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## Poetry in the Classroom: The Why and How of Teaching and Inspiring Students Through Poetry

Rachel Knapp Funk

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**POETRY IN THE CLASSROOM:  
THE WHY AND HOW OF TEACHING AND  
INSPIRING STUDENTS THROUGH POETRY**

**Rachel Knapp Funk**

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2016

COLUMBUS STATE UNIVERSITY

POETRY IN THE CLASSROOM: THE WHY AND HOW OF TEACHING AND INSPIRING  
STUDENTS THROUGH POETRY

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE  
HONORS COLLEGE  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR HONORS IN THE DEGREE OF  
BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN EDUCATION  
MIDDLE GRADES EDUCATION  
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HEALTH PROFESSIONS

BY

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## Abstract

This paper seeks to answer the questions “Why teach poetry?” and “How does one teach poetry?” through research and personal experience in the classroom. Although many teachers struggle with teaching poetry, it is valuable in the classroom for many reasons: it is in the Georgia State Standards, it gives students a deeper understanding of the English language, and it provides students with an emotional connection to the world around them. This paper also explores the findings from my personal experiences in the classroom. My first experience included inviting a poet into my eighth grade practicum classroom and observing her interactions with the students; my second experience came from visiting and observing three classrooms (an elementary, middle, and high school classroom) in which the teachers were teaching poetry. Based off these experiences and peer-reviewed articles, I discovered that both analyzing and experiencing or connecting with a poem are valuable; however, helping students make an emotional connection to poetry first, before critically analyzing it, is key. Finally, teachers can help students overcome their fear of poetry by letting them read and write poetry, allowing them to become comfortable with the genre and as well as learn in a hands-on approach. I conclude the paper with a list of resources teachers can use as they explore the art of teaching poetry.

## TO MY MOTHER, MARTHA KNAPP

Thank you Mom, for always listening to my ideas, thoughts, concerns, fears, and joys. Thank you for being there with and for me every day for the first 21 and a half years of my life. You were a beautiful human being, and I can only dream to be half as powerful, impactful, and kind a person and teacher that you once were.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	v
INTRODUCTION.....	1
SECTION 1: WHY TEACH POETRY.....	3
SECTION 2: HOW TO TEACH POETRY.....	9
1.1 Poet in the Classroom.....	9
1.2 My Experience in the Classroom.....	16
1.3 Tools and Ideas for Teaching Poetry.....	26
CONCLUSION.....	28
REFERENCE LIST.....	30
APPENDICES.....	34



**Introduction**

Today, many teachers, elementary, middle school, and high school alike often see poetry as an unnecessary element in their classroom; they may see it as an afterthought or a supplement, but not as something to be taught throughout the year due to feeling confined by standards and testing (Seale, 2015, p. 12). Since most standardized tests (including the Georgia Milestones test and AP literature test) tend to focus on analyzing informational texts or excerpts from short stories or novels, teachers may feel confined to studying these texts in the classroom and not place as much emphasis on the study of poetry. In addition, teachers often struggle with teaching poetry based on their own struggles with it in their own education (Linaberger, 2005, p. 366). Because of their own negative experiences and uncertainties, these teachers may feel an aversion toward this genre as a whole, thus impacting the way they feel about teaching poetry. This aversion to poetry often impacts students' perception of the subject and leaves them feeling anxious about the study of poetry (Duncan, 2012, p. 1).

Also, not everyone agrees that poetry should be taught in schools—or at least not to the extent that it is taught now. This topic has been discussed for over a century: Thomas Jefferson stated that “much poetry should not be indulged” in the school setting, though Jefferson admitted that some, such as Shakespeare and Pope “may be read for pleasure and improvement” (1818, ME 15:166). On a more recent note, until 2013 when Australia introduced its first National Curriculum in secondary schools, it had “seen no comprehensive review of the teaching of poetry,” and therefore, questions were being asked, “such as whether English teachers [were] teaching poetry in English at all,” (Weaven and Clark 2013, p. 198). However, while the topic of the import of teaching poetry is debated in informal settings on the internet, such as on the

International Debate Education Association, few scholarly sources argue that teaching poetry is a waste of time in the classroom ("Poetry," 2013). Many teachers' own personal uncertainties regarding poetry, though, and their consequential lack of including it extensively in their classrooms, contradict the common sentiment that it is an important tool in the classroom. Weaven and Clark (2013) continued their study in Australia, finding that many teachers felt uneasy when confronted with the aspect of teaching poetry in front of their classroom, potentially feeling unqualified (p. 199). Poetry is may not be as common a classroom tool as one might think.

Why, then, should teachers dedicate time to studying poetry in the classroom? What benefit does the study of poetry bring to students and the classroom? The first portion of this paper seeks to answer these questions. It will answer these questions first by analyzing state standards and finding poetry's place—or lack thereof—in Georgia's standards, and therefore standardized testing. For example, poetry is included in some grades' standards more than others; even so, poetry is filled with several basic elements of language that are included in the standards separately. This paper will also describe how scholars and teachers defend the study of poetry in the classroom. It will use these scholars' voices to propose that leading students to listen to, read, and write poetry helps them gain a better understanding of the English language. Finally, this paper will use scholars' and teachers' voices to explain that poetry holds an emotional connection to the world around these students that is important to them at this time in their lives.

The second portion of this paper seeks to answer the question "*How* should teachers teach poetry in their classrooms?" This portion of the paper is divided into three subsections, two of

which are descriptions and reflections of my own experiences with poetry in the classroom—whether teaching or observing. The first experience involved Rebecca Gayle Howell, an award winning poet, visiting my practicum eighth grade classroom. The second subsection describes my visits to several classrooms throughout my county where I observed three teachers teach poetry. The third subsection includes various, research based ways to incorporate poetry into the classroom, such as writing it, connecting with students on their level, and more. I found these both from my discussions with and observations of these teachers, as well as from peer-reviewed articles, teaching journals, and more.

The reason I am interested in the study of connecting students to poetry is because I am currently a pre-service Middle Grades English Language Arts teacher. I plan to have my own English classroom in the near future, and am interested in finding ways to help students connect with literature and engage in deep, meaningful analysis of literature. I am interested in finding resources to help myself (and other English teachers) create such learning experiences for students.

### Section 1: Why Teach Poetry

Teachers need to teach poetry for the simple fact that it is found in the Georgia Standards of Excellence for Teaching English Language Arts, and of course, standardized testing will be based on the information in these standards. This paper will focus on standards in the middle grades, as that is my concentration. **ELAGSE7RL5**, the only standard in the middle grades almost solely devoted to poetry states: “Analyze how a drama’s or poem’s form or structure (e.g., soliloquy, sonnet) contributes to its meaning” (Georgia Department of Education, 2015, p. 1). This standard addresses an important aspect of poetry: poetry’s meaning and form are often

connected, like most art forms. If students are to understand poetry, they need to understand this concept. Students are also required to learn skills such as comparing and contrasting, reading and comprehending, determining meaning of words and phrases as used in a text, and drawing evidence. Several times poetry is listed as a source among many from which students will learn these skills (four times in the sixth grade, three in the seventh, and one in the eighth).

Poetry is also a valuable tool to learn other elements of language found in the standards. Poetry is filled with elements found in the standards such as figurative language, theme of a text, structure, point of view, and more. For example, **ELAGSE6RL4**, **ELAGSE7RL4**, **ELAGSE8RL4** are all similar; 8RL4 says: “Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts” (Georgia Department of Education, 2015, p. 1). Also, 6, 7, and 8RL2 and 6, 7, and 8RI2 require students to be able to identify the theme or central idea of a text (Georgia Department of Education, 2015, p. 1). Students are required to search for these items and more by analyzing complex texts in the secondary grades, such as novels, short stories, dramas, and informational texts. Poetry holds every one of these aspects of literature, and more, and is therefore an excellent avenue to introduce students to figurative language, connotative meanings, analogies, allusions, and more.

However, teachers should not teach these aspects of literature simply because the standards include them and therefore, students will be tested on them; the ability to analyze texts through these lenses—theme, figurative language, point of view, structure, and more—is a powerful tool that will assist and empower them throughout the rest of their education, if not into

their career. This leads to the second point of why poetry is important to teach students: it helps them have a better understanding of the workings, restrictions, power, and beauty of the English language. For example, to capture to the beauty of an object using the English language, one does not normally define it strictly, but rather introduces it through another aspect of what it is. Award winning author, Lisa Dale, (2010) discusses how she practices writing poetry to help her prose, in part because writing poetry helps keep her from depending on definitions: “Define something,...and you remove its fundamental essence, like trying to demonstrate a butterfly's beauty by pinning it to a board. Poetry doesn't seek to define meaning, but to inhabit it. Prose can do that, too, and poetry can teach prose writers the way” (p. 33). In his article, “Seven Reasons to Teach Poetry,” Ted DeMille says that “If I could only teach one genre, it would be poetry. As a teacher of first and second graders, I want to inspire and instruct my students to craft clear and memorable pieces of writing. I want them to develop their own writing voices and become better consumers of the conventions of writing. No genre teaches these elements better than poetry” (2004, p. 16). DeMille points out three specific reasons to teach poetry here—three ways poetry helps students understand and appreciate the English language better.

