

Poetry: Big Thoughts in Small Packages

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Essential Question: How can I write lots of poems by combining strong feelings or big thoughts with concrete details and carefully chosen words?

Bend I: How can I live like a poet, seeing the world through the eyes of a poet, working to put what I see and feel into poems?

Bend II: How can I write and rewrite poems so that I find honest, precise language, and use repetition, tone, and comparisons to say something that can't easily fit into ordinary words?

Bend III: How can I explore different structures for my poems, trying to find a structure for each poem that matches what I want to say in that poem?

How can I revise my poems so I explore point of view and imagery?

Welcome to the Unit

NOW THAT THE BOOKS ARE ALMOST DONE and we have been speaking to our readers, people have been asking lots of questions about the new series. Among those questions, we've heard is "Why a book on poetry?" Frankly, the question takes us by surprise. For us, it would be easier to imagine people asking, "Why isn't there a book on poetry at every grade?" because we wish that was the case. For that question, we have our answer ready, because the *If . . . Then . . . Curriculum* book does indeed detail the way a unit on poetry might go for every grade. But no, the question is "Why a book on poetry?" and the source of the question is the fact that poetry is not one of the three types of writing that has been highlighted in the Common Core State Standards. That is, when the CCSS suggests the school day should give equal time to the three types of writing, they are referring to opinion, information, and narrative writing, and poetry is not on the list.

We have a few answers. First, we actually believe that as a result of the Common Core, the emphasis on poetry will ultimately increase, not decrease. The standards will come to be defined by the way they are tested, and as far as we can detect, poetry will play an increasingly large role in new assessments because the push will be to engage students in more analytic reading of short complex texts. The CCSS ask that students can read, looking at the craft choices authors have made, and ask, "What does that choice have to do with the central meanings of this text?" Poetry is supremely suited to this sort of close, interpretive, analytic reading and can serve as a gateway to close reading of other kinds of texts as well. The CCSS, too, are clear that at a young age, children need to be able to identify literary devices and to discuss the effects of techniques such as alliteration and repetition on the flow and meaning of the overall text. By third grade, the CCSS expect readers to refer in technical terms to parts of texts, including lines and stanzas in poetry. That is, we believe there will be a premium placed on reading poetry, if not on writing

poetry, in upcoming high-stakes assessments. And there is no better way to teach young readers an awareness of craft decisions and their relationship to authors' purposes—appreciation for the significance of where a poet has chosen to create line breaks or recognition of the insight that a poet achieves through creating a surprising metaphor—than to engage those readers in similar decisions as poetry writers. So yes, we do believe that poetry will be in the spotlight in the years to come.

More than this, we specifically asked Sue Pimental—who refers to herself as one of the architects of the ELA CCSS—why poetry was left out of the CCSS. Did they regard it as unimportant? Her response was that to the contrary, they regarded it as so important that they worried that somehow trying to establish objective ways to evaluate poetry would devalue it and that they assumed states would add poetry to the additional standards that were left in the hands of the states—as indeed, many of them have.

But above all, we want to stress that decisions about what one teaches can't be outsourced. Ultimately, each one of us is the author of our own lives, and that means, too, that we are the authors of our own teaching. We must always be able to say, "This is *my teaching*, by me." And to my colleagues and me at the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project, a language arts curriculum that includes no poetry would be unimaginable.

Poetry reminds us to slow down and read every word, every pause, to listen to what is said and how it is said. Poetry stretches us, requiring us to see how an old tree is like a grandmother. A study of poetry teaches children to explore ideas and language, valuing voice and metaphor and sensory detail. And because poetry is often short, this genre allows children to explore the intersection between language, structure, and meaning. Considering every part of a poem, including the spacing and shape of the words on the page, the type and size of the font, even the white space that surrounds the text

as meaningful elements: this offers children multiple opportunities to make decisions based on meaning, reinforcing the crucial reading/writing/thinking concept that nothing we read or write is accidental, and therefore everything is worth interpreting.

And in truth, we feel fortunate to have written a book that teaches children to seek and cherish small observations, sewing them into finely crafted poems. For poetry is greater than rhyme, greater than metaphor; poetry is connection. When we teach children to write poems, we teach them to organize their dreams, memories, wonderings, and favorite facts into folded treasures, treasures that will find homes in readers' minds and hearts. It is our hope that you and your students will find beauty and surprise on poetry's path and that what you learn will follow you into all other genres.

