

Call 811 – A Poetry Emergency

Saskatchewan School Library Association

THE MEDIUM – SPRING 2009

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Poetry is when an emotion has found its thought and the thought has found words.

- Robert Frost

Rhythm and rhyme, similes and metaphors, alliteration and onomatopoeia – these delightful literacy devices serve as exploration points for enjoying the genre of poetry. In honour of National Poetry Month, celebrate poets and their craft.

From friezes on government buildings to Mother Goose rimes, from liturgy verse passage to love letters, from songs played on the radio to singing games echoed by children, poetry is clearly interwoven throughout our lives. Poetry is “the distillation of experience that capotes the essence of an object, feeling, or thought” (Huck, 2003). Its richness in imagery and in language play stimulates the imagination through playful, magical contexts. In the Wire Side Chat, *Peeing in the Ool and Other Kids' Poems*, popular poet Kenn Nesbitt describes poetry as intimate- a means to express love, disgust, elation, bemusement, imagination or any other feelings you have roiling around inside you.

Rich learning experiences involve thoughtful discussion and are devoid of intense dissection. Create an environment of spontaneous pleasure in poetry – student self-selections of poetry and acceptance of individual response to poetry, rather than a tedious analysis of the same poem and insistence upon the same interpretation of a poet’s work.

SETTING THE STAGE

Display

Hang shirts, pants, and other articles of clothing with pockets. Place several examples of poetry, classic, modern, and student written poems, in the pockets. Students can browse and select a “pocket of poetry” to read.

Convert the library into a coffee house setting to host poetry jams and slams. Students can recite poems and discuss one another's work, staged with scenery. Advertise the "open mike" poetry readings and guest poets. The setting can also be used for a poetry reading club.

Arrange space for a writer’s studio to foster the creation of poetry. Supply writing material, magnetic poetry, and electronic equipment to create podcasts.

Entice readers’ imaginations with quotes about poetry from famous poets. ReadWriteThink’s *Observations About Poetry* (http://www.readwritethink.org/lesson_images/lesson848/observations.pdf) lists observations about poetry by various poets and authors.

Resources

Create a poetry resource display with posters of notable poets in tandem with their books. The collection should include a mix of anthologies, picture books, and audio books of lullabies, nursery verse, riddles and wordplay, playground verse, nonsense and standard poetry collections. Include recipients of poetry awards: The NCTE Award for Excellence in Poetry for Children, The Lee Bennett Hopkins Promising Poet Award, the Lee Bennett Award for Children’s Poetry, and the Claudia Lewis Award. Audio poetry adaptations often accompany print resources and

poetry-related Web sites, such as [The Academy of American Poets](#), [Poetry Magazine.com](#), [Poets and Writers, Inc.](#), [LibriVox.org](#), and the [Favorite Poem Project](#).

Poster

The Academy of American Poets has unveiled the official poster for National Poetry Month 2009. The poster, designed by Paul Sahre, features the lines "Do I dare / Disturb the universe?" from T. S. Eliot's poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" smudged onto a fogged window. A spring scenery glimpses beyond the window, bleared with rain and colour, intensifies Eliot's question. For a full view of the poster, or to request a free copy for your school library, visit www.poets.org/poster.

ACTIVITIES

National Poem In Your Pocket

Celebrate the second national *Poem In Your Pocket Day* on Thursday, April 30, 2009 (<http://www.poets.org/page.php/prmID/406>) by having students carry and share a poem. The poems can be stowed in pockets in a variety of ways: a handwritten copy, a saved text on a cell phone, or an audio file on an iPod.

Need a poem for your pocket? The Academy of American Poets (Poets.org) features poems to download, a sign-up list to have a poem emailed daily for the month of April, and instructions for accessing a mobile poetry site. *Poem In Your Pocket: 200 Poems to Read and Carry* (Bleakley, 2009), a unique collection of poems that can be torn from the book and taken with the reader, is another resource for pocket poems. [Poetry 180: A Poem a Day for American High Schools](#), from the Library of Congress, features a year's worth of poetry for high school students. Beginning with Billy Collins' "Introduction to Poetry," the poems are meant to be read aloud, and enjoyed by the entire school community.

