

ANIMAL, MAY I BORROW ... ?

CONTRIBUTOR:

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OBJECTIVES:

Students will humbly consider abilities on display in the natural world, and incorporate them into their poems, and perhaps their lives.

EDUCATION LEVEL:

Any level

GENRE:

Poetry

FORMAT:

Lesson Plan

TIME FRAME:

60 minutes

PRIOR KNOWLEDGE/SKILLS:

None

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

paper and pens, sample poem

LITERARY MODEL:

Cobra, Can I?

5th graders, Manzo Elementary

Water, can I borrow your strength

for I am too weak

to flow through obstacles

Sea Star, may I borrow your way

of grasping onto structures

for I am not strong enough

to hold on

Lightning, can I borrow your sense of doom,

the thunder and rainy skies

you strike into people's hearts

for I am too silly

for people to take me seriously

Cobra, can I borrow your slithery quietness?

for I am too loud and I always get caught

Ocean

can I borrow

your wave

!

up

up,

up,

for I want to go

and then come back

d

o

w

n

.

Sunflower, may I borrow your way

of following the sun

for sometimes I get lost on my path

and would appreciate

your guidance

Ocean, May I Borrow Your Tears?

At a fundraiser for Kore Press, writer Kimi Eisele offered the audience a prompt that she had recently blogged in a time of stress: Whale, may I borrow your heart? Mine is too small to hold it all.

I'm drawn to writing exercises that encourage emotional interaction with the natural world. As the adult audience responded deeply, I thought Kimi's prompt would work well with writers of any age.

Introducing the concept and warming up (20 minutes):

With a group of fifth graders, I initiated a discussion of unique abilities certain animals had. I'd throw out a type of animal (Giraffe) and they would name various qualities they associated with it (tall, long legs, long neck, the ability to reach). "Why do you think the animal developed this trait?" I asked, "What would you like to borrow from this animal and why?" (In the excitement of the borrow, it's easy to forget to say why you desire this trait.)

Giraffe, can I borrow your legs, for I am too short to dunk my ball in the basket.

We discussed biological processes that plants and animals possess, and then the class expanded the discussion to dirt and air and fire and water. They began to come up with their own "borrows":

Miguel: Turtle can I borrow your patience, for I am always rushing in life.

Lola: Stingray, may I borrow your sense of wonder, for I too want to take flight and explore.

Writing (20 minutes):

Once the class was warmed up, I gave them 20 minutes to write their own borrowings. As they wrote I walked around the class and read individual lines out loud. I enjoy reading lines that don't exactly conform to the format, so students understand they can improvise. (*Roadrunner, speed me away from the sadness, let me run toward happiness.*)

Younger students might find this template helpful for the first few lines:

_____, may I borrow your _____

for I am _____.

Sharing (20 minutes):

Students were eager to share at least one line from their poems, and many wanted to read all of them. I asked what they appreciated in other writers' poems. What were they surprised by? Was there anything they did not understand?

After prompting responses to the first readers, I was silent, and students stepped into that invitation and responded to their peers. After everybody had read we talked about if their feelings about animals had changed after borrowing from them. Can they learn from an animal's example? Could they imagine incorporating their animals' strengths into their own lives?

Example of Student Work:

Animabilities

Water, can I borrow your strength
for I am too weak
to flow through obstacles

Praying Mantis,
can I borrow your invisibility
for I am too exposed

Desert Tortoise
can I borrow your slowness
For I am speeding like a jack rabbit
to win the race of life

Regal Horned Lizard
can I borrow your spiky defense
and your tears of blood
to convince my mom
to buy me a new computer

Golden Eagle,
can I borrow your supreme eyes
So I can see my future life

-Luckaz V.