Second-graders sometimes become "quantity writers," believing that the more they write, the better it is. This unit, with its focus on clarity and precise language, will help children reread and listen to the sounds of their words. These habits transfer to other genres of reading and writing, partly because poetry itself spans other genres: there are informational poems, opinion poems, and narrative poems. We can look to this range of poetry to supplement our students' understanding of the craft work at the heart of poetry and prose. If we show students how Valerie Worth writes about a soap bubble and describes how it "Bends out of shape/On the air/Leans, rounds again,/Rises, shivering, heavy," we can then invite our young writers to pay closer attention to their use of verbs, to try, as Worth does, to make each verb paint a precise picture. This poetic practice matters in any genre.

All year long, your students have been speaking in small poems. "I keep a stone in my pocket, smooth as a whisper." "My cat makes a circle on our chair. She looks like a furry orange cake!" New to the world, children speak with a freshness that adult poets work to grow in their own writing. This genre takes time to wrap its arms around these fresh and metaphorical ways of seeing the world. In this unit, you will help children find poetry in life, and then you will teach them techniques that put life into poetry.

OVERVIEW OF THE UNIT

This poetry unit is divided into three bends, each one helping children deepen their understandings of poetry. First, students will learn that poets are sparked by objects and feelings that they translate to music on the page. This early part of the unit, with its special attention to sound, will help develop students'

readers' ears as they experiment with line breaks, as they come to understand that a poem is different from a story. A poem looks different from prose, and line breaks help a reader know when to pause. As the unit progresses in Bend II, children will recognize that in a poem, choice and placement of words matter more than ever. They will admire and experiment with metaphor, deepening their ability to see like poets. You will not focus on teaching rhyme or forms such as haiku or diamante, but rather on meaning and crafting through repetition, metaphor, white space, and language. As you round Bend III, children will explore various natural structures of poems: story poems, poems with a back-and-forth structure, list poems.

Bend I introduces students to the sounds and feelings of poetry by having them read poems aloud in groups, with partners, and alone. The brevity and music of poetry invites repeated readings, and by reading poems again and again, children will begin to internalize the varied rhythms of this genre. By spending early time with favorite poems, you will have many teachers as you write through the unit. This unit is peppered with poetry from many poets, especially Kristine O'Connell George, and you will want to collect favorite poems of your own. Each poem will silently offer your writers guidance as they choose topics, structures, metaphors, language, and line breaks for their poems. During these early days, children will explore objects and memories, recognizing the poetry in their own lives.

In this first bend, set up a table or corner where you will collect humble and beautiful objects from nature: small rocks, nests, shells, snakeskin sheds. The very first few days of this unit will focus on how poets see and hear the world differently and how children can and do see with "poets' eyes." Writer Annie Dillard said, "How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives," and by collecting and studying natural objects, you will teach children that this is a worthy way to spend life—drawing, thinking, wondering, comparing. The work of poetry is not simply making marks on paper; it is work of deepening observation. These early days are for inner work, deep seeds that will later flower into leafy poems. You will help the children learn to listen and to see and to care. Children will write many poems about pine cones and dandelions, making comparisons and experimenting with line breaks. They will soon move to writing about their own topics, just as they have in all other units, learning that their own stories and wonderings can be shaped into poems too. You will teach them how poets choose topics that matter and that hold big feelings in moments or images. Your class will discover poems in their own lives and will discuss where poets of favorite poems may have

found their inspiration. Students will understand that spelling matters in poetry, recognizing that each word must be clear to readers. To this end, you will teach a new strategy for editing for spelling as students prepare for a first small poetry celebration.

