



Hello Fellow Educators and Community Partners,

In these difficult circumstances we have pulled together a poet's dozen of our favorite lessons. Inevitably, some of these have been used recently with your students; hopefully, some will feel fresh. I have also attached to this email a larger packet of poems and a .pdf of May 4th specific lessons.

If I can be useful please let me know.

Kindly,

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Wick Method

A couple of words about our method. It takes root from the tradition started by Kenneth Koch and Robert Hass serving as guest poets in NYC. From the beginning, their work emphasized challenging students with contemporary texts and focusing on responding to work instead of interpreting it. Flipping the script in this way makes the process focus on generating new work. It becomes about a “poetry idea” that encourages the students to write. In my experience, this achieves a quality understanding of difficult texts, the same kind of understanding that explication and careful interpretation leads to. It is simply a different path.

Here is a basic outline of what we do:

- Poetry Idea/Introduction
 - We always encourage students to work up to the idea with a creative introduction. I ask them model curiosity. Tell a story. Bring in a prompt. Perform for them.
- Model Poem(s)
 - The model poem is where the big idea comes from. Sometimes two different approaches help students see different possibilities.
- Teaching Artists’ Response Poem
 - It’s important to write your own response. This models that writing poetry is a serious and worthwhile activity. It can also come in hand if the students struggle with the model, or to add during sharing. This may not be shared every time, but it always helps me see where students might get stuck.
- Writing Together
 - This, along with the introduction and models, is what David Hassler has always called “Charging the Air.” Guiding the students to write a few lines together, perhaps towards a common theme shows them what is possible. I always think that if I do this right there is nothing I can do to stop them from writing on their own.
- Writing Alone
 - The magic happens here.
- Sharing
 - This is where we get to see what magic happened.

For you all, I think “Introduction to Poetry” by Billy Collins makes a case for why we do what we do. And, if you haven’t seen Taylor Mali’s piece on “[What Teacher’s Make](#)”, please enjoy (Mature Language).

Introduction to Poetry | Billy Collins

I ask them to take a poem

and hold it up to the light
 like a color slide
 or press an ear against its hive.
 I say drop a mouse into a poem
 and watch him probe his way out,
 or walk inside the poem's room
 and feel the walls for a light switch.
 I want them to water ski
 across the surface of a poem
 waving at the author's name on the shore.
 But all they want to do
 is tie the poem to a chair with a rope
 and torture a confession out of it.
 They begin beating it with a hose
 to find out what it really means.

Lesson: Where I'm From

Overview & Objectives:

George Ella Lyon's poem "Where I'm From" is a great poem to start out with. Her writing is specific, sensory, and detailed. Most importantly, it allows us to ask students to tell us where they are from. The author's use of street names, places, commercial products, natural imagery, smells, sounds, etc, encourages our writers to write from their own experiences and validates these experiences.

Lesson:

- 0- 10 Minutes **Introduce the Poetry Idea.** Make a list: What do you think of, when you think of home. Discuss the details that make up our sense of home. Introduce the activity and read George Ella Lyon's **example**. Have another voice read the poem.
- 10-20 Minutes **Discuss the poem.** What kinds of things does this author put in her poem to show us where she's from? Which parts of the poem do you connect with? What do you like? What questions do you have?
- 20-30 Minutes **Write Together.** List sounds. What do you hear when you fall asleep? When you wake up? What are the favorite foods in your house? What street names mean something to you? Who was around? What did they say? What music made your soundtrack? What plants and animals and natural imagery did you see?
- 30-45 Minutes **Writing Time.**
- 45-60 Minutes **Share.**

* Bring in your own example to share.

Model Poems:

Where I'm From

by George Ella Lyon

I am from clothespins,
 from Clorox and Carbon-tetrachloride.
 I am from the dirt under the back porch.
 (Black, glistening
 it tasted like beets)
 I am from the forsythia bush,
 the Dutch elm whose long gone limbs I remember
 as if they were my own.

I'm from fudge and eyeglasses,
 from Imogene and Alafair.
 I'm from the know-it-alls
 and the pass-it-ons,
 from perk up and pipe down.
 I'm from He restoreth my soul
 with a cottonball lamb
 and ten verses I can say myself.

I'm from Artemus and Billie's Branch,
 fried corn and strong coffee.
 From the finger my grandfather lost
 to the auger
 the eye my father shut to keep his sight.

Under my bed was a dress box
 spilling old pictures,
 a sift of lost faces
 to drift beneath my dreams.
 I am from those moments-
 snapped before I budded-
 leaf-fall from the family tree.

The Fields of Clymer (Short)

By Mrs. Amber Brunco's Classes at Clymer Central School

I am from the backwoods,
 from the forest and the mist-clouded mountains,
 the mosquitoes that swarm around me.

I am from the coyotes howling at night,
 it makes me feel scared and unprotected.

I am from the black stormy valleys of this world.

I am from a big family
 bickering, smiles, and love
 from the cry of a toddler at 6:30am on a Saturday.

Quiet Sundays in the pews,
 long church services filled with prayer and hope.

I am from warm summer days smelling sweet hay
 from the Amish horses' feet clicking on the pavement.

I am from the plows hard at work in the fields farmers working before it rains,
 from the cow manure that I stomp my boots in.

I am from where your coach is also your history teacher,
 from playing basketball in the spotlight,
 from getting pulled by the coach.

I am from the gray house on the hill where I took my first steps
 and maybe even my final steps.

 From the circle of the clock, from the blood in my veins,
 the town where everyone knows everyone.

I am from my Dutch roots, May Day and the Tulip Festival,
 from New York... "Oh, but not the city."

The Crowd Going Wild

By Students in the IPromise Network by the Lebron James Family Foundation

Born in an incubator

for two months passing there was only me.

I am from the city, from the lion

that came out of her place.

I am from my shoelaces to my hoodie

from bleach and Fabuloso.

I am from Frederick Boulevard

where lots of good and bad things happen.

I am from Akron, filled with Lebron wannabees,

filled with greatness and destruction.

I am from a family that loves and hurts everything they touch.

I am from a place where my brother almost lost his foot

from my mother who believes in me until her last breath.

I am from the green, healthy oak tree and the raspberry bushes.

My life is a bucket filling with water

like the billions of places in my city waiting to be found.

I am from the bottom and I am going to the top

(The crowd going wild).

The Sugar Bush,

By Charlie Malone

From bullfrogs booming in the night, dogs barking
and horses chomping their hay. All these sounds.
I am from Music Street.

From the butter melting off the cob of sweet corn
the kernels sticking between my teeth.
I am from the wild strawberries I picked under the spruce trees.

I from long walks with my mom
the hard packed trails, the canopy of leaves dancing over us.
From the long drives with my dad, car sick, and bored to madness.

I am from sore muscles, from the work of the farm
throwing bales, gathering sap
From the maple syrup pooling around the pancake.

I am from the wind blowing across the irrigation pond
reflecting the remembered faces of my grandparents
freezing solid, breaking up, home to the redwing blackbirds.

Lesson: How to...

Overview & Objectives:

Poetry is an art that borrows from other forms. I've seen poems in the shape of letters or news headlines. I've seen poems that look like recipes. This is the idea: to borrow from another form to open up the possibilities of poetry. Specifically, we will look at directions or instructions. Another objective here is to explore the use of active verbs. For that objective, a list of strong verbs is included.

Lesson:

0- 10 Minutes **Introduce the Poetry Idea.** I want you to write for yourself, just a moment. What do you wish you knew how to do that you don't? Be brave and wild and human with your list. Come up with at least one serious one, one funny one, one strange one.
How to fix the tire on a bicycle. How to end climate change. How to kiss a snake. How to become a supernova.

Partner up with someone near you. Share.

Introduce Each Other: What did you like from your partner's list?

10-15 Minutes **Discuss the Activity.** Let me explain why I asked you to do that. I am interested in how poetry borrows ideas from other things we write. In this case, instructions or directions. Consider this poem by **Juan Felipe Herrera**. He titles the poem like it is directions to his house.

Read the poem.

What do you think? Could you find his house? What's he doing?

Be specific. Use strong images. Use your imagination. Use the five senses.

Here's another example that I like a little bit better. Read **Clymer**.

25-45 Minutes **Write Together.** How to Win the Sixth Grade. Read the example from 8th Graders at Clymer and have everyone contribute a line. Start each line with a good, active verb. Share verb list.

45-50 Minutes **Writing Time.**

50-60 Minutes **Share.**

Model Poems:

Five Directions to My House

by Juan Felipe Herrera

1. Go back to the grain yellow hills where the broken speak of elegance
 2. Walk up to the canvas door, the short bed stretched against the clouds
 3. Beneath the earth, an ant writes with the grace of a governor
 4. Blow, blow Red Tail Hawk, your hidden sleeve—your desert secrets
 5. You are there, almost, without a name, without a body, go now
 6. I said five, said five like a guitar says six.
-

How To Win the 8th Grade

By Mrs. Amber Brunco's Classes at Clymer Central School

Defrost your brain from summer break
 Toss your bad attitude
 Light up a room
 Fine tune your patience
 Delete all the negative thoughts of how smart you are
 Knit yourself a blanket of warm protection.
 Grind your negativity
 Don't burn important papers or homework.
 Log out of the bad behavior; log into the good.
 Unleash your anger on essays and poems and stress.
 Surf past the wave of uncertainty.
 Turn up the music and dance around the house and school.