DeMille's three points are: helping students 1) write clearly and memorably, 2) develop their writing voices, and 3) “become better consumers of the conventions of writing” (2004, p. 16). DeMille's first point, utilizing poetry to inspire students to “craft clear and memorable pieces of writing” is a logical one (p. 16). Writing poetry—a clear, concise, and articulate writing form, by extension, helps students gain the ability to write in a concise and articulate way, even in prose. Poetry is filled with figurative language that needs to be formed into tight, concise and clear language. Being able to form this work within poetry will carry over to students' other

forms of writing. Author Lisa Dale also discusses this concept in her article, “What Poetry Can Do for Your Fiction Writing” (2010). While Dale is not an educator, she does explain that writing poetry (and taking classes to help fine tune this ability) has helped her tremendously in writing prose. Using word choice to its full extent is a vital key to writing good poetry; whereas in prose it is not as necessary, in poetry, words have to “double or triple their load-bearing capacity” and she says practicing this has made her prose come to life, stand out, and leave an impression “like cigarette burns on a page” (2010, p. 33).

Finally, Dale explains her reason, overall, for practicing poetry as a prose writer:

Practicing poetry isn't necessarily about becoming a better poet; it's about becoming a better writer. A prose writer diligently pursuing poetry is something like a quarterback studying ballet. On the surface, it may feel like a waste of time. But it's the interaction—and the gap—between the two forms that forces growth and improvement on both sides of the divide. (2010, p. 33)

DeMille also mentions leading students to write memorable pieces. Writing poetry is, at least partially, about capturing the emotion of a moment, making it stand out in a special way.

Practicing this ability in poetry will help transfer to students' ability to write memorable, emotional pieces in prose as well.

DeMille's second point is about helping students form their writing voice. In an interview, when asked about which poets inspired her, award winning author and poet Jacqueline Woodson responded with a list of oddly matched poets, from William Yeats to Nick Flynn to Langston Hughes. She also said that many poets, just by “being in the world and writing” inspired her; however, it was reading their poems helped her find her own voice (Vardell, 2016,

p. 11). She responded to the next question, “What else would you like to explore in creating poetry for young people?” by saying that one of her goals is to “put the voices of young people out into the world, and visit places where kids think they’ve never met a ‘real’ writer and hold up a mirror for them. It would be amazing to walk into classrooms and get young people to believe they have a story, a poem, a voice” (2013, p. 11). Lori Oczkus (et. al) and other teachers write about their struggles of encouraging to help students find and write their “personal voice through sensory details” (2006, p. 476). However, once Oczkus modeled for her students not only reading poetry, and finding the elements in it they enjoyed, but actually writing her own poetry in front of the class, it gave them the courage to write their own pieces. As they wrote, Oczkus and other teachers who have modeled this simple lesson say that their students began to form their own writing voice more and more (2006, p. 476-678).

And finally, DeMille points out that teaching poetry introduces students to a fun form of writing—thus inspiring them to consume more forms of writing. As a student encounters an item he or she loves, such as poetry, they generally want more. There are several young adult novels that are written in poetic form that teachers can help point students to if they love poetry but struggle with novels, such as Jacqueline Woodson’s *Brown Girl Dreaming* (2014) and *The Crossover* by Kwame Alexander (2014). Poetry is an excellent resource to help students understand—and write—the English language in a better, more understanding way.

The third, and arguably most important reason students should be taught poetry is because poetry holds an emotional connection for humans, and in this case, adolescents, that few other pieces of writing hold. Poetry is, in fact, an excellent way to pull out the emotions that adolescents feel on a day to day basis. “Poetry embodies passion,” says Priscilla Myers, “poems

compress thoughts, feelings, and attitudes in much the same way adolescents compress the essence of their lives into a single party, a football game, or a telephone call. An adolescent's day-to-day life is a series of poems—intense, complex, sometimes startling, and often difficult to understand” (1998, p. 262). Myers makes this beautiful connection between the passion found in poetry and the passion in adolescents' lives and hearts. Teachers ought to teach poetry if only just to help students that have never made a connection to literature before, make it with poetry.

This idea is central to teaching poetry: teachers exploring how to help students make the imperative connection with poetry, thus opening students' awareness of all different kinds of figurative language, themes, point of views, passion, depth, and more, even beyond the realm of poetry. In her explanation of why she includes poetry in her classroom on a daily basis, Kathy Perfect says, “Poetry can help us see differently, understand ourselves and others, and validate our human experience” (1999, p. 728). She goes on to explain that poetry is both a tool to encounter one's daily experiences in a new light as well as learn and connect with others' experiences. “Because it speaks so often of our common human condition and experiences, poetry is a bridge between ourselves and the poet, ourselves and others. It can validate our feelings and help us make sense of the events of our lives” (1999, p. 729). When she reads *Been to Yesterdays* by Lee Bennett Hopkins (1995), she says that every student who has ever experienced a divorce is able to connect with the poem on an emotional level; the same with “Homework! Oh, Homework!” by Jack Prelutsky, with the concept of homework (1984). Poems “enable us to connect to others but also to our own inner selves” (1995, p. 729). This is the magic of poetry—adolescents, and readers at large—are given the opportunity to connect with others across any limitation of space, time, class, race, nationality or age based around every day,



human experiences. They can either point to these and say, “I have felt that before,” or they can say they have now, in an abstract way, encountered this fear, joy, loss, embrace, or pain that they otherwise would not have encountered. This is the power of poetry, and I would argue, one of the most important reasons teachers should teach poetry.

## Section 2: How to Teach Poetry

### Poet in the Classroom

While I have answered my first question “Why teach poetry?” in my previous section, this section seeks to answer, “How does one teach poetry?” This first subsection includes my personal experience in the classroom—both teaching and observing. For the first step in this project, I invited the poet Rebecca Gayle Howell to visit an advanced eighth grade classroom, at a middle school where I completed my practicum for the Fall of 2016 semester. This practicum supplemented a necessary university education class that I needed for my degree; to complete the practicum requirements, I was required to spend 60 hours in the classroom and teach at least six lessons in this class. Because I was planning for my Honors senior thesis at this time, (I thought that the subject was going to be student connection to literature) I was informed that the poet Rebecca Gayle Howell was staying at the Carson McCullers Center, a house owned by my university—Columbus State University. The experience of inviting her to my practicum classroom influenced me to narrow my focus of study to poetry. I taught a lesson before Howell’s visit to introduce the students to poetry and Howell’s work and then taught a brief lesson after her visit.

I taught a lesson before Howell’s classroom visit in order to introduce these students not only to poetry as a genre, but specifically to two of Howell’s poems. This lesson plan and lesson

materials can be found in Appendix A. The lesson started off with the students filling out part of a nontraditional KWL chart (which normally has three columns where the students fill in “what you know, what you want to know, and what you learned”). However, this chart had two “Know” columns; one “Know” asked the students what they knew about poetry in general, and the other asked what they knew about poets. After the students completed filling out the first two columns of the chart (by themselves or with a partner), I led them in an activity where one from each pair, and each student who worked alone, stood up in “rapid fire” style and reported one thing off their first “Know” chart (what they know about poetry). They were supposed to try not to repeat what anyone else said. The purpose of this activity was to help me, as a teacher, not only have written documentation of what students knew before and learned afterward, but to also give me a quick “snap shot” before I taught the lesson of what they already knew about poetry (or any misconceptions they had). Examples of student KWL charts can be seen in Appendix D. After this, I briefly went over the basic elements of poetry with PowerPoint slides. I included the definition, different styles of poetry, and terms: rhythm, rhyme, stanzas, line breaks, and figurative language. This was a short review meant to connect their introductory activity to the lesson and give them a refreshing on the topic of poetry—or introduce it if they had never been taught about poetry.

Finally, we discussed Howell’s two poems, which were “How to Kill a Rooster,” (2013a) and “My Mother Told Us Not to Have Children” (2013b). These poems include themes such as revenge, connection to nature, anger, family struggles passed down through generations, and more to which the students were able to connect. As a class, we discussed how specific literary devices such as similes, enjambment, and personification helped articulate these themes and the

mood of the poems. The students had copies of these poems at their desks, and they were encouraged to annotate their poems as we discussed them in class. As the teacher, I invited the students to explore what they interpreted the poems to mean. We completed our discussion of the two poems, and then I surprised them with the fact that “the poet of these poems will be visiting your classroom Wednesday!” They were thrilled to hear this. At the end of the class, they wrote in the KWL—in the column where students normally answer the question “What do you want to learn?”—questions that they wanted her to answer when she visited. Student examples of questions they wrote to Howell can be seen on their KWL charts in Appendix D.

The next day, I stopped by briefly to ask them to write out the answer to two questions:

- Describe how reading through the poems and discussing the elements with me helped you better understand the poems than when we read them at first, or if you had simply read the poems on your own.
- Predict: How do you think meeting the poet will impact your perceptions of these poems? Do you think your opinion of them will change any? Why or why not?