In Bend II, your students will have even more opportunities to dive into work and play with language. The lessons in this bend focus on how poets choose precise words, use repetition, and convey feelings. Together, you will notice how poems have different moods and how poets choose words and rhythms to match these moods. Children will collect poems in their folders, annotating them to indicate places where poets did something interesting with words, and you will encourage them to use these collected poems as mentors, experimenting with these same techniques. Because they will be writing many poems, each lesson and technique you teach can be used in a new poem or to revise an old favorite. This bend places a special emphasis on metaphor, first helping children to make comparisons and then teaching them to sustain one metaphor over several lines. Throughout this unit, your goal will be to strengthen students' understandings of structure and metaphor, word choice and repetition. While we focus more closely on these poetic devices in this unit, our intention is that children will bring these understandings to all of their future writing. As you engage your class in the work of the day, you will expect that they also build on their repertoire of poetry strategies. Expect them to be able to tell you what they are trying out: "I used lots of repeating in my poem to show how dizzy I really felt." By encouraging children to read poems aloud throughout this unit, we help them tune their ears to the rhythms of all writing.

Bend III will continue your study of all aspects of poetic language, but you will especially focus on structure, teaching students that poets choose structures. The lessons in this bend will help children "fly above" various poems, noticing particularly how they are sewn together. Your lessons will teach children to read like writers as they name how some poems are story poems, some are lists with twists, and some have a back-and-forth structure. Be prepared that your children will likely notice aspects of structure you have not introduced, because children are very observant and interested in reading like writers. During this bend, you might want to look at a one-poet collection, such as *Old Elm Speaks* by Kristine O'Connell George, noticing the many ways she approaches the topic of trees: story poems, list poems, mask poems. Children will learn to notice structure, seeing lists and stories, questions and answers as ways to organize poetry. This bend will not focus on forms such as limerick and haiku, but rather, on more natural structures that

we often find in poetry. Your class will play with point of view, realizing that they can pretend to speak to something or as something or create imaginary back-and-forth conversations in the shape of poems. This final bend will end as children revise their poems for careful language, edit, and celebrate their poems in a variety of ways.

ASSESSMENT

As with any unit, it will be important for you to know what knowledge and experience your students bring to this unit on writing poetry. Before the unit begins, you may decide to give students an on-demand writing assessment. You might say, "Writers, today I'm going to give you some time to write a poem about something that matters to you. Remember to use everything you know about good poetry writing." As you observe most students "finishing" their poems, you might ask them to take their revision pens and revise! This will show you what they know about revising poetry as well. You may decide to give them the whole thirty minutes of the workshop time, or just fifteen to twenty minutes on the first day, leaving more time for children to share their ideas and questions about poetry after they have written. Some questions that might drive your observation of student work might be What do students think poetry is? What do students remember about studying poetry from last year? What are students using from the units you have studied so far this year? Are students selecting meaningful topics? Do students write with details? How are students using line breaks, white space, and punctuation? You will also want to keep in mind the qualities of good writing that you use throughout every genre study: structure, elaboration, conventions/craft, and meaning.

After this initial assessment you will want to use the information you have gathered about your students to drive the instruction of the unit. Use the patterns you notice in student work to help you plan whole-class minilessons and small strategy groups.

In addition to the on-demand assessment you administer at the beginning of the unit, you can collect formative assessments of your students throughout the unit by looking through their writing folders and asking questions during conferences to assess growth. Some questions you might ask include:

- "Can you tell me about this topic?"
- "What do you hope readers see, think, or feel when they read this poem?"

- “How did you use your poets’ eyes in this poem?”
- “What images are you planning to add for your readers?”
- “How will you use white space or line breaks in this poem?”
- “How are you paying attention to sound in this poem?”
- “Can you show me some very specific words you have chosen, and tell me why?”
- “I notice that you _____. How is that decision working in your poem?”
- “Are you trying to achieve something with this poem that is hard for you?”
- “How are you planning to revise?”

Children’s answers to these questions can guide you in choosing what and how to teach them in conferences and small groups.

Be sure to give your students an opportunity at the end of the unit to do another on-demand poem as a summative assessment so that you can compare the two pieces of writing and see how students are using what they have learned. Consider both the qualities of good writing and your main goals of the unit to assess how kids grew as poets and writers.

GETTING READY

On the CD-ROM you will find some helpful resources. You might want to print the bibliography of suggested poetry books and check what your library has available. Offer your children a variety of poetry books about a variety of topics, because while everyone loves funny poems, we hope that our students will see that poetry can touch all emotions. Like good friends, one poem might

make us laugh and one might cry with us when we need it. One poem might pause and celebrate beauty, and one might rollick playfully with the sounds of words. When you choose books and mentor poems, be sure to choose many unrhymed poems, because this unit focuses on poetic techniques other than rhyme, strict meter, and forms. Look for poems with great metaphors, interesting line breaks, repetition, alliteration, and clever points of view.

