

EDITING POEMS AS A GROUP

by Matisse Rosen

Grade level: Elementary

Time frame: 50 minutes – 1 hour

Objective: Students will define their own revision practices. Students will practice revision through collective editing of a group-written poem.

Required materials: A pre-existing group poem written by the whole class

Sequence of activities:

Brain-storm & Introduction to Editing (20 minutes): Intended as an expansive brainstorming session wherein students create their own categories for editing and revision.

Sitting in a circle, briefly introduce the idea of editing / revision, then begin by asking students how they might make a poem better. What would they do to it? What would they change? What would they add? When they think about making a poem come alive, what are some of the qualities they might bring to the poem?

As students share their answers, follow up with questions, pushing them to be more specific.

For example, one of my students offered, “you could add words to the poem,” so I asked them what kinds of words they would add. When they said they didn’t know, I asked, “What are you trying to do the poem? And what kinds of words might make that happen?” They ended up saying words they wanted to make the poem more colorful, and they would add words with many different sounds.

Once you have generated a number of responses, you can start to make a list of their categories on the whiteboard, or a big piece of paper.

Example (5-10 min): Show them two drafts of a poem (could be yours or somebody else’s), one before, and one after revision. Ask the students to listen to each poem aloud, while taking note of the differences between them. After they’ve heard both versions, ask them to identify some of the editing tactics from the list that they think the poet used to revise the poem.

Rewriting a Class Poem Out Loud (20 min): For this part of the activity, I brought in a poem students wrote together in a previous workshop.

Because younger students are often more comfortable speaking aloud than when they are writing independently, I found this exercise generated a lot of excitement and allowed students to practice the editing skills they'd brainstormed in a low-stakes, improvisational manner.

Tell the students you are going to re-read the poem they wrote together so you can practice editing it as a group. Read the poem aloud, then ask students to pick a couple things they would like to focus on changing in the poem. Ask students to call out changes they would make based on the categories you've decided to focus on.

While students feed off each other's energy, and shout their ideas out, act as a scribe, writing all their ideas in a big brainstorming clump on the board. The brainstorming should generate a lot of ideas and energy. Once you have enough ideas down, re-read them back to the students, and work together to put them in an order.

Through this exercise my students generated an entirely new class poem together.

Example Poems:

The Belly of the Beast

Garden Poem Part 1

I found a lizard in the grass, then I left it in a leaf.

The trees don't like people—they are mad

because people pick their leaves like

They pick their own skin.

The tree said, "Adair!" & Adair said

Hi

Why did you bite me mosquito?

I did nothing to you!

I did it for the trees.

Are you angry?

I saw a lizard as squished as a leaf
And an old stump who no-one would give water.

The Humans' Mistake

Garden Poem Part 2

First there was one,
Then there were two,
Then there were a hundred of them.
Since the stinkbugs were
at the bottom of the food-chain,
One by one,
they stacked themselves
up to the height of a human.
And then the stickers climbed
up the bug legs to form arms
and a sword.
And crickets crawled from their holes
to make the stinkbug feet.
Butterflies flew up to give the bug-human wings
Then a mosquito flew to the top
of the bug-human
And through a little hole
entered its head
The hole opened
then closed back up

And the bug-human came alive
To avenge all the dead plants
And damage caused by the humans