

# Poetry

## Understanding Poetry

Poetry engages students in writing, reading, speaking, and listening. Creating poems can capture the essence of an idea. As stated by Polly Collins, “when students create poems about topics of study, they enhance their comprehension through the connections they have made between the topic and their own lives, the topic and the world around them, and the poetry and the content texts they have read” (2008, 83). Developing understanding of language arts through the creation of poems challenges students to consider concepts related to language arts in new ways and to share their understanding through language and metaphor. Often, students enjoy creating poems but are not sure how to begin. The strategies provide guidance that will help students identify and work with rich language to explore the intricacies of language arts. Students use mentor poems to discover craft such as rhythm and beat, line breaks, and vivid verbs. They find that poems do not have to include end rhyme. “We are more interested in ‘surprising images’ or words that have a special sound pattern. They empower students to be ‘word-gatherers’” (McKim and Steinbergh 1992). Students are invited to put words together in fresh new ways, drawing on evocative language and the playful juxtaposition of ideas, and create images through words as they write poems about concepts in language arts. This active engagement changes students’ relationships with language arts as they find their own language to describe what they know.

By working with poetic language, symbolism, and metaphors, students can deepen their understanding of ideas and develop their abilities to express. Dr. Janette Hughes notes, “Poetry encourages an economy and precision in language that transfers to other types of oral and written communication” (2007).

Using poetry to explore language arts builds conceptual understanding. When students become poets, they fine-tune their writing

and explore the use of patterns, rhythm, and metaphor. Writing poems challenges students to use language in fresh ways and develop a deeper understanding of language arts.

“Poetry personalizes information. . . . It’s a way for kids to internalize information. . . . It’s the doorway into literacy for a lot of kids.”

—Georgia Heard (as cited in Borris 2016, para. 5, 12)

## Elements of Poetry

The following list of terms related to poetry is informed by the Academy of American Poets (n.d.), and the work of Kwame Alexander (2019), Georgia Heard (1999), and Mary Oliver (1994).

- **Sound:** The creation of meaning with sound, often through the use of onomatopoeia, assonance, consonance, alliteration, and more.
- **Rhythm:** The beat of the poem, created through pattern, repetition, rhyme, syllables, and more.
- **Imagery:** Precise word choices and figurative language create an image in the reader’s mind by evoking the senses and imagination.
- **Structure:** The organization of ideas. Some poems are free verse, others follow a specific form. Intentional line breaks and use of space on the page create meaning.
- **Density:** What is said (or can be said) in the space; density distinguishes poetry from regular speech and prose.
- **Audience:** Poets write with their audience in mind, revealing tone or attitude toward the message, subject, and more.