

Workshop 3

Teaching Poetry

Overview

Many students—and teachers—avoid reading and writing poetry because it seems so difficult and foreign to their everyday experience. But for middle school students, poetry offers an unparalleled opportunity to explore feelings and emotions and to increase awareness of the power of written expression. In Workshop 3, we see two master teachers—Vivian Johnson, who teaches eighth grade in Elizabethton, Tennessee, and Jack Wilde, a fifth-grade teacher from Hanover, New Hampshire—helping their students develop as readers and writers of poetry.

Workshop 3 goes first to Vivian Johnson’s classroom, where her eighth-graders are in the midst of a unit on poetry. Vivian is using poetry models and excerpts from books on writing poetry to teach her students about the power of line breaks. The students apply the lesson during writing workshop, and then one of the students shares his piece with the class. Throughout the classroom segments, we see how Vivian’s carefully structured, student-centered approach fosters her students’ appreciation and understanding of poetry and helps them begin to find their own poetic voices.

Like Vivian, Jack Wilde is using a published poem to teach his fifth-grade students about writing poetry. After the students read and analyze the poem, Jack gives them a topic and has them practice writing stanzas modeled on the exemplar to combine into a class poem. The children share their writing, and then Jack leads them in a discussion of how they might apply what they have learned from this exercise to writing their own poetry.

Interspersed throughout Workshop 3 are interviews with Jack and Vivian as well as excerpts from a conversation the teachers had about teaching poetry. Also featured is an excerpt from an interview with Tom Romano, the author of *Clearing the Way: Working With Teenage Writers* and *Writing With Passion: Life Stories, Multiple Genres*.

Workshop 3 Teachers

The teachers seen in the video program include:

- Vivian Johnson, Grade 8, T.A. Dugger Junior High School, Elizabethton, Tennessee
- Jack Wilde, Grade 5, Bernice A. Ray School, Hanover, New Hampshire

Background Reading

Before coming to the workshop session, you should prepare to participate by:

- Reviewing the unit plan for Vivian Johnson and the lesson plan for Jack Wilde available on the Web site (www.learner.org/channel/workshops/middlewriting/). These plans may be downloaded and printed, along with supporting classroom materials and samples of the students’ writing.
- Reading the article provided under “Related Reading” on the Workshop 3 Web page and highlighting two or three sections that strike you as particularly useful or insightful, that raise questions in your mind, or that relate to your own practice. Record your responses to the article in your workshop journal.
- Reviewing the “Key Practices To Observe in Workshop 3,” available on the next page and on the Web site.
- Choosing a favorite short poem or part of a longer poem and making copies of the text to share with fellow participants at the Workshop Session.

Key Practices To Observe in Workshop 3

In this workshop session, you will see a number of effective teaching practices intended to help students write poetry.

- Teachers affirm the importance of writing poetry by modeling that they value poetry and by emphasizing that students are empowered as poets. Students are led to recognize how poetry allows them to express their own feelings and ideas creatively. The goal is not merely to know about poetry, nor is the goal merely to practice a poetic technique.
- A sense of community is evident in the classes. Students collaborate, express themselves, and clearly feel comfortable and safe in conveying their ideas and feelings, as well as in responding to their classmates' work. Respect for learning and for learners is evident.
- Reading and response to reading are demonstrated as key teaching practices in helping students develop as writers. Teachers provide models of poems so that students can develop a sense of how other poets work, and students apply what they learn in writing their own poems. Teachers use poems written by others as a stimulus for their students' own poems.
- The teachers ensure that students are active. The children read and respond to models and to their own drafts. They engage in quick writes, share aloud, analyze poems, talk about techniques, respond to questions, and write notes to each other about what they have written. The teachers make sure that many students are involved in the conversations about writing. The classroom is not merely a forum for the teacher to talk about poetry.
- Teachers are intentional and systematic in their practices, including well-focused and organized mini-lessons on poetry. The lessons are sharply focused on important poetic techniques, the "tools" of a poet. The lessons include time for students to apply what they have learned.
- Teachers arrange for students to have useful resources as writers: lists of criteria, models, quick writes, annotated samples, and "tips" on writing.
- Teachers respond to students and provide a structure for students to respond to each other orally and in writing.

