Teaching Poetry

This book contains essential information, text models, lesson banks, worksheets and assessment tools to support you and your students as they explore, discover and write poetry. Dip in, take what you need, or adapt to fit your own individual writing classroom.

Exploring Poetry

Through reading, writing and presenting poetry, students develop creative and critical thinking abilities. This book offers activities that engage multiple literacies to build oral, written and digital communication skills. Reflective processes assist with personal development, promoting social skills, emotional insight, self-awareness, empathy and interpersonal learning. Activities which place poetry within real world contexts increase its relevance by demonstrating its practical applications, both social and vocational. Poetry can be incorporated across the school curriculum as a fun learning method.

What is Poetry?

The answer to this question varies wildly from one person to another. Some of us may recall writing poetry in our school days and being told that what we had written wasn't 'proper' poetry. Some argue vehemently that poetry ought to rhyme while others say that rhyming 'doggerel' is impossible to take seriously. This book takes a more balanced and open approach. Poetry doesn't have to rhyme, but it can. Rhyme is just one of many devices that can be used in poetry. Students should be encouraged to experiment with as many poetic devices as possible. Poems can be presented as paintings, posters, collages, digital art, movies, audio-recordings, live music, live performance and in many other forms beyond just print. They can masquerade as recipes, text messages and advertising. Some poems might be no longer than a single word or even a single letter, but meaningfully arranged. Other poems might seem trite on the page but gripping when read aloud. They can employ formal, elevated language, everyday speech or even nonsense words. They can be sad or joyous, serious or joking, or sometimes a mix of everything. All styles are equally valid because 'proper' poetry is a myth.

If you make it and call it a poem, then it is. If you interpret it and call it a poem, then it is.

Writing Poetry

Contemporary poetry can be understood in terms of 10 key elements: structure, sound, description, language, symbolism, narrative, character, visual elements, cyber elements and performance elements. Each element involves a number of more specific devices. Pages 8 to 12 offer more detailed explanations of the 10 elements and their individual devices. The **lesson banks** on pages 39 to 61 largely correspond to the elements, with the exception of language, which may be too confusing for students who are still learning the basics of reading, writing and spelling. The **text models** on pages 17 to 38 and the **worksheets** on pages 62 to 80 all link to specific elements, devices and exercises within the lesson banks.

Assessing Poetry With Rubrics

Poetry has always been difficult to assess in a measurable, positive, meaningful and objective way. Rubrics help solve the problem. Rubrics are a list of levelled criteria, skills, concepts or understandings related to a specific task or process. They act as developmental maps on which you can plot the progress of your students, or where students can plot their own progress. Rubrics establish clear expectations for students, and help them to direct themselves and set their own goals. Because there is an entry point for all students, all students can be successful.

In terms of poetry, the benefits of writing are in the process, not the results. Opinions about what makes a 'good' poem vary widely. Rather than trying to grade poems themselves, the **assessment tools** on pages 14 to 16 are rubrics which focus on students' knowledge of poetic elements and devices, and on how they apply this knowledge to reading, writing and performing poetry.

Haiku and Senyru

(1)
The sky is bright blue,
but the air is still icy.
Leaves shine with dew drops.

(2)
Bright blue sky
and icy air,
leaves shine with dew.

(3)
It's city peak hour.
Cars wait at lights, not moving.
Bikes weave around them.

(4)
City peak hour:
bikes weave
round motionless cars.

(5)
Mum is drinking tea
and reading the newspaper
before she starts work.

(6)
Sipping tea,
turning pages
—my Mum before work.

