



Activity 2-1 The Nature of Poetry

AT A GLANCE

Read and discuss several poems related to biodiversity, then write original biodiversity poetry.

OBJECTIVES

Compare several poems that relate to the theme of biodiversity over time. Recognize the tone, meaning, rhythm and use of specific language and imagery in poems. Write poetry to convey personal reflections on biodiversity.

SUBJECTS

English language arts

SKILLS

gathering (reading comprehension), analyzing (discussing), presenting (writing)

LINKS TO ILLINOIS BIODIVERSITY BASICS CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

cultures

TIME

two or more class periods

MATERIALS

copy of “Types of Poems” for each student; paper; pencils

CORRELATION TO COMMON CORE STANDARDS AND NEXT GENERATION SCIENCE STANDARDS

English language arts: Writing Standards for Literacy in Science, Range of Writing, 10

Living things and wild places often elicit strong emotional reactions in people. Some people feel awe at the sight of graceful birds; others feel terror at the sound of a rattlesnake. Some people have felt threatened and fearful in a forest at night; others have felt peaceful on a secluded lake or in an urban park. For all these types of experiences, poetry can be highly effective for sharing our reflections with others. In this activity, your students will read poems that relate to biodiversity and compare the poems’ different themes and tones. Then the students will try their hand at writing poetry of their own to see if they can capture an emotion or insight they’ve had about species or landscapes.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Make a copy of the “Types of Poems” page for each student.

WHAT TO DO

- 1. Read some poems with biodiversity-related themes.**
Read several biodiversity-related poems to the class. Some suggested sources are listed below although you may use any poems that address aspects of biodiversity. Tell the students to pay attention to the tone of each poem, the message of each poem, and the imagery the poets use to get their messages across. You may want to read each poem more than once. Also, you may want to provide a list of vocabulary words for the students to review either before or after reading the poems.

“**Corners on the Curving Sky**” by Gwendolyn Brooks, available through many Internet sites

“**Phoenix**” by Hazel R. Broadus, from *Prairie Poetry* (see “Resources” list)

“**The Heron**” by Wendell Berry, from *Collected Poems* (see “Resources” list)

“**Liquid Flutter**” by Anne Selden, from *Of Frogs and Toads* (see “Resources” list)

“**Elm Buds**” by Carl Sandburg, from *Honey and Salt: A New Volume of Poems* (see “Resources” list)

“**Tomorrow**” by Ann Carlson, from *Prairie Poetry* (see “Resources” list)

“**I Could Not Swallow the Lake**” by Andrea L. Change, from *Power Lines* (see “Resources” list)





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The Nature of Poetry (continued)

2. Discuss the poems.

Encourage your students to discuss their reactions to each of the poems. You may want to start with general questions regarding students' likes and dislikes of the poems and their reasoning for such feelings. Ask the students if any poem captured their feelings about nature and/or biodiversity. You may also want to ask specific questions about each poem. Be sure to discuss the tone, setting and images evoked by each poem. Allow the students to speak freely and give recognition to any answer that they can support thoughtfully.

3. Have students write their own poetry.

To assist students in writing original poetry, it is important to help them focus their writing. You might begin by asking them to recall some of the different emotions or ideas conveyed in the poetry they have read (awe, delight, humor, fear of wildlife and so on). Have they had similar or different reactions to the plants, animals and places they have seen or read about? With the students working in small groups, encourage them to share specific emotions about significant experiences with nature that they have had. You might even want the students to share images that capture the feeling or idea they are remembering.

Alternatively, you might want to take students outside for a nature walk. Encourage them to look closely at one or a few specific elements of the natural world. They can draw pictures or jot down ideas before going back inside.

Pass out copies of the "Student Page—Types of Poems." Go over the descriptions of the different kinds of poems to make sure the students understand them. Explain to the students that they will be writing their own poems about biodiversity. They can choose any form of poetry, from one of the forms described on the sheet to rhyming verse. And they may write about any aspect of biodiversity they choose. They should write at least two poems, each using a different style.

Allow the students to begin writing their poetry. Again, they can write about any aspect of biodiversity—a specific place they have visited, a particular plant or animal, their general feelings or ideas about nature and so on. Remind the students that images and rhythms can all be used to reflect their ideas and feelings. And stress again that poetry can convey all kinds of feelings—both positive and negative.

You'll probably need to give the students more than one session to finish their poems. Assign the final poems as homework and have the students turn them in on another day. They can read them out loud to the group, also.

WRAPPING IT UP

Assessment

1. Ask the students to select one of their poems and copy it onto paper without their name. Collect the poems and then randomly redistribute them (making sure that the students don't get their own poems). Have students become "peer coaches" and write commentaries on the poems they receive. In their reviews they can describe the moods the poems create, the ways the words and phrases convey the moods and meanings, what the poems mean to them, strengths of the poems, suggestions for improvements, and the connections between the poems and biodiversity. Assess the reviews on the student's ability to interpret and analyze the poem, to synthesize their critical review and personal reactions, and to apply critical thinking skills.
2. Have each student write another poem using one of the following leads.

