

# Growing Poems

## Standards

ELACC4RL1: Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

ELACC4RL2: Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text; summarize the text.

ELACC4RL5: Explain major differences between poems, drama, and prose, and refer to the structural elements of poems (e.g., verse, rhythm, meter) and drama (e.g., casts of characters, settings, descriptions, dialogue, stage directions) when writing or speaking about a text.

ELACC4L3: Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.

- a. Choose words and phrases to convey ideas precisely.
- b. Choose punctuation for effect.

## Cultivating Creativity and Communication Skills through Garden-Inspired Poetry



Even when school gardens are tucked in for the winter, your students need not lose touch with plants, weather, insects, and other natural wonders. By reflecting on their gardening experiences through poetry, they can keep their gardens growing in their minds, maintaining a rich context for exploring phonics, personal expression, parts of speech, figurative language, and many other language arts standards.

The objectives of this Classroom Project are to encourage students to develop more diverse ways of describing everyday objects, processes, and events, and to recognize that they each have a unique way of expressing themselves -- their own voice. Many children get a great deal of enjoyment from participating in plant-based lessons in school gardens, habitats, and indoor settings. They often connect deeply with plants and nature, and this serves as a rich source of material for budding poets.

Poetry is meant to be a liberating medium for expression, yet it also encourages precise use of words as kids hone in on what they wish to communicate. The buried treasure kids discover is the skill to harness language to enrich their work in all disciplines. And since poetry is meant to be read aloud, it also can bolster presentation skills. Ideally, it will help them grow into effective, compelling wordsmiths and communicators.

Here are some activities for tapping students' experiences and memories of their gardening and habitat adventures as a starting point on the road to writing poetry.

## Materials

- Poetry examples (class set)
- word harvest worksheets (attached below, one per student)
- dictionaries (class set)
- thesauruses (class set)
- clipboards or notebooks (one per student).

## Part 1. Sample some Poetry

**A.** To prepare your class for writing their own poems, read a few aloud. First, practice alone or with another teacher so you can get a feel does not follow the line breaks. Reading aloud demonstrates that cadence, like punctuation in sentences, clarifies the meaning of the phrases.

**B.** After each one, explore some of these questions together.

*What do you think this poem is about?*

*Does the poem create an image for you?*

*How does it make you feel?*

*How do you think the poet was feeling, or trying to tell us?*

*Do they help you see the subject (e.g., the wind, dandelions) in a way you didn't before?*

*From whose point of view is it written?*

*Does it have a rhythm?*

*Does it rhyme?*

*Are there some words whose meanings you don't know?*

*What about poetry is different from a news story?*

*From a short story or novel?*

**C.** In anticipation of Part 2 of this project, have a brief class discussion about the difference between observations and feelings. Ask your students, *What does it mean to observe something?* (It means to study something with all of your senses). *How are observations different from feelings and reactions?* (Observations are made from external stimuli, and reactions and feelings come from inside of us.) Reread one of the poems. Ask, *What do you think the poet is observing in the poem? What are the poet's reactions/feelings?*

## Part 2. Harvest Your Own Words



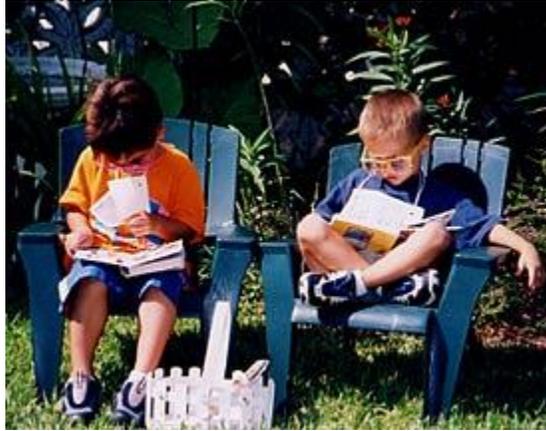
Even if your garden is put to bed for the season, your students can still harvest ideas and words for making poems.

