



WORLD WISE GLOBAL SCHOOLS PROGRAMME

3 WORKSHOP PLANS FOR POETRY

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Principles of the Practice:

- 1 These following 'Lesson Plans' are not 'teaching' plans but facilitation plans for running a creative writing through poetry workshop in a classroom context.
- 2 If these workshop are facilitated by the class teacher rather than by a practitioner of creative writing (and of poetry in particular), the ideal would be that it take place in a non-classroom space: the library, a study space, a sports hall, anywhere that is 'non-classroom'. Where this is not possible and it is delivered in the students/participants' classroom, clear *all* desks of *all* but the necessary writing notepads and biro/pencils. Nothing else is necessary.

Aim for a sense of 'Zen' space. Participants will benefit greatly from a sense of internal space, freedom to imagine, and freedom from rules generated by examination pressures, legitimate in the classroom, but not great in a creative workshop writing space.
3. The teacher delivering this workshop ought to clarify that this is not an English grammar or literature class: it is a 'creative writing through poetry workshop'. So, minimum or zero emphasis on grammar, spelling, and indeed handwriting. Otherwise, the necessary fluidity of imagination will be unnecessarily constrained. Be open and upfront about this. The more usual deliverer of workshops is a practitioner of creative writing or other art, be it in poetry, fiction, creative non-fiction, drama, storytelling, the visual and sound arts, etc. and has additionally the

real advantage of not being 'the teacher' and as an outsider, bringing authority of a different form.

4. Class rules on speaking, conversation or other 'interruptions' during the workshop are better relaxed even at the cost of uncertainty. A spirit of freedom, openness and 'non-regulation' generates a supportive mode of trust, and a leaning towards enthusiasm.
5. The key 'outcomes' of the workshop session are what happens during the session, and are not necessarily what might have been expected or supposed to happen. Trust is at the core. The imagination will and can do the rest, to differing levels of achievement and discovery for each participant. There should be no relative marks assigned to outcomes; no percentages. Just encouraging support for all possibilities. What's right or wrong, or bad, belong elsewhere.
6. The benefits of the sessions, curriculum-wise, will reveal themselves in a non-competitive form, and not immediately. Any sense of 'competition' involved ought ideally to be with oneself rather than with/against others. The facilitator's approach is vital here.
- 7 The first principle is to allow participants to enjoy these sessions.

A WORKSHOP STRUCTURE OR SCAFFOLD

Each workshop needs a basic structure or scaffolding; this is one of many possibilities, especially for 'big' themes and topics:

- 1 *An opening ritual:* to invite/ imply a change of space or feeling towards what is about to take place; to awaken the body as well as the imagination. I use a proverb which I quote as the group sit upright or stand with arms crossed, and optionally eyes closed to listen with focus. It takes less than a minute, and is done in silence. The physical activity is intended to be 'out of place' or 'silly' or 'stupid' in order to both engage the body and to shift the mind into an 'other' zone, thereby opening up the imagination. The proverb used need have no connection with the theme of the workshop; it is just an activity with words in its own right. I use this with adults as well as with young people and children. My own favourite is: 'Three best to have

in plenty: sunshine, wisdom, and generosity' (number 1032 in *Irish Proverbs & Sayings*, Cashman & Gaffney (1974, O'Brien Press, 2015), which invites discussion on each of the three 'qualities' identified.

Different proverbs could be used for each session, or the same one repeated. Close the session (before everyone rushes off) with the same proverb. This will help hold and settle the whole session in the mind afterwards.

2. *Outline the key aims.* The stages of completion may be indicated: sometimes useful, sometimes not.

3. *Activities: the workshop core involves:*

listening thinking IMAGINING READING listening,

writing. Writing, WRITING...

editing EDITING READING listening,

- 4 *Closing ritual.* It is *vital* to try not to end all in a rush as some bell rings; better to leave something undone or unfinished so the ritual of less than a minute's duration can settle participants last moments in the workshop. The opening proverb could be repeated here.

WORKSHOP 1: THEME: EMPATHY. TOPIC: HUNGER

Aim

The aim of this workshop is to facilitate each participant in the writing of a poem that communicates to readers their thoughts, images and feelings about the idea of 'hunger' in a short poem of perhaps eight to twelve lines (or more).

In preliminary discussion, open up the variety of meanings the word conveys, and the contexts in which we use it, which range from missing breakfast to the tragedy of famine. Allow each to choose and write the poem they decide upon for themselves. The result should be a lively variety of poems and ideas to be shared in readings at the end of the session.

Research

Initial research and information sourcing can be done online and in books to get information on the subject and to supplement their existing knowledge. Make notes in a copybook or sheet.

Give each participant a sheet with some poems on the topic of hunger and the facilitator reads these aloud to the group (who also follows this on the page so that they both hear and see these poems). Discuss responses and thoughts with the full group; and/or also by smaller groups of say four. Ask all to jot down notes of the ideas they have discussed. This is part of creating their 'research notes' for the poem.

Such notes are merely background materials and may or may not appear in the poem.

Examples of poems that relate in different ways to the idea of hunger. Three poems I have used together for this exercise are: 'Hunger' by Laurence Binyon; 'I'm Hungry' by Amy Richter, and 'A Mother in a Refugee Camp' by Chinua Achebe. (These are ideal for ages from senior classes in Primary up to adult participants.) These are available on google, and there are plenty of alternatives to be found.

MAKING THE POEM

[a] create a word bank of about ten words related in any way to 'hunger'.

[b] plan on 2 or 3 verses of 6 lines each (Why six? Well, there are 6 letters in the word Hunger!) Or, as the writer decides. Or try number of letters in your name and/or surname. Make a positive active decision, and note down why.

