

Joyful Noises: Creating Poems for Voices and Ears

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In this article, Apol and Harris discuss their efforts to rekindle fifth-grade students' sense of poetic passion and pleasure.

Poet William Stafford was frequently asked when it was that he first realized he wanted to become a poet, and his response has become a touchstone in talking about children and poetry. Stafford answered:

I've thought about that, and sort of reversed it. My question is "when did other people give up the idea of being a poet?" You know, when we are kids we make up things, we write, and for me the puzzle is not that some people are still writing, the real question is why did the other people stop? (Stafford, 1978, p. 86)

Another contemporary poet, Donald Hall (1982), also traces the origins of poetic thought (what he terms the "sensual pleasures" of poetry) back to our earliest days—"both personally (back to the crib) and historically (back to the fire in front of the cave)" (p. 149). Hall termed the primitive elements that make up the sensual pleasures of poetry *Goatfoot*, *Milktongue*, and *Twinbird*. According to Hall, *Goatfoot* is the pleasurable thrill of rhythm and motion in poetry; *Milktongue* is oral pleasure in the texture of poetic language and in the shape and taste of poetry itself; and *Twinbird* is our pleasure with form, balance, and opposition in poetry. Like Stafford, Hall claims that all three elements—muscle pleasure, mouth pleasure, and the pleasure of match-unmatch—occur early and quite naturally in our lives.

If these poets are right and the language we enter at birth is filled with poetic possibilities, then it would seem natural for children (and adults) not simply to be comfortable, but to be passionately enthusiastic about poetry—after all, entering the world of poetry should represent a linguistic homecoming of sorts. Unfortunately, those who work with students and teachers know that poetic passion—or even comfort—is the exception rather than the rule. When the topic of poetry comes up in classrooms, both teachers' and students' facial expressions, body language, and journal responses rarely reflect joy or pleasure; often reactions range from mild discomfort to panic and outright aversion.

Many studies have explored various causes for dislike, disinterest, ignorance, neglect, or misuse of poetry in the classroom. Teachers, researchers, and poets claim that a negative reaction to (or lack of familiarity with) poetry occurs and is perpetuated across educational levels, from preschool

to graduate school, and that the best way to replace negativity and unease with passion and pleasure is to provide students of all ages with positive, meaningful, and engaging poetic encounters (Denman, 1988; Heard, 1993; Hopkins, 1987; Koch, 1970; Livingston, 1990; Nye, 1994).

In our respective roles as classroom teacher (Jodi) and poet (Laura), we have been challenged by this negativity, and in our own work have looked for ways to rekindle in students a sense of poetic passion and pleasure. This paper recounts our efforts on one such project that took place in Jodi's fifth-grade classroom in suburban Detroit, where Laura was invited in as a visiting poet.

POETRY AS DIALOGUE: SPOKEN AND HEARD

Because the pleasures of poetry come to us early on—long before we learn to write—it seems that an important link we have to Hall's (1982) *Goatfoot*, *Milktongue*, and *Twinbird* is that of the spoken (oral) and heard (aural) aspects of poetic language. Poetry begins with our voices—speaking the form, creating the rhythm, shaping and tasting the words. Yet, as we progress through school, our encounters with poems are more and more often through print—words on a page that we read or we write in silence.¹

If the root of poetry (historically and developmentally) is first and foremost oral and aural, then how do we and our students regain access to poetry that will please our ears, that will rise and fall with our voices, that will engage our muscles, our lips and our tongues?

One possibility is suggested by contemporary poet Paul Fleischman, who, in 1988, titled his Newbery award-winning collection of poems *Joyful Noise: Poems for Two Voices*—a title that highlights the aural and oral aspects of the pieces and implies that within this collection the poems are to be spoken aloud and are to be heard.

