

“Poems Create Relationships”

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The ideas presented here build off of the “Presents/Presence” lesson plan from February 2021. While it would certainly be possible to adapt these to other lessons in other contexts, I’m specifically assuming you are 1) teaching over Zoom 2) building inside of some improvisational framing and 3) working with students who have been primed for lots of creative risk, wonder, and fun.



One activity I like to use immediately after “Presents/Presence” goes like this:

- I give a little segue into poetry by using NourbeSe Philip’s idea that “poems create relationships” and that our job, as poets, is simply to set things next to each other to see what relationships emerge. One way we can do that is by experimenting with prepositions!
- Be sure students know what prepositions are and how they function. It can be helpful to point out a few and/or to name the most common ones (in front of, behind, on, under, above) and then brainstorm a list of lesser used ones. If your class needs help doing that, just show them [this list](#) and have them call out ones that interest them.
- Once they have a handle on prepositions, have them go back to the chat where people identified the gifts they received in Presents/Presence. Give them 5 minutes to create a 7-line poem using ONLY words found in the chat and 3 interesting prepositions from the list.
- Encourage students to share these poems because they are always a total hoot! And you and your students will see the joy of collaboration and revision (using someone else’s words in a new way) while allowing a new part of an earlier activity to become prominent (the new relationships).
- By having them write their first poems this way, it can also relieve them of the pressure to write something “very profound” or “perfect.” It can also help them to see that all words have poetic possibility.



Another way to use the chat your class generated in “Presents/Presence” is to have a couple of students pick out some interesting images from the chat. Then, put those words together to form a line (don’t think too much about making this perfect – “Bat fruit on the wooly wing” is just fine!). Now, tell them they have 5 minutes to write a 10-line poem that begins with the same line – in other words, that is the first line of each student’s new poem! It’s so fascinating to see all the places they go even though they began with the same words/images!



Another way to return to the chat (or to develop either of the above activities) is to introduce students to [alliteration](#). Once they understand the concept, have them write a 5-line poem using ONLY words found in the chat, with the additional constraint that 3 of the 5 lines must contain at least a little alliteration. Here again you can highlight the value and wonder of revision, our seemingly endless ability to change focus even within a previously used text, and the thrill of not using a lot of time to plan but instead, simply jumping right in and enjoying the leaps!