Take note, too, of the digital resources. There is a generous poetry community online, and you will find a handful of websites offering poems, minilessons, and poetry videos for the classroom. These can be projected on a screen, or you might offer children the opportunity to visit a poetry site when you are at the computer lab.

We recommend Kristine O’Connell George’s *Old Elm Speaks* as a mentor text to carry you through this unit. All about trees, this book offers poets a variety of structures and viewpoints, a close attention to word choice, and a celebration of finding poetry in the every day. You will find a few poems from *Old Elm Speaks* in these pages, and you will likely want to add it to your classroom library.

For your lessons, you are welcome to print the pages of children’s poems. Copy them onto classroom charts so that everyone can make observations about various techniques, or print them for your students, allowing them to recite poems together and even annotate them, marking what they notice about the topic or craft.

Look around your classroom. What in the room or outside your window might inspire you to write a poem? If you have thought much about this before, this is a perfect time to bring more beauty and intrigue into your room. Set up a small kaleidoscope or a clear bowl full of water and rocks. Hang a prism by the window or leave some unusual articles from the newspaper on the windowsill. We reflect what we take in, and by surrounding your children with what the world has to offer, you provide them with subjects for poems.



Session 3

Putting Powerful Thoughts in Tiny Packages

IN THIS SESSION, you'll teach students that poets choose topics that mean a lot to them, and then they anchor those topics in a meaningful small moment, image, or object.

GETTING READY

- ✓ Your own big idea and small moment to demonstrate generating ideas for poems (see Teaching)
- ✓ "Strategies Poets Use to Write Poems" chart (see Teaching)
- ✓ A big idea or big feeling that your class shares to practice generating ideas for poems. We use loving to listen to a book (see Active Engagement)
- ✓ Chart paper and marker (see Active Engagement)
- ✓ Excerpt from "Valentine for Ernest Mann" by Naomi Nye, enlarged on chart paper (see Share)
- ✓ Tiny Topics notepads, either recycled from earlier in the year or brand-new (see Share)

THIS LESSON SHINES A SPOTLIGHT on an essential element of poetry—meaning. Today you teach children how to choose topics for poems in such a way that they pay attention to both craft and meaning, and above all, to the intersection of the two. Up until now, your children have been writing poems about a handful of small objects—little treasures—set up around the classroom. Topic choice hasn't been a big concern, even when kids added objects of their own choice. Instead, the focus has been on writing with the sound and shape of poetry.

But we know, of course, that poets write from the heart about topics they hold dear. Today, then, you'll take your writers squarely back to the importance of writing about subjects that matter. You'll do this in ways that maintain the importance of writing with precision. Your goal will be to help children write about big topics that matter while still writing with tiny details.

In this session you'll demonstrate a way to generate a topic by thinking first of a big feeling or idea and then of a small moment, object, or image that holds that feeling, that idea. Prepare some ideas ahead of time instead of trying to come up with them on the fly. You may find that it will take some thought; you may need to kiss a few frogs before you find the prince. The key is that your feeling is big, your detail small and specific, and both are relevant to your students. You might even reverse the order of big and small, showing that a writer can notice that an object, moment, or image resurfaces often in his or her mind and can then explore its larger significance.

The suggestion that poets write about something big that is also small is hugely significant and pertains to most (or all) writing, not just to poetry. If a writer starts with something small, it's helpful for that writer to reach for something big in which to couch it (the image of a blue plastic dinosaur in the mud holds my feeling of frustration at having to share my room with a careless sibling). On the other hand, if a writer starts with something big (loving my mom), it's wise for the writer to reach next for something small (a surprise fruit gummy in my lunchbox).

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS: W.2.3, W.2.5, W.3.3.b, RL.2.1, RL.2.4, RL.2.10, SL.2.1, SL.2.4, L.2.1, L.2.2, L.2.3, L.2.5, L.2.6



MINILESSON

Putting Powerful Thoughts in Tiny Packages

CONNECTION

Recall and celebrate what your children have been doing as poets. Tell them poets also choose their own topics.