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Fleischman's dialogic form of poetry is more than simply an innovative device for arranging poems on the page. His poems for two voices are nearly impossible to read silently; the poems are planned for two voices (or two groups of voices), with a set of words written for one reader or group placed on the left side of the page, a set of words written for the other reader or group placed on the right. Lines are said in the order in which they are printed down the page, and lines that are to be said together are printed directly across from one another. Sometimes

both voices read the same words at the same time, sometimes they read the same words at different times, sometimes they read different words at the same time. That is the genius of Fleischman's construction: readers and listeners are required to pay careful attention to words and meanings, sound and sense, as voices weave in, out, and through.

While Fleischman's poems are created specifically to be read in dialogue, there are innumerable other poems that can be adapted for choral readings as well—poems that can be arranged and performed successfully by students of all ages. And the benefits of asking students to arrange and perform poetry in this manner are many. For example, in planning and executing choral readings, students explore multiple ways to function in community—from choosing an appropriate text to planning ways to arrange various words, lines, and stanzas, whether they are reading as a whole group in unison, using solo voices and small groups, or starting with a single voice and adding additional voices with each line. Working with text in this way—arranging a weaving of individual voices—emphasizes the poetic elements (balance, rhythm, taste and shape of words) as they are spoken and heard. At the same time, effective choral reading asks students to examine the poem's structure in order to match the performance to the content and form of the poem. In describing the merits of choral reading, Carol Fisher (1994) writes, "As the students practice reading the poem together and experiment with different ways to read it, they are exploring its meaning, the structure, and the way each of these aspects supports the other" (p. 63).

CHORAL READING: ONE CLASS'S INTRODUCTION

In order to explore what we believe are the significant benefits of using choral reading to expose students to the poetic possibilities of language, we—Jodi and Laura—together created a sequence of activities for fifth graders in Jodi's classroom that would identify those students' incoming understandings of poetry, introduce them (through reading and writing) to a wide range of poetic possibilities, and include time for reflection on their own and others' poetic processes. The sequence would culminate in a project in which they read and performed Fleischman's poems, then wrote and performed their own poems for two voices.

The project began with a poetry survey that Jodi gave to her students on the second day of school. In order to get a sense of their perceptions of poetry at the outset of the project, the survey asked students to finish open-ended statements like "Poetry is . . .," "When I think of Poetry, I think of . . .," and "I think poetry should be about . . ." In order to get a sense of their previous experiences with poetry, Jodi also asked students to complete the phrase "I have written poems about . . ." and to indicate whether or not they wrote poetry "on their own."

The survey responses indicated that most of the students had very basic (both limited and limiting) perceptions of poetry—a finding that surprised us, given that this was a school with a strong language arts program. At the start of our project, students' perceptions of poetry fell into a few main categories. Out of twenty-six responses, nearly half of the students mentioned form when they talked about poetry; most mentioned rhyme, claiming that poems are “words that rhyme put together” and “patterns and rhyming,” or that poems have “short paragraphs with many words rhymed.” Many of the responses mentioned a correspondence between poetry and feelings—“Poetry helps people express themselves and their personal feelings”—and many students saw the subjects of poems falling within a few general areas as well: the natural world, people and events, and funny stories (for example, “When I think of poetry I think of happy things and nature”; “Poetry should be written about an event in someone’s life”; and “Poetry is a funny work of art”). A few students refused to be pinned down about the nature or subject of poetry, responding broadly that “Poetry can be anything to anyone,” and “People are entitled to write about anything.”

When asked about previous experiences with poetry, six students responded that they had *never* written a poem; eight cited poetry experiences that stemmed from previous school classes, including “form” poems and poems for various “school” occasions (“I’ve only written a few [poems] in Ms. K’s class and I don’t remember what they were about”; “I wrote a haiku on Snow”; and “I have written poetry about Columbus on Columbus Day.”) Some students referred to various scenes from nature (the seasons, flowers, sunsets over water, and cold winter winds) as the subjects of their poems; others related that they wrote poetry in response to events in their lives (“I wrote a poem about my mom on her birthday but I can’t remember how it went” and “I have written poems about my hamster, who passed away”). One student said he’d written poems about his “thoughts of life and death,” and a few listed a range of topics so wide it could only be classified as “anything and everything.” One student summarized his previous experience writing poetry in this way: “I have wrote one [poem] but forget what it was about.”