The students had a variety of answers. Several students talked about how the discussion in class helped because they were able to hear what other students had to say; several talked about how discussing the poem helped them understand its “deeper meaning rather than the surface”; others said statements like “when we explained the elements it made more sense.” There was not a single student that said that discussing it in class did not help them. So, it can be gathered that one basic step to helping students understand poetry is to perform close readings and discussions with the entire class. Also, many—though not all—of the students assumed that meeting Howell

would change their perception of the poems because she could give them “a better explanation of why she wrote those poems.” See examples of student work in Appendix E.

The students had a lot of anticipation built up for when “the famous poet” would be visiting their classroom. When she came, they listened avidly to her and willingly asked questions—some I recognized from their papers, but many I knew they formed after hearing her talk and read her other poems. When she read “How to Kill a Rooster,” she asked the students to close their eyes. She read it in a soft yet powerful voice. At one point, I looked to see if the students were in fact closing their eyes, and as far as I could tell, everyone was. There was a soft but audible reaction to the poem once Howell finished. Students said that their hair stood up while she was reading. Howell asked the students why they thought she asked them to close their eyes; several offered answers about imagination and feeling. She affirmed these answers and expounded on them by saying there are two ways to look at a poem: critically analyzing it, and experiencing it. She said that neither one is more important than the other; while analyzing it is valuable, many teachers miss the opportunity to simply allow students to experience and connect to the poem.

Several students said they were touched by her visit and poems. One student said that one poem reminded him of his childhood—it was not a happy poem. When asked, he did not want to share more, but Ms. Napier (the cooperating teacher) commented later that his comment—the fact that he had made a comment, rather, surprised her—he was a quiet student and did not usually offer anything in class discussions. Another student, who also rarely talked in class, discussed how he related to several of her poems that talked about anger and family relations—he was angry when his father had to leave for war when he was a child. One student was

particularly interactive during discussion with the poet, and when I talked to her, she barely had words to express her excitement and wonder at this experience—she likes to write poetry and this visit inspired her beyond words. This visit connected with these students on an emotional level, a level that I did not reach by simply analyzing these poems with them just a couple days prior.

The day after the poet's visit, I came back to the classroom and discussed the poet's visit with the students. This lesson plan and lesson materials can be found in Appendix C. I started the class by asking them to write down two aspects or parts of the poet's visit that stood out to them, which we discussed as a class—several students had answers, such as what she was wearing, the way she read the poems, and the fact that she wasn't crazy. I asked them if they enjoyed her visit, and the general consensus was, "yes." I also asked them to fill in the last column of the KWL chart—the "Learned" column. They were to answer whether Howell matched up with what they had anticipated she would be like, and whether their prediction proved accurate regarding whether meeting her would change their perception of the poems or not. Our class discussion after they answered on paper was centered around their expectations of her as a poet. While some students said that yes, she did match up with what they had anticipated, most of the students did not think she did. Some said they had assumed she would be old and/or fat because "all she must do is sit around and write."

Their misconceptions continued. Other students said they had assumed Howell would look down on them a bit, either because she was famous, they were too young, or both; many students were surprised that she came in with a t-shirt, jeans, and boots. Other students said they thought she would be "artsy" or like a "hippy." In reality, however, she was down to earth and

related well with the students; she did not look down on them but related to them as smart and educated people—not little kids. It seemed as though they rose to the occasion—they matched Howell's expectation. One student mentioned to me afterwards that "She didn't treat us like kids—I liked that." Some student examples of their answers can be seen on their KWL charts in Appendix D. This discussion based on their KWL chart responses helped me understand that students can benefit from realizing that artists and authors are "real people too." Once they discovered that she was a "real person," and that she was both down to earth and respected them, they were open to her, and even began sharing personal stories with her. Once the poet became real, her poetry became real.

After I left, I asked Ms. Napier to ask the students questions, based on thumbs up, sideways, or down. She asked them if, "the poet's visit to my classroom helped me to connect to the poems better than when we read them in class together." All of the students gave thumbs up on this question, a response none of the other questions produced. This experience obviously allowed them to appreciate these poems more so than simply analyzing them in class.

Some of the students' also gave written answers regarding their prediction of whether Howell's visit would change their perceptions of her poems or not. Many said their prediction was correct, their perceptions did change, but not for the reason they anticipated; they had not expected her to ask them to close their eyes and engage with the poems the way she did. One student said, "I didn't expect her to tell us to close our eyes and read it to us in a creepy voice." Another student answered both questions (the first regarding their anticipation of the poet) with, "Sort of, as poets are just people, but they don't all look like what they write. She wrote about death, although she looked kind. Meeting her did change my perception on her poetry, because I

found the reason she wrote them.” This answer reflected what other students wrote: just because her writing was “creepy,” it didn’t impact the way she looked. Also, several students commented on how meeting her did change their perception of her poems because she explained some of the background of her poems.

I asked Ms. Napier to ask the students several questions after I left. The students were asked their opinion of this statement: “I think that connecting to the author of a work will help me understand and appreciate their literary works better. (Whether it be simply investigating their background in an interesting way, retelling or listening to a retelling of their life story, or skyping with them).” 15% “kind of agreed,” and 85% strongly agreed. However, when asked their opinion on this statement, “I think that understanding the background of specific a literary work is important and will help me appreciate the work more,” only 27% strongly agreed—23% kind of agreed and 50% disagreed. And finally, when asked their opinion of this statement, “I would like to have more opportunities where we can connect and interact with authors and others who work with the literary arts,” 42% strongly agreed. 46% kind of agreed, and 12% disagreed. So, while they all appreciated the poet’s visit, and most think that understanding an author will help them understand their work, most do not think that understanding the background of a specific piece will help them understand it more, although it is true they could have misinterpreted the question. And finally, what I found most surprising, is that less than half of the twenty-six students strongly agreed that they would like more experiences to interact with authors. It should be noted though, that a poll from a single eighth grade classroom is a limited source of data. The poll did, however, provide a “snapshot” of these students’ thoughts toward

the poet's visit and potential other formats for connecting students to poetry and other works of literature.

### **My Experience in the Classroom**

In order to assist my journey in discovering how poetry can be taught in classrooms, I took the opportunity to visit three different classrooms to observe three teachers teach poetry. I visited a fourth, seventh and eighth, and tenth grade classroom. While each of these classrooms and experiences held several stark differences, there were also surprising similarities.

The fourth grade classroom was at a suburban elementary school. The class I observed was gifted. While I was not quite sure what to expect in a fourth grade classroom, what I met surprised me. The activities in which the teacher led the students were active, engaging, and thought provoking. Shortly after the class began, the teacher handed out poster boards, each with a large question printed in the middle of the board. On each board was written a large question. Three of the boards read the question, "Why do people write poetry?" and three others read, "What makes poetry a unique form of writing?" The students were required to remain completely quiet for several minutes while in small groups, and, with markers, they wrote their answers to their given question by linking it with a line to the question. After they were done with their answer, they had to respond to others' answers by drawing a line and responding. After their time was up, they swapped tables to write on another board with the other question. This is much like an online discussion board, except it is immediate, more personal, and arguably more appropriate for a fourth grade classroom. To see some examples of students' work on the poster boards, see Appendix F.



While some student answers in this activity revealed misunderstandings about poetry, and most were informal, many revealed thoughtful and insightful responses. For instance, in response to the question, "Why do people write poetry?" several students replied with an answer similar to this one: "I think people write poetry because they can express how they feel." Some students included specific feelings such as joy, sadness, and anger—some went further by saying poets try to spread these feelings, express opinion, or persuade people. Other ideas students included were because it is fun, because they like it and are passionate, and "Because some people like singing and poetry sounds like singing." All of these answers arguably do express different aspects of poetry, and perhaps reveal certain reasons why people do write poetry.

For the second question, "What makes poetry a unique form of writing?", the answers came in similar style. Many students mentioned the common brevity of poems, and even more mentioned rhyme. This student went a little further: "I think it's a unique form of writing because, its [*sic*] not like plain writeing [*sic*], you kind of say it in a pattern or rhyme and it is kind of like a song." Others mentioned the variety of topics, creativity, and the expression of emotions. Again, while limited, these answers are certainly aspects of what makes poetry unique. The question I asked myself was: are these aspects ones they learned on their own, have been taught, or a mixture between the two? What I learned later is that the teacher had not specifically taught poetry since early in the year, in mid-September. At that point, she taught the technical terms and aspects of poetry. However, all throughout the year she had poetry books available for the children to read in their free time, an opportunity of which they took advantage. When they answered these questions, they had not "learned" about poetry for over six months; however,

they had immersed themselves in children's poetry books throughout the year, learning by experience, as these answers show.

While this teacher may not have included poetry in most of her lessons, she sought to include it as a regular part of her classroom. Betsy Miguez, in her article "Bring Back the Poetry," shares that "Most educators agree that incorporating poetry into the elementary classroom every day is the best way to build poetry appreciation," but unfortunately, many do not. Miguez argues that building an appreciation for poetry opens the door to giving them a greater appreciation for the written word at large (2005, p. 26). Miguez agrees with this paper's sentiment that increased standardized testing makes it more difficult for teachers to incorporate literature such as poetry in the classroom; however, she says that "planting seeds for lifelong love of poetry" in students is worth the effort. Also, in International Literary Association's article "Poetry, Please,"

Karen Hildebrand argues that the power of poetry extends beyond pretty and emotional words—it helps readers of all ages gain better language development. "Better readers and writers are built through hearing and reading rhyming words" (2016, para. 1). That this elementary teacher has made it available to her students is an important aspect of them becoming comfortable with it.