"Writers, we have learned about two important elements of poetry. You've used your poets' eyes to see the world in fresh ways, and you've learned that line breaks are one way to give poems music. Today I want to teach you about something else that poets consider when they want to write a poem—and this is even *before* they think about how to describe something or how to position the words on the page. And this is a biggie. Poets choose topics that matter to them." I paused to be sure all eyes were on me.

"You've been writing about little treasures and other interesting objects. Poets *do* often write about shells and pine cones and even safety pins! But in real life, poets aren't told, 'Here's a pine cone. Go write a poem about it.' Instead, a poet—like every other kind of writer—needs to start by thinking, 'What matters to *me*?'"

✿ Name the teaching point.

"Today I'm going to teach you that poets think about a big idea, a big feeling, and then find the small moment, image, or object that holds that big feeling, that big idea."

TEACHING

Point out that poets need to find a topic that is big and that is also small and specific. Show how you generate such a topic.

"To get a good poem, I need a topic that is big—at least it needs to feel big to me, a topic that fills my heart. When I have my big, strong idea or feeling, I then think about a small moment or even just a picture in my mind—a sound or an object—that gives me that feeling. Right now I want to show you how I can start with something big, like how much I adore my niece Katie. That's a big topic that gives me a big feeling."

◆ COACHING

Writing a poem requires us to draw on six (or sixty!) concepts at once. A poem must have language, rhythm, form, line breaks, music, and meaning—all at once. But we can't convey this to children all at once. So far in this unit, we have emphasized form and language over content. Today changes this.

We could have simply told children to choose their topics without giving them instruction on this, but we worried that if given no instruction, children would go toward what they felt were poetic topics (spring, flowers, love).

"I could write a zillion poems and stories about Katie, but I need to zoom in on one small thing—a moment or an object or image that can hold my feeling of admiration—and then I need to see that small thing with poets' eyes, like you've been doing. So watch what I do.

"Let's see. Last weekend we went to the zoo together! That was a really fun experience, and all during it, I kept thinking how much I adore this girl. That's still big, but I'm getting there. I need to zoom in even more. Oh, I know! I bought some food from the little machine so Katie could feed the sheep. At first she was scared to hold her hand toward the sheep's mouth, but then she did it. It was such a sweet moment that somehow captured how special Katie is to me. Now this is getting specific and small.

"If I close my eyes, I can play that moment like a movie in my mind. Katie held her hand out like this." I reenacted how Katie gingerly held her cupped hand toward the sheep. "I can remember how it went, and I can see the image of her hand out like this, and the sheep licking the food off of it." I paused and said, speaking now to the children, "Now I'm ready to write a poem because I have a big topic, a big feeling—how much I adore my niece Katie—and I have something small and specific. I remember how we fed the sheep together."

Show the children a chart on which you've listed some of the strategies you used to generate your idea for a poem.

"Did you see how I did these things?" I revealed what would become an anchor chart. I captured the steps I'd taken, and reminded them of how to get going with their poems once they had a big idea and a small moment that holds that big idea or big feeling.

Strategies Poets Use to Write Poems

- Poets find a big topic that gives them a big feeling.
- Poets find a small moment, detail, or object that holds the big feeling.
- Poets look with poets' eyes and see this ordinary thing in a new way.
- Poets write about it, experimenting with line breaks.

Jane Yolen, an author your students already know and love, wrote a haiku about the small moment in Owl Moon when her daughter Heidi went looking for owls with her father.

Owl Moon Haiku

by Jane Yolen

Snowy night, shadows,
What flies silent past the moon?
Pa and I watch owls.

You might wish to share Jane's haiku about Owl Moon, noting that the big feeling is joy over her husband and daughter's relationship and the small moment is when they go owling together.



ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Help the children coauthor the start of a poem about a shared big feeling.

"Let's try to get started on writing a poem together. Because we're doing this together, we need to think of a big feeling we all have, together. How about this big feeling: loving to listen to a book. Thumbs up if you enjoy being read to!"

A flurry of thumbs went up.

"Now get that big feeling—loving listening to a story—in you right now." I paused to give them time to imagine the pleasure of listening to stories.

"Now close your eyes and think about a small moment or image that you have related to the big feeling of loving to listen to a story. It can be an object—something in the classroom—or it can be the memory of one particular moment. Once you have something in mind, tell your partner what small thing, for *you*, holds the big feeling of loving to listen to stories."