Facilitator's Outline: Workshop 3

This outline of the Workshop 3 video contains approximate entry points for each section. Use this chart to help identify the pause points in the Watch the Video section. Zero your VCR counter at the Annenberg/CPB logo at the beginning of the tape.

Segment 1 (0:00–19:32)	Introduction (beginning at 0:00)	
	In the Classroom (beginning at 3:50) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introducing a lesson on line breaks 	Vivian Johnson
Segment 2 (19:33–30:25)	Teacher Discussion (beginning at 19:33)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Immersing students in poetry 	Vivian Johnson and Jack Wilde
	In the Classroom (beginning at 22:53) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using models to teach the power of line breaks 	Vivian Johnson
Segment 3 (30:26–50:02)	Teacher Discussion (beginning at 30:26)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effective poetry instruction 	Vivian Johnson and Jack Wilde
	In the Classroom (beginning at 32:50) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exploring the possibilities of poetry 	Jack Wilde
	Teacher Discussion (beginning at 43:17)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helping students become readers and writers of poetry 	Vivian Johnson and Jack Wilde
	In the Classroom (beginning at 45:34) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Imitating an exemplar in a quick write 	Jack Wilde
Segment 4 (50:03–end)	In the Classroom (beginning at 50:03)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applying the lesson on line breaks 	Vivian Johnson
	Teacher Discussion (beginning at 53:42)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Benefits of studying poetry in the reading/writing classroom 	Vivian Johnson and Jack Wilde

Workshop Session

Discussion and Sharing (15 minutes)

- Exchange your favorite short poem or piece of a longer poem with a colleague. After reading your colleague's poem, answer the following questions:
 - What do you like about this piece?
 - What teachable features (i.e., metaphor, imagery, form, etc.) do you notice in this poem?
 - How might you incorporate the poem into a lesson for your students?

Share your responses with your partner.

- If time allows, take a few minutes to write in your workshop journal about one or two successes and challenges you have experienced in teaching poetry and then share your observations with your colleagues.

Watch the Video (60 minutes video plus 30 minutes discussion)

Watch the video, stopping at the end of each segment (see the Facilitator's Outline on the preceding page for help locating the pause points). If you are watching the workshop on your own, use your workshop journal to respond to two or more discussion questions from each of the four segments.

Segment 1 (0:00-19:32)

[Pause point: After the choral reading of "We Real Cool" and before the first Teacher Discussion.]

- In the introduction to the workshop, Tom Romano confesses that he was 29 years old before he wrote his first poem. What was your own experience with poetry as a young person? Share how you felt then and how you feel now about reading and writing poetry.
- What kinds of poems do you share with your students? How do they respond to these poems? Do you agree with Tom Romano's call for sharing accessible poems with young people?
- What message does Vivian communicate to her students when she distributes a packet of her favorite authors' poems and their reflections on the writing of poetry?

Segment 2 (19:33-30:25)

[Pause point: After Vivian's students begin the writing workshop and before the second Teacher Discussion.]

- Why do you think Vivian chose "We Real Cool" by Gwendolyn Brooks to introduce line breaks rather than the poem on biology lab ("Owl Pellets" by Ralph Fletcher)?
- Discuss how poetry can provide a concise way to teach students the general principles of good writing.
- For both Vivian and Jack, teaching poetry isn't limited to a single unit—it's a yearlong study. Summarize their reasons for following this practice. If your practice differs, do you think immersing your students in poetry throughout the year would fit into your overall curriculum? Why or why not?

Segment 3 (30:26-50:02)

[Pause point: After students read their stanzas in Jack Wilde's class and before the final part of the lesson on line breaks in Vivian's class.]

- When Vivian's students read "We Real Cool," they pause at the end of each line, and the class agrees that this pause is what makes the last word in a line the most powerful. Later, in Jack's class, we see him instruct the students to let the punctuation marks, not the ends of the lines, determine where they stop when they are reading. What does this discrepancy between the two teachers' instruction suggest about the nature of poetry and of teaching poetry?
- Jack's activity involves a quick write and the creation of a class poem that imitates a model. What are the benefits of such an activity for middle-level students?

