

# Promises to a River

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**Time Frame:** 40+ minutes

**Literary Model:** Alfred, Lord Tennyson's "The Brook Poem"

**Age range:** Kindergarten to 3rd grade

## Learning Objectives:

- To explore "promises" in different contexts (What does a promise between two friends look like? Between a person and their pet? And, finally, what does a promise look like between human and nature?)
- To write collaboratively

## Supplies:

Plenty of construction paper cut into strips--I chose blue paper to symbolize water.

Stapler and tape

Markers

## Sequence of Activities:

### Pre-session set-up

Cut construction paper into approximately 2x8 inch strips

On each strip, mark one side with X's

On the opposing side, number the strips from one to the number of students in the class (I did considerably more than there were kids just in case)

### Warm Up Discussion (15 minutes)

Discuss the concept of promises. Do so by asking several different questions in regards to what promises are and how they work. I ask first for examples of promises. Starting with examples is a good way to situate them into your topic—besides, that's how we all think: through lived experiences. I then ask, "What would you promise your friend?"—this gears the discussion toward what constitutes a promise, or what promises are made of. We then discuss what you would promise your *pet*. I ask this question to think about what we promise certain creatures; which is a purposeful seed for the later writing exercise.

### Literary Model (5-10 minutes)

I read "The Brook" by Tennyson to the class. The river is the speaker in this poem. The brook babbles over rocks and into towns. The-river-as-speaker allows the kids to situate themselves in the imagery as the river, and this then allows them to develop a better kind of sympathy for the river. Sympathy for an inanimate object such as the river is, again, useful for our later exercise.

After reading the poem, I ask them about rivers they have seen before. I ask them to tell me what they remember about the rivers (“What color were they? What was living inside them?”) I also ask if they can name any rivers. With prompting, we discuss the Colorado River--this helps them visualize a nearby resource and, thus, have something to write about. I then ask the entire class, “What would you promise a river?” (I don’t specify that this promise must be to the Colorado--I want creative liberty on this.)

### **Exercise (15 minutes)**

Project or write the prompt “I promise the river...” in front of the class.

Explain that we will make a river with our words! Show them the strips of blue construction paper and explain that these are like “drops of water,” and that we will write on our strip our promise to the river. Then, these will all be linked into a paper chain to make our river of words.

Demonstrate the side of a paper strip with Xs and explain that this will be the side we write our promises on (this is to ensure the visible sides of our paper chain are the sides with writing).

### **If there’s time...**

The numbers on the opposing sides are for organizational purposes. Staple strip one into a circle and then call for the consecutive number (and so on) to bring their strip to you. This is to ensure you aren’t bombarded with students wanting their chain stapled next. After everyone has attached their piece you can read the chain of water drops/miniature poems aloud.

### **If you don’t have time remaining...**

I ran out of time and had to attach the chains at home. Even though the numbered strips were for in-class organization, I followed the order of numbers as a creative choice in form. Following the numbers created an interesting randomization element. Attaching at home was easier because it allowed me time to decipher their handwriting—reading young penmanship on the spot can be a bit intimidating. As I attached, I typed out each line; once the chain is attached it can be hard to read each piece.