

Course Topic: Teaching Writing**Course Instructor:**

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Course Synopsis:

Poetry can be a great tool to use to teach English to our students. In this session, we first discuss why poetry writing is a useful and motivating activity for English language students of all ages, levels and backgrounds. We look at how to structure a poetry writing lesson in order to fully engage students in the process. Finally, we identify the structure of different types of poems that students can write. At the end of this session you will be able to effectively integrate poetry writing into your classes.

Course Agenda:

1. What is Poetry?
2. Why Should we use Poetry Writing to Teach English?
3. Factors to Consider When Planning a Poetry Writing Lesson
4. A Sample Poetry Lesson
5. Different Types of Poetry Our Students Can Write

1. What is Poetry?

Poetry is the expression of imagination, emotion, thought and experience through meaning, sound, imagery and rhythmic language choices. The language choices may follow a prescribed pattern or may deliberately have no pattern at all.

2. Why Should we use Poetry Writing to Teach English?

The following are some of the reasons to use poetry writing in your classroom:

1. It's fun!
2. It allows students to express their own ideas within a set structure or format.
3. It gives students the opportunity to be creative and artistic.
4. It helps students to develop creative language.
5. It forces students to write accurately and precisely in order to express themselves.
6. It gives students the opportunity to revise and refine their writing.
7. It helps students learn to write well!

3. Factors to Consider When Planning a Poetry Writing Lesson

Choosing activities depends on many factors:¹

- What level are the students?
- What is the average age of the students?
- Why are the students learning English?
- What should the students be able to produce at the end of the exercise?
- What is the focus of the exercise? (tense, structure, usage, etc.)

Warning: Teachers need to ensure that the students feel personally involved if they want the poetry writing lesson to have lasting value. In order for students to accept that poetry writing is more than just 'fun', a teacher needs to be clear about which skills he or she is trying to develop. If the objective of the lesson is not clear, students might not feel motivated to participate. Teachers also need to provide constructive feedback to help students refine their language choices. Without this feedback, the lesson could be perceived as being meaningless.

4. A Sample Poetry Lesson

You can use the following lesson plan to teach poetry writing.

¹ adapted from http://esl.about.com/cs/teachingtechnique/a/a_twrite.htm

Time	Procedure
5 min	Ask the students what a poem is. Do they like poetry? Do they have a favourite poem or poet? Who is a famous poet from their country?
10 min	Have students work in small groups of 4. Each group has one example of the type of poem to be written. They must complete the following tasks: a) Identify the structure/form of the poem (what are the parts of speech in each line) b) Report orally and informally to the rest of the class on the feeling or tone of the poem c) Identify any relationships among the different lines of the poem Students can use dictionaries, as necessary, to figure out unfamiliar words.
10 min	Write the structural form of the poem on the board or screen and/or present it on a handout.
10 min	As a class, brainstorm possible words or phrases that fit within one of the lines of the poem (for example, with a cinquain poem, brainstorm synonyms that can be used for the first and last lines). Put the pairs up on the board as suggestions (for example, for a cinquain poem, you could have: vacation-holidays, artist-creator, Paris-paradise, life-journey, etc.).
10 min	Choose one of the brainstormed sets of words and write a sample poem together as a class on the board/overhead screen.
15 min	Working individually with the template created in the second step, students write one or more poems on the subject(s) of their choice. If time, have students share their poems with the class or in small groups.

5. Different Types of Poetry Our Students Can Write

The following are different types of poems that you can teach students, using the same lesson plan given above.

Acrostic

An acrostic poem has the first letter of a series of words making another word. The words in the series should be adjectives or phrases describing the main word.

Tough
Enthusiastic
Ambitious
Caring
Helpful
Energetic
Resourceful

As a variation on an acrostic poem, students can use their names for the first letter of each word.

Cinquain

A cinquain poem is a five-line poem that is diamond-shaped. The order of content for each line is as follows: 1 noun, 2 adjectives, 3 gerunds, 1 full sentence, and finally a synonym for the first noun.

Water
Cool, clear
Invigorating, refreshing, sustaining
A thing that provides energy
Life

Diamante

A diamante poem is similar to a cinquain poem except that it has more lines and more word classes. A diamante poem is a seven-line poem that is shaped like a diamond. The order of content for each line is as follows: 1 noun (A), 2 adjectives (A), 3 gerunds (A), 4 nouns (2A, 2B), 3 gerunds (B), 2 adjectives (B), 1 noun (B). As you can see, the poem is equally divided into two parts – the first three lines and the first two nouns of the fourth line are related to one topic (A), and the last two nouns of the fourth line as well as the last three lines of the poem are related to another topic (B).

Winter
Rainy, cold
Skiing, skating, sledding
Mountains, wind, breeze, ocean
Swimming, surfing, scuba diving
Sunny, hot
Summer

Haiku

Haiku is a Japanese poem format. It is an un-rhyming poem. There are three lines with a total of 17 syllables. The first line has 5 syllables, the second has 7 and the third has 5. Haiku can be used to describe something (although the subject of the haiku is never mentioned in the poem) or to convey the mood of a situation or setting. To have your students write haiku, you can assign a subject or mood, or students can select this for themselves.

Green leaves softly shake
Pieces of yellow light jump
Branches creak and groan

Metaphor

Each line in a metaphor poem contains a different, prescribed metaphor for one person or object. You assign all of the metaphor categories and students select the person or object they would like to write about. Here is an example. You gave the class the following metaphor categories:

- a food
- a beverage
- a season
- a type of transportation
- an animal
- a type of flower

A student then wrote the following metaphor poem about his/her mother:

Fresh baked bread filling the house with a sweet aroma.
A hot apple cider on a cold day.
The green of new life pushing up through the last snow.
A graceful yacht catching the evening breeze.
A koala bear, soft and warm.
Your brilliant yellow petals light up the garden.

Limerick

A limerick is a humorous poem with five lines. The last word of the first, second and fifth lines rhyme. The last word of the third and fourth lines rhyme. The first, second and fifth lines have 3 beats followed by a silent fourth beat: da DUM da da DUM da da DUM “silence”. The third and fourth lines have two beats: da DUM da da DUM. Because of this distinctive rhythmic pattern, limericks are particularly good for teaching students the rhythm of English. Here is an example.² Try saying it out loud to get the rhythm correct.

There was an old man from Peru,
who dreamed he was eating his shoe.
He awoke in the night
with a terrible fright
and found out that it was quite true.

Sonnet

A sonnet is much more complex than any of the other poems introduced thus far. It should only be used with advanced level classes. A sonnet has 14 lines, which are divided into four sections called quatrains. The first three quatrains each have four lines. The fourth quatrain has two lines.

² Taken from <http://www.gigglepoetry.com/poetryclass/limerickcontesthelp.html>.

A sonnet has a strict rhyming scheme.

- First quatrain: ABAB
- Second quatrain: CDCD
- Third quatrain: EFEF
- Fourth quatrain: GG

The rhythm of a sonnet is called **iambic pentameter**. This means that each line has 10 beats, of alternating stressed and unstressed syllables. Each quatrain has a specific role:

- The first quatrain introduces the subject of the sonnet.
- The second quatrain develops the subject or theme.
- The third quatrain rounds off the subject or theme.
- The fourth quatrain concludes the sonnet.

Shakespeare wrote some of the most beautiful and famous sonnets. Here is Shakespeare's Sonnet 18, also known as "Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer's Day?".

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate;
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date;

Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd;

But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st;
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st:

So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

Now you are ready to try using poetry with your students!

Thanks for participating!

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