

Nighttime
by Rachel Mindell

Contributor: Rachel Mindell

Objectives: Students will explore the magic, wonder, and possibility of the night using repetition, the five senses, the natural world, and their imaginations.

Education Level: Elementary

Genre: Poetry

Format: Lesson Plan

Time Frame: 50-60 minutes

Materials: Phone or computer with speakers, paper, pencils

Literary Model: Optional – “[Untitled](#)” from *Poetry Everywhere*

Introduction (5 minutes):

Begin class with the lights out and have students close their eyes. Play night sounds sourced from the internet—[this](#) or [this](#) are nice for desert sounds but there are plenty of great options for all kinds of landscapes. First, have students just listen closely in silence. Then, take them on an imaginary journey. Continue to play the sounds throughout this exercise.

Activity (5-10 minutes):

Tell them to imagine they’ve woken up in the night and that everyone in their house is safe. It is also safe outside. Keeping their eyes closed and remaining seated, have them act like they are stretching and tiptoeing, opening their bedroom door, walking down the hall and exiting through the front door. Younger students tend to enjoy performing the movements without being self-conscious—if it seems too silly for older students, skip the movement. Remind them to be quiet so they don’t wake anyone in the house up. Keep the night sounds playing.

Once they are “outside,” ask them to use their five senses and observe their surroundings with their imagination. What do they see? Are there plants and animals? What do they hear? Smell? Taste? Touch? Have them do this imagination exercise just outside their house, in their neighborhood.

Depending on attention level, the journey can continue, with students “walking” out into the desert, or to whatever natural environment surrounds the area where you are teaching. You could have the group “wake up” still outside or have them open their door, go back down the hall, and get back into bed.

Idea Building (5-10 minutes):

If possible, leave the lights off. Have students create a list of words (either on their own paper, as a group on the board, or both) related to nighttime. Tell them to include anything that they observed on their imaginary journey, anything that pops into their head, anything wild or weird they can invent about night. Just words—no full sentences, no editing, no judgement of what comes. Remind them of their five senses when creating the list or lists. Allow students to share from their lists.

Lesson Prep (5 minutes):

Tell students they will be creating what’s called a list poem, focused on the nighttime. You could share [the example](#) from *Poetry Everywhere* if it seems helpful, create your own example poem, use a worksheet (see attached examples), or just instruct them that they are to begin as many lines as possible with the phrase “In the night.” Write this phrase on the board. Draw from several student’s word lists and/or the shared word pool to give examples—the lists they’ve made should help them with ideas for their poems. See if students can give you example lines also to ensure understanding.

Writing (10-20 minutes):

If possible, have students write in the semi-dark—if this isn’t possible, turn on the lights at any point. Keep the night sounds playing if you wish. Encourage students to write as many lines as they can; the more they write, the wilder the night may become. Give them freedom to invent whatever they want, to alternate between real and unreal details, to be only realistic—whatever they feel like. If students seems stuck, you could write any of the following questions on the board or invent your own (see Worksheets 1 and 2 for other ideas):

What magical things happen in the night? What invisible things?

What can you see and hear in the night but not during the day?

What do animals and plants do at night?

What kinds of dreams do people have at night? What about animals? The natural world?

What is the weather like at night? How does the air feel? Is there wind?

What happens in an empty school at night? In an empty library? An empty school bus?

What memories do you have about nighttime?

What is the best part of nighttime?

If students seem to be focusing to their detriment on night as a scary time, ask them to think about what can make the night less scary. For example, “In the night, my night light is always shining.” If students are enjoying the spooky possibilities of night, or drawn to writing about personal and/or dangerous situations, let them go get it out.

Sharing (10-20 minutes):

Have students share what they’ve written (voluntarily) with one another and/or the class.

Extensions:

- Incorporate [other poetry](#) about nighttime
- Use a projector and incorporate images of nighttime into the Activity portion and as students write
- Include minor instruction (plus images) about interesting things that happen in the natural world only at night (the [night blooming cereus](#) is a fun example)
- Include a discussion of metaphor and simile and/or encourage students to use figurative language
- Create a group poem with a line or two from all students
- Have students work with a partner or small group to create their nighttime poems