Workshop Session, cont'd.

- Why do you think Jack initiated the discussion about what makes “The Truth About Why I Love Potatoes” different from prose? Comment on his use of the board to record what the students are saying.
- Both Vivian and Jack use varied approaches to reading poetry: choral reading, silent reading, assigning different stanzas to different students, reading aloud to the class, etc. What are the advantages of this practice?

Segment 4 (50:03-end)

[View to end of program.]

- Comment on Vivian’s mini-lesson on line breaks. How does she structure her lesson? What evidence do you see of the lesson’s success? Share a mini-lesson you have used successfully in teaching poetry or some other form of creative writing.
- How do you help your students feel comfortable sharing personal writing? From observing their classrooms and listening to their comments, can you infer how Vivian and Jack handle this issue?

Going Further (15 minutes)

- Do a quick write (no more than five minutes) modeled on one Vivian Johnson sometimes uses with her students—creating a few lines of poetry incorporating a line or a phrase from someone else’s writing. Use one of the favorite poems shared at the beginning of the workshop (yours or a colleague’s) as your inspiration.

When you finish, read what you’ve written to the group. Then reflect on this experience in your workshop journal. Why did you choose this particular line? How do you feel about reading your writing aloud? What is something you really like about what you have written? What direction might you take this piece to expand or refine it? If time allows, share your reflections with the group.

Before Next Week

Homework

- Complete your exploration of the Web pages for Workshop 3—looking at materials, listening to audio files, and/or printing out resources. Record any comments or responses in your workshop journal to share with your colleagues. In particular, you might check out the poem featured in “Responding to Student Writing” (see the links on the home page and on the banner of all interior pages). This interactive activity gives you a chance to read and respond to a student’s poem and see another teacher’s comments on the draft.
- Revisit how you presently teach poetry and see at what points you might include strategies and practices demonstrated or discussed in Workshop 3. Record your ideas for changing your present practice in your workshop journal.
- Use the poem you brought to the workshop, one a colleague brought, or another short poem or part of a longer poem to help you design a mini-lesson on some specific feature of poetry such as simile, metaphor, imagery, repetition, etc. To find other poems that also illustrate this feature, you might want to explore the poetry collections listed on the following pages.

Background Reading for Workshop 4

Before coming to the workshop session, you should prepare to participate by:

- Reviewing the unit plans for Jenny Beasley and Jack Wilde available on the Web site (www.learner.org/channel/workshops/middlewriting/). These unit plans may be downloaded and printed, along with supporting classroom materials and samples of the students’ writing.
- Reading the two articles provided under “Related Reading” on the Workshop 4 Web page and highlighting two or three sections from each essay that strike you as particularly useful or insightful, that raise questions in your mind, or that relate to your own practice. Record your responses to the articles in your workshop journal.
- Reviewing the “Key Practices To Observe in Workshop 4,” available in this guide and on the Web site.

Selected Sources for “Teaching Poetry”

