

**Title:** Making Little Poetry Books of Questions to a Nature Being

**By:** Taylor Johnson

**Education level:** Pre-school, kindergarten, elementary

**Genre:** Poetry

**Time frame:** 60-minute class period, may need one or more additional periods for prep or follow-up activities including folding the booklets, and typing and revising the poems.

**Objective:** To create a poem that inspires the writer to be in a relationship of curiosity and loving inquiry with the natural beings in the world around us. To create a book to house the poem and to enhance the elements of poetry form, including a title, lines, and stanzas, as well as a sense of intimacy and kinesthetic interaction with form through the texture and touch of paper folding. Miniature books feel more special to write in than a piece of notebook paper.

**Prior knowledge and skills:** Create a one-page zine using [this folding process](#). If students have a bit of practice with [doing this folding process](#) beforehand, it will make the lesson go more smoothly, but you could also “fold” the instruction into the main lesson (see what I did there?).

**Required materials:** Paper, scissors, pencils, colored pencils, or markers; a copy of the poems by Joy Harjo, William Blake, and any student poems from *Rose, Where Did You Get That Red?* by Kenneth Koch in the section about “The Tyger,” and an outdoor space such as a school garden or grounds with natural elements from nature, such as pebbles, tree leaves, fallen flowers, seed pods, etc. (Always take care around desert landscapes with spiny cactuses and other hazards.)

**Literary models:** [“Speaking Tree”](#), by Joy Harjo, [“The Tyger”](#) by William Blake, and [Rose, Where Did you Get That Red?](#) by Kenneth Koch

### **Sequence of activities:**

1. Begin in an opening circle to warmly greet and gather all participants in the classroom and welcome them to today’s lesson. (2-4 minutes)
2. Show an example of a pre-folded one-page book and tell students: “Today we are

going to make a little 8-page book with a single sheet of paper so we can write a poem in it.” (1 minute)

3. Pass out sheets of paper to all participants, and once everyone has their paper, do a demonstration of how to fold the booklet. Basic instructions are to fold the rectangular, 8.5 X 11 paper “hamburger style” three times in a row, creasing each fold, before opening it back up to the first half-fold. Then, make a single, perpendicular cut just to the middle of the paper along one folded edge by starting the cut across the folded edge rather than starting across the open side of the paper. (This [one-min video](#) will be important to watch beforehand so you can properly demonstrate and describe.) Help the students make their folds, repeating instructions as needed and helping them choose the right place to use scissors to make the single cut to the center of the first fold. Then, show them how to assemble the book after making the central cut. Again, watch [the video](#) or [view this pdf](#), as it is rather difficult to explain in words but is pretty easy to watch. The book does not require staples and it will have 8 pages. (7-11 minutes)
4. Once the blank books are prepared (and again, you can do this step on a separate day if you like), take the class outside with their books and pencils and find a tree to sit under together. Read aloud the poem “Speaking Tree” by Joy Harjo. You may want to repeat a few lines for emphasis afterwards: “I am a woman longing to be a tree” or “I have heard trees talking, long after the sun has gone down” and ask students what they think trees are feeling and thinking as we approach them and interact with them. Plant the seed that the trees have a personhood and an aliveness and can interact with humans. Be open to what students share about their own awareness and relationship to the aliveness of trees. (5-8 minutes)
5. Then, read aloud “The Tyger” by William Blake and ask students to share with the group what they noticed or saw in their imaginations as they listened. (You could alternately read aloud one or more poems written by students in the book *Rose, Where Did You Get That Red?* in the section devoted to “The Tyger” and ask them to share what they saw in their imaginations.) Draw attention to the fact that the poet is asking questions of a being in the poem(s). (3-5 minutes)
6. Finally, give students the invitation to find their own being of nature somewhere close by—maybe a rock, insect, flower, or leaf—to gently observe or hold in their hand and begin writing down in their book some questions they would like to ask the being about itself. Since the book is small, remind students they may want to devote one question to each page, leaving space to write their name and a title for their book / poem on the front or back cover. (10-15 minutes)
7. If time allows in the same period, return to the classroom to allow students to

add colored drawings using colored pencils, crayons, markers (or other art supplies available in a typical classroom setting) so as to enhance their writings with art. If time has run out, allow students to add to their books with illustrations another time or day or for homework. (10 minutes)

8. Invite students to read aloud from their books or allow them to share their creations with you one-on-one, and enjoy how eager and delighted they are. (3-6 minutes)

Note: The books can then be transcribed into poems on the computer by typing or voice-typing. When I help younger students by doing this with or for them, I try to preserve their line breaks and treat each page as a separate stanza, but you can follow other patterns as you see fit. Older students can type up their own poems, but younger students may need help or someone to do it for them. If students forget to add titles in their books, this can be accomplished later on during the revision process.