VERB LIST:

Wash

Trust

Crash

Shake

Smile

Swim

Open/Close

Fly

Accessorize

Ask

Break

Hold

Listen

Run/Sprint

Climb

Stagger

Dream

Pull

Tear

Throw

Carry

Fall

Melt

Smother

Memorize

Burn

Wrench

Bounce

Paint

Know

Nurture

Grow

Conceal

Leap

Dress

Squeeze

Wonder

Spin

Sing

Holler

Feel

Remember

Dance

Fear

Believe

Disguise

Create

Howl

Erase

Lesson: Everyday and Extraordinary Objects

Overview & Objectives:

Having a tactile experience with an object can make writing more concretizing and interactive while still allowing room for incredible leaps of thought. Pablo Neruda's collection *Ode to Common Things* finds remarkable ways to celebrate the mundane. From soap and gillyflowers to cats and French fries there are a lot of fun examples. Still, people also love the stories of their most precious objects and so you could bring in a random bag of things or have them bring in their favorites, or a mix of both.

Lesson:

- 0- 10 Minutes **Introduce the Poetry Idea.** Introduce the activity and read Neruda's example. Why are objects connected to memory and emotion? Why do people keep things? What does it take to make these objects? What do they know? Who has touched them?
- 10-20 Minutes **Discuss the poem.** How do Neruda's socks look? What do they do? What do you love, why?
- 20-30 Minutes **Write Together.** Bring in a sample object that you can all write about. Make a list of the way our object looks. Make a list of what our object does. Use your senses. Have fun. Create a group ode.
- 30-45 Minutes **Writing Time.** Have everyone write about their extraordinary or everyday object.
- 45-60 Minutes **Share.**

Model Poems:

Ode to My Socks

[Pablo Neruda](#), 1904 - 1973

Maru Mori brought me
a pair
of socks
which she knitted herself
with her shepherd's hands,
two socks as soft
as rabbits.
I slipped my feet
into them
as though into
two
cases
knitted
with threads of
twilight
and goatskin.
Violent socks,
my feet were
two fish made
of wool,
two long sharks
sea-blue, shot
through
by one golden thread,
two immense blackbirds,
two cannons:
my feet
were honored
in this way
by
these
heavenly
socks.
They were
so handsome
for the first time
my feet seemed to me
unacceptable

like two decrepit
firemen, firemen
unworthy
of that woven
fire,
of those glowing
socks.

Nevertheless
I resisted
the sharp temptation
to save them somewhere
as schoolboys
keep
fireflies,
as learned men
collect
sacred texts,
I resisted
the mad impulse
to put them
into a golden
cage
and each day give them
birdseed
and pieces of pink melon.
Like explorers
in the jungle who hand
over the very rare
green deer
to the spit
and eat it
with remorse,
I stretched out
my feet
and pulled on
the magnificent
socks

and then my shoes.
The moral
of my ode is this:
beauty is twice
beauty

and what is good is doubly
good
when it is a matter of two socks
made of wool
in winter.

Lesson: What Does the River Know?

Overview & Objectives:

This prompt reference to the history, uses, and ecology of the Cuyahoga. We created it to teach students about the history of our river in the 50th year since we last set it on fire. The Signal tree references indigenous uses of the river. Ducks and irises invite conversations about the ecosystem. The North and South idea acknowledges that this river is one of the only ones in the world to flow in both directions. The use of simple repetition makes getting started and keeping the lines coming easy. Before sharing the ideas of what the river knows, I like to ask students what they know about the river in order to build on the knowledge and memories they already have.

