

Literacy at Work

how to write a poem



TEACHER GUIDE WITH GLENIS REDMOND GRADES 6–8

"My goal as a teaching artist is not to make every student a poet, but to make students discover the poetry within themselves." – Glenis Redmond

OBJECTIVES

In this lesson, students will:

- Identify and use three elements of poems to write a self-portrait poem
- Select word choice to reflect intended tone and meaning for poems
- Self-reflect on the writing process and celebrate their completed self-portrait poem by sharing it aloud

VOCABULARY

Alliteration

the use of the same consonant sound at the beginning of two or more closely connected words.

Assonance

the use of the same vowel sound of two or more closely connected words.

Anaphora

The repetition of a word, phrase, line, or stanza.

MATERIALS

- ☐ Paper or journal
- ☐ Pencil or pen

SET-UP

Show "How to Write a Poem" video. Start a discussion to elicit what students learned about poetry from the video. Consider asking the following questions:

- What is a poem? Does poetry always have to rhyme?
- Do you have a favorite poem/poet?
- What did you see and hear from the students who shared their poems?
- What does Glenis Redmond mean when she says the process of writing a poem connects the heart and the head?



LEARN

Use the lesson vocabulary and the examples below to introduce the three common elements of poetry.

Alliteration:

this is the portrait
of a **black boy**
in **bloom**,
the **brown eyed baby**
whose **birth's** purpose
was to unearth poems.

Assonance:

In other words, I worried my mother
She wanted me in matching outfits
Legs crossed and voice ladylike quiet
But I was **olly-oxen-free** loud

Anaphora:

I loved to wear beads and eat beans.
I loved candy and still do now
I loved to play outside and just be a kid.

Literacy at Work

how to write a poem



TEACHER GUIDE WITH GLENIS REDMOND GRADES 6–8

"My goal as a teaching artist is not to make every student a poet, but to make students discover the poetry within themselves." — Glenis Redmond

LEARN (Continued)

While working in small groups to brainstorm, have students create a list of words that reflect an important age or moment in their life.

Instruct students to write the following:

- Six words or phrases that describe: what they looked like and their feelings at that age
- Three words that show the special gifts, talents, and challenges they faced at that age

BRAINSTORM

OUTSIDE SELF (PHYSICAL APPEARANCE)

1. Pigtails, cornrows, or braids
2. Big brown eyes
3. Mahogany-colored skin
4. Tomboy—baseball cap and t-shirts
5. Unkempt—ashy elbows, skinned knees
6. Graceful swagger

GIFTS/TALENTS

1. Athletic
2. Graceful
3. Reader

INSIDE SELF (FEELINGS/EMOTIONS)

1. Joy
2. Shame
3. Focused
4. Popular
5. Lonely
6. Daydreamer

CHALLENGES

1. Lonely
2. Math
3. Racism

Model an example of a finished list for students.

When students are ready, allow them to work individually to complete each section of the list. Encourage students to share with the group or the class the words they've included on their list. Students will use this list to write a self-portrait poem.

MODEL

Model for students an excerpt from a self-portrait poem.

Instruct students to bold the words in the poem that match or reinforce the words from the brainstormed list.

Guide students to identify one or all of the three elements discussed by underlining them.

EXAMPLE

Self-Portrait: *Bard in the Making* By Glenis Redmond

When I was in the fifth grade
I was the biggest **tomboy**
always in **t-shirt** and jeans
baseball cap turned sideways
complete with **ashy elbows, skinned knees**
and a mouthful of bubble gum
I made popping and blowing bubbles (alliteration)
into an art form

I was the princess of the playground (alliteration)
ruled at Prison Ball, handball, and tetherball
I could pummel, smash, catch, and throw
I was the **fastest sprinter in the school**
I could stop on a dime
and give you nine cents change.

Literacy at Work

how to
write a poem



TEACHER GUIDE WITH GLENIS REDMOND GRADES 6–8

"My goal as a teaching artist is not to make every student a poet, but to make students discover the poetry within themselves." – Glenis Redmond

WRITE

Now students will work individually to write their poems. As students write their own self-portrait poems, remind them to:

- ☐ Consult their brainstorming lists
- ☐ Remember the craft elements: alliteration, assonance, and anaphora
- ☐ Use words that will "paint a picture"
- ☐ Think back on the modeled poems if they need guidance

SHARE-OUT

Instruct students to work with a partner to underline one of the three poetic elements they used in their self-portrait poem.

Encourage partners to provide positive feedback to each other about their poems.

Invite pairs to share their poems with the class.

- I enjoyed listening to your poem because _____.
- I especially liked that you included _____.



DIFFERENTIATION

Individualize instruction by using these activities to meet your students' needs.

SUPPORT

Scaffold instruction by using sentence frames:

- *When I was in _____, I looked like _____.*
- *I liked to play _____ with _____.*
- *I was happy to _____, but felt scared when _____.*

EXTEND

Instruct students to use a thesaurus or online tool to revise some of the words for clarification or specificity. Additionally, have students to create a collage that reflects their self-portrait poem.