After talking with the teacher, she expressed a bit of remorse in the way she taught poetry that year—since it was her first year teaching it to this extent—and said that she would be teaching it differently in the future. The reason it was her first year teaching it on a deeper level was because Georgia standards have changed with the push towards Common Core, and Georgia teachers are required to dig deeper into poetry with fourth graders than they ever were before. For example, the standard **ELAGSE4RL5** says that students must be able to "explain major

differences between poems, drama, and prose, and refer to the structural elements of poems (e.g., verse, rhythm, meter) ...” The standard **ELAGSE4RL2** says that students must be able to determine the theme of a poem, and the standard **ELAGSE4RL10** says that by the end of the year, students must be able to “read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poetry...” (Georgia Department of Education, 2015, p. 1).

Fourth grade is the first year that students are introduced to poetry to this level. In the third grade, while standards say that students need to be able to read and comprehend poetry, especially to help them in their fluency, they are not introduced to any structural elements of poetry. This fourth grade teacher said that in the following year, she would teach poetry differently, getting them hooked with poetry *first*. She said she would do activities like the ones she did during my visit, getting them engaged with poetry before going over the elements of poetry. Then, after they become immersed (and interested) in it, she will introduce the structural elements.

This teacher did two more poetry activities with her students, both involving sticky notes. For the first activity, she had the students write on two sticky notes: on one, they wrote what they liked about poetry, and on another, they wrote what they did not like about poetry. Then, they gathered in the middle of the class and shared some of their ideas. Some students commented on poetry’s common rhyming pattern, the emotions of poetry, and how funny poetry can be; another simply said, “The only thing I like about poetry is that it’s short!” Some negative comments included how difficult poetry can be to understand, that it is time-consuming, and that sometimes it does not rhyme. For the next activity, she had the students choose a poetry book with a partner, read through it, and write down their “wonderings,” questions they had concerning the poems,

and “noticings,” things they noticed about the poetry. Some of the “noticings” included rhyme, rhyming patterns, pictures, humor, patterns, and more. The “wonderings,” however, ranged from “why does it not rhyme [*sic*],” to “How dose [*sic*] he come up with this stuff?” to questions about the plot of narrative poems. These activities were meant to make the students think more about poetry and immerse themselves in its ideas, patterns, inconsistencies, wording, and more. This teacher taught these young students by allowing them to express their ideas of poetry and come to their own conclusions about it based on their immersion in and exploration of poetry—an activity the teacher wished she had led the students in before teaching them the structural elements of it.

I encountered this idea that students should encounter and engage with poetry before learning the structural elements in the tenth grade class I visited, as well. This teacher teaches at a vocational high school in an urban, lower socio-economic area of the city. She teaches a college level English class to both sophomores and juniors. She introduced the concept of poetry with a short, simple poem, “Head, Heart,” by Lydia Davis (2007). This poem is simple in nature, but portrays a profound yet common felt phenomenon—the “head” trying to help the “heart” when both have lost someone. This poem’s powerful sentiment wrapped in simple yet beautiful words created an excellent avenue for this teacher to relate poetry to her students. Everyone has lost someone or something, even if not to the point of death, the idea is relatable to all. She also used this poem to explain to her students that poetry does not always have to be difficult to understand. She chose to first relate poetry to her students on a basic level before moving into deep analysis.

On this teacher's second day of introducing poetry, in which she did a dialogue-style lecture of explaining what poetry is, she read to the students "Richard Corey," by Edwin Arlington Robinson (1897). This poem paints the picture of a young, wealthy, handsome man living a "perfect life," who—seemingly out of the blue—goes home and shoots himself. For the entire second half of the class, she discussed what the meaning of this poem could be to their own, personal lives. She barely analyzed the poem itself. She simply led the students in a discussion of how they could look for the Richard Coreys in their own lives. Myers spoke of the idea of adolescents' lives being filled with poetic opportunities: "An adolescent's day-to-day life is a series of poems..." (1998, p. 262). It is the job of the teacher to make the connection between a poem and the students' lives, which this teacher did with a class full of captivated students. When I talked to her afterwards, she explained that it is important to introduce students to poetry as a source of meaning before critically analyzing it. If teachers jump into the elements of and analysis of poetry first, they will lose their students. This idea is tied in with what Rebecca Gayle Howell told the class when she asked them to close their eyes as she simply read poems to them: "Reading poetry is two sided—one side is analyzing it, but the other is experiencing it. One is not more important than the other." This teacher modeled this idea perfectly.

However, this teacher did not stop with ensuring a connection was made between students and poetry, but she turned to the other side of poetry: analysis. On a later day that I visited her classroom, she had her students find a partner and together, analyze the poem, "A Letter from Phillis Wheatley" by Robert Hayden (1996). This poem, unlike, "Head, Heart," is not quite so simply or short—it requires some "digging" to understand it, and even more to appreciate its poetic depth. She briefly introduced the poem, then asked the students as they read

the poem to think about whether they thought Hayden wrote the poem on his own, or if he found it and published it under his name. Then, after they paired up, she told them to read the poem “actively” and to annotate it. She told them not to rush, but to take their time “and actually *study* the poem. Be collegiate!” She told them they had the majority of the class, so they needed to dig deep—they would take time at the end of the class to share ideas.

At first, she stayed separate from the students, allowing them to get settled, read the poem together, and come up with the main ideas on their own. However, once the students understood and began analyzing the poem, she started to answer their questions. She eventually went and checked with every group, offering ideas, encouragement, definitions, and guidance. She never did too much of their thinking for them, but neither did she abandon them. As I walked around, I heard students discussing allusions, metaphors, themes, and more. Towards the end of the class, she wrapped it up with about ten minutes of discussion. The students were willing and even eager (though some more than others) to share their ideas. This tenth grade class discussed ideas and themes such as identity, facades, different forms of bondage, innocence, and more. While the teacher led the discussion, they offered profound ideas to the discussion.

This teacher transitioned seamlessly from engaging the students with poetry by helping them find a personal connection with it to analyzing it and finding deeper meaning within it. She allowed her students to complete most of the critical analyzing, thus enabling them to identify the various literary devices and figurative language in the poem on their own. The National Council of Teachers of English has a position statement that includes several aspects of teaching that this teacher implemented. The statement says that teachers should “create environments that allow students to engage in critical examinations of texts as they dissect, deconstruct, and re-

construct in an effort to engage in meaning making and comprehension processes" ("A Call," 2004, para. 17). This teacher allowed these students to "dissect" the text by giving them free reign to analyze it themselves, yet also monitoring their process.

The students also, however, came to some varying conclusions toward the end of their discussion, not all agreeing, and the teacher did not stunt these discussions by offering her "final" opinion. In fact, at the end, she admitted to the students that she did not know whether the poem was in fact written by Hayden or Wheatley; she said she did not want to know, because it made the poem more interesting to her. Several of the students disagreed on this point, but she left it open for personal opinion. This same position statement of NCTE says that discussion of texts is necessary, and should be authentic, student-led and "teacher facilitated. Such discussion should lead to diverse interpretations of a text that deepen the conversation" ("A Call," 2004, para. 13). This teacher did this by allowing her students to offer up their ideas, and only guiding the discussion.

Unfortunately, while I visited the seventh and eighth grade classroom at the suburban middle school I visited, I did not find these connections being made before the elements of poetry were taught. Perhaps this is because I came during the wrong time, but the teacher was simply making her students take notes on the literary elements from a PowerPoint. Once she began introducing poems to the students, it was all focused on noticing literary and structural elements of the poems. She handed out copies of "The Eagle," (Tennyson, 1901) and "Unfolding Bud," (Koriyama, 1967) but the students were not actively interested and participating as they were in the high school and elementary classes. Then, she handed out a sheet that held a list of several aspects of poetry, including theme, tone, different types of figurative language, and more.

There were boxes next to the terms, and the students were to fill in the boxes with examples from the poems—there was another box where they were supposed to paraphrase the poem. On the back of the seventh grade sheet were questions about the differences between poetry and prose. On the back of the eighth grade sheet was a list of 27 “Poetry Terms to Know” and their definitions.

When I visited her class, the students did not show the eagerness, excitement, or willingness to participate like they had in the other two classes I visited. While none of these are bad questions, poems, or ideas, she had not, from what I could tell, first grabbed their attention with a poem, eliciting a strong emotional response that many of us can find in poems that we appreciate. Even if she had, that connection had seemingly not carried over. However, this first impression I held by visiting her class proved to be somewhat misleading. When I asked, she later informed me that she had introduced the concept of poetry to her class with spoken word poetry. She also compared poetry with something every student listens to: music. Spoken word poetry is potentially easier for students to connect to, and it provides a visual illustration of the power of poetry. Some of the spoken words poems she uses via YouTube are Prince Ea’s “Why I Think This World Should End,” Suli Break’s “Why I Hate School, But Love Education,” and Sarah Kay and Phil Kay’s “Origin Story.” She said that that she loves to teach these poems because every time she does, the students become animated over them—they seem to be able to connect with these poems that offer real world situations, problems, and stories. She did understand, at least to an extent, the power of students becoming passionate about poetry.