Lesson:

- 0- 15 Minutes **Introduce the Poetry Idea.** Ask students about their relationship with the river. Have they visited it? What have they seen? What have they done? How do they feel when they are near water? Ask them if they know about the fires. Talk about what that history means to them.
- 15-20 Minutes **Discuss the Poem.** Ask them what lines capture their interest, what lines they have questions about.
- 20-30 Minutes **Write Together.** What do they think the river knows? Are there animals the river knows? Are there things the river sees or hears? The river is old, how does the river feel the flow of time?
- 30-45 Minutes **Writing Time.** There are lists of river verbs, nouns, and adjective to help excite their writing.
- 45-60 Minutes **Share.**

Model Poem:

What Does the River Know

by Charlie Malone

The river knows when we got here
 and it knows who was here first.
 The river knows about the signal tree
 pointing to warm homes, to summer.
 The river knows how blood moves in our hearts,
 it knows where tears come from.
 The river doesn't know it is two parts hydrogen;
 it is three parts time and one part dream.
 The river knows if a duck's quack echoes.
 The river knows the smell of iris blossoms,
 and the lick of cold silt.
 I think the river knows where we are going,
 and I don't mean North and South.
 The river knows how to reveal and how to frolic
 these are lessons for a poet.

River Nouns

mouth	creek	wetland
eddy	watercourse	flow
rill	inlet	habitat
brook	ourn	wildlife
flood	waterfall	vegetation
torrent	oxbow	plants
deluge	bend	basin
cascade	bank	whirlpool
tributary	headwaters	rapid
watershed	channel	riffle
rivulet	floodplain	whitewater
stream	delta	

River Verbs

attack	groan	shiver
bash	growl	shove
dash	gulp	shudder
blast	haul	skip
charge	howl	slither
chase	irritate	spray
coax	jab	squeeze
collide	lash	swirl
conceal	leap	pour
construct	melt	stagger
erase	mutter	stumble
ease	shudder	tease
demolish	ooze	trip
devour	nuzzle	trickel
disappear	pelt	tropt
engulf	pluck	twist
cascade	rage	vanish
flip	reveal	wander
flutter	rush	wonder
gallop	sabotage	whistle
gobble	scatter	
frolic	scrape	

River Adjectives

wet	briny
cool	high
quick	low
clear	shallow
murky	deep
slow	still
pure	navigable
soft	swollen
sweet	winding
melodious	choppy
fresh	sunlit
sparkling	dark
polluted	vast
noble	long
wild	short
untamed	dangerous
calm	serene
turbulent	muddy
tangled	
twisted	
riotous	
tumultuous	

Lesson: Some Questions You Might Ask

Overview & Objectives:

This prompt has a spiritual and philosophical bend. And, it can also lead to some pure play and curiosity. The idea here is to think big and encourage wonder. Formally, the prompt employs the structures of questions and answers. It can be fun to talk about [Mary Oliver as an Ohio poet](#) if there is time.

Lesson:

- 0- 15 Minutes **Introduce the Poetry Idea.** Ask about something they've always wondered. Do they have questions they want adults to answer but never seem to get taken seriously? For example, what makes the sky blue? Sure there is some scientific reason, but I still wonder even then why those combinations of gases makes it blue. Is it because it's sad? What is sadness? Gather some, at least 5, possible question options from the class.
- 15-20 Minutes **Discuss the Poem.** Mary Oliver's poem about our souls does so much of the work here, but having an example of your own that takes the idea in a different direction can help. Explain how some questions don't really have answers, just more questions; but that doesn't make them any less important to ask.
- 20-30 Minutes **Write Together.** Choose one of the questions from the students, or have one of your own. And work through it. Answer questions with questions. Reach for the big and wonderful ideas. What is it? What do you think of when you are asked this? What do you feel when you think of it? Be specific!
- 30-45 Minutes **Writing Time.** What do they want to know?
- 45-60 Minutes **Share.**

Model Poems:

Some Questions You Might Ask

by Mary Oliver

Is the soul solid, like iron?
 Or is it tender and breakable, like
 the wings of a moth in the beak of an owl?
 Who has it, and who doesn't?
 I keep looking around me.
 The face of the moose is as sad
 as the face of Jesus.
 The swan opens her white wings slowly.
 In the fall, the black bear carries leaves into the darkness.
 One question leads to another.
 Does it have a shape? Like an iceberg?
 Like the eye of a hummingbird?
 Does it have one lung, like the snake and the scallop?
 Why should I have it, and not the anteater
 who loves her children?
 Why should I have it, and not the camel?
 Come to think of it, what about maple trees?
 What about the blue iris?
 What about all the little stones, sitting alone in the moonlight?
 What about roses, and lemons, and their shining leaves?
 What about the grass?

What is Success?

by Rachel Lamorgese

Is it a lavish lifestyle?
With a garage full of fancy cars
And fifteen spare bedrooms?
Or is it a spontaneous trip to Sicily,
With no price limit on adventure?

Maybe it's a gold star on your research paper for biology,
Establishing your place as top in the class

Is it making it big?
Getting verified on Instagram?
Or having over a million followers on Twitter?
Is how many people who see is the determiner of whether we are worthy?