In answer to the statement “I write poetry on my own. ___ yes ___ no,” fourteen students responded “no,” and twelve students responded “yes.” We suspect, however, that the question may not have made clear what was meant by “on my own,” since two of the students who checked “yes” had previously answered that they had never written a poem, and since many later admitted to Jodi that they’d answered “yes” because they thought it was “what [she/the teacher] wanted.” In addition, it is possible from the wording of the question that students may have understood “I write poetry on my own” to stand in contrast to poems authored by an entire class or a group within the context of a class. In further conversation, Jodi said that she believed that at the start

of the school year only two or three of her students actually did write poems outside of class.

Our early, informal findings confirmed for us Fisher’s (1994) claims that elementary students’ ideas about poetry are “very incomplete and rudimentary,” that the majority of students are “unsophisticated about poetry,” and that “their level of sophistication stems from their minimal exposure to poetry. Further, they have encountered poetry which is almost exclusively short, rhymed humorous verse” (Fisher, 1994, p. 55).

In order to scaffold an experience that would lead students beyond a superficial encounter to a deeper understanding and appreciation of poetry, Jodi spent the early weeks of the semester introducing her students to poems and poetry of various sorts before Laura joined the class. Jodi’s work with poetry was embedded within her curriculum; students read a variety of poems by a variety of authors, and they wrote poetry on a regular basis, creating group poems, class poems, poems using magnetic words, word wheels, and color poems.

In the week immediately preceding Laura’s visits, Jodi got her class acquainted with the idea of choral reading. She introduced the idea of a chorus of voices that make up a choral reading, and helped the class perform a poem she had previously arranged. After the class felt comfortable with the idea of choral reading, Jodi modeled on the overhead how she goes through the process of dividing up a poem and arranging it for performance. Then she put a poem she had selected as conducive to choral reading on the overhead, and together the class divided, arranged, and performed the poem.

Later in the week, Jodi handed out folders that contained a selection of poems, asking students to form small groups, select a poem from the packet or from one of the books in the classroom or the library, arrange the poem for a choral reading, practice, then perform the reading for the class. Although this exercise followed a month-long introduction to poetry in which Jodi stressed that poetry *doesn’t have to rhyme*, every poem selected by the groups was a rhymed humorous story-piece except the poem “October” by Robert Frost that one student brought from a collection he’d found at home. (Even this poem, of course, is rhymed, though much more subtly than the others, and its content is clearly meant for adults who would understand the brevity of life, the beguilement of a mild October morning, and the wish to “Slow slow! / For the grapes’ sake”).

After students had selected a poem, they negotiated within their groups the arrangement of the various lines and stanzas, they assigned “parts” to individual group members, they rehearsed their pieces, and they concluded by doing their choral reading for the rest of the class. When all the poems had been performed, Jodi went back to each of the seven groups and conducted a brief interview in which students explained how they made decisions about selecting the poem and arranging the performance.

In thinking about the benefits of using choral reading in the classroom, Fisher (1994) claims that “The real learning in choral reading comes from planning how to read the poem because it causes students to examine the poem’s structure so that they can enhance its effect” (p. 61–62). However, when the fifth graders in this study were asked at this point to explain why they had decided to perform the poems the way they did, their responses reveal that their examinations of the poems were limited to a superficial acknowledgment of the stanza structure, with almost no attention given to more substantive issues like content or structure on a deeper line or word level. Several groups gave responses like: “We saw there were four paragraphs and said, hey, there are four people. So we each took one.”

While the content of the poem did not seem to have a discernable effect on the way students divided or arranged their pieces, it *did* seem to lead to some interesting sound effects.