This teacher also held an event showcasing students’ interest in and passion for poetry after testing. She named the event “Poetry Café,” but it was also a “Poetry Slam.” Towards the



end of the semester, the students were required to write their own poems, and they could choose to present them in front of the class on this day for extra credit. On this day, she set the atmosphere with food, music, table cloths, “menus” of the poems being presented, soft lights, and more. As the students performed, their classmates judged them on a basic scale, and the top three students received a prize. I visited two eighth grade classrooms, and some of these poems were truly powerful. This event portrayed the power of poetry in a remarkable way. Several students wrote about issues they saw in the world around them, such as violence, sexism, racism, pollution, beauty, etc.; some students were more specific to the issues they perceived in their own middle school, such as bullying, identity, etc. Some simply spoke about the lessons they learned in middle school and the expectations they held for high school. There were a variety of other topics. I was surprised the by the power and emotion behind many of the poems read. While these students may not have cared much about “The Eagle,” they certainly relished in the opportunity to speak their mind about the world around them—and in an artistic, poetic format as well.

I did not get to observe the fourth grade teacher while she led the students in any form of literary analysis of poetry beyond their own personal ideas, and I was not overly impressed with the middle school teacher’s method of leading the students in an analysis of poetry. However, this is not to say that analyzing poetry is any less important than allowing students to experience and connect with it. The high school teacher provided an example of both connecting and engaging the students emotionally and personally, and then leading them in critical analysis. Utilizing both of these avenues of teaching poetry is important as a teacher, and I hope that myself and other teachers will be able to utilize this discovery.

**Tools and Ideas for Teaching Poetry**

As I stated early on, passionate, human, emotional connection is an important reason for teaching poetry. I also discovered that this is the very key to introducing poetry—engaging students' emotions before leading them to analyzing. Students' attentions need to be caught before moving into deeper waters. I kept encountering the idea that poetry should spark a passion in students first before teachers move onto the structural elements. Teri Lesesne, in his journal entry, "Passion for Poetry," says that a colleague of his gave an excellent metaphor for what students often "smell" when they think of poetry: formaldehyde. They are so used to dissecting poetry to the extreme that they have lost their love for it (2000, p. 61). Hopkins has worked his whole life to reconnect students with a passion and love for poetry.

Diana Bilimoria talks about "passion and poetry in management" education: Essentially, I am referring to permeating everyday management tasks with the most uplifting aspects of human interaction—those elements that create a sense of identity, purpose, and contribution, that generate genuine enthusiasm and excitement, that encourage openness and creativity, that provide a solid base of goodwill and care facilitative of transformation, that manifest beauty and harmony in the interstices among routines, and that give rise to a deep sense of connection. (1999, p. 465-466)

This idea is essential—connecting the students with the passion of humankind found in poetry, and permeating this idea into every area of the classroom. The key is to introduce poetry as this element of passion *before* one teaches analyzing, or "dissecting," or else all students may remember of poetry is "formaldehyde."

A difficulty teachers face however, is expressing and spreading this passion for poetry to their students, especially once the introduction is over and it is time to begin exploring the depth of poetry. One concept Myers discusses is the power to carefully choose the poetry one will share—it is important to know one's audience. Once the teacher has the key poems with which he or she knows the students will be able to connect, the teacher can move on to a broader spectrum (1998, p. 263). In Appendix A is an annotated "Teaching Poetry Reference List" to provide teachers with sources to find potential poems and ideas for teaching poetry.

Mara Linaberger explains that teachers today often feel that the task of teaching poetry is daunting—but it doesn't have to be. She says one way to captivate students' attention with poetry is helping them to write it—including kinds of poetry that don't have to rhyme. When students write it, they are forced to utilize what they have learned about poetry—the figurative language, literary elements, patterns, themes, and more—and put it into practice, forcing them to learn and know the material on a greater level. Another tool she mentions is simply exposing students to poetry—all different kinds of poetry. The more students become exposed to poetry, the more they feel comfortable with it. Lenz (1992) explains that allowing students to listen to poetry helps them "develop a feel for the texture and power of language" (p. 597). These tools combined, reading, and then writing, is one of Linaberger's "magic formulas:" "The fundamentals of writing poetry will come through the imitation process" (2005, p. 368). NCTE reinforces this idea by saying that reading and writing development go hand in hand: "Writers grow in their ability to craft a particular genre, say poetry, through being immersed in opportunities to read, write, and to look closely at the poetry of others. Over time, and with these kinds of experiences, writing develops a voice and quality that can earn the writer membership in

a particular discourse community” (“What We Know About Writing,” n.d., p. 1). While talking to my Poetry professor, Dr. Nick Norwood, he also said that leading students in writing poetry at a young age is an excellent way to help them connect with poetry. These tools, leading students to read and write poetry, and introducing them to poetry early in life, are tools educators can use to help their student connect to and learn from poetry.

### **Conclusion**

Teachers who dismiss poetry as something to be skimmed over because it is a difficult concept for students, is not covered by the standards adequately, or they simply feel uncomfortable with it, are missing out on an incredibly valuable tool for teaching the English language. Teachers ought to teach poetry extensively not only because it is covered in the standards explicitly, but also because poems are filled with elements found all throughout the standards. In fact, reading and writing poetry—a concise, articulate, and beautiful form of writing—will strengthen students’ overall writing skills. Poetry also opens the door of opportunity, revealing to students their own every day experiences in a new, artistic, emotionally colored light, giving them the opportunity to make a connection not only to a form of literature, but to the rest of the human race that has had those same experiences.

My own experiences in the classroom reveal that students can nearly always connect with poetry—the teacher simply has to introduce it properly. Once students share this emotional connection with poetry, it opens the door for a greater understanding, appreciation, and ability to learn from and about poetry. One way teachers can engage students is to read and analyze poems with which they can find an emotional or experiential connection. It is important to first allow them to connect with this poetry, before delving into a critical analysis of it. Teachers can also

help students overcome their fear or aversion of poetry by letting them read and write it, allowing them to become comfortable with the genre and as well as learn in a hands-on approach. These are some practical ways of guiding students into appreciating poetry, and therefore entering into a world where human passion is shared.

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Retrieved from <http://www.readingrockets.org/article/10-ways-use-poetry-your-classroom>

This source offers several practical ways to include poetry in one's every day classroom activities while still using it to teach the standards, though it doesn't downplay the power of poetry for the simple sake of poetry. It also offers many resources, mostly poetry books, and what those poems have to offer in the way of students. Some examples the article offers are: activate prior knowledge, establish theme, set a scene, inspire writing, and more.

2. Cleaver, S. (2016). 24 Must-Share Poems for Middle School and High School. *We are Teachers*. Retrieved from <http://www.wearteachers.com/blog/24-must-share-poems-for-middle-school-and-high-school>

This site offers a list of poems that I have already personally used. The list offers 24 poems, both classics and modern ones that will likely connect to most of one's students for various reasons.

For poems that one is not familiar with (and even ones that one would be familiar with), the site offers a brief, one sentence description of the poem underneath its link to identify what aspects a teacher could most likely pull out of each poem. The site also offers several visual captions of poems (pictures with the poem written in a complementary font in front of it) that students will likely find compelling.

## Appendix A

## Teaching Poetry Reference List

1. Schoch, K. (2013). 10 Ways to Use Poetry In Your Classroom. *Reading Rockets*.

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3. Read Write Think. Retrieved from

[http://www.readwritethink.org/search/?sort\\_order=relevance&q=poetry&srchgo.x=0&srchgo.y=0&old\\_q=](http://www.readwritethink.org/search/?sort_order=relevance&q=poetry&srchgo.x=0&srchgo.y=0&old_q=)

This website offers a plethora of activities and lessons that teachers can use for any ELA topic, including poetry. Above is a link to all of the lessons that include “poetry” in their title—the grades vary from K to 12. Read Write Think is an excellent resource for teachers because it offers extensive information about and justification for its lessons; it also provides the necessary resources the teacher needs.

4. Poetry Out Loud. Retrieved from <http://www.poetryoutloud.org/teaching->

[resources/lesson-plans](http://www.poetryoutloud.org/teaching-resources/lesson-plans)

This site also holds several lesson plans specific to poetry. It included detailed lesson plans that each have brief explanations under their links. Each lesson plan gives a comprehensive list of objectives, tools, and activities that the students will do. Some examples of lesson plans are The Tone Map, Visualizing Voice, Poetry as a Ceremony (a lesson primarily about rhythm), and Line Dancing (a lesson about the importance of line breaks).

