

## Looking For Silence: Dealing With Abstractions

Another way of dealing with abstractions is by asking students to tell us in their poems where silence or loneliness, courage, patience, etc. might be found. Here is a four-step method for this approach:

- 1) Write these categories on the board and underline them: Vehicle, Weather, Plant, Animal, Utensil, Sports, Music. Help them build a list of specific words under each category, so that, for example, the sports list will consist of words like mitt, hoop, stadium, softball, etc.
- 2) Take “beauty” as the subject for a warm-up with the technique before they begin writing their own poems. Ask them to choose an item they listed under one of the categories. The lists will inspire them to think of new connections, and, hopefully, will help them avoid the common ones for beauty such as “the sun setting on the mountains.”
- 3) Write on the board an uncommon image, one that comes from the “vehicle” list. “There is a red kind of beauty growing across the rusting truck abandoned in the junkyard, glittering under the gaze of the sun.” Briefly discuss this image, and ask them to recall something we do not usually think of as beautiful, and tell what made it seem beautiful. This one came from the animal category: “There is beauty inside my cat’s ear, protected by silky black fur.”
- 4) Pass out the list of abstract words. They will choose one and write a title like “Finding Beauty,” or “Where Beauty Hides,” etc. Let them know they are not limited to the categories, and remind them to sprinkle their poems with uncommon images and details.

## Adaptations for Younger Students

With younger students you might focus on “hunger” for the abstract subject for a warm up. Tell them to think of places where they see hunger. Include the other senses as well. To avoid the common responses, give a prompt such as, “How can the sky look hungry?” Encourage them to follow these steps:

- 1) Start with “I saw hunger” or one of the other senses.
- 2) Tell where
- 3) Tell what happened there to create the hunger

## Sample Poems:

## **Finding Beauty**

There is beauty in a water bottle, the way  
the mixture of shiny plastic and untouched water  
sends out a glowing sparkle.

There is beauty in a hibernating bear, the way  
his rhythmic breathing sends his enormous  
sleeping belly up and down.

There is beauty in a still-standing scarecrow  
in a dead cornfield, the way it says there will  
soon be life again.

There is beauty in a poem, the way the words  
fill the pencil, the paper, and your heart.

*Megan Walsh, 5<sup>th</sup> grade*

I saw hunger in the sky  
when the wind pushed  
all its clouds away.

*Jack Buhler, 2<sup>nd</sup> grade*

I heard hunger  
in our car trying to start  
with no gas in the tank.

I saw hunger  
in my helpless pencil  
with a broken tip.

I felt hunger  
when I put my hands  
in my empty pockets

*Emily Gregorio, 2<sup>nd</sup> grade*