Element: Structure in fixed form   **Focus:** Haiku and senyru   **Lesson bank:** pages 42–43

Lesson Bank
Structure in Fixed Form

AREAS OF FOCUS
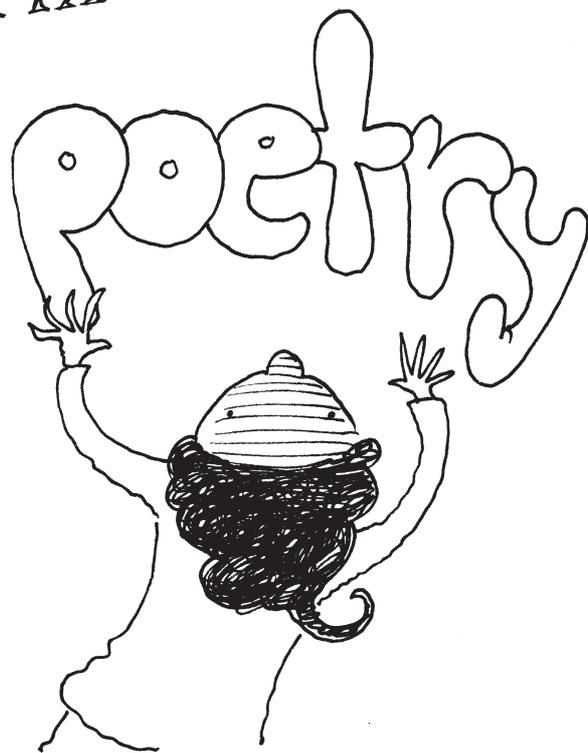
◑ Fixed rhyme schemes

◑ ABAB rhyme scheme

◑ Haiku and senyru—both image-based and syllable-based

RESOURCES

◑ **Text Model 2:** Lenny the Litterbug

◑ **Text Model 3:** Haiku and Senyru

◑ **Worksheet 2:** Haiku

OTHER USEFUL RESOURCES

◑ Australian Haiku Anthology
at www.haikuoz.org/faha/haiku.html

◑ Children's Haiku Garden
at homepage2.nifty.com/haiku-eg/

MINI LESSONS

IDENTIFYING FIXED RHYME SCHEMES

Fixed rhyme schemes are perhaps the most commonly recognised elements of poetry. Although it is important for students to understand that poetry *does not* have to rhyme, and that there are many other poetic elements and devices, fixed rhyme schemes remain an important piece within the overall puzzle that is poetry. An easy way to identify and describe the rhyme schemes in poetry is to label each line with a letter of the alphabet. A poem in which the first two lines rhyme and the third and fourth lines rhyme could thus be labelled *AABB*. A poem with alternating rhyme sounds, as in **Text Model 2**, could be labelled *ABAB*.

Find a selection of poems that use different rhyme schemes. Write them on the board and then, as a class, label each rhyme scheme. Encourage students to discuss the process of labelling the poems' rhyme schemes and to ask questions where necessary. After you have identified two or three different rhyme schemes, have students choose the one they like best and write a poem using that rhyme scheme.

FIXED RHYME SCHEMES AND MOOD

Read the poem in **Text Model 2** together, then discuss it.

Is the poem's mood funny or serious? Why do you say that?

Write the poem on the board, then cross out the last word of every second line. Ask students to suggest different, non-rhyming words that have the same meanings, for example 'silly duffer' instead of 'silly thug' and 'ponged' instead of 'stunk'. Read the poem aloud again.

Is the mood of the poem the same or has it changed? If so, how?
Which version of the poem do you prefer? Why?

DIFFERENT TYPES OF HAIKU

Distribute copies of **Text Model 3**. It consists of six short poems, each of which can be considered a haiku. Talk about the similarities and differences:
(1) is a syllable-based haiku about nature
(2) is an image-based haiku about nature
(3) is a syllable-based haiku about the city
(4) is an image-based haiku about the city
(5) is a syllable-based senyru (a haiku about a person)
(6) is an image-based senyru.

For a description of the differences between image-based and syllable-based haiku, see page 8.

Have each student write at least two haiku or senyru, one syllable-based and one image-based. Enthusiastic students may choose to write more. There is no set topic. If students are stuck for ideas, have them look out the classroom window for inspiration.

Once all students have completed the exercise, ask for a show of hands to gauge who prefers to

Alliteration

In the space before each bold word, write a describing word (adjective) beginning with the same letter.

One day I met a _____ **camel**

with a _____ **hump**. He said his

name was _____ **Samuel** and

that he was looking for his best friend,

_____ **Bella** the _____

emu.