5. Poetry 180. Retrieved from <http://www.loc.gov/poetry/180/p180-list.html>

This resource includes 180 poems that Billy Collins, Poet Laureate 2001-2003, put together for people to have inspiring poems available to read each day. Collins’s goal was to put together pieces to inspire people and make them “think about what it means to be a member of the human race.” This is a perfect source to being to look through poems and identify which ones will best match any specific group of students. There is also a book form of these poems—the eBook can be found on <https://books.google.com/books?id=ssxHjRNX9->

QC&printsec=frontcover&dq=poems+for+middle+and+high+school&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwicovmniJPOAhVm54MKHQlrCKkQ6wEIHzAA#v=onepage&q=poems%20for%20middle%20and%20high%20school&f=false

6. Poets.org Retrieved from <https://www.poets.org/national-poetry-month/tips-teaching-poetry>

This resource is not as “sophisticated” as Read Write Think, in that it does not have complete lesson plans. But, if a teacher is in need of tips to include poetry in the periphery of his or her class—especially during National Poetry Month, this tool is excellent. It has nine to twelve valuable points under each of these headings: Preparation, Reading, Writing, Other Activities, and Success Stories. However, these tips don’t only need to be used in April, but can be used all throughout the school year.

7. Lies, B. B. (1993). *The Poet’s Pen: Writing Poetry with Middle and High School Students*. Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Teacher Idea Press.

While a bit antiquated, this resource offers not only further reason to teach poetry in the classroom, but it also offers tips to teach it, specifically writing it. For example, Lies encourages teachers to allow students to work in small groups to stir up ideas, give feedback, and to give every student a voice. She says it is important to allow every student to express their work, but it is a vulnerable process, so a small group is safer than the whole class. Lies has more valuable tips like this one in this body of work.

8. Skelton, S. (2006). Finding a Place for Poetry in the Classroom Every Day. *The English Journal*, 96(1), 25-29. doi:1. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30046658> doi:1

This is an article that follows a woman's journey as she began to include poetry more and more in her class. It includes examples of her own students' poetry, but it also give formats to help any teacher's students produce poetry. For example, Skelton used poems such as "Where I'm From" by George Ella Lyon and "The Red Wheelbarrow" by William Carlos Williams as a template for her students to place their own ideas and experiences within. Then, she guides them as they

move out from that format. This article gives many more examples of Skelton discovery of how to incorporate poetry in the classroom every day.

Lesson Title	Poetry: Preparation for Rebecca Garcia Howell
Standard(s)	<p><b>ELAGSEELA:</b> Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.</p> <p><b>ELAGSEELA5:</b> Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.</p>
Timeline	55 minutes
Essential Question or "Big Idea" for Student Learning	<p>How does understanding the poet help us understand the poetry?          How does understanding terms and key words help us understand poetry better?          How does figurative language, enjambment, and the use of specific words establish a specific mood or meaning in the poem?</p>
Lesson Objective(s)	<p>Students will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Identify components of the poetry genre.</li> <li>-Identify figurative language and literary devices in poetry, and will describe how they impact the poem and its meaning and mood.</li> <li>-Describe connections between a poet's background and a poem's meaning.</li> </ul>
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Power point for Smart Start</li> <li>-Powerpoint with the texts, terms, and Prompt</li> <li>-Poetry Handout Chart</li> </ul>
Introduction/ "Hook"	<p>As students enter, the Smart Start will be displayed on the screen.</p> <p>Prompt: Get a handout from the front. Fill out the /few two columns. You can work with a partner.</p> <p>What do you know about poems? What do you know about poets? What would you expect them to be like?</p>

Appendix B

Lesson Plan and Materials: Preparation for Rebecca Gayle Howell

Lesson Plan Template

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Rachel Knapp \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Lesson Title</b>	Poetry: Preparation for Rebecca Gayle Howell
<b>Grade Level</b>	8 <sup>th</sup>
<b>Standard(s)</b>	<p><b>ELAGSE8RL4:</b> Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.</p> <p><b>ELAGSE8L5:</b> Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.</p>
<b>Timeline</b>	55 minutes
<b>Essential Question or "Big Idea" for Student Learning</b>	<p>How does understanding the poet help us understand the poetry?                      How does understanding terms and key words help us understand poetry better?                      How does figurative language, enjambment, and the use of specific words establish a specific mood or meaning in the poem?</p>
<b>Lesson Objective(s)</b>	<p>Students will:                      -Identify components of the poetry genre.                      -Identify figurative language and literary devices in poetry, and will describe how they impact the poem and its meaning and mood."                      -Describe connections between a poet's background and a poem's meaning.</p>
<b>Materials</b>	<p>-Power point for Smart Start                      -Powerpoint with the texts, terms, and Prompt                      -Poetry Handout Chart</p>
<b>Introduction/ "Hook"</b>	<p>As students enter, the Smart Start will be displayed on the screen.</p> <p>Prompt: Get a handout from the front. Fill out the <i>first two</i> columns. You can work with a partner.</p> <p>What do you know about poems? What do you know about poets? What would you expect them to be like?</p>

<p><b>Body of Lesson/ Procedures</b> Note: "We say" and "You say" portions of lesson might be combined. "You say" might also happen during lesson closure).</p>	<p>"I say" (Teacher models for students)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. After the students get settled in, the teacher will give the students a few minutes to complete their smart start.</li> <li>2. The teacher will ask each pair to pick their "representative." Then, the teacher will say "Okay, now we're going to go around the room, and each pair's representative will stand up quickly and say one thing about poetry that they listed. You need to try and not say something anyone else said. Be quick!" The students will then go around the room and list off their findings.</li> <li>3. Then, the teacher will open a powerpoint that includes the basic definition, aspects of poetry, examples of types of poetry, and more. The teacher will go over each one briefly, connecting to students' comment made in the previous activity. The teacher will leave this activity open for questions or comments during or after it.</li> </ol>
	<p>"We say" (Teacher guides students)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. The teacher will hand out copies of the two poems to the students, and then will read "How to Kill a Rooster" to the students without any explanation except that the author of this poem is alive today.</li> <li>5. Afterwards, the teacher will ask the students, "So, what do you think? We're going to go over some key terms and words here in a minute that will help us figure out more of what the poem is saying, but can you tell me, overall, how it makes you feel?" As the students offer up some thoughts, the teacher will guide them in the direction of, "Perhaps it grossed you out a little bit?"</li> <li>6. Then, the teacher will read the poem again, but will stop to explain and will go over the words "spurred" and "clothes line," to make sure the students know what these mean.</li> <li>7. The teacher will ask the students if they notice any figurative language at certain points in the poem, and will ask them to annotate, along with the teacher, the devices used. The teacher will stop in the third stanza and ask this,</li> </ol>

		<p>and will then discuss the personification of the rooster, and how that makes the killing of the rooster more potent.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8. The teacher will be sure to discuss enjambment in the twelfth stanza, and will ask the students why they think she used it there? The teacher will guide the students' answers in the direction of, "What if the line simply ended there? What is she implying?" The students should catch on that, "We, at some points in life, are like that rooster."</li> <li>9. The teacher will discuss repetition in the 9<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, and 14<sup>th</sup> stanzas, and how they affect the poem. "What visualization does the line, 'and flap and flap and,' give you? How does this tie into the next line that says, '...this desperate bird.'? Have you ever seen a bird hopelessly trying to flap its wings in desperation? How does it make you feel? Have you ever felt like that?"</li> <li>10. "Also, why do you think she repeats the line, 'Remember in the end.' What is she emphasizing?" The students may not have anything to offer. The teacher will read the last few sentences again. She will emphasize the word "taste," and how that ties into what is at the end. "What meaning does taste have other than food? Can you taste of things in this life? What double meaning do you think it may have in this context?" "Now, why do you think she is emphasizing, "the end," and telling us to remember it?"</li> <li>11. How did this affect the poem? How did the poem make them feel? Why do they think that? Can they give examples of why they might feel creeped out? Can anyone think of a deeper meaning this poem is trying to capture? There could be more than one right answer. If there is time, the teacher will read the poem one last time, after the discussion.</li> <li>12. Next, the teacher will take a poem from the same author that is not found in her book, that will help give some</li> </ol>
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	<p style="text-align: center;">"You say" (Students work independently or in small groups)</p>	<p>background information on the author and help the reader understand it more. The teacher will open a page on the smartboard that has the poem, "My Mother Told Us Not to Have Children."</p> <p>13. The teacher will read it to the students, and then ask them, "So, what is Howell talking about in this poem?" The students should say something like, "Her childhood, and her mother's childhood." The teacher will ask, "What was her childhood like?" The students, if they hadn't already, will say something like, "It was hard, and filled with fighting." The teacher will then ask them what elements they noticed in it, or what words were unfamiliar to them. The teacher will make sure the term, "enjambment" and "simile" are brought up. She will discuss how these elements impact the poem. "Look on the second and third line, in the first and second stanza, what term do you see being played out there?" The students should answer, "enjambment." "How do you think it plays a role in this part of the poem? How does it affect the message being relayed?" The teacher will talk about how, if the sentence ended at the end of the line, it would be a "nice ending." However, when it continues on, it stabs in the heart. "In light of the what the first line says, what does the last half of this sentence imply?" The students might say, "That she didn't want to have children, but once she found out she was pregnant, since there was nothing they could do about it, so she simply accepted it." Though the students may not come up with that whole thought, the teacher will help them along.</p> <p>14. "What literary element do you see in the fourth line, second stanza?" The students should say, "simile." "Why do you think she chose a knife to compare with her mother? How does this simile reflect the kind of person her mother was? What else does the line say- what elements</p>
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		<p>of a knife does Howell choose to explain?" The teacher will lead the students, if they don't come to the conclusion themselves, to the conclusion that a knife has to be used with care, and that is what Howell chose to bring out of the simile. However, a knife is still a knife—it cuts straight to the point, and can be ruthless. A knife also has two sides, like her mother.</p>
<p>Lesson Closure</p>	<p>In wrap up of the lesson, the teacher will go over Howell's poetry to reinforce the lesson. I want you all to show back out your hand at the end column a question you have for questions. Don't ask but what her favorite relate that to any of the poems we looked would really help you understand the we better. You can ask about what it's like to travel or vagabond. But also, don't simply we're going to vote on the two best questions who have the best questions signed by her." The teacher will give the their questions.</p>	<p>15. The teacher will ask the students if they see any other examples of similes, enjambment, or other literary devices that stand out to them. The teacher will make sure the simile, "It felt like drowning, her tenderness," is brought up. It correlates to the other simile—the two sides of her mother, her caring side that was never separate from her practical and at times harsh look on life. The teacher will also bring up the enjambment of "last" in the fourth stanza—the way Howell chooses to show that her mother was probably last in more ways than one. She chose to reveal this aspect of her mother's life to, in part, explain her outlook on life. IF students bring up more examples, the teacher will go along with them if they prove useful to understanding the poem.</p>
<p>Modifications</p>	<p>(leave blank for now)</p>	<p>16. Also, the teacher will make sure that the term, "back-forty" is explained as part of a homestead, a large plot of land—it was forty acres.</p>
<p>Evaluation (Student Assessment)</p>		<p>17. If there is time, the teacher will read the short paragraph at the bottom of the page that helps explain this poem a bit more.</p>
<p>Reflection</p>		<p>18. Finally, the teacher will ask the students how this poem helps them understand the poet more. Do they think about the first poem any differently?</p>
	<p>"You say" (Students work independently or in small groups).</p>	<p>19. The teacher will then say, "Okay, now I want you all to get out a piece of paper and a pencil." The teacher will place power point slide with a prompt on the smart board. The prompt will say: "Describe how reading through the poems with a me and discussing the elements helped you better understand</p>