On the other hand, while the content or deep structure of the poem did not seem to have a discernible effect on the way students divided or arranged their pieces, the content *did* seem to lead to the inclusion of some interesting sound effects. For example, one group stated that “When we were working on our poem, Randi said ‘and then the snake ran away’ and we thought we could all go ‘sssssss’ because that’s what a snake does.”

Sometimes sound effects were common. Several groups mentioned the oral and a poetry performance, saying they “just use their performance. One group described effect in this way: “We kept playing around each paragraph until everybody sounded tended we were talking about a real me and that we would be scared.” One group background “Oldies” music, so they “singing in the Oldies way.” Within this group opted to sing backup to the rest of the thought it would be neat to have the same time that [other members of the group] were singing. When Jodi asked this group whether they had noticed what the audience was doing while they were performing, they responded, “Yes, they were clapping, clicking, tapping their feet, and moving their heads. They were into it”—signifying an awareness of the level of involvement audience members experienced as a result of listening to the oral performance of the poem. *Goatfoot*, *Milktongue*, and *Twinbird* were beginning to find a place in class.

When Jodi asked one group why they had decided to memorize their poem, a student answered that they knew they didn’t *have* to memorize it. “We just had fun with the words and were saying them over and over again, so it just happened,” the student explained.

And what’s good about choral reading? “You get to express the poem your way.” And “You don’t have to memorize or act it out with your body, you just use your voice in different ways. This is really cool!”

POEMS FOR TWO VOICES: OUR VERY OWN JOYFUL NOISE

By the time Laura arrived in the classroom, many of Jodi’s students were feeling fairly confident about their ability to read and write poems. After some lengthy conversations about poetry in which students posed questions to Laura, and she in turn posed questions to them, and after some brief sessions writing and reading together, we were ready to move on to creating our own choral poetry—poems written expressly to be performed by multiple voices. As educators, we were convinced that students needed to be exposed to many examples of dialogic poetry before being asked to write it, since experimentation with writing makes students more appreciative of the crafting involved in the poetry they read (McClure, Harrison, & Reed, 1990). Jodi had already done a lot to prepare her students to write their own choral poetry; as a last step before writing, Laura brought multiple copies of Fleischman’s *Joyful Noise* for the class to experience together.

Laura explained that this was a collection of poetry about insects that was told in those insects’ own voices; then Jodi and Laura performed one of the poems. By the time the performance finished, students were eager to try reading these poems themselves. First Laura handed out copies, divided class in half, and students together read “Water Boatmen” (one of Fleischman’s simpler arrangements). After they had a hang of it (and it didn’t take them long), students paired and spread out around the room to practice. When they’d read through the poem a couple of times, we gathered again. I tried another poem, “Water Striders,” as a class. After some time practicing this poem in pairs, we regrouped once more to read “Fireflies,” practiced in pairs, then concluded reading “Honeybees” as a class and in pairs.

As a final exercise, each pair of students chose one of the four poems they’d practiced and polished it for a videotaped class performance. At this point, many students chose to embellish their readings of the poems by adding body motions, changes in volume and pitch, and so on. At one point a minor squabble erupted between two groups who had selected the poem “Water Striders.” Each group had chosen to perform the end of the poem the same way, and there was some heated debate about where the idea had originated and who had copied whom. Though the dispute was quickly resolved, it

was clear to us that students had a stake in creating interesting and imaginative renderings of the poems.

During the various stages of the activity, Laura asked the class about the characteristics of each of the selections. Students noted that the selected poems became increasingly complex, moving from "Water Boatmen" in which the two voices speak either individually or in unison, to "Fireflies," where the voices dart in and out, crisscrossing and echoing, to "Honeybees" where the very different perspectives of worker and queen bee are juxtaposed and woven through one another without any breaks. Laura asked the students to try to imagine why Fleischman would have chosen to portray these various insects in these different ways. Students were quick to notice how poetic form and content fit together—boatmen who need to row together would unite their voices for a solid "Stroke" at regular intervals throughout the poem; fireflies would flicker on-off, dart in-out, each with an individual brightness and pace; honeybees would have very different experiences and tell very different stories, depending on their roles and responsibilities in the hive.