I'm leaning towards the idea of it being greater.
Like making someone cry of laughter
Or helping dry their tears of sadness.
Feeling as though you can achieve what you'd always hoped
That, it seems, remains priceless.

Lesson: What I Want

Overview & Objectives:

There's a real power in saying out loud what we want. Part of the idea here is to give students permission to do this. In a sense, this is about their voice in its most direct form. Inevitably, some students will write selfish lines and others present themselves as altruists. Celebrate them all. The repetition here is similar to other prompts and can lend itself to a very compelling group poem.

Lesson:

- 0- 15 Minutes **Introduce the Poetry Idea.** Open with some brainstorming. Students will create three lists. First, make a list of things they want for themselves. Then, build a list of things they want for people they care about. Encourage them to be specific and to use good details. Ask them what they want for everyone in the world.

- 15-20 Minutes **Discuss the Poem.** The students in Mrs. Brunco's classes gave us a good list. Talk about the lines they like. Talk about

- 20-30 Minutes **Write Together.** Be specific. Be detailed. Be imaginative. Ask them to find powerful and strange images for the things they want. Ask them how it feels to say what they want.

- 30-45 Minutes **Writing Time.** What do they want? For themselves, for others, for all.

- 45-60 Minutes **Share.**

Model Poems:

What We Want (Short Version)

By Mrs. Amber Brunco's Classes at Clymer Central School

What I want is to have the feeling of summer run through my veins.
 I want a body that is over eight feet tall with blue eyes
 and I wish my hair was totally awesome.
 I want to smell the leather of the volleyball;
 to hear the crowd screaming my name.
 I want that car that you have to drive with two hands on the wheel.
 I want to ride on the back of a giraffe across a mountain.
 I want to catch a fish. I want to ride a train.
 I want to see all the art and culture in Rome. I want to see Pompeii.
 I want the cool sip of bittersweet lemonade on a hot day.
 I want warm days with lavender and sage flowing through the air.
 I want to grow and be a better person.

What I want is for there to be acceptance of everyone
 and not being afraid to try because you fear rejection.
 I want a better world for the next generation of children who have to grow up too fast
 for the ones who wonder when their next meal will be.
 I want to end pollution and I want my sister to go to college.
 I want to float freely in a sea of people with no struggle or hardships weighing on me.
 I want the last bite of the apple, the sweet before the sour before the rotten core.
 I want to dance with the stars at night and the birds in the day.
 I want to see my parents' faces when I succeed.
 I want to finish school, to find myself.
 I want to look back and say "I made it."

I want white roses that smell like heaven.

What I Want

by students at Miller South

I want our young voices to be heard.
 I want a pen that never runs out of ink
 and a journal to write my stories from the past.
 I want traffic lights to turn all different colors.
 I want all the clocks to freeze at my command,
 so I can just stop and smell the roses.
 I want my life to have a remote with a rewind button,
 so I can fix all the things I regret.
 I want my best friend back alive, so we can have that picnic.

I want our country to sound smooth like a flute.
 I want our history books to talk about peace for once.
 I want to alter the world's personality.

I want a book, one that will not end.
 I want to write a letter, one I don't have to send.
 I want to meet my great, great, great, great, great grandparents.
 I want a river to carry away all the tears of children.
 I want clouds to be made of cotton candy
 and to lower down sometimes just for one bite.
 I want a big house with a tree growing through it.

I want to spin, skip, run, skate, jump, and walk
 all at the same time.
 I want to hit a softball toward freedom.
 I want confidence to beam from my face
 so you will say "Wow!"
 I want my life to not have a grade.

I want more love, less hate.
 I want trumpets to blow peace over every nation.
 I want to sing away the pain of victims everywhere.
 I want my cousin home from Iraq.

I want to go back to Cleveland and give that guy
 holding the coffee cup forty-five dollars,
 because he probably needs it more than me.
 I want to care and be cared for in return,
 so it's not like I'm walking down a dead-end road,
 but one that loops around the entire world.
 I want the color of people's skin to never matter again.

I want to be unstoppable, if only that were possible.
I want my “so-called friends”
to stop being my “so-called friends”
and maybe be true, good friends.
I want to feel loved, so I don’t have to
safety pin my heart together once more.
I want most of all to see my dad again.

What I want is to be me, not the me you see,
but the person who doesn’t care about what’s on the outside,
only on the inside, of you and me.

