

Saying A Word Aloud

Once, in a third grade classroom, students were contributing words to a list of specific kinds of berries. They were invited to say one of the words, “huckleberries,” aloud, and to be aware of how their mouths and throats felt while saying the word. They took great delight in saying it over and over.

They were asked to put two fingers against the base of their throats just above the sternum and press very gently while saying the word “huckleberry.” They talked about what the experience “felt” like. One girl said the feeling was like having a berry move around her mouth and then get caught in her throat when she got to the “ck” sound. The students’ responses indicated that this might be the first time they were savoring the sound and feel of a word.

- 1) Write the word “ocean” on the board and invite students to say it aloud while being aware of its sound and feeling. Write their ideas about what it feels like on the board: “the exhale of a bus coming to a stop on the road of my tongue,” etc.
- 2) Read the following poem, “Saying Ocean Aloud” (inspired by James Wright’s “Saying Dante Aloud”), and briefly discuss the images. Do the same with the caboose and thunder poems:

Saying “ocean” aloud
I can feel the hollow
hush of wind rushing
over rolling, foaming
crests, like the whirr
of hundreds of herons
pumping the air through
the coves of my mouth.

- 3) Have them choose a single word to say aloud several times and write a brief poem, describing the way it feels as they say it. You might suggest words like lizard, beach, sunlight, October, tulip, desert, autumn, etc.

Note: This would be a good time to encourage students to develop the habit of savoring words by keeping a notebook of favorite words they find in different places: stories, poems, signs, fruit and vegetable stands, field guides, etc. It is also a good time to suggest that they always read their poems aloud, *listening* for the words and phrases that fit or don’t seem to fit the poem or the poem in progress.

The poet, Donald Hall, once wrote: “...the poem exists in the whole body of the person absorbing it, and most particