

Expansion and the 5 W's

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Grade level: Early elementary

Time frame: 45 minutes

Objective: For students to expand on a poem they have previously written

Prior knowledge and skills: None needed

Required materials: A previously written poem, printed or handwritten; a pen

In their first drafts, students can at times leave much to desire in their writing. They are so excited to tell a story, they leave out context. The story is important but they forget that the reader wasn't there and needs more details in order to feel connected to their imagery. Revision is a space where we can ask students to add in that contextualizing detail.

The 5 W's are our friend when it comes to contextualizing and expansion in writing. What are the 5 W's? **Who, what, when, where, and why.** Ask these of your writing and watch it become fuller and more meaningful.

Sequence of Activities:

STEP 1. Class exercise and examples

I demonstrated the 5 W's using example sentences lifted from their poems. I wanted to use examples that felt familiar to them to show exactly how expansion could improve their writing. This proved especially useful during virtual learning when it isn't feasible to comment on the students work individually. The sentences I choose weren't word-for-word from their writing, but bore a similar enough resemblance that I hoped they could connect with them.

Example sentences:

Bat, may I borrow your ears so that I can hear better?

Ask the students *what* would you want to hear better? *Who* would you want to hear better? *Why*?

I dreamt I was in an icy place, this means I will have bad luck.

Ask: *Where* is this icy place? *Why* is it icy? *What* does bad luck look like?

I didn't necessarily focus on each W, but I asked whatever seemed relevant to that example sentence. I simply asked questions that got the students excited about adding more to the sentence.

STEP 2. Expansion in their Poems

Ask the students to make use of the 5 W's and expand on at least one thing in their poem. Remind them that they are painting a picture for the reader. Our goal is to express ourselves and a reader has a better time connecting if they can visualize what we are expressing.

Below are some examples of lines in student poems once they expanded their writing. Notice that the revised, expanded parts are in bold.

Tiger, may I borrow your nose for I am in need to have a good sense of smell **because I need to smell the good food mom cooks.**

Corgi may I borrow your ears for I am a need of hearing **when the pancakes are done**

Bunny, may I borrow your feet for I am in need of cute feet **because I want to show them off and make people jealous.**

STEP 3. Possible extension: descriptive detail and the 5 senses

The 5 senses and sensory detail allow the reader to situate themselves in a poem or story. These are necessary for the reader to connect to the writing. Discuss the 5 senses with the students, asking them if they can name them all.

I asked students to add in a texture, flavor, sound, scent, or shape. I encouraged them to add details that allow the poem to come alive. Sometimes we have to remind ourselves and our students that simply adding a sensory detail can charge the poem with action, imagery, and tension—and this is what poetry is all about.