As partners shared, I listened in, hoping to find a partnership whose conversation I wanted to fishbowl. I said in a voiceover, "If you've got something small you want to share that holds this big feeling, will you signal to me? Cup your hand like this if you've found a tiny object or moment that holds a poem, and I'll come listen to you explain it to your partner."

"I've got one," Evette said, holding her hand out as if to show she held the pearl of an idea. When I pulled in to hear her talking to her partner, I heard Evette present what she hoped was the start of a poem. She said: "I love to read."

I reminded her, "That's a big feeling. Remember? It's the one we all started with. What *exactly* do you see or do you recall that goes with that big feeling?" Evette pointed, "That's my place during read-aloud." "That's specific, Evette. There's a poem hiding in that idea. Let's see. Could it start . . ." and I began to record the class poem on chart paper.

*I have a place on the rug
Where I sit during read-aloud*

Evette nodded.

Help children see the concrete detail with fresh eyes.

"Maybe you could think about what happens when you sit there, Evette, and try to see that moment with fresh eyes, like you've been seeing your purplish stone with fresh eyes."

"I sit there and . . . um . . ." Evette hesitated.

We don't in this instance give children a choice over the big topic, following the general rule that we engage children actively in the part of the process we are trying to spotlight at this moment and expedite the other steps of the process by doing them ourselves.

Remember that many children benefit if you translate your big concepts into concrete, physical motions and objects, as we do here. We are picking up on something the children learned in earlier units, which is an especially wise thing to do.

Wyatt, who was still holding his hand gingerly as if it contained the wing of a butterfly, piped in. “Evette, maybe you can say the book opens and the story comes out.”

“That’s beautiful. You are writing a poem already. ‘The book opens. I see . . . ’ what? Wyatt?”

Wyatt thought, then recited, “‘The book opens. I see dragons and stuff.’”

“You open the book, there is the story, and soon . . . picture it. You are where, exactly?”

Squinting up his face, Wyatt whispered, “Flying on the back of a dragon.”

Say the children’s own words back to the class as a poem, and extrapolate the lesson you hope writers learn that pertains to another day and text.

“What a poem! Listen,” I said and recited their words as a poem, not yet writing it on chart paper but making quick notes to myself to write it up later.

*I have a place on the rug
where I sit during read-aloud.
I sit there and the book opens
and I’m flying on the back of a dragon.*

I continued, “Writers, do you see how Wyatt and Evette began with a general feeling of loving to read. Then they zoomed in on the moment when they sit in their reading spots, the book opens, and suddenly they are riding the backs of dragons! What a poem!”

LINK

Remind children of the possibilities they have for writing today.

“Writers, you have so much work to do today! One thing you can do, just like what we did here together, is to find the big topics, the big feelings, in your own lives. You can think of a big feeling you have.” I pointed to the first item on the anchor chart. “Then you can find the small moment, detail, or object that holds that big feeling.” Again I located my suggestion on the chart. “Then what?” I asked, and children piped in, referencing the remaining bullets on the chart. I nodded. “So you can write new poems that do all these things. You can also reread your existing poems, deciding whether you can revise them so they do all these things. *And* you have a treasure chest full of possible poems. So many choices! When you have a plan for what you want to do today, leave the meeting area and get started!”

Telling children that poets choose a big feeling and then locate that big feeling in something small feels impossibly complex. But when you scaffold children as we do here, the process is not so difficult. This is an example of the teaching method of guided practice. Wyatt is actively doing something—generating a poem—and we use lean prompts to carry him along through the process. In this way, we act almost as training wheels, allowing Wyatt to do something with our support that he couldn’t yet do alone.

Our scaffolding has made a world of difference. Wyatt couldn’t have written this without our help. That’s okay if Wyatt and his classmates learn from this in ways that allow them to write more effectively another day, on another poem.



CONFERRING AND SMALL-GROUP WORK

Balancing Responsive Teaching with Things You Know You Want to Teach

CONFERRING IS OFTEN A BALANCING ACT between noticing and supporting students with the work they are doing, and guiding students into learning that you already have in mind. We often end up doing both kinds of work during one writing session. For example, knowing that you want to bring editing work in as a through-line rather than as something tacked on the end, you could gather a group of students for whom today's minilesson was a breeze, teaching them to bring an editing lens in earlier to their writing process.