At the end of our time together, Laura told students that they would be writing their own "poems for two voices" the next time we were together, and that in the meantime they should be "thinking like writers"—gathering ideas from their lives and their neighborhoods (Nye, 1997) that would work well in these kinds of poems. Throughout the following week, students spent time in and out of class brainstorming ideas, developing drafts, and arranging and rearranging lines (often consulting other writers for new ideas and revisions). When they'd finished their pieces, Jodi collected their poems into a book they titled, *Our Very Own Joyful Noise*, and students selected partners and practiced their readings.

On Friday, we held our Joyful Noise Poetry performance, and once again we audio- and videotaped the session. One by one the writers introduced their poems and their partners. Their pride in their finished projects was unmistakable, and each poem was followed by sounds of appreciation from around the room and by rounds of spontaneous applause. The pieces themselves were, without exception, excellent examples of choral poetry—creative, deliberate, frequently clever, and often thought provoking. Students had, indeed, devoted out-of-class time to gathering ideas, and they were deliberate about choosing topics and arranging lines so that content and form complemented and enhanced one another.

After the choral readings, we reflected on the experience of writing and performing the poems. Laura opened the conversation by asking students where they had found their ideas. Dan, author of the poem "Kitty Cat," answered the question of where he got his ideas by saying, "I thought of how my cat felt when we got a new kitten that is seven years younger, and that she probably was mad and jealous, so I wrote about that and how they were the same and different."

Kitty Cat

by Dan

I'm a kitten	I'm a cat
I'm soft	I'm soft
I play	I rest
people pet me	that was before that brat showed up
I look out the window for birds	been there done that my eyes are green
my eyes are green mine glow	me too

Dan structured his poem so that the traits shared by the cats are spoken together, while the individual characteristics are spoken back and forth by the two voices. The final line surprises the reader by having the cat echo the kitten—perhaps reflecting the adult cat as the grown up version of the kitten, with a kitten voice still lingering somewhere inside—while the title, "Kitty Cat," can be read as a single label or as the two voices already in tension, both kitty and cat in one poem.

Another student, Lisa, wrote the following poem about downtown Detroit, capturing the ambiguity and irony of simultaneous urban development and decay.

Detroit

by Lisa

The city of Detroit	The city of Detroit is very new
No it's old	It's both
In a way On my side of the Street, many buildings Stand no more	There are too many Buildings to count, Buildings galore
Some need more paint	Many are so Beautiful they Could make you Faint
Yes many buildings are gone, All my friends	I'm happy
I'm angry They're destroying Many buildings Exactly like me.	They're building Many buildings Exactly like me.

Lisa explained the origins of her subject in the following way:

I was going to dinner in Detroit with my family over the weekend, and I was looking around at the buildings. My dad said how they are building down here again and how he is glad for Detroit, and then I looked around and saw so many run-down buildings, too. So they could be having a conversation because there were different things going on.

Several students told how their passion for hockey and for the local hockey team, the Detroit Redwings, showed up in their poems. As one student remarked, "I love hockey. So I wrote about hockey because it is life to me." In one of the many hockey poems, Joe contrasts the rapidly changing viewpoints of an offensive and a defensive player.

Goal or Save
by Joe

Blading down the ice going for my first goal	Staying in the net
I gotta get the goal snap	making my millionth save I gotta make the save
goal	miss
boo yeah	whiff
try to make the save	bummer
breakaway snap	oh I will
rebound	save
goal	whiff
game over yes	game over bummer

Shawn, author of "Greedy Selfish Brat," found his topic in his experience of family life. He said, "I thought of my brother and how sometimes he picks on me and so I thought I would write about a brother that is a brat."

