

Line By Line: The Process Of Discovery

Grades: 4th through 12th

Description:

This is the kind of poem written with a list of ten words. There is no chosen subject, and the poem grows as the student works with the word list from line to line. The greater success of the poem will require students to use verbs and adjectives creatively, as addressed in lessons six and seven. The poem's format will also eliminate predictability. This exercise draws students into an elemental dynamic of writing that all poets experience each time they write: discovering what they didn't know was there all along.

Activity:

- 1) Tell students they will be compiling a ten-word list as you call out categories from which they select a word of their choice. They will write their list going down the right-hand side of an 8 ½ inch by 11 inch piece of lined paper. Some of the words will be selected randomly from the verb, adjective, and noun lists in the handouts. Students should have those word lists before they begin. (Do not explain the technique until they have their words.)
- 2) Begin calling out the categories:
 1. a noun that names a place in nature (forest, river, meadow, etc.)
 2. a verb from the list (For unpredictable writing, have them put a finger on a verb, close their eyes, go up and down the column, stop, and choose the verb they land on.)
 3. a noun that names something they would find in the sky
 4. an adjective from the list (They might try the random process again with this list.)
 5. A noun that names a weather
 6. A verb from the list
 7. A color
 8. An adjective from the list
 9. A noun from the list (They may choose this word deliberately.)
 10. A noun that names a season

- 3) Pass out the handout. Read the poem and ask students if they notice a connection between the list and the poem. Tell them they will build a poem of ten lines with their word list in which each line ends with the words in that order. (They cannot change the order.) Tell them they may change the form of any word as long as the change keeps the root word. Draw attention to where the writer did that in her poem.
- 4) It is not absolutely necessary, but it would be very helpful if you wrote a ten-word list vertically on the board and showed them how the process works. Do this as a collaboration; it will get them immediately involved in the process, and they will be clearer on how to smooth out snags as they go from line to line.
- 5) Tell students not to spend a lot of time getting started. If, for example, the first word in someone's list is "meadow," they could get started right away by writing "In the meadow," then go into the next line and let the end-word help them continue building.
- 6) You might explain that writing a poem with this technique is like taking a walk on a path that has ten curves. Each time they come to the next word, they will turn into the next line. Since they have to work with this particular list and this specific technique, they will end up writing a poem they never would have written otherwise.
- 7) Suggest that they find a line or a phrase in their poems for a title when they finish.

I have presented this exercise too many times to count, and I have rarely encountered students who were not surprised and pleased by their poems. Enjoy the results.

Time: 1 hour

Supporting Documents: Line By Line Explanation
Line By Line Handout 1, 2, 3, & 4

State/District Standards:

1.1.1 – Develops ideas

1.1.2 – Develops organization

1.2 – Uses style appropriate to the audience and purpose

1.2.1 – Voice

1.2.2 – Word choice

2.2.1 – Writes to express him/herself

2.3.1 - Poetry