**A.** Distribute Word Harvest Worksheet (attached below), which has a column each for Observations and Feelings/Reactions.

**B.** Explain that in the garden they'll take a few minutes (5 to 10 minutes) to quietly observe one thing that captures their attention -- a puddle, for instance. Have them record what they sense about it (e.g., wet, shiny, shallow, chilly) in the Observations column, and their feelings and reactions to it (my dog would drink that; splashing with galoshes; makes me shiver) in the right column. If it's not possible for them to use all their senses (tasting the water in the puddle is out of the question!), suggest that they imagine what it tastes like.

If going outside isn't an option, ask students to take a stroll through the garden in their memories, and pick one thing they remember strongly: perhaps tasting freshly picked strawberries, or pulling weeds. Have them take a few minutes to imagine using all their senses, even the unlikely (What does a strawberry sound like?), to observe the object or activity, recording these and resulting feelings that arise.

## Part 3. Cook up some poetry!



With the "raw materials" -- their recorded phrases and ideas -- kids can fashion first drafts of poems.

**A.** Here are some tips you can share to get them started:

- Choose an idea, feeling, or image from your trip to the garden that you want to communicate, and write it down. Use the words on the sheet to illustrate it.
- Start with a single word or phrase from the sheet that you like the best, and use that as your topic. You don't have to use any other words from your worksheet unless you want to.
- String entire phrases from worksheets together in a way that makes sense to you.
- Connect words that sound pleasant together.

If there are students who need more structure to get started, they can try composing simple haiku, a traditional Japanese poetry form based on or inspired by nature. The least rigid of the modern haiku formats requires that the poet use words totaling 17 syllables within two or three lines. (For more poetry structures to experiment with, see the Resources Section)

**B.** Rewriting is a way a poet refines their words so they come closer to conveying the subject, image, or feelings in an accurate way. Here are some suggestions you can offer them.

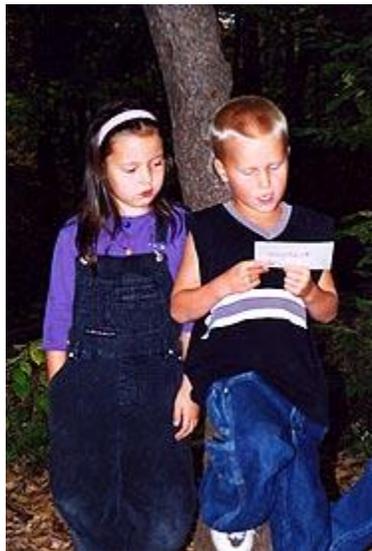
Read your poem over silently several times.

- Can you remove words without losing the feeling or meaning you want to share?
- Can you replace some words with others? Depending on the age of your students, discuss the concept of synonyms. Ask them to try and think of their own synonyms first, and then explore further with a thesaurus.

After rewriting, read your poem aloud a few times to yourself, and then to a friend. How does it sound? Does it need any adjustment?

C. Share poems aloud. Before students read their poems to the class, suggest that they imagine themselves in the garden sensing the thing that inspired them. Prompt practice of good communication and public speaking skills by advising them to:

- Read the poem slowly. Every word is important.
- Pause for a few seconds between the title and the first line.
- Read in a normal voice, but loud and clear enough that everyone can hear.



Use some of the questions from Part 1.B to bring the exercise full circle. Let your young poets know that their works are as valid as those of the poets you introduced them to at this beginning of the lesson!

If your students are eager to share their works with others, they can host a reading in the garden (if weather permits) and invite other classrooms, parents, and community members. Or, they can publish an illustrated booklet for display in the library.

<http://www.kidsgardening.org/classroom-projects/growing-poems>

### Word Harvest Worksheet

Observations -- external (use senses)	Feelings and Reactions -- internal