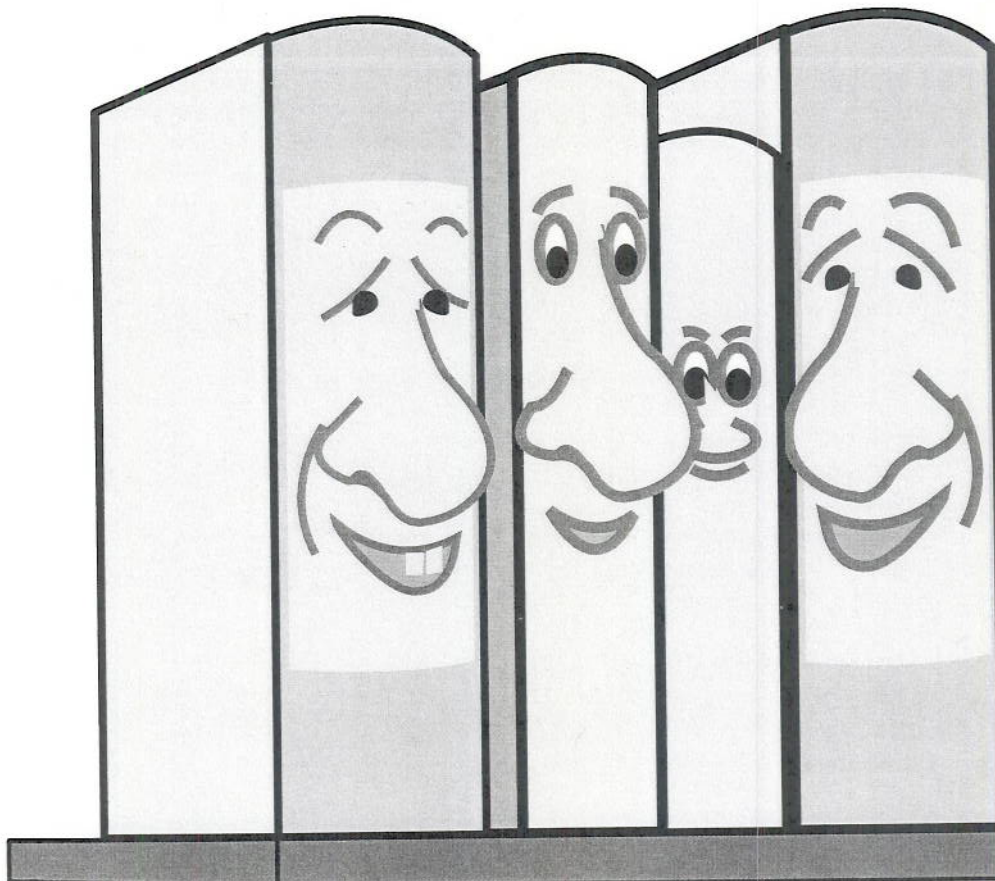


Table of Contents

Introduction

Chapter One: Thinking about Poetry	1
The Poetry Illiterate	
What makes a Poem a Poem?	4
We Need Our Bad Poems	5
Chapter Two: Marinating Children in Poetry	9
Teacher as Guide . . . Share Your Love of Poetry	
Sharing Meetings . . . Setting Up Daily Writing Routines	10
Feel Trips . . . Treasure Walks	12
Poet's Window . . . Poetry Journals	13
Music . . . Performance Poetry . . . Mirrors	14
Poetry Share Alouds	16
Word Lists	17
First Words . . . Last Words	18
Reading Backwards . . . Favorite Images	
Paint Your Experience . . . Breathing the Author's Air	19
Poetry Calendars . . . Poetry Quilts	
Poetry Gifts . . . Poetry Party Favors	20
Chapter Three: Collaborative Poems	21
Pocket Charts and Sentence Strips	22
The Question or "I Wonder" Poem	23
The List Poem	24
Chapter Four: Other Poem Formats	28
Simile and Metaphor Poems	
Poems for Two Voices	30
Sketch Poems	31
Improvisations or Stream of Consciousness Poems	32
Place Poems	33
Opening Line Poems	34
Sound and Noisy Poems . . . Persona Poems	35
Character Poems	36
Newspaper Poems . . . Birthday Poems	37
Significant Number Poems . . . Earliest Memory Poems	38
Favorite Word Poems	39
Pantoums	40
Talk to an Object Poems . . . Imaginary Poems	41
Acrostics	42
Diamante	43
Cinquain	44

