

## **My Pencil Is Quiet, Searching For A Word: A List Poem of Personification Using Adjectives** (With adaptations for very young students at the end of the instructions)

It is a fascinating thought, believed by some traditional cultures, that everything in the universe has consciousness. Consider this haiku by the Japanese poet, Ryota:

No one spoke—  
not the host, not the guest,  
not even the white chrysanthemums.

The attribution of speech to flowers imbues the chrysanthemums with a kind of human presence and gives their quiet existence a new way of being in the world. In the following writing experience, students will develop the concept of personification by making new associations with an adjective in the form of a list poem. The exercise will also focus on eliminating the use of clichés.

- 1) Ask students to call out the first word that comes to them when you say or write on the board: “quiet as a....” Several might respond with the word, “mouse.”
- 2) Write the question, “What Is Quiet?” in capital letters and tell them that they will help you make a list poem of objects (with brief, descriptive details) that have a quiet quality. Tell them that the title is a question, and each part (stanza) of the poem is an answer.
- 3) Invite students to look around the classroom for different objects and list them on the board: clock, flag, piece of chalk, chair, backpack, etc. List objects at home and in different places: toothbrush, fork, vacuum cleaner, etc. Make another list of objects outdoors: a swing in the park, rocks, trees, etc.
- 4) From the different lists, start building a poem of quiet things on the board under the title: an old boot in the dark closet; an abandoned truck in a weedy field; a fork in the back of a drawer; dust under my sister’s bed, etc. (Leave a space between each part to show that poets like to arrange poems into stanzas so that each idea gets its own attention.)
- 5) Give students the adjective list handout. They might find an adjective in the list that inspires them to write their poems, or they might have one in mind that’s not in the list. (Ask them to let you know the adjective they chose if it isn’t in the list, to make sure it is an adjective before they start writing the poem.)
- 6) Remind students to title the poem in the form of a question and to think of the stanzas as a list of answers. This way they will not have to write the adjective in the body of the poem.

Adaptation for younger grades: rather than passing out the adjective lists, teachers may want to stay with the “quiet” concept rather than change the focus. If first graders are just beginning to learn to write sentences, teachers may want to have them write simple “poetry sentences,” perhaps just one, especially if this exercise is presented in the early stages of the school year. A sample poetry sentence: “The old boot is quiet, sleeping in the dark closet.”

## Sample Poems

### What Is Quiet?

A car without kids

A lonely cave  
abandoned by bears

My frozen breath thawing  
into invisible air

A baseball  
snuggled in winter grass

The night dreaming  
while dawn glints  
pink as a fingernail  
on a dark hand

*-Kevin, 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade*

### What Is Tired?

Maple leaves  
hanging for months  
on a branch.

A broken down fence  
in a weedy field.

The smile  
on the face of a statue.

The year at the end  
of Decedmber, waiting  
for January.

*-Emily, 4<sup>th</sup> Grade*