		<p>the poems than when we read them at first, or if you had simply read the poems on your own. Also, tell me briefly your honest, overall impression of her two different poems.”</p> <p>20. The teacher will read the aloud and give the students 5-6 minutes to complete the activity.</p> <p>21. The teacher will quickly take up a few examples that students wrote down and respond to them, if there is time.</p>
<p><b>Lesson Closure</b></p>	<p>To wrap up the lesson, the teacher will tell the students that the reason she chose to go over Howell’s poetry is because they will actually get to meet her! “Okay, I want you all to now take out your handout one last time. I want you to write in the last column a question you have for the poet. Now, these need to be good questions. Don’t ask her what her favorite color is—unless you can somehow relate that to one of the poems we looked at. But please, think of questions that would really help you understand the work better, or understand her life work better. You can ask about what it’s like to live as a poet, but try not to be too broad or vague. But also, don’t simply ask if she likes to peps vs. coke. Also, we’re going to vote on the two best questions or sets of questions. The two students who have the best questions will get to have her book, and get to have it signed by her.” The teacher will give the students 4-5 minutes to write down their questions.</p>	
<p><b>Modifications</b></p>	<p>(leave blank for now)</p>	
<p><b>Evaluation (Student Assessment)</b></p>		
<p><b>Reflection</b></p>		

PowerPoint Used with Lesson "Poetry: Preparation for Rebecca Gayle Howell"

## Smart Start

Get a handout from the front. Fill out the *first two* columns. You can work with a partner.

What do you know about poems? What do you know about poets? What would you expect them to be like?

## Key Points and Terms of Poetry

- o Poems sometimes **rhyme**:
  - o repetition of the end-sounds of words.
- o Poems are almost always made up of **stanzas**:
  - o grouped set of lines within a poem, usually set off from other stanzas by a blank line
- o Poems almost always include **line breaks**:
  - o the termination of the line of a poem, and the beginning of a new line
- o Poems almost always use **figurative language**

## Writing Prompt

- o Describe how reading through the poems and discussing the elements with me helped you better understand the poems than when we read them at first, or if you had simply read the poems on your own.
- o Predict: How do you think meeting the poet will impact your perceptions of these poems? Do you think your opinion of them will change any? Why or why not?

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*\*Note: The original handout was in a landscape orientation.*

KWL Chart Used During Lesson "Poetry: Preparation for Rebecca Gayle Howell"

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

<p>Know: What do you know about poetry? Make a bullet-point list of what you know about poetry, such as the elements that make it up, or what you know about poetry as a genre in general. For example: It is a written expression of art, it is made up of stanzas, etc.</p>	<p>Know: What do you know about poets? What do you think they are like? For example, how do you think they make their living, and what do you think their every day life is like? Do you think most of them have similar personalities? Make a bullet-point list of your thoughts.</p>	<p>Want to Know: Write down 2-3 questions you would like to ask the author of these poems if she were here. What would you like to know more about her poems, her life, or her inspiration to write these poems?</p>	<p>Learned:</p>
<p>Standard(s)</p>	<p>ELA L.5-8.1: By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of grades 5-8 text complexity band independently and proficiently</p>		
<p>Timeline</p>	<p>25 minutes</p>		
<p>Essential Question or "Big Idea" for Student Learning</p>	<p>How does understanding the poet help us understand the poetry?</p>		
<p>Lesson Objective(s)</p>	<p>Students will: -Evaluate their prediction -Determine whether reading the poet influenced their perception of the poems or not</p>		
<p>Materials</p>	<p>-Powerpoint with the writing prompts -KWL Charts (the same one as in Lesson 5)</p>		
<p>Introduction/ "Hook"</p>	<p>As students enter, the Smartboard will be on the board. Prompt: Name two things that happened yesterday from the poet's visit that stood out to you or were especially interesting.</p>		

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\*Note: The original handout was in a landscape orientation.

<p>Lesson Procedures Note: "We say" and "You say"</p>	<p>"I say" (Teacher models for students)</p>	<p>1. After the students get settled in, the teacher will give the students a few minutes to complete their smart sheet. The teacher will then ask the students what they put for their answers, and will take several answers. The teacher</p>
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Appendix C

Lesson Plan and Materials: Quickly Analyzing Rebecca Gayle Howell's Visit

Name           Rachel Knapp          

<b>Lesson Title</b>	Poetry: Quickly Analyzing Rebecca Gayle Howell's Visit	
<b>Grade Level</b>	8th	
<b>Standard(s)</b>	<p><b>ELAGSE8L5:</b> Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.</p> <p><b>ELAGSE8RL10:</b> By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of grades 6-8 text complexity band independently and proficiently</p>	
<b>Timeline</b>	25 minutes	
<b>Essential Question or "Big Idea" for Student Learning</b>	How does understanding the poet help us understand the poetry?	
<b>Lesson Objective(s)</b>	<p>Students will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Evaluate their prediction</li> <li>-Determine whether meeting the poet influenced their perception of the poems or not.</li> </ul>	
<b>Materials</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Powerpoint with the writing prompts</li> <li>-KWL Charts (the same one as in Lesson 5)</li> </ul>	
<b>Introduction/ "Hook"</b>	<p>As students enter, the Smart Start will be on the board.</p> <p>Prompt: Name two things that happened yesterday from the poet's visit that stood out to you or were especially interesting.</p>	
<b>Body of Lesson/ Procedures</b> Note: "We say" and "You say"	"I say" (Teacher models for students)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. After the students get settled in, the teacher will give the students a few minutes to complete their smart start. The teacher will then ask the students what they put for their answers, and will take several answers. The teacher</li> </ol>

<p>say” portions of lesson might be combined. “You say” might also happen during lesson closure).</p>	<p>(Leave blank for now)</p>	<p>will be sure to ask why certain aspects of the poet’s visit were more interesting or stood out more than other aspects.</p>
<p>Reflection</p>	<p>“We say” (Teacher guides students)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. The teacher will then ask the students about their general thoughts of the poet’s visit from the day before. Did they like it? What did they think? Did they learn from it? The teacher will take open answers from anyone willing to share their thoughts of the visit from the day before.</li> <li>3. Next, the teacher will ask the students what they thought or expected Rebecca Gayle Howell to be like. Did she match up with their expectations? The teacher will try and choose several students, trying to elicit several short answers from several students. She will also try and choose students that weren’t offering as many thoughts before.</li> </ol>
	<p>“You say” (Students work independently or in small groups).</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. The teacher will then hand out the prompt they completed before the teacher came. The second part of this prompt asked the students whether they thought that meeting the poet would help them understand the poems better or not. The teacher will also ask them to get out their KWL charts. The teacher will put a writing prompt on the board for the students to answer in the “L” or “Learned” section of their KWL chart.</li> <li>5. The writing prompt will have two sections. It will ask, “Did the poet match what you put in your ‘poet’ section of your KWL chart? Did your prediction match up with what happened? Why or why not?”</li> <li>6. The teacher will walk around and answer any questions the students may have.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Lesson Closure</b></p>	<p>The teacher will take up the KWL charts as well as the writing prompts.</p>	



<p><b>Modifications</b></p>	<p>(leave blank for now)</p>
<p><b>Evaluation (Student Assessment)</b></p>	
<p><b>Reflection</b></p>	

Writing Prompt Used During Lesson Poetry: Quickly Analyzing Rebecca Gayle Howell's Visit

## Writing Prompt

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- Did the poet match what you put in your 'poet' section of your KWL chart?
- Did your prediction match up with what happened? Why or why not?

