Unleashed: Poems by Pets
by Glen Grunberger Elementary
School Poet-in-Residence 2010

Grade Level: 4-5

Duration: 50-60 minutes

Objective: Develop student skills in personification, writing from a created persona, dialogue, and empathy in poetry

Prior Knowledge and Skills: Designed for students who can read and write at or above 2nd grade level.

Sequence of Events:

I. Introduction: What would our animals say if they could talk? Read short poem from Unleashed. (5-10 minutes)
   a. How many of you have pets? Different kinds of pets – names.

II. Brainstorming: What are some of the things our pets might say? 10 minutes
   a. Do you ever imagine what they are saying?
      Get examples – if a child says, for example, “My dog likes sausages. My dad always pretends he’s Fluffy saying “Give me sausages!”

III. Read another poem from the dog’s point of view. Talk about the perspective. (5 mins)

IV. Individual Writing: Write a poem from the first person perspective of a pet. (20 mins)
   - Try to imagine the world from their perspective, or some event from their perspective.
     Can be a big thing -- like maybe when your little brother or sister was born. Or something ordinary - like you going to school every day – what do they think, what do they do when you’re gone?
   - Give at least 7 lines
     Remember about poetry – doesn’t have to rhyme. And you get to use words in different sorts of ways.
V. Sharing with class (practicing performance) (15 mins)

Required Resources: *Unleashed, Poems by Writers’ Dogs*, Hempel, et al.  (I used the poems, "Stalker," by Jeanne Schinto and "Buddy" by Andrew Hudgins.)

Optional Resources: Can bring in your own example or some of these student examples of poems by one’s pets or animals.  (See below for student examples).

Samples of student work: Joey

The Dog
Please, please, now let me in!  I’ll be responsible.  I won’t run. Now please!
I won’t destroy anything. I have to go in!
I want to play with you now. Please let me in. Please oh you.  I’ll look inside.
See what’s going on.  I’ll get in or my name isn’t Joey!

-  *Adolfo Lopez Alvarez, 4th grade, Corbett Elementary, Tucson*

Dog’s Story
My name is Kiser (Ky-zer). One day, some people came in and they had boxes in their hands. I tried to bark, but Kenya, Arizona, and Ericca wouldn’t listen to me. I calmed down once they gave some chicken nuggets. I like chicken nuggets. The men had words on their shirt that said, “movers.” Did Ericca just move in or something? I thought she had this house for ages! I got comfortable on Arizona’s leg and dug my nails in her leg. What? I need to squeeze once in a while! I heard her complain and she took me off. What kind of friend are you, Arizona?
I got back on, right after that and it happened all over again! Ha, ha, Arizona. After I did it 16 more times, she got used to it. I needed to go pee, so I barked. They wouldn’t listen, so I got off of AZ’s leg, and did my stuff on Kenya’s leg. She gave me a chicken nugget to stop me from doing it again. I love chicken nuggets. I also love Arizona, Ericca, and Kenya. They snuggled me and laughed. I liked that day.
THE END.
- by Kiser

*Arizona Rashad, 4th grade, Corbett Elem., Tucson, Reflection on “Unleashed” Lesson Plan*
Notes about this Lesson Plan:

A couple of things to watch out for here. One is that so many of the kids wanted to tell stories about their pets that I got behind on leaving time for the writing. Second, I found that about half to two-thirds of the kids really got the writing objective – to write from the pet’s perspective – but a good percentage of them just really had trouble with the concept of writing in first person as if they were the animal. I think it really helps to go around and work with the kids individually with questions on this format, and to have teachers and teachers’ aides, if any, enlisted to help. I thought I emphasized this point a lot, but I think I’d write on the board, “Use ‘I’ and “my” in your sentences” and write a couple of sentence starters, like: My name is Fido. I am hungry all the time. Finally, I think I had one child in each class claim that they had never had a pet, but that was pretty easily resolved when I asked if they knew a friend’s or family member’s pet.

One little girl said that her dog had recently died and she was sad. I told her I understood that sadness, that my beloved dog had died just a couple of years earlier and I still missed her. But that we could still write something imagining what our dog might say. She wrote.