

Poetry Lesson

Recess

Grade Level: 6-12

Time Frame: 60 minutes

Objective: Students will take inspiration from Kealoha's poem *Recess* to reach back into their own memories of joyful play.

Prior Knowledge and Skills: Grade level reading and comprehension

Required Materials: white board and markers, paper and pencil, *Recess* poem and/or videos by Kealoha (provided in this lesson plan)

Sequence of Activities:

Introduction: Engage students in an open-ended conversation on what poetry is or can be. This can be a chance to explore, expand, or even challenge previously held ideas about poetry and poets. Below are some starting questions:

What is poetry?

Does poetry always rhyme?

Does poetry have rhythm, like music?

Can spoken words be poetry? What about words that aren't written down?

Are song lyrics poetry?

What do other art forms have in common with poetry? For example, how are painting or dancing like poetry?

Can poetry be a performance?

Read and Discuss Literary Model:

Read the poem below by Kealoha and watch the poem performed at the link below. Read or watch twice if possible.

<https://youtu.be/42piJ1ZXUVo?si=XlEyKEHGH5t7a01r>

Afterwards, invite students to share their thoughts on these questions:

What inspired or surprised you from the poem?

How did you react to or feel about the performed version?

What do you remember about recess?

Who were your friends? What did you play?

Is there anything in your life today that gives you the same feelings as childhood recess?

Use these questions to elicit storytelling from students.

Recess

Remember the days when we used to play on the playground everyday?

What was that thing we took?

Recess!!

Yeah that's right, recess... 15 minutes of sheer madness

15 minutes of running around

Getting down with all of your friends until the bell sounded

That inevitable bell

That wrought the well of time dry

And I remember those days so vividly

Licking Jell-O instant pudding off of our hands

Making forts out of sand

And doing everything you can to just play

When's the last time you took 15 minutes out of your day to just run around and play?

We used to do this everyday

It was a staple of our existence

And those days are now dissonant

But if you close your eyes you can remember it those 15 minutes that now seem trivial

But when you were a kid 15 minutes was ephemeral everlasting

It was a fleeting moment but it was so freaking real

15 minutes was enough time to swing your brains out

Make a movie out of clouds

It was enough time to climb in and out and around the monkey bars 5 times

It was enough time to join a game of 4 squares and make it up to king

Or fling red rubber spheres at each other in a game of dodge ball with 3 teams weaving in and out of rotation

It was enough time for 2 friends to run up and down hills holding hands singing ridiculous bits

It was enough time to get 1 kick in a game of kick ball

and really that's all you ever needed was one kick to show everybody what's up

and I never had the power to crank it long like Andrew Leong

over the fence, hence a home run

but I could always get on base and tease my opposition into going for a squeeze play

and I would escape easily, obtaining that extra base with a "facial disgracial," right?

When's the last time you grabbed your friends and played a game of kickball?

When's the last time you approached someone eating raw ramen all crushed up inside the bag with the powder sprinkled all over it, stuck out your hand and said those two magic words... "I like?"

When's the last time you just called someone and said "let's ride bikes?"

When's the last time you grabbed a carrot when you were in your bibadeez and sang into it like a mic?

not an "M.I.C. steady rhyming to the beats

keeping yo' heads bobbing cuz my styles is deep"

but I'm talking about grabbing a freaking carrot
and singing some Lion King or some bit like that...
“

Collaborative Writing Prompts:

Write the following sentence large on a white board or sticky note. In round robin fashion or by calling on volunteers, fill in the blank as many times as desired to create a series of new sentences inspired by one of the lines in Kealoha's poem *Recess*.

“When's the last time you _____?”

Students may take each iteration of the sentence in many directions, and that's okay. Use this space to generate line after line, even if they all begin the same way. They can tag on new lines and expand as desired or not at all. If a particularly interesting or vague line crops up, the facilitator can say “tell me more” to dig a little deeper and bring out increasingly specific ideas.

Example of Collaborative Poem:

Recess

-after Kealoha

I remember kicking a soccer ball around
I remember the swing
and now as an adult it makes me dizzy
I would swing so high I felt I could make it go in a circle

I played Hickory Dickory Dock on the slide when I was seven,
sliding down many times, the way the Teletubbies played it

Kids bugged me at recess, made me cry
Trying to read a book
I wore a huge white jacket and tie - my church clothes
That's why they were making fun of me

I liked to run at recess, and sometimes a few laps,
by myself

I do remember playing recess
on the twisty slide with my friends
I was the one on the bottom

If you use wax paper on the tall hot metal slide,

you go faster

I liked one day our teachers had some wheelchairs
and we got to play on them

-written by students at [ArtWorks](#) in Tucson, Arizona

Individual Writing Prompts:

If students find their flow and get on a roll with the collaborative prompt, that's a good indication they might be ready for the individual prompt. On their own paper, invite them to start a poem with the below line:

"Remember the days when we..."

Encourage students to reach back into childhood, perhaps memories shared with friends or siblings or peers, and write line after line calling this memory back to life. Ask them to describe the moment with as many details as they can recall. Where did it take place? What words were spoken? What games were played? What jokes were told? What made them laugh or cry? Who else is part of this memory? Some students may even wish to lean into the collective memory aspect of this line sharing, for example, generational references like shared songs, movies, phrases, and more.

Sharing: Save five minutes at the end of class for volunteers to share their poems. One way to expand this lesson is to practice the performance aspect of poetry. When students share their poem, what expressive movements could they add? It might be with their entire bodies, as in a dance, or it might be as small as hand movements. It could include moving across an area to speak to an audience or incorporating callbacks, as Kealoha does in the video.