Chapter Five: Putting It All Together	45
Chapter Six: A Vignette	51
Building Word Power . . . The First Words Are Anyone's Words	
A Vignette	52
Character and Setting	53
Chapter Seven: Final Thought	55
What About The Title? . . . What About Word Choice?	
What About Spelling and Punctuation?	
The Perfect Poem . . . Reading Aloud	56
Why Would Anyone Want To Read This?	
Erasures . . . Put It Away	57
References	58



INTRODUCTION

I often answer questions at the end of my young author workshops and sooner or later children will ask two questions:

The first is, "Why would anyone want to be a poet?" My answer is to ask students to look around them. The walls of the world are filled with poetry. When was the last time you received a gift that was not accompanied by a card with a poem within? Poets have tremendous influence.

Second, children usually ask, "Are you rich?" This question was best answered by a really sensitive middle school boy who popped up when the question came up at his school. His answer, "Of course he's rich! He gets paid to do what he loves."

If the content of this book wanders into what some might consider academics, it will have done so by accident. I am not an academic poet. I wrote my first poem -- at least the first one which mattered to me -- when I was in my early thirties. While I have read several books about teaching poetry, formal training in poetry has escaped me or perhaps I have escaped it.

This book is written for classroom teachers by a person who loves to explore language. This is a book about techniques which have worked for me in classroom situations. For me, poetry celebrates the uncommon beauty in common things. I delight in language play.

Within this book, I hope to accomplish six goals:

1. examine the role of poetry within the classroom,
2. provide a variety of activities for developing poems,
3. offer ideas to extend poetry within the classroom,
4. demonstrate collaborative poetry,
5. offer intervention strategies — when your students are stuck — which you can try with children.

Poetry is a process rather than a series of products. The product is only more important than the process when the product is truly a result of the process. To teach poetry, teachers need to marinate students in poetry and not simply delegate assignments. Marinating begins by providing adequate time to explore and write poetry. Adequate time for me, is virtually every day.

Sensible expectations and respect for the process must be considered in providing adequate time for writing poetry. Yes, I am capable of completing a poem in one setting, but, writers know that the first words we write could be anyone's words and that we must continue to work pieces until we ultimately abandon them. This process can take weeks or months. In fact, I had a poem published in a magazine that took me one and one-half years to complete — even though I had abandoned it, I am still not satisfied. Why then do we expect novice writers to complete a picture-perfect poem in one or two 30-minute periods -- or even as an overnight assignment? Remember, writers do not finish their work, they abandon it!

Marinating continues, by building word power, by building poetry power and by working toward desired goals. Students build word power through extensive sharing of language -- including vocabulary -- with caring others. Here children and teachers construct word lists and mind maps. They also play with words and search for wonderful words that tickle their ears.

Students build poetry power in listening to poetry being read, by reciting poetry aloud in Writers' Coffeehouses and in Reader's Theater groups, through language play with jump rope rhymes, hand jives, and rewrites of nursery rhymes. They collect favorite poems and search for poems in greeting cards, on calendar walls and throughout their environments.

It is also important that the teacher understand the difference between assigning and teaching poetry. Assigning poetry, as I use the term here, indicates a lack of instructional purpose. The students will spend time with the topic but the outcome is not new learning.

On the other hand, teaching implies purpose and change; the teacher has an aim for the lesson and hopes that as a result, each child will improve her abilities in some way. Perhaps, the lesson will expand the child's mind, or her awareness of some aspect of poetry, add dimension to the child's writing or encourage the student to approach the project in a novel way.

Perhaps, what also makes this book unique, is the premise that poems have characters and settings. One reason students have difficulty with writing poetry is that they are unable to see those characters and settings. Ideas will be offered to help you work through this concept.

Don't forget to do activities and lessons along with your students. You will see how challenging the process really can be and you will be in a position to better empathize with your students' questions. When you start writing, and struggle with writing yourself, you will begin noticing strategies you can share with your students. You will be able to say, "Oh yeah, I've had that problem, too. Let me tell you what I did to address it."

Lastly, I often tell people that I know very little about cars. I know how to check the gas, oil, air, windshield wipers or a new light. Beyond that, I am lost. Many teachers feel that same way about writing. They know about the obvious: titles and sequence -- beginning, middle and end. Beyond that, they are lost.

I have come to understand that I'll never learn to fix a car from only reading a book. I have to open the hood, and get my hands dirty. I have also learned that while poetry is messy work, it's a lot cleaner than oil and grease. Marinate yourself in it.

Best wishes,

Sigmund A. Boloz
Flagstaff, Arizona
November, 1999