Greedy Selfish Brat
by Shawn

Brat	Brat
Greedy	
Brat	Selfish
He cries and he cries 'til he gets what he wishes	Brat
	He even has his mom do the dishes
Brat	Brat

Greedy
Selfish
Brat
When he is at school
he sure loves cheatin'

Brat
Greedy
Selfish
Brat
If the school found
out he'd sure be in trouble

Brat
He's such a
Greedy
Selfish
Brat

Selfish
Greedy
Brat

He's so lazy I'd give
him a beatin'

Brat
Greedy
Selfish
Brat

I'd love to be the one
to burst his bubble
He's such a
Greedy
Selfish
Brat
Brat

Shawn's piece is unusual in that his use of two "voices" is more evident in the performance than in the topic of the poem—that is, Shawn's is an example of a dialogic poem that doesn't convey two viewpoints, but rather that has a single viewpoint expressed by two voices that weave through one another in a complex, though unified, theme.

When Laura asked students how they knew how to arrange the poems on the page—where to give each of the voices a chance to speak alone and together—they were articulate about the relationship between content and form. "In my poem about aliens," one student reported, "I wanted each of us to speak in a robot voice but to say 'o-oo-ooo-o-oo' together." Marcus, author of the poem "Slithering Snakes," was particularly clear about the relationship between what he wanted to say and how it should be said. He said, "I had my snakes do the 'ssss' together because that's what snakes do and I thought it sounded cool. Then I looked for other 's' words to use for each of my snakes to say, like 'slithering' and 'sidewinding.'"

Slithering Snakes
by Marcus

S-S-S-S	S-S-S-S
We're snakes slithering through the cold water	
S-S-S-S	S-S-S-S
	we're snakes sidewinding in the hot desert
S-S-S-S	S-S-S-S

we're snakes
 slurping
 our forked tongues
 S-S-S-S

S-S-S-S

S-S-S-S

S-S-S-S
 we're snakes
 shedding
 our scaly skin
 S-S-S-S

Students went on to explain several other (sometimes contradictory) reasons for deciding why voices spoke lines in unison. One student said, "In my poem 'Kitty Love,' whenever they said things that were opposite, I wanted to have them say it at the same time." Another student countered by explaining the arrangement of his poem entitled "Clouds":

I had the clouds both say "clouds" and "beauty of the sky" because even though there are different kinds of clouds, they are all beautiful to me. So, this is to show that they are the same even though they are a little bit different if I have them say it at the same time.

Although Kayla offered little explanation about the process of writing her poem "Two Lane Highway," saying only that she'd thought of it while riding in the car, we found its dialogue comparing the number of cars traveling in each direction (in and out of the city) at various times of the day—which are always spoken in unison—to be an especially creative example of the effective wedding of content and form:

Two Lane Highway
 by Kayla

Left Lane
 Morning rush hour.
 I'm jammed with cars.

Mid-morning.
 A car every once in a
 while.

Midday.

Some driving to the
 city for a half day's
 work.

Mid-afternoon.
 Nobody.

Afternoon rush hour.

Only a few cars, maybe
 for a city dinner.

Right Lane
 Morning rush hour.

I can't see cars for miles.
 Mid-morning.

Same here.
 Midday.
 Some cars for a
 quick lunch.

Mid-afternoon.

Some cars
 getting off work early.
 Afternoon rush hour.
 I'm jammed
 with cars, horns
 always honking.

Nighttime.

Not many here, either.
 Surely, the left lane is
 best!

Nighttime.

Only a small amount
 of cars, coming
 back from their city
 dinner.

Surely, the right lane is
 best!

POEMS FOR TWO VOICES AS A STEP TOWARD RECOGNIZING POETIC POSSIBILITIES

The observations made by the students in Jodi's class about their own choral poems are significantly different from these students' early understandings of poetry and their first experiences arranging choral readings from the poetry of others. While, initially, many of these students had limited the possible subjects of poems to nature, funny stories, thoughts and feelings, and a glib "anything and everything," at the end of their activities involving dialogic poems they demonstrated a much deeper understanding of the possibilities of poetry. These students had taken to heart the idea that poems often spring from real life, for their poems were populated with the characters, events, and observations of daily living. Through their poems, they heard and spoke in the voices of buildings they passed, roads they drove on, pets they lived with, passions they held.