Appendix D

Student Work Before Howell's Visit: KWL Chart

Student A

Date: 10/11/11

<p>Know: What do you know about poetry? Make a bullet-point list of what you know about poetry, such as the elements that make it up, or what you know about poetry as a genre in general. For example: It is a written expression of art, it is made up of stanzas, etc.</p>	<p>Know: What do you know about poets? What do you think they are like? For example, how do you think they make their living, and what do you think their everyday life is like? Do you think most of them have similar personalities? Make a bullet-point list of your thoughts.</p>	<p>Want to Know: Write down 2-3 questions you would like to ask the author of these poems if she were here. What would you like to know more about her poems, her life, or her inspiration to write these poems?</p>	<p>Learned:</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*sometimes it rhymes.</li> <li>*often it tells the events in chronological order.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*poets are often troubled.</li> <li>*their everyday life sometimes may be troubling.</li> </ul>	<p>How did her mom treat her as a child? How did her family being so large get along?</p>	<p>did Mrs. Howell match up with what I put in the poet section. She seemed like her childhood was a little dark but she got over it. my prediction didn't change of her. I predicted that I would understand where she was coming from when I heard her speak &amp; I did.</p>

"Jesus loves me" = power, love, calmness

Student B

<p>Know: What do you know about poetry? Make a bullet-point list of what you know about poetry, such as the elements that make it up, or what you know about poetry as a genre in general. For example: It is a written expression of art, it is made up of stanzas, etc.</p>	<p>Know: What do you know about poets? What do you think they are like? For example, how do you think they make their living, and what do you think their every day life is like? Do you think most of them have similar personalities? Make a bullet-point list of your thoughts.</p>	<p>Want to Know: Write down 2-3 questions you would like to ask the author of these poems if she were here. What would you like to know more about her poems, her life, or her inspiration to write these poems?</p>	<p>Learned:</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• they are organized by stanzas</li> <li>• they normally rhyme but not all do</li> <li>• poetry is a written expression of art</li> <li>• different styles of poetry</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• write about life experience</li> <li>• usually have another job unless their famous</li> <li>• write about their feelings about things.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why would you write about your childhood when it was bad?</li> <li>• Would you ever stop writing poetry? if so what would you do instead?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ms. Howell matched up pretty well with what poets are like she wrote about a life experience and she has another job (photography).</li> <li>• My prediction pretty much matched up with her. I thought that once we asked her our questions it would help me understand the poems more and it did. At first I did not understand how to kill a rooster but then she said what inspired it and I totally got it.</li> </ul>

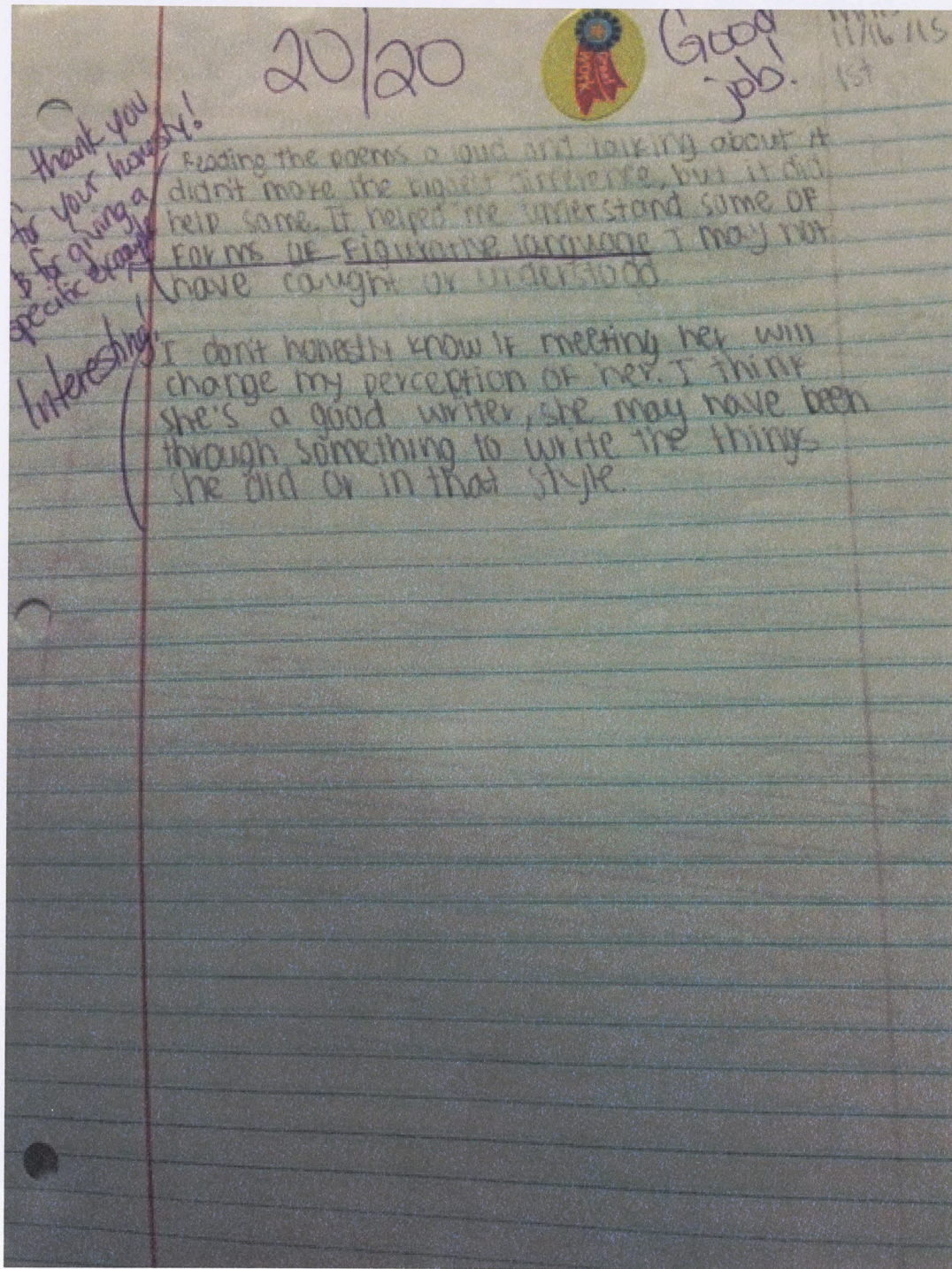
Student C

<p>Know: What do you know about poetry? Make a bullet-point list of what you know about poetry, such as the elements that make it up, or what you know about poetry as a genre in general. For example: It is a written expression of art, it is made up of stanzas, etc.</p>	<p>Know: What do you know about poets? What do you think they are like? For example, how do you think they make their living, and what do you think their every day life is like? Do you think most of them have similar personalities? Make a bullet-point list of your thoughts.</p>	<p>Want to Know: Write down 2-3 questions you would like to ask the author of these poems if she were here. What would you like to know more about her poems, her life, or her inspiration to write these poems?</p>	<p>Learned: My prediction was correct for me. I did not change my opinion from what she told us.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not all poetry rhymes</li> <li>• poets use it to express feelings</li> </ul>	<p>grateful until it's gone</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I think that they are normal people.</li> <li>• They are all different.</li> <li>• they all have their own writing style</li> </ul>	<p>What was the background that inspired you to write these poems? Were your poems directly related to you? Or were they written to describe someone else?</p>	<p>The poet was just a normal person. Acted normal and not formal or anything like that. So for the most part, I was correct.</p>

Appendix E

Student Work Following Howell's Visit: Writing Prompt

Student D



Student E

Great job! 20/20

11/17/15  
1st block

Writing prompt

✓ She helped explain what the poem was about, and we learned some new terms to help us when reading poems on our own. Ms. Knapp helped me out in understanding the poems.

✓ I think meeting the poet will help me understand the poems more. And once we ask her our questions it will give me a better explanation of why she wrote those poems. I think my opinion will change because once she gives us more details in her writing it will hopefully change our opinions on her.

Student F

21/20 Great job!

STAR

✓ Reading the poem with Mrs. Knapp helped me. It helped me by letting giving/showing examples of line breaks and the other elements of Poetry. *Way to be specific!* *+1* ~~For example in the poem~~ If I were to read the poem by myself I wouldn't understand it. By meeting ~~this~~ the poet I feel like I'll like poems more and understands poets more. *✓* I think my opinion may change after meeting a famous person.



Appendix F

Example of Fourth Grade Classroom Boards

