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Indulging in Poetry No 1: Setting the scene



Lesson Sequence Overview

Poetry draws on the heart and imagination and fortunately we have an abundance of poems to introduce to students. This can be for the sheer joy of sharing, to focus on teaching appreciation of meaning and language through reading, or to express feelings and identity through writing or performing orally.

Students come to classrooms with varying experiences of poetry. It is important to find out what they know and more so, how they feel about poetry. The teaching sequence below has been designed for this purpose and as an introduction to an indulgence in poetry. It is intended to be the prelude to a deeper focus on a range of carefully chosen poems based on both teacher and student experiences, attitudes and desires in regard to poetry.

As a teacher it is worth thinking about how you want the teaching of poetry to look, sound and feel in your classroom. This will involve considering your own experiences and feelings towards poetry and drawing upon this with your students as you guide them into an appreciation of poetry throughout their lives. Robyn Ewing suggests:

The teaching of poetry should begin with sharing a wide range of poems aloud and lots of talk connecting our own experiences and emotions to those of the poet's. The emphasis should be on enjoyment. And, when it comes to writing poetry, once again playing with rich word pictures to convey meaning and exploring language should be fun – not threatening. ([Ewing, 2021](#))

Overview of teaching strategies

- Finding out what students know and believe
- What is poetry? Investigation and joint construction
- Introducing anthologies
- Setting up a poetry pack
- Engaging with poetry
- Where to next?

Finding out what students know and believe

As already mentioned, students will come to the classroom with a range of experiences and feelings about poetry. Before diving into engaging with poems, it is worth finding out their reactions to poetry. Provide the statements below for student response. This can be done in a variety of ways and can also be used as pre-assessment and later as post assessment tasks or just to begin and sum up the learning and conversation about poetry. This conversation can then be revisited throughout and at the end of a longer teaching and learning sequence.

Ways to begin the conversation

- Individuals complete a survey and then share responses in small groups.
- Present the statements in an online survey e.g. using Google forms or a Zoom poll and then present whole class results for discussion.
- In small groups, students sort the statements into a table under the headings – always, sometimes, never.
- Sort the statements into 'agree' or 'disagree' by crossing the floor to respond to each. Those who agree with statements stand on one side of the room to those who disagree.
- Discuss as a whole class or in small groups by encouraging justification and sharing of experiences.

Statements

Poetry is about feelings.
Poetry is about using the imagination.
Poetry is descriptive.
Poetry tells stories.
Poetry is serious.
Poetry is enjoyable.
Poetry is boring.
Poetry is magical.
Poetry has to rhyme.
Poetry uses figurative language.
Poetry has patterns.
Poetry is written language.
Poetry should be read aloud.

What is poetry?

Display the sentence beginning, 'Poetry is ...' and ask students to use no more than five words to make one phrase or clause to describe what poetry is to them. Examples could range from 'Poetry is lots of words' to 'Poetry is a delicious memory.' This can be done individually or in pairs using English or other languages. Students can record on a large strip of paper which can then be added to a class chart for later use.



Read a selection of poems that describe the meaning of poetry. Some examples include:

[What's A Poem](#) by Charles Ghigna

[A Poem Is A Spider Web](#) by Charles Ghigna

[What is a poem?](#)

A Poem by Sally Murphy (Murphy, p3, [PETAA](#), 2021)

Compare the ideas, thoughts and feelings to those listed by the students. As a whole group, select a few examples from the list developed by the students about what poetry is and jointly construct into a class poem by arranging, combining and editing their ideas. Display a large copy of the poem on a wall in the classroom.



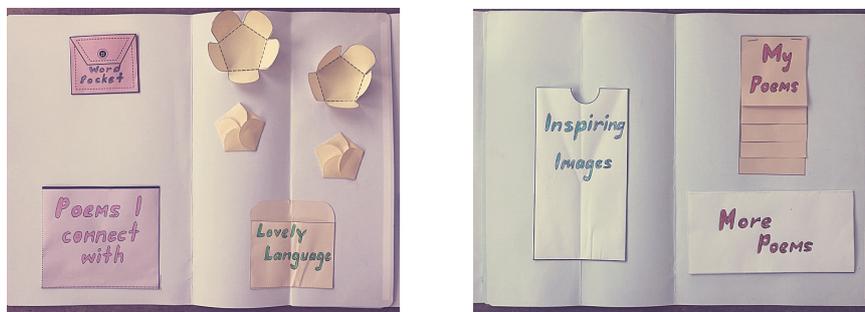
Introducing anthologies

As teachers, when we search for poems, we often choose a poetry anthology as a starting point for collecting examples of poems and ideas for designing teaching and learning. Students can be shown a selection of poetry anthologies (see list below). These should always be available in the classroom. When reading and writing poetry with students, we can set up our own classroom poetry anthologies which can contain collections of poems read and selected or curated by students themselves or an anthology of student's own poetry writing. These anthologies may be digital collections or class books produced by the students. These are great resources to keep on the classroom bookshelf, place on the school office coffee table or donate to the school library. Alternatively, students can create their own personal anthology. If an anthology is the aim of the teaching and learning, students should be made aware of this, its purpose and the potential audience from the outset.

Designing a poetry pack

To support and engage students in appreciating, responding to and creating their own poetry, a resource or Poetry Pack can also be established at the beginning of the learning sequence. This may take many forms, but one possibility is for students to design what is often known as a 'lap book' which contains various sections for collecting and storing ideas, inspirations and their own poetry which can then influence contributions to an anthology. The teacher should have their own Poetry Pack to model how to use it during encounters with poetry and specific language.