Visual Poetry

Consider having students create a visual of the mental images evoked by a chosen poem. Add the photos to the [Flickr Group, Poem in Your Pocket](#) (<http://www.flickr.com/groups/piyp/>). Upload your school library's National Poetry festivities photos as well.

The Academy of American Poets features a Free Verse Photo contest encouraging poets of all ages to take a few lines from a popular poem, and express it in an ephemeral, non-permanent way. Entrants can, for example, write the words on a sandy beach with a stick, place text in the snow, assemble twigs on a hillside, spell them out with chalk on a sidewalk. Photograph the virtual poem before it disappears, and post it by April 15 in the [Free Verse](#) group page on Flickr (<http://www.flickr.com/groups/freeverse/>), or on the Academy's Fan Page on Facebook, or email the photo (freeverse@poets.org). Entrants must include the source of the lines in the photo caption.

Visualize poetry using Wordle. Copy short poems or first stanzas from some poems and create a Wordle. Lead students to creating a verbal collage of their reflections to a poem using Wordle (www.wordle.net/) – students type phrases that resonated with them and connections that they made. The choice of style, font, and orientation of the Wordle should reflect the mood evoked by the poem.

Poetry Read-A-Thon

Celebrate the reading of poems and writing about poems by organizing *Poetry Read-A-Thon*. Students choose poems to read and then write responses describing the elements of the read poems. The students maintain a log of their reading and teachers submit outstanding exemplars to be considered for posting on the Poets.org site. Visit The Academy of American Poets Web site (<http://www.poets.org/page.php/prmID/318>) to register a class or for more information. ReadWriteThink's lesson *Poetry Sound and Sense* (http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=848) provides nonthreatening ways to discuss poetry - the author's language and choices, the sounds and sense of language.

30 Poets/30 Days

Beginning April 1st, the Children's Book Council is featuring 30 Poets/30 Days, a celebration of children's poetry. Thirty children's poets, including current Children's Poet Laureate Mary Ann Hoberman, past Laureate Jack Prelutsky and the National Ambassador for Young People's Literature Jon Scieszka, will be sharing previously unpublished poetry at *GottaBook* blog (<http://gottabook.blogspot.com>). Every day in April, *GottaBook* will feature a new poem by a different poet.

The 30poems/30days Project can also be followed on Twitter by following *GottaBook*. Search or post tweets using the hashtags (# sign) #poetry or #kidlit. For example, including #poetry in your tweet allows followers to locate your comment and other people talking #poetry by searching Twitter for the hashtag.

E-ACTIVITIES

For further exploration of poetry and educational fun, explore Poetry4 Kids (<http://www.poetry4kids.com/games>), *Fridge Magnets* (<http://www.channel4learning.net/sites/bookbox/games/fridgemagnets/fridgemagnets.swf>), Magnetic Poetry Kids' Poetry Pages (<http://www.magneticpoetry.com/kidspoetry/index.htm>), or Create a PicLit (http://www.piclits.com/compose_dragdrop.aspx). ReadWriteThink also offers a collection of online Student Materials to support learning about poetry (http://www.readwritethink.org/student_mat/index.asp).

Other Useful Links

Scholastic (<http://teacher.scholastic.com/poetry/>) offers resources for meeting poets, poetry workshops, writing prompts, and videos. Random House spotlights Jack Prelutsky and provides suggestions for introducing his poetry to students (http://www.randomhouse.com/catalog/teachers_guides/9780375822865.pdf).

CONCLUSION

Poet Robert Frost noted that "Poetry is the renewal of words forever and ever. Poetry is that by which we live forever and ever unjaded. Poetry is that by which the world is never old". The human capacity to express has long manifested itself in poetic expression. It begs to be heard, to be shared out loud, and to be talked about.

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