While we typically teach more heavily into editing at the end of the writing process, as part of preparing writing for publication, children need to internalize conventions and editing strategies and to use them with increasing automaticity, so that third-graders are not editing for the same conventions as first- and second-graders. Rather than waiting for the end of a unit and editing only what they choose to publish, they can do a quick edit after every day's writing. This will be an invaluable habit to take with them into third grade when they are introduced to the new tool of writers' notebooks. Showing them some simple professional editing marks can pique their interest and take it from being a fun activity to a real habit. Children who see editing as part of writing rather than as a big nuisance can more seamlessly edit as they revise. You can get this kind of work going in your classroom by gathering small groups of children who are ready for it.

On the other hand, you'll absolutely want to be responsive to what comes up as you talk with individuals. In this instance, I knew that Maddie had begun to revise a personal narrative she had written during an earlier unit by turning it into a poem. Pointing out the similarities between focused small moment narratives and poems may inspire students to try reworking their own personal narratives as poems—or at least making poems about the same meaningful moments they described in personal narratives. (Later in the unit, this idea of "story poems" comes up as part of a minilesson about structure, but you may decide to support students' experimentation now in the context of conferences and small groups. One of these student story poems might serve as a strong model for your future minilesson.)

SESSION 3: PUTTING POWERFUL THOUGHTS IN TINY PACKAGES

MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING

Reading Our Poems Aloud with Music in Our Voice

"Poets, eyes up here for a minute. I have to tell you, the best part of my day is at the end of it, when I get to curl up on my couch and read through your folders. I get goose bumps over what you have been writing. But poems are meant to be read aloud, and I have noticed that sometimes when you are reading your poetry to your partners, you don't have the music in your voice. You sound a little bit like robot readers. You have worked so hard to give your poems music, it is important that the music comes through in your reading. This made me think that we all need more time to read our poems out loud. We need to listen to the music we are writing into our poems so we don't accidentally read them like robots!

"Get together with your partners. Partner 2 goes first. Look over your poem before you read it so you have it in your heart and you are ready. Then your job is to read your poem aloud with the exact music you want it to have. Read it once, then let there be silence. Then read it again. Afterward, your job, Partner 1, will be to tell Partner 2 what his or her poem made you feel. Then you can switch roles."

Maddie's original story was about the night her baby sister, Isabel, was born, and I remembered well the vivid and poignant images she'd included. I knew Maddie would have no trouble rewriting the lines so her text *looked* more like a poem. She had done this easily and on her own before I approached.

(continues)

*We went to the pizza shop before Isabel was born
In the evening
We went there
We got dough
And cheese
When we got home we made a tiny pizza
My mom had a piece and my dad had two*

This was one of those moments in which I have to remind myself that my job is to teach the writer, not the writing. The poem belonged to Maddie. As much as I wanted to remind her of all the beautiful images contained in her original story, I knew I had to research to find *her* intentions for this piece. After some conversation, it became clear that Maddie hadn't thought much beyond the idea of making her poem *look* like a poem. She was thinking not of conveying deep meaning, but of faithfully recording events. The line breaks were purely incidental.

I said, "Can I ask you what you hope for your poem? I mean, what do you want people to know or think about when they read it?" I looked at her expectantly.

"I don't know. I just started writing it out of my memory, I wanted people to know what it all looked like."

"Maddie, that's so great. You make it easy for people to visualize what was happening that evening. I want to teach you right now that when writers revise stories into poems, poets *do* make poetry decisions about images, as you did, but there's something else they do even before that: they think about the *meaning*, the big reason it deserves to be a poem, and they make sure the way they write their poem supports that meaning. In today's minilesson we talked about having a big, strong feeling and connecting it to something small. When poets revise, turning a story into a poem like you are doing, they make sure that the stuff they add is still connected to the big feeling of the poem. What *is* the big feeling you want to get across from that night?"

"I guess . . . amazed. I was amazed that she was finally here, and I got to see her when she was still so new."

"Okay, and what is the small image or moment that holds that amazement for you?"