Lesson: What I Have Inside Me

Overview & Objectives:

Carl Sandburg's poem "Wilderness" considers the deep, subconscious connection we have with nature. The speaker of this poem connects the emotions they feel with the behaviors of different animals. Their anger is the wolf; their playfulness is the baboon. Sandburg uses specific details to paint pictures of each animal.

Lesson:

- 0- 10 Minutes **Introduce the Poetry Idea.** Offer students a list of emotions or actions (see word bank below). Ask them to connect each word with a specific animal. Ask them why they might make those associations? What about anger makes you think of ____? Make a couple associations as a group, then share the poem by Carl Sandburg. Have another voice read the poem.
- 10-20 Minutes **Discuss the Poem.** What questions do you have about the poem? Which parts of the poem do you connect with? What lines and images stand out to you? Did the speaker make any of the same animal/feeling associations that you did? Did the speaker make any associations you didn't think about?
- 20-30 Minutes **Write Together.** Use the prompt "There is a _____ inside me." Consider the list you made as a group. When you feel an animal inside of you, what does the animal do? What other things might exist within you? Is there wind inside of you? Sunshine? If you are stuck, think of typical feelings you have. What plants, animals, objects can you compare those feelings to?
- 30-45 Minutes **Writing Time.**
- 45-60 Minutes **Share.**

Word bank

anger

sadness

joy

curiosity

playfulness

intelligence

courage

excitement

fear

solitude

nostalgia

laziness

patience

happiness

hopefulness

Model Poems:

Wilderness

by Carl Sandburg

There is a wolf in me . . . fangs pointed for tearing gashes . . . a red tongue for raw meat . . . and the hot lapping of blood—I keep this wolf because the wilderness gave it to me and the wilderness will not let it go.

There is a fox in me . . . a silver-gray fox . . . I sniff and guess . . . I pick things out of the wind and air . . . I nose in the dark night and take sleepers and eat them and hide the feathers . . . I circle and loop and double-cross.

There is a hog in me . . . a snout and a belly . . . a machinery for eating and grunting . . . a machinery for sleeping satisfied in the sun—I got this too from the wilderness and the wilderness will not let it go.

There is a fish in me . . . I know I came from salt-blue water-gates . . . I scurried with shoals of herring . . . I blew waterspouts with porpoises . . . before land was . . . before the water went down . . . before Noah . . . before the first chapter of Genesis.

There is a baboon in me . . . clambering-clawed . . . dog-faced . . . yawping a galoot's hunger . . . hairy under the armpits . . . here are the hawk-eyed hankering men . . . here are the blonde and blue-eyed women . . . here they hide curled asleep waiting . . . ready to snarl and kill . . . ready to sing and give milk . . . waiting—I keep the baboon because the wilderness says so.

There is an eagle in me and a mockingbird . . . and the eagle flies among the Rocky Mountains of my dreams and fights among the Sierra crags of what I want . . . and the mockingbird warbles in the early forenoon before the dew is gone, warbles in the underbrush of my Chattanooga of hope, gushes over the blue Ozark foothills of my wishes—And I got the eagle and the mockingbird from the wilderness.

O, I got a zoo, I got a menagerie, inside my ribs, under my bony head, under my red-valve heart—and I got something else: it is a man-child heart, a woman-child heart: it is a father and mother and lover: it came from God-Knows-Where: it is going to God-Knows-Where—For I am the keeper of the zoo: I say yes and no: I sing and kill and work: I am a pal of the world: I came from the wilderness.

Lesson Plan: My Voice

Overview & Objectives:

This prompt asks students to consider the power of their voices. We can do more with our voices than just talking. Our voices can roar like lions or whisper like rain. Our voices can hurt others and uplift others. Think about how your voice reflects your individual personality. How does your voice reflect you?

Lesson:

- 0- 10 Minutes **Introduce the Poetry Idea. Discuss:** What can we do with our voices? What are the different things we use our voices for? **Make a list:** What are some sounds you hear everyday? What sounds do your favorite animals make? What are some weather sounds? List as many different sounds and sound words as you can. Introduce the activity and read “My Voice.” Have another voice read the poem.
- 10-20 Minutes **Discuss the Poem.** What does the speaker’s voice do in this poem? Which parts of the poem do you connect with? What lines and images stand out to you? What questions do you have?
- 20-30 Minutes **Write Together.** Use the prompt “My voice is…” or “My voice does…” What do you think your voice looks like? Does it look like a certain plant? What does it smell like? A favorite food? Use the lists of sounds to describe what your voice sounds like. Think also about what your voice might taste like or how it might feel?
- 30-45 Minutes **Writing Time.**
- 45-60 Minutes **Share.**

* Bring in your own example to share.