Manila Folders can be used to [make a lapbook](#) or in this case a 'Poetry Pack'. Many online sites show how to make lapbooks with [free downloadable templates](#) available to add to the manila folder. The example below has been made particularly for engaging with poetry and can be developed as a learning sequence evolves.



Engaging with poetry

Having discussed their own experiences and feelings about poetry, students should be given the opportunity to engage with a range of poetry for the purpose of enjoyment. Based on the lists below, certain poems and sites can be selected for setting up poetry stations where groups rotate through and engage with a range of poems. Students will need sufficient time at each station and this could take place over a series of lessons. Whilst moving through the stations students can choose to add to their Poetry Packs. Ensure paper, strips of card and post it notes are available. They may choose a particular poem, link, image, phrase or word. The teacher should join groups and model how to add to the Poetry Pack. Poetry stations may be organised as below with as many or few resources as appropriate.

1. Anthologies
2. Poetry websites
3. Blogs
4. Podcasts
5. Picture books
6. Verse novels
7. Performance poetry

On completion the class can share their feelings and experiences about engaging with a range of poetry and whether they chose to add to their Poetry Pack.

*When selecting poetry to use with students read several times to ensure it is appropriate for the particular students and context.

Anthologies –
collections of
poems

[Our Home is Dirt by Sea: Australian poems for Australian Kids](#) selected by Dianne Bates (2016, Walker Books)

[This is Home: Essential Australian Poems for Children](#) selected by Jackie French (2019, National Library of Australia)

[The ABC Book of Australian Poetry: A treasury of poems for young people](#) compiled by Libby Hathorn (2010, Harper Collins)

[The Jackie Morris Book of Classic Nursery Rhymes](#) by Jackie Morris (2020, Walker Books)

[Poems to Save the World With](#) chosen by Chris Riddell (2020, Pan Macmillan)

[Guwayu, for all times: A Collection of First Nations Poems](#) commissioned by Red Room Poetry and edited by Jeanine Leane (2020, Magabala)

Poetry websites
– extensive
poetry
collections

[Red Room Poetry](#)

[Poetry Foundation](#)

[Poetry4kids.com](#)

[The Children's Poetry Archive](#)

[Australian Literature: Poetry](#)

[Australian Poetry Library](#)

[Australian Children's Poetry](#)

Blogs – ideas
and poems
shared by
individual poets

[Kathryn Apel](#)

[Amy Ludwig vanDerwater](#)

[Celia Berrell](#)

[Australian Children's Poetry](#)

[Aussie Kid Lit Poets](#)

Podcasts – a
range of poems
read aloud

[A Pod of Poets](#), ABC radio National

[Poetry for Kids](#), Kenn Nesbit

[Squishy and Delishy](#)

[Audio Poem of the Day](#), Poetry Foundation

Picture books –
books with poetic
features

Each Peach Pear Plum by Janet and Allan Ahlberg (1989, Penguin)
Why I Love Australia by Bronwyn Bancroft (2016, Hardie Grant)
Piranhas don't Eat Bananas by Aaron Blabey (2019, Scholastic)
Flood by Jackie French and Bruce Whatley (2012, Scholastic)
Sing Me the Summer by Jane Godwin and Alison Lester (2020, Affirm Press)
Isabella's Garden by Glenda Millard and Rebecca Cool (2021, Walker Books)
Waltzing Matilda by AB Paterson and Freya Blackwood (2019, Scholastic)
The World that we Want by Kim Micelle Toft (2005, University of Queensland Press)

Verse Novels –
narratives told
through poetry

Bully on the Bus by Kathryn Apel (2014, University of Queensland Press)
Footprints on the Moon by Lorraine Marwood (2021, University of Queensland Press)
Zoe, Max and the Bicycle Bus by Steven Herrick (2020, University of Queensland Press)
Sister Heart by Sally Morgan (2015, Fremantle Press)
Roses are Blue by Sally Murphy (2014, Walker Books)
Bindi by Kirli Saunders (2020, Magabala Books)

Performance
Poetry – poetry
performed before
an audience

Australian Poetry Slam
Perform a Poem
Solli Raphael
Probably Tom Foolery (Tomos Roberts)

Where to next?

After having discovered student experiences and feelings about poetry and given them time to engage for enjoyment, a deeper focus on poems can be developed through a learning sequence based on poetry relevant to the group of students and broader teaching context.

Selection of poems may be guided and organised by:

- Student interest
- Poet study e.g. Shel Silverstein, Sally Murphy, Jackie Hosking, CJ Dennis, Lorraine Marwood, Sharon Creech, Banjo Patterson, Michael Rosen, Steven Herrick
- Poetic forms e.g. free verse, haiku, shape poems, ballads
- Themes e.g. family, feelings, hope, community
- Links to subject areas e.g. historical ballads in History, landscapes in Geography
- Issues e.g. Covid, climate change, refugees.

A [Poetry List](#) organised by age, category and genre can be found on the [Foundation for Learning and Literacy](#) site.



References

- Ewing, R (2021) [Getting started teaching poetry in primary classrooms](#). Foundation for Learning and Literacy.
- Murphy, S (2021) [Teaching poetry for pleasure and purpose](#). PETAA, Sydney.