I'll always remember . . . (Describe an experience with nature.)

I don't understand why some people feel _____ around animals.

3. Have the students illustrate one of their poems or draw a picture about what it describes.



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Portfolio

The poems and critiques of the poems can be used as part of the student's portfolio.

Extensions

1. Collect the students' poems and publish them. Distribute copies of the poetry book to the student-authors, as well as to others in your school and community.
2. Have a "Biodiversity Poetry Jam." Students can invite other classes to listen as they read their biodiversity poems out loud. They can also recite the biodiversity poems they read at the beginning of this activity. You can provide refreshments to make the jam like a real coffeehouse event.
3. Have students record their poetry including natural sound effects and rhythms, available from nature stores or other sources.

Resources

Philosophical

- Berry, Wendell. 1968. *Openings*. Harcourt, Brace and World, New York. 67 pp.
- Merrill, Christopher. 1991. *The forgotten language: contemporary poets and nature*. Peregrine Smith Books, Salt Lake City, Utah. 77 pp.
- Pack, Robert and Jay Parini. 1993. *Poems for a small planet: contemporary nature poetry*. University Press of New England, Hanover, New Hampshire. 320 pp.
- Roberts, Elizabeth, Amidon, Elias and Wendell Berry, editors. 1991. *Earth prayers: from around the world, 365 prayers, poems and invocations for honoring the earth*. Harper, San Francisco. 480 pp.

Light Poetry Reading

- Armstrong, Patricia Kay. 1979. *Prairie poetry*. The Naperville Sun, Naperville, Illinois. 154 pp.
- Berry, Wendell. 1984. *The collected poems, 1957-1982*. North Point Press, Albany, California. 268 pp.
- Nash, Ogden. 1965. *The animal garden*. M. Evans and Company in association with Lippincott, Philadelphia. 48 pp.
- Parson-Nesbitt, Julie, Rodriguez, Luis. J. and Michael Warr, editors. 1999. *Power lines: a decade of poetry from Chicago's Guild Complex*. Tia Chucha Press, Chicago. 200 pp.
- Sandburg, Carl. 1963. *Honey and salt: a new volume of poems*. Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, New York. 111 pp.





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Poetry Collections for Children

- Adams, Adrienne, editor. 1972. *Poetry of earth*. Scribner, New York. 48 pp.
- Carpenter, Jill, editor. 1998. *Of frogs and toads*. Ione Press, Sawanee, Tennessee. 131 pp.
- Cowden, Frances B. and Eve B. Hatchett. 1994. *Of butterflies and unicorns and other wonders of the earth*. Grandmother Earth, Germantown, Tennessee. 63 pp.
- Daniel, Mark. 1986. *A child's treasury of poems*. Dial Books for Young Readers, New York. 160 pp.
- Fulcrum Resources Contest Winners, Third Annual. 2000. *From ants to zorapterans: pesky poems about bugs*. Fulcrum Resources, Golden, Colorado. 144 pp.

- Livingston, Myra, editor. 1992. *If you ever meet a whale*. Holiday House, New York. 32 pp.

Teaching Poetry

- Hopkins, Lee Bennett. 1987. *Pass the poetry, please*. Harper Collins Children's Books, New York. 262 pp.
- Larrick, Nancy. 1991. *Let's do a poem*. Delacorte, New York. 122 pp.
- Lies, Betty B. 1993. *The poet's pen: writing poetry with middle and high school students*. Libraries Unlimited, Englewood, Colorado. 201 pp.

“In the end, the poem is not a thing we see; it is, rather, a light by which we may see—and what we see is life.”

—Robert Penn Warren, writer



Student Page
The Nature of Poetry

TYPES OF POEMS



Haiku

A type of poetry from Japan with a very structured pattern.

Line 1— 5 syllables **Trees bend with strong wind**
Line 2— 7 syllables **gusts and torrents blow so hard**
Line 3— 5 syllables **yet ever rooted.**



Free verse

Any number of open lines with no set rhyme or pattern.

Sun sets gently through the horizon cushion to be absorbed beyond view.



Cinquain

Verses with the following pattern:

Line 1—one word title *Swallows*
Line 2—two words describing title *Sleek, deft*
Line 3—three words showing action *diving, soaring, flying*
Line 4—four words showing a feeling about the title *bringing joy to Earth*
Line 5—one word (simile or metaphor for the title) *dancers.*



Diamante

A poem written in the shape of a diamond, using a set order of grammatical words, like nouns, adjectives. Often the first half of the poem is the opposite of the second half.

noun
adjective adjective
participle participle participle
noun noun noun noun
participle participle participle
adjective adjective
noun

turtle
bulk cumbersome
crawling creeping dragging
shell legs paws fur
running racing leaping
quick slick
cheetah

