

# **Persona Poems**

By: Elizabeth Brown

**Education level:** Junior high (also upper level elementary, high school)

**Genre:** Poetry

**Time Frame:** One class period

**Required materials:** Paper, pencils, index cards and a container of some sort

**Literary model:** Ted Kooser's "Look for Me," Louise Glück's "The Wild Iris," and (optional) the first stanza of Sarah Teasdale's "Desert Pools"—the whole poem can be used, but I think that the first stanza is a simpler illustration of persona

## **Sequence of activities:**

### **15 minutes**

Mention that in ancient Latin, the word *persona* means "mask." The word also can refer to a character played by an actor.

Hand out (or project) the poems. Start with Ted Kooser's poem, "Look for Me." Ask a student to read this poem out loud, and then lead a discussion about it. Who or what is speaking in this poem? Is the speaker young or old? How do you know? Then have a student read, Louise Glück's poem, "The Wild Iris." Who or what is speaking in this poem? I also like to mention that the poet suffered from writer's block and depression before writing this poem. All she could do was work in her garden, until deciding to write this and an entire book of poems (of the same name) from the perspective of different flowers in her garden. This book won the Pulitzer Prize in 1993. (Optional: we also look at the first stanza of Sarah Teasdale's poem. Who or what is the speaker in this poem?)

### **10-15 minutes**

In this activity, I hand out index cards to the students, and ask them to write the name of a person, animal, plant or object—it could be anything—although I discourage them using the name of someone in class. I encourage them not to overthink this, just write whatever comes to mind. Then, I ask them to fold the index cards in half. I collect these cards and put them in a container (I like to use a hollowed-out gourd, but any kind of basket or box will do). I then ask for a volunteer to randomly pull one of these cards out, and I write the word they pulled out on the board. I do this a number of times—this is especially interesting for the students and gives them a better sense of the variety of things, animals and people they could use in crafting a persona poem.

### **20-25 minutes**

I hand out the persona worksheet. Students write a persona poem. This worksheet is optional. Students can write the poem without the worksheet, but many have found it to be a helpful starting place, and after filling it out, go on to create their own poem.

## Persona Worksheet

(use whatever is helpful to you)

1.

I am a \_\_\_\_\_

(What are you? Object, animal, another person?)

In a \_\_\_\_\_

(Where are you?)

\_\_\_\_\_

(How do others see you, think of you)

\_\_\_\_\_

(Repeat the statement, change it, or end with “who I am.”)

2.

Look for me \_\_\_\_\_

(Where)

I’m the \_\_\_\_\_

(What are you)

\_\_\_\_\_

(What do you do? What can’t you do?)

\_\_\_\_\_

(What have you learned? Or, what is something about you that no one else can do or knows?)