

Adopt-a-Tree: Poetry Writing



Grade Level: 3 to 5



Developed by Ann Gengarely, Poet in Residence, Marlboro Elementary School, Marlboro, VT and used in Grades 3 and 4

Community Partner: The Poetry Studio, Marlboro, VT

Overview/Rationale for Lesson:

Children revisit their adopted trees and write poems informed by close observation and inspired by listening to poems that explore trees from different perspectives. Focusing questions include: “What’s special about your tree? How does your tree talk to you? What gifts do trees give?”

Learning Objectives:

- Children will listen to tree poems and respond to sensory images, figurative language and poetic voices.
- Children will write a poem informed by observation of their tree and inspired by poetic elements from the poetry reading.
- Children will share and respond to each other’s tree poems.
- Children will develop an intimate relationship with a tree and thereby care more about its natural environment.

Lesson Plan Procedure

Preparatory Activity:

Time: 5-10 minutes

Step 1. Gather children in a circle outdoors near their adopted trees and start a discussion about trees. Share the plan for today’s poetry session. Note: Ann Gengarely's notes on this lesson (see “Resources” for link) will help you prepare for discussion. 5 minutes.

- Teacher narrative: “I understand that you have each chosen a tree you have become friends with. How did you choose which tree you wanted?”

Preview what children will be doing during poetry session: Listen to tree poems; write a poem at your tree; and share tree poems.

Main Activity:

Time: 60 minutes

Step 2. Introduce poetry reading and give children questions to think about while they listen to poems. 5 minutes.

- Teacher narrative includes questions: “What’s special about trees? What’s special about your tree? What gifts do trees give?”

Step 3. Read aloud three tree poems (see “Resources” for link). Ask children to listen for poetry words they notice and like. Point out different styles of poems (mask, ode, portrait). Leave time

- "Old Grandfather Tree": "This is an example of a mask poem. Imagine being your tree, taking its voice."
- "Willow": "Which poetry words convince you about the poet's friendship with the tree?"
- "That Large Oak Tree": "In an ode the poet can speak to its tree or about it. Celebrate or praise your tree, show your tree how thankful you are for it."

Then share with students a sample concrete poem, such as Karla Kuskin's "If You Stood" (see "Resources" for link), and ask, "What do you notice about the shape of the words on the page?"

Step 4. Invite children to go to their tree and write a poem. Give them handout "Trees: Beginning Lines" (see "Resources" for link) to help them get started writing. 30-40 minutes.

- Each child takes a handout, clipboard, pencil and lined paper.
- Colored pencils are available for drawing before or after writing (optional).
- Teacher circulates and may scribe for children who need help with writing.
- Children who finish may copy their poem over onto folded paper and draw an illustration. *Directions: Fold unlined paper in half like a greeting card, unfold it so there are two facing pages, write poem on one side of paper and make an illustration on the opposite page.*

Download more student poems written by Gengarely's class from Resources.

Trees

Tree, I heard you calling
my name
a long time ago.
But now I've come for you.
What do you need, tree?
Are you feeling well
or are you feeling sad
in your roots
Down
down
down
in a deep dark hole
darker than the night sky
no stars
no moon?
Tree, I heard you calling my name.

Mercer, 3/4th Grade
Marlboro Elementary School

Conclusion/Follow-Up to Activity:

Time: 15-30 minutes

Step 5. Gather children into circle and share poems. 15-30 minutes, depending on number of students

- Teacher's notes on sharing:
 - "Sharing a poem is a gift and listening is a gift. Who will share the first gift?"
 - "There are three ways to share your poem: read it alone; ask someone else to read it for you; or read it as a duet with a partner."
 - "Show your thanks for the poem by giving a compliment to the poet. You may want to focus on an image, a poetry word or the emotional content."

Additional Notes on Lesson Plan:

This lesson is part of the *Adopt-a-Tree* sequence, which begins with *Adopt a Tree: First Visit*. See also *Adopt a Tree: Watercolor Painting*. This class did the poetry and painting activities on the same day: they divided the group in half and switched activities after an hour and a half, with lunch and outdoor games between activities.

Materials Checklist:

- Ann Gengarely's [Notes on Tree poetry lesson](#) (download at Resources)
- [Tree Poems to read aloud](#) (download at Resources)
- Student Handout: "[Trees: Beginning Lines](#)" (1 per student, download at Resources)
- Clipboard, lined paper and pencil for each student
- Colored pencils and unlined paper for final copy (if time).

**Extension(s):**

- Back in the classroom give children time to revise poems and copy over or type them for display.
- Identify and discuss poetic elements in children's tree poems (sensory images, figurative language, alliteration, poetic voices).
- Exhibit poems on bulletin board with photographs and paintings of trees.
- Publish a class anthology of poems and paintings. See *Hogback Tree Study Book* (link forthcoming).

Developer's Comments on Lesson:

"Whether I work with nine year olds or adults, the image of trees invites a deep connection to our psyches. Reading the students' poems once again, I am reminded how easily they sense a tree's inner life, perhaps in the same way Native Americans believe all living things possess a spirit.

If poetry is a weaving between our inner landscapes and the outside world, these poems are a testament to that belief.

What an honor it was to witness students thoroughly engaged, sitting by their trees, deepening their friendship; paying attention in the way the poet Mary Oliver reminds us: *Attention is the Beginning of Devotion*. Devoted these poets were!

Thank you to Carol Berner for believing in our work and bringing this feast of poetry and art to others who might be inspired by what Marlboro students created."

--Ann Gengarely

Useful Links and Downloads are available at http://row.ctriver.org/?page_id=223.

CURRICULUM STANDARDS/Frameworks

English Language Arts (Connections to the Common Core State Standards, <http://www.corestandards.org>):

Reading: Literature » Grades 3 & 4

Key Ideas and Details

- RL.3.1. Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.
- RL.4.1. Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.
- RL.4.2. Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text; summarize the text.

Craft and Structure

- RL.3.4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, distinguishing literal from nonliteral language.
- RL.4.4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including those that allude to significant characters found in mythology (e.g., Herculean).
- RL.4.5. Explain major differences between poems, drama, and prose, and refer to the structural elements of poems (e.g., verse, rhythm, meter) and drama (e.g., casts of characters, settings, descriptions, dialogue, stage directions) when writing or speaking about a text.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

- MA.8.A. Locate and analyze examples of similes and metaphors in stories, poems, folktales, and plays, and explain how these literary devices enrich the text.

Writing » Grades 3 & 4

Text Types and Purposes

- MA.3.A. Write poems, descriptions, and stories in which figurative language and the sounds of words (e.g., alliteration, onomatopoeia, rhyme) are key elements.
- MA.3.A. Write stories, poems, and scripts that use similes and/or metaphors.

Range of Writing

- W.3.10. & W.4.10. Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Speaking & Listening » Grades 3 & 4

Comprehension and Collaboration

- SL.3.1. & SL.4.1. Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, group, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 3/4 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

STANDARDS, cont.**Language » Grades 3 & 4***Vocabulary Acquisition and Use*

- L.3.5. & L.4.5. Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.
- L.4.5 Explain the meaning of simple similes and metaphors (e.g., as pretty as a picture) in context.

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