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Implementing 'Poetry Friday' into the Middle School English/Language Arts Classroom

By Desiree Harrison

When I was in middle school, I never understood poetry. I didn't get the point and sometimes it frustrated me when other people picked up a book of poetry to read just for pleasure. I had never gotten any pleasure out of poetry, so how could they? I found that stuff loaded with odd phrases and strangely constructed stanzas, and I often thought to myself, "Can poetry even be considered English?" I knew English—it was writing essays and reading strategies and giving oral presentations. English only turned into poetry for two or three weeks in April.

No teacher during my formal education instilled in me the pleasure that can come from reading and writing poetry. And I'm ashamed to say that, when I first started teaching, I developed the same attitude towards bringing poetry into my classroom—only when absolutely necessary! But after four years of separating poetry from writing, I am finally acknowledging that poetry is not only a part of ELA- but also one of its most beautiful aspects. And while it is still difficult for me to write and understand poetry, I no longer want my students to miss out on appreciating poetry because of my insecurities. With those thoughts in mind and after some light summer reading, I developed the following plan for including "Poetry Friday" in my classroom.

Setting up the classroom

- Get a pronged folder for each student. One helpful tip is to color-code the classes so that each student in a particular hour has the same color.
- Find a short, inspirational poem to glue onto the front of each folder.
- Get a pack of sheet protectors for the class (one for each student) to house finished poems in the prongs.

How "Poetry Friday" works

- Almost every Friday, the teacher introduces a new poem to the class. Each Friday should also introduce a different technique used in poetry.
- Have a discussion about what students notice in a poem and then introduce a technique.
- Teacher reads his/her example aloud and the class has a discussion about similarities between original works and the teacher's versions.
- Teacher then works with students to create a pre-writing strategy.
- Teacher gives children independent time to work on pre-writing and drafting.
- Teacher also gives drafting time for students to imitate individual poems.
- What students don't finish in class becomes homework and/or can be done during down time in the classroom work.
- All poetry work is housed in the poetry folder.
- The published version of each poem is due at the end of the grading period.
- Once a month, a Friday is set aside for simply working on the revision and publishing of poems started in previous weeks.

Assessment Option

Create an anthology of the poems, complete with a dedication page and a page explaining inspirations and/or techniques used. Grade is based on completion of poems, imitation style, and accurate use of techniques presented in class.

Student Reflections

The following represents a random sampling of 8th grade responses to the prompt:

"Honestly write about your likes and dislikes of Poetry Friday."

"I enjoy poetry Friday because it gives me a chance to be creative and reveal my emotions without having to worry about the 'correct' way to write."

"I really like having poetry Friday because I feel like I don't have personal time anymore to write poetry. Also I think it's good we do it on Friday because then we can reflect on what has happened that week. And having the poetry folder gives us somewhere to keep our thoughts."

"I like poetry Fridays. I like that there is a structured day to focus on our writing of poetry. I think it's a good idea."

"I love poetry Friday because I can write down all of my feelings, and feel better afterwards."

"I personally do not like poetry Friday because I do not like poetry. What I hope to get out of it is to become a better writer."

"I like poetry Friday because you can be yourself in poetry and it can be fun. It's just what you feel."

"I really don't have much to say but I'm just going to say that it helps me with my ideas."

"I liked the poetry it was pretty cool."

With only two months of school done, I have already found that Poetry Friday is a success in my classroom! Implementing this special time for poetry during this school year has allowed me to see a more creative and personal side of my students. They are producing wonderful and unique poems, and they love doing it! The techniques learned in this short amount of time are also starting to trickle over into their informal and formal writing during the other days of the week. I hope that you can adapt this plan into your classroom in order to have poetry successes throughout the year.

SUMMARY

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