Likewise, through creating and performing their own poems for two voices, students understood, on a much more meaningful level, the relationship between content and form in poetry. They played with the sounds of words and lines, shaped the slippery "s" sounds of snakes, adjusted volume and pitch to match subject and mood. They heard and created voices that could intersect, disagree, collide, unite. They knew when and why they wanted words to be positioned together, words to be spoken alone, words to be set in opposition or agreement, and their reasons were no longer limited to easy division and fairness in turn-taking. They had seen how the rhythm and music of poems could move the feet, hands, heads, and bodies of members of their audience, and they had begun to understand how to pattern and position words to achieve various effects.

The activity of writing these poems was not intended to teach about alliteration, though in the end it did. It wasn't intended to teach onomatopoeia or assonance, though it did that, too. It didn't mean to address vocabulary or spelling, but it even did that. Instead, as Fisher (1994) explains,

These explorations . . . help students learn about poetry in meaningful ways. [Students] begin to see why line breaks come as they do, which things are repeated, how poems have rhythm or beat to their pattern. They note rhymes, repeated sounds or letters, and the comparisons that are made. They begin to know intuitively the facts that make a

poem a poem just as they figured out what made a story a story some years before. (p. 56)

If the language and forms of poems are birthed in our early encounters with *Goatfoot*, *Milktongue*, and *Twinbird*, then these fifth-grade students had been re-introduced to those elements—the pleasures of balance and form, or rhythm and motion, of taste and shape—through the oral and aural experience of poetry designed to be spoken and heard. The real purpose behind the progression of these activities was to bring poetry back to the voices and ears of these students, and to explore the poetic possibilities of language, where rhythm, sound and form both create and reflect meaning, and where the play of words crosses from sound to image, image to sound.

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in the world around them.**

These students recognized that poetry could be found everywhere in the world around them, and that the poet's job is to watch, to listen, to notice and record moments when poems occur. In a poem called "Valentine for Ernest Mann" (when spoken aloud, the name comes out "earnest man"), poet Naomi Shihab Nye explains this everyday-ness of poetry. She writes:

I'll tell a secret . . .
poems hide. In the bottoms of our shoes,
they are sleeping. They are the shadows
drifting across our ceilings the moment
before we wake up. What we have to do
is live in a way that lets us find them. (Nye, 1994, p. 70)

The students in Jodi's class were learning to find poems. During Laura's final visit, a half-dozen students came up to share poetry journals they'd begun in which they were now recording observations, images, feelings, and phrases that could be turned into poems; even more students came forward to read or to offer copies of poems they'd written, unassigned, outside class. And Jodi reported that at the recent school book fair, all the copies of Fleischman's *Joyful Noise* were sold out—and she was pretty certain she knew where those copies had gone!

In a second survey taken a few weeks after their choral poetry experience, these students articulated once again what they thought of poetry, poets, and poems. This time, no one imagined that a poem had to rhyme; funny stories were mentioned as a possibility rather than a definition of poetry; and every student in the class had a considerable list of poetry credits to his or her name. Many students now felt comfortable with the process of discovering the subjects of their

poems. As one student put it, "When I think of poetry, I think of all the things around me and I write about [them]." "Poetry should be written about real things that happen in life," observed another writer. And one student claimed that his thinking about poetry had changed because he had "learned . . . how to find poems."

"Poetry is like music," one student concluded. "It is meant to make you laugh, cry, and smile. It's like having a river of words run through your head." ●

Notes

1. The possible exception is the type of poetry that depends on a chanting, sing-song rhythm, and rhyme, which is easy to read aloud and enjoy, but which often leads students and teachers to conclude that poetry consists solely of this sort of verse and is defined primarily by its adherence to strict rhythm and rhyme. For the sake of clarity, in the remainder of this article, references to "poetry" will be to poetry that does *not* exhibit these overpowering characteristics.

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