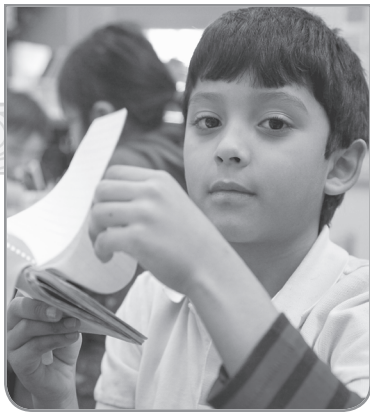
"Ohhh. It's when she was finally born and she was all shiny. She still had some slippery stuff on her. I was holding her for the first time, and I looked in her eyes and she was smiling."

"Wow, Maddie. Wow. You have two great elements of your poem right there. Is the having pizza part you added also connected to the big feeling you just talked about so beautifully?"

"I guess not. I could take it off. But I think waiting for the baby is important because I was waiting and waiting for her to come out!"

I watched for a moment as she got started. After a few lines, I felt ready to leave her to it, so I stopped her to briefly recap our work. "Maddie, before I leave you to work, remember that poets think about connecting the images they add when they revise to the big feeling that the poem is about—just like you're doing with the images you are adding. Ones that don't fit, like the pizza stuff, can be taken out. I'll come check on you again in a bit."

*Waiting
For the baby
Mom took lots of walks
One day
The midwife came
Daddy tried to wake me
I was fast
Asleep
The baby came out
I finally woke up
She was crying
I got to hold her. She was
Soft, wet, slippery
With grease and blood
All over her
We looked in each other's eyes
She was smiling at me
Her name was Isabel.*



SHARE

Living Our Lives as Poets

Tiny Topics Notepads

Remind children that they are poets throughout the day, and recruit them to live in ways that let them find poems. Share Naomi Nye’s poem “Valentine for Ernest Mann.”

“Poets, I want to remind you that you aren’t poets for just one hour during the writing workshop. You are poets all day long. When you head home today, you will be traveling home as a poet, entering your home as a poet, talking with someone at home as a poet, and going to sleep as a poet.

“To write poems during our workshop time, you need to follow the advice of Naomi Nye. Remember earlier this year, we read her poem ‘Valentine for Ernest Mann’?

“Remember how a child asked her, ‘How do you make a poem?’ and she answered”:

Valentine for Ernest Mann (excerpt)

by Naomi Nye

*You can’t order a poem like you order a taco.
Walk up to the counter, say, “I’ll take two”
and expect it to be handed back to you
on a shiny plate.*

*Still, I like your spirit.
Anyone who says, “Here’s my address,
write me a poem,” deserves something in reply.
So I’ll tell you a secret instead:
poems hide. In the bottoms of our shoes,
they are sleeping. They are the shadows
drifting across the ceiling the moment
before we wake up. What we have to do
is live in a way that lets us find them.*

“Today and every day from now on, I hope you, like Naomi Nye, live in a way that lets you find poems.”

Remind children of the Tiny Topics notepads they kept earlier in the year, and suggest they revive these as places to record seeds of poems.

“Remember that earlier this year, when you learned to write from Jane Yolen and Angela Johnson, you kept Tiny Topics notepads? If you were at home or at recess and you saw something tiny, something important that you knew you’d want to remember, you jotted it in your Tiny Topics notepad. I think you need to begin to do that again, only this time you’ll observe the details of your life (like shadows that drift across your ceiling or a bird way up in the sky) that could become poems. Write those down, and tomorrow in school, you can look at them like you’ve been looking at the shells and feathers.”

Give out the notepads, and remind the children to pay attention to the poems hiding in their lives.

“So I’m giving you your Tiny Topics notepads—and tonight, remember to follow Naomi Nye’s advice and live in a way that lets you find poems. Pay attention. Notice the shadows drifting across the ceiling just after you wake up and all the other poems hiding in your life. Bring your Tiny Topics notepads with you to writing workshop tomorrow.”

Just as the teaching in second grade builds upon what students have already learned, so does it lay foundations upon which future teaching will build. The Tiny Topics notepads foreshadow an important tool in the upper-grade writing workshop. Next year, students will keep writer’s notebooks and learn about “mining” their entries for important bits of writing. By using this tool now, I am creating schema that future teachers can build upon.