- Apol, Laura. “What Do We Do If We Don’t Do Haiku?” *English Journal* 91.3 (January 2002): 89-97.
- Atwell, Nancie. *In the Middle: Writing, Reading, and Learning With Adolescents*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1987. ISBN: 0867093749.
- Baart, Nicole. “Saying It More Intensely: Using Sensory Experiences To Teach Poetry Writing.” *English Journal* 91.3 (January 2002): 98-103.
- Barbieri, Maureen. “To Open Hearts.” *Voices From the Middle* 5.1 (February 1998): 29-35.
- Behn, Robin and Chase Twitchell, eds. *The Practice of Poetry*. New York: Harper, 1992. ISBN: 006273024X.
- Blake, Robert W. “Poets on Poetry: One Way To Write a Poem.” *English Journal* 80.4 (April 1991): 21-27.
- Blasingame, James B., Jr. “Seven Poets Answer Seven Questions for the Classroom Teacher.” *English Journal* 91.3 (January 2002): 109-113.
- Boland, Dagny D. “O Taste and See: Poetry With Eighth-graders.” *Voices From the Middle* 5.1 (February 1998): 12-18.
- Carey, Michael. *Poetry: Starting From Scratch*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1989. ISBN: 093498817X.
- Collom, Jack and Sheryl Noethe. *Poetry Everywhere: Teaching Poetry Writing in the School and in the Community*. NY: Teachers & Writers Collaborative, 1994. ISBN: 0915924986.
- Connell, Marjorie. “Click: Poets at Work in the Middle School.” *English Journal* 79.6 (November 1990): 47-52.
- Drake, Barbara. *Writing Poetry*. NY: Harcourt, Brace, 1994. ISBN 015500154X.
- Flynn, Nick and Shirley McPhillips. *A Note Slipped Under the Door: Teaching From Poems We Love*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse, 2000. ISBN: 1571103201.
- Frazier, C. Hood. “Building a Community Through Poetry: A Role for Imagination in the Classroom.” *English Journal* 92.5 (May 2003): 65-70.
- Frazier, C. Hood and Charlotte Williams. “The Way In Is the Way Out: Poetry in the Classroom.” *Voices From the Middle* 5.1 (February 1998): 3-9.
- Garrison, Peggy. “Looking Inside: Writing Mind Poems.” *Teachers and Writers* 28.4 (1997): 1-4.
- Glasser, J.E. “The Reading-Writing-Reading Connection: An Approach to Poetry.” *English Journal* 79.6 (November 1990): 22-27.
- Gorrell, Nancy. “Let Found Poetry Help Your Students Find Poetry.” *English Journal* 78.2 (February 1989): 30-35.
- Graves, Donald H. *Explore Poetry*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1992. ISBN: 0435084895.
- Heard, Georgia. *Awakening the Heart*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1999. ISBN: 032500093X.
- Heard, Georgia. *For the Good of the Earth and Sun: Teaching Poetry*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1989. ISBN: 043508495X.
- Heard, Georgia. *Writing Toward Home: Tales and Lessons To Find Your Way*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1995. ISBN: 0435081241.
- Heartwell, Proal. “Masters as Mentors: The Role of Reading Poetry in Writing Poetry.” *Voices From the Middle* 10.2 (December 2002): 29-32.

Selected Sources for “Teaching Poetry,” cont’d.

Hewitt, Geof. *Today You Are My Favorite Poet: Writing Poems with Teenagers*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1998. ISBN: 0867094524.

Janeczko, Paul. *Favorite Poetry Lessons*. New York: Scholastic, Inc., 1999. ISBN: 0590006185.

King, Wendy. “Stealing a Piece of the World and Hiding It in Words.” *Voices From the Middle* 4.1 (February 1997): 22-29.

Kirby, Dan and Tom Liner. *Inside Out: Developmental Strategies for Teaching Writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1988. ISBN: 0867092254.

Koch, Kenneth. “I Never Told Anybody: Four Poetry Writing Strategies.” *Teachers and Writers* 23.4 (1992): 7-10.

Koch, Kenneth. *Rose, Where Did You Get That Red?: Teaching Great Poetry to Children*. NY: Vintage, 1990. ISBN: 0679724710.

Koch, Kenneth. *Wishes, Lies, and Dreams: Teaching Children To Write Poetry*. NY: Harper & Row, 1970. ISBN: 0060955090.

LeNoir, W. David. “Grading Student Poetry: A Few Words From the Devil’s Advocate.” *English Journal* 91.3 (January 2002): 59-65.

Lockward, Diane. “Poets on Teaching Poetry.” *English Journal* 83.5 (September 1994): 65-71.

Marshall, Suzanne and Dan Newman. “A Poet’s Vision.” *Voices From the Middle* 4.1 (February 1997): 7-15.

Moore, John N. “Practicing Poetry: Teaching To Learn and Learning To Teach.” *English Journal* 91.3 (January 2002): 44-50.

Murray, Donald. *Crafting a Life in Essay, Story, Poem*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1996. ISBN: 0867094036.

Oliver, Mary. *A Poetry Handbook*. Fort Washington, PA: Harvest Books, 1995. ISBN: 0156724006.

