

# Wonder Year Lesson Plan - Poetry



## OVERVIEW

Kids and poetry are natural friends, but somehow many find poetry inaccessible and dry. Poetry speaks to our heart rather than our mind; it speaks to our subconscious experience rather than logic. Poetry encourages the dreamlike state and kids easily relate to its wackiness and illogic. Poetry is a tool to process the world from our heart.

Worldschooling is a perfect time to play with poetry because it's a way to digest our experiences. Floating between cultures, having time to think, and having our minds expanded is poetry in motion.

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## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- 1) Play with words.
- 2) Deeply observe surroundings and feelings.
- 3) Write some original poems.

**GRADE LEVELS:** Kids and Kids-at-Heart Ages 10-100

## ACTIVITIES

### Step 1: Warm-up

- Read poems everyday, from Shel Silverstein to ee cummings, from Langston Hughes to Ogden Nash. Listen to poems read by the authors for car rides. There are plenty of collections on iTunes. Robert Frost reading *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* or Nikki Giovanni reading *The Reason I Like Chocolate* will make a poetry lover out of anyone.
- Start with poem structures, like acrostics, haikus, limericks and sestinas. (Google these if you're unfamiliar. They're actually quite inviting.) Write collaboratively until they're comfortable and soon they'll be asking to write their own.
- As an evening read aloud, consider Sharon Creech's *Love That Dog*--the classic intersection of kids, pets, poetry and love. Or try a novel in verse.
- Teach a few poetic devices like repetition, alliteration, assonance, onomatopoeia, simile and metaphor, listed here in order of difficulty. You can ask them to write it in their notebooks or not, write a definition, or not. Then look for the devices in the poems they read. Challenge them to ten spelling words based on poetry and if everyone gets them correct (including onomatopoeia) treat them to ice cream for lunch.

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## Step 2: Now that you're warmed up...

- Create a group poem. Collaborative writing takes the spotlight off of budding poets. Pass out one index card to each family member, parents included. Brainstorm as a group words that come to mind when you think of a place. For example in Wellington, New Zealand, you might write 'windy', 'ocean', 'chocolate fish', 'kiwis', etc. Write one of these words on each card and circle it. Pass your card one to the left. For thirty seconds, write as many rhyming words to your main word around the periphery of your circled word. Don't overthink it. As the famous poet Chogyam Trungpa said, "First thought = best thought." Pass the card again and keep adding new words for thirty seconds. Go around the circle until everyone has their turn. Now turn the card over. List as many synonyms or related words to your circled word as you can, like for kiwis, you might write: fruit, fuzzy, kind, Maori, etc. And follow the same steps around the circle for rhyming. Now you have a word bank. As a family, reassemble the word bank to form a poem. Have fun; be silly; no need to make sense.
- Memorize a poem. Kids choose a poem they like from an anthology. Copy it down, practice it and when they're ready, read it from memory. Memorization exercises a muscle and it's good medicine to have a poem you love in your back pocket.
- Another group poem idea, sometimes called splendid corpse (no need to tell young kids that name). Everyone has a sheet of binder paper. Write one nonsense line of poetry. (This is usually easier for kids than adults.) Pass it to your right. Now write one more nonsense line that has an end rhyme to the last word above it. Fold your paper over so that it hides the first line. Now pass it to your right again. Repeat the process so that you're only writing and rhyming with the line immediately above you. When you're ready, read them out to the whole group and laugh at all the silliness. Using a time limit helps kids not to overthink it and be more fully in the stream of consciousness. For older kids, you could ask them to use one poetic device as well as end rhyme.

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## Step 2: Now that you're warmed up...(continued)

- Found poems. Take any piece of writing you see: a brochure from a tourist attraction, the empty mac and cheese box, a recipe from a newspaper, a boarding pass... anything. Cut around the words or phrases to make little tiny pieces, rearrange them and play, just like those refrigerator magnets. (I've known people to do this with letters from the IRS or wacky Christmas letters.) Tape your poem down into your journal or rewrite them.
- Look at song lyrics. Are they poems? An easy starter is Louis Armstrong's *What a Wonderful World*. What poetic devices are used in the lyrics. Have a discussion about the distinction between rap, poetry and song lyrics.

## EXTENSIONS/ADAPTATIONS

- For all those down times when you're waiting in line, you can think of silly haikus or limericks. "There once was a girl from Laos, who ..."
- Another waiting in line game is "First thought, best thought" which exercises those creative writing muscles. One person says any random word and then everyone else shares the first word that comes to their mind, even if it doesn't make sense. Always good for a laugh.

## CULMINATING PROJECT

- Rewrite all their original poetry onto clean sheets of paper, maybe illustrate the margins and make them into a book or keep them as part of your writing portfolio.