.

Other books by Allan Wolf

Something Is Going to Happen: Poem Performance in the Classroom (Poetry Alive, 1990) For teachers, 6th grade and up.

It's Show Time! Poetry from the Page to the Stage (Poetry Alive!, 1993) For teachers 1st grade through 6th.

The Blood-Hungry Spleen and other Poems About Our Parts (Candlewick Press, 2003). Anatomy poems for upper elementary through adult.

New Found Land: Lewis and Clark's Voyage of Discovery (Candlewick Press, 2004) Young adult novel in verse narrated by fourteen members of the expedition.

Immersed in Verse: An Informative, Slightly Irreverent & Totally Tremendous Guide to Living the Poet's Life (Lark/Sterling, Spring, 2006) For poets young and old.

Zane's Trace (Candlewick Press, Spring, 2007) Young adult novel in verse. A modern and historical story combined. A troubled young boy in a stolen car picks up a mysterious female hitchhiker with a 230-year-old bullet around her neck.