Model Poems:

My Voice

by Lori Galambos' Class, 4th Grade, Miller South

My voice fills the air with song
It pops out like a purple crocus in spring
Blooming louder every day.
My voice carries a secret
Then passes it on.
My voice is like an oven,
It dings when a good idea is done.
My voice moves to the vibrations of peace.
I hear the world sing
And my voice sings back.

My Voice

by Robert Stevens, 7th Grade

My voice is a river,
 It goes on without stopping.
 It flows into the depths of the earth.
 It is a fountain
 Bubbling forth from the rock,
 A slight trickling whisper,
 To the restless roar
 With the nature of a waterfall,
 Endlessly flowing forward.
 The language of the wild ones
 and the magical beings of the ancient stories.
 The voice of the storyteller.
 The writer.
 The actor.
 The child.
 My story is a story in
 And of itself.
 It is fear.
 It is time.
 It is life.
 It is mine.

Lesson Plan: Letter Poems

Overview & Objectives:

David Hernandez's "Sincerely, the sky" offers an epistolary poem, or poem in the form of the letter, from the perspective of the sky. He asks us to "Do something with your brokenness." As a generative idea, the poem gives us the opportunity to inhabit another point of view, an observer. Where in our lives might we write from? How can we surprise ourselves?

Michael Ondaantje's poem "To a Sad Daughter" offers the chance to write to someone else, in verse or not. Who might we write to? What image or gesture can we frame the letter around? Ondaantje uses his daughter's desk beside a window overlooking forsythia. This form of a letter poem allows us to be inquisitive observers, asking the questions we've always wanted to ask.

Lesson:

- 0- 10 Minutes **Introduce the Poetry Idea.** Have you ever written someone a letter before? What is the purpose of a letter? What are the typical elements of a letter? Make a list of some people and even some objects that you would like to write a letter to. Read one of the model letter poems below.
- 10-20 Minutes **Discuss the Poem.** What elements of a letter do you see in this poem? What images or lines stood out to you? What do you notice? What questions do you have?
- 20-30 Minutes **Write Together.** Start with "Sincerely the..." Pick an object from nature to write a letter to. Maybe the sun, the moon? What questions do you have for that object? What specific images or details do you connect to that object? What do you want that object to know about you? Don't forget to use all five senses when exploring these questions and images.
- 30-45 Minutes **Writing Time.**
- 45-60 Minutes **Share.**

Model Poems:

Sincerely, The Sky

by David Hernandez

Yes, I see you down there
looking up into my vastness.

What are you hoping
to find on my vacant face,

there within the margins
of telephone wires?

You should know I am only
bright blue now because of physics:

molecules break and scatter
my light from the sun

more than any other color.
You know my variations—

azure at noon, navy by midnight.
How often I find you

then on your patio, pajamaed
and distressed, head thrown

back so your eyes can pick apart
not the darker version of myself

but the carousel of stars.
To you I am merely background.

You barely hear my voice.
Remember I am most vibrant

when air breaks my light.
Do something with your brokenness.

To A Sad Daughter

by Michael Ondaantje

All night long the hockey pictures
gaze down at you
sleeping in your tracksuit.
Belligerent goalies are your ideal.
Threats of being traded
cuts and wounds
--all this pleases you.
O my god! you say at breakfast
reading the sports page over the Alpen
as another player breaks his ankle
or assaults the coach.

When I thought of daughters
I wasn't expecting this
but I like this more.
I like all your faults
even your purple moods
when you retreat from everyone
to sit in bed under a quilt.
And when I say 'like'
I mean of course 'love'
but that embarrasses you.
You who feel superior to black and white movies
(coaxed for hours to see Casablanca)
though you were moved
by Creature from the Black Lagoon.

One day I'll come swimming
beside your ship or someone will
and if you hear the siren
listen to it. For if you close your ears
only nothing happens. You will never change.

I don't care if you risk
your life to angry goalies

creatures with webbed feet.
You can enter their caves and castles
their glass laboratories. Just
don't be fooled by anyone but yourself.

This is the first lecture I've given you.
You're 'sweet sixteen' you said.
I'd rather be your closest friend
than your father. I'm not good at advice
you know that, but ride
the ceremonies
until they grow dark.

Sometimes you are so busy
discovering your friends
I ache with loss
--but that is greed.
And sometimes I've gone
into my purple world
and lost you.

One afternoon I stepped
into your room. You were sitting
at the desk where I now write this.
Forsythia outside the window
and sun spilled over you
like a thick yellow miracle
as if another planet
was coaxing you out of the house
--all those possible worlds!--
and you, meanwhile, busy with mathematics.