[c] work out the purpose (main idea, image or thought) for each verse. An image, especially a concrete one, or a metaphor related to the idea will invigorate the verse.

The First Draft

[d] Write a first complete draft, as urgently as possible. No dawdling!

Editing

[e] This first draft can now be worked on to make or shape the poem.

Think in poem lines: look at the line lengths, listen to the sounds of each line and to the rhythms in the line.

And if a rhyme turns up between some of the lines, *great*. But if not, equally *okay*! Rhymes are not essential, but they do add colour and connections.

This is the enjoyable and exciting element of *crafting*, line by line and verse by verse, to make the poem to say and be what you hope it might be. There is no right or wrong, just what you want to say written as best you can do in the short time available.

Reading the Poem

When the poem is done, write out a fair copy to see how it works.

Read it out loud if at all possible to the group, and/or swap and share with someone and discuss responses to each other's work.

Other similar themes and topics to consider could be: anger, injustice, happiness, tragedy, poverty or friendship.

WORKSHOP 2. THEME: CHANGE TOPIC: MY CHANGING TIME

The topic 'My Changing Time' is also the specified title for the poem in this instance but do not let the group know this until later (see below).

The Plan: *Structure the workshop* as indicated in Lesson 1 above. *Method:* also similar to Lesson plan 1 above.

Suggested poems to read: 'Changing Everything' by Jane Hirshfield; 'The Changing Light' by Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and 'Hope is the thing with feathers' by Emily Dickinson.

These are each very different poems in content, imagery, rhythm and tone. And each wonderful to read and hear. And work very well when presented together. (Ideal for ages from senior classes in Primary and all the way to adult participants.)

Discussion: to energise the group, introduce the following (or similar) range of topics for short group discussion/comment on change in style (clothes, hair, etc.), communications, game, school, geography, environment, history; social, wealth and poverty, etc. The possibilities are endless. Allow about fifteen minutes of conversation here.

The Poem to Write: Only at this point give them the title of the poem they are being asked to write: 'My Changing Time'.

MAKING THE POEM

Word bank/mind map

Perhaps suggest four verses of five lines each (why? 'We have five digits on each limb!' So the poem will have this connection to the writer's body' – as perfect a reason as any.) Then, also offer the option to decide for themselves, but to note what they decide and why on their sheet of paper.) Perhaps as many lines as their age ... *Rhymes:* optional, but great if they happen. *But* allow only legitimate, meaningful rhymes; never artificial or forced ones. Unless of course unless it is intended to be a 'nonsense poem'.

Writing [a] Do a first complete draft, as urgently as you can. No dawdling!
The poem title gives a clear direction for the poem's focus. Let the participants free to write as they choose.

Editing [b] Edit and revise, and write out a fair copy.

Reading [c] Read aloud, share, discuss as indicated in Lesson 1 above.

WORKSHOP SESSION 2. THEME: EMPATHY. TOPIC: AN INCIDENT

(A variation of an original lesson by Academy of American Poets with <http://edsitement.neh.gov/>)

This workshop is based on a poem called 'Gate A-4' by Naomi Shihab Nye (the poem Text is available at: www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/gate-4)

Introduction

Imagine an airport gate where an older person who speaks Arabic has been told over the loudspeaker, in English, a language she does not fully understand, that her plane is delayed. She has a medical situation she must attend to the next day at her destination and fears she won't arrive in time. She collapses to the floor and starts crying and wailing. From this kind of tense situation, Naomi Shihab Nye creates the idea of a community where compassion, food, tradition, conversation, fun and commonality are shared.

Activities

1. Before reading this poem:

Ask group to identify some incident when they did not know or understand why something unusual and even slightly frightening happened near them.

Have a discussion to discover the emotions involved in facing such unusual situations. Imagine for instance a large glass vase of flowers falling from a high shelf onto a crowded shop floor right beside you, smashing to pieces. What range of emotions might you experience? And what did or might people around do? Or what would you do? How would you react?

2. The whole class discusses various reactions to the incident chosen.

Then in small groups of 4 to 6, each group plan a tableau – a freeze-frame image they make with their bodies that enacts some key responses to the incident, showing what happened and some of the emotions it would have generated. Take about ten to fifteen minutes to create and rehearse their tableaux.

Each group then presents their silent still drama to the rest in turn, and comments are invited on what is represented and how effective it is and why.

3. *Hand out the poem* to each participant. Read it aloud to the whole class.

Or perhaps *play the YouTube video* to the class so they hear the poet read her poem.
video clip of poet reading Gate-A4:

https://youtu.be/9V5xyEt_RYA?list=PLB0uqVEuzoEcz_IUzeETAB7PNcat9lkaF

Ask participants to make notes of unusual words, or images that they feel are important.

5. *Class discussion* on the poem and their responses.

Does it reveal empathy, community? How? Note that compassion, food, tradition, conversation, fun and commonality are all shared in this poem.

6. **Write a poem**

Write a poem about an incident each participant recalls that they were involved in and which was about helping someone in need of support.

Making the poem: make it a story poem with description of the incident and where it happened, and of the people involved and your own role. It need not be very long, just as many lines and verses as the story needs to be fully told.

Take the participants through how each verse in Naomi Shihab Nye's poem tells her story, moving it on in each verse the next stage of the incident, and including people's conversation where necessary, and with a strong visual/descriptive element in each verse. And note at the simple but clear and strong closing line.

Read the poem

As always, invite participants to read their poem to the whole group, or among themselves in little groups of two to four.