Romano, Tom. *Clearing the Way: Working With Teenage Writers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1987. ISBN: 0435084399.

Romano, Tom. *Writing With Passion: Life Stories, Multiple Genres*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1995. ISBN: 0867093625.

Salam, Kausam R. “Poetry in the Classroom: The Fervor and the Fret.” *English Journal* 91.3 (January 2002): 104-108.

Wilde, Jack. *A Door Opens: Writing in the Fifth Grade*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1993. ISBN: 0435087614.

Recommended Poetry Books for Middle-Level Students: Vivian Johnson and Jack Wilde

Adoff, Arnold, ed. *I Am the Darker Brother: An Anthology of Modern Poems of African Americans*. New York: Bt Bound, 1999. ISBN: 0613014995.

Belloc, Hilaire. *Hilaire Belloc’s the Yak, the Python and the Frog*. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1975. ASIN: 0819307858.

Brooks, Gwendolyn. *Selected Poems*. New York: Perennial, 1999. ISBN: 0060931744.

cummings, e.e. *In Just-Spring*. New York: Bookthrift Co., 1990. ASIN: 0316163902.

Dunning, Stephen, Editor. *Reflections on a Gift of Watermelon Pickle ...and Other Modern Verse*. New York: Harper-Collins, 1967. ISBN: 0688412319.

Selected Sources for “Teaching Poetry,” cont’d.

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Fletcher, Ralph. *I Am Wings: Poems About Love*. New York: Atheneum, 1994. ASIN: 0027353958.

Florian, Douglas. *insectlopedia*. New York: Harcourt, 1998. ISBN: 0152013067.

Foster, John, Editor. *My First Oxford Book of Animal Poems*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002. ISBN: 0192762699.

Foster, John, Editor. *My First Oxford Book of Poems*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001. ISBN: 0192762745.

Frost, Robert. *You Come Too: Favorite Poems for Readers of All Ages*. 2nd Revision Edition. New York: Owl Books, 2002. ISBN: 0805069852.

George, Jerry, Don Stone, and Faye Ward. *On Common Ground, Book 3*. Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford University Press/Canada, 1994. ISBN: 0-19-541020-3.

Giovanni, Nikki. *Spin a Soft Black Song*. New York: Hill & Wang Publishing, 1987. ISBN: 037446493.

Heaney, Seamus and Ted Hughes, Editors. *Rattle Bag*. New York: Faber & Faber, 1985. ISBN: 057111976X.

Hughes, Langston. *The Dream Keeper*. New York: Knopf, 1996, ISBN: 0679883479.

Justice, Donald. *Night Light*. Revised edition. Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University, 1981. ASIN: 0819511064.

Kennedy, X.J. *The Kite That Braved Old Orchard Beach: Year-Round Poems for Young People*. New York: Margaret K. McElderry Books, 1991. ASIN: 0689505078.

McBride, Mekeel. *Deepest Part of the River*. Pittsburgh: Carnegie-Mellon University Press, 2001. ISBN: 0887483410.

McCord, David. *One at a Time: Poems*. Reissue Edition. New York: Little Brown & Co. (Juvenile Trade), 1986. ASIN: 0316555169.

Merriam, Eve. *Finding a Poem*. New York: Atheneum, 1970. ASIN: 0689206070.

Moss, Jeffrey. *Bone Poems*. New York: Workman Publishing Company, 1997. ISBN: 076110884X.

Pastan, Linda. *Carnival Evening: New and Selected Poems 1968-1998*. New York: Norton, W.W. and Company, Inc., 1999. ISBN: 039331927X.

Rylant, Cynthia. *Waiting To Waltz: A Childhood*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984. ISBN: 0027780007.

Sierra, Judy. *Antarctic Antics: A Book of Penguin Poems*. San Diego: Gulliver Books, 1998. ISBN: 0152010068.

Soto, Gary. *Neighborhood Odes*. New York: Harcourt, 1992. ISBN: 0152568794.

Updike, John. *A Child's Calendar*. New York: Holiday House, 1999. ISBN: 0823414450.

Notes