I cannot look at forsythia now
without loss, or joy for you.
You step delicately
into the wild world
and your real prize will be
the frantic search.
Want everything. If you break

break going out not in.
How you live your life I don't care
but I'll sell my arms for you,
hold your secrets forever.

If I speak of death
which you fear now, greatly,
it is without answers.
except that each
one we know is
in our blood.
Don't recall graves.
Memory is permanent.
Remember the afternoon's
yellow suburban annunciation.
Your goalie
in his frightening mask
dreams perhaps
of gentleness.

Lesson: Odes

Overview & Objectives:

Odes are a traditional poetic form that have evolved throughout history. Different poetic eras have adapted the form of the ode, but the core is always the same: a celebration or praise of a person, place or thing. The ode is a great way to encourage students to celebrate the things in life that are important to them, the simple things they rely on but rarely celebrate, or whatever brings them joy.

Lesson:

- 0- 10 Minutes **Introduce the Poetry Idea.** Make a list: What are some items, concepts, people that we hold dear? This list could include tangible objects, spiritual principles, people you know or people you knew. Anything that you value. Introduce the activity and read Katie Daley's **example**. Have another voice read the poem.
- 10-20 Minutes **Discuss the Poem.** How does the author **personify** joy in this poem? Which parts of the poem do you connect with? What do you like? What questions do you have?
- 20-30 Minutes **Write Together.** Start with a relatively universal feeling like joy. What does this feeling look like to you? When does it arrive in your life? Does it have a certain smell or taste? Is it baked in a recipe from a family member? Does it feel like a certain kind of weather? What else does this feeling remind you of? Use specific words and images.
- 30-45 Minutes **Writing Time.**
- 45-60 Minutes **Share.**

Model Poems:

Ode to Joy

by Katie Daley

Oh sweet baby joy
 so good to see you again
 I love the way you
 show up sometimes for no reason at all
 How you climb into the bright red convertible of my heart
 pop the top off
 and drive me all the way downtown
 to back alleys where tulips swivel their hips
 and all the workers
 bounce on the trampoline in the square

I love the way you shut off the car engine
 so we can coast down the hills
 and let the purple songs
 of redwing blackbirds
 jangle through our hair

My trunk
 just won't stay shut when I'm with you
 it's so full of acrobats and otters
 and the broken-off bottoms
 of high-heeled dancing shoes

And when you squeeze my toes
 daisies sprout up from my kneecaps

This is it, this is the life
 All the people we love
 disembarking from big yellow boats
 arias of laughter
 fluttering out from their mouths like moonlight

Let's get out here, joy
Let's get out right here
and welcome them home

Ode to My Ear

by Mrs. Ziarko's Class at Garfield Elementary school

My ear is a cracked eggshell,
 a dark cave echoing with the roar of a ferocious lion.
 My ear is a broken-off gum eraser
 erasing anything I don't want to hear.
 My ear is the number 6 counting syllables,
 a blue whirlpool swirling in sounds.
 My ear is a piece of chewed-up gum
 sticking words to my brain.
 Thank you, ears
 for letting me hear the crunch of hard candy,
 the chirping of peepers in the trees,
 and the splish-splash of hip hop.
 And thank you for allowing in the peaceful silence at night.

Ode To the Potato My Roommate Left In the Bathroom

by Carrie George

Google says potato slices
 can be used to soothe burns.
 Can be used to reduce the puff
 on puffy eyelids. Potato slices
 are a substitute for cucumber
 relaxation. If a migraine is your
 ailment, place potato slices
 at each temple and massage gently.
 Or even, use a potato to clean your
 windows, to shine your
 silverware, to feed your
 geraniums. Did you over-salt your soup?
 Drop in potato chunks
 to absorb that excess sodium.
 Legend you can remove a wart
 by waiting for a full moon,
 halving a potato, rubbing it
 on your wart, burying the potato, and
 leaving it in the ground forever.

Potato, I don't know why
 my roommate chose for you this fate.
 Why she halved you, scalped
 you in two, made specimen out of you,
 counted your uses as she hovered
 above your rotting body, sloshing Listerine
 in her red mouth at midnight.
 Potato, vegetable of vision, course skin,
 small-soil heart, what hands have broken
 garden's ribcage, palmed for pulse,
 unearthed your breathing body
 just to leave you opened,
 sweating from hot-shower bathroom fog,
 drying from the inside, graying

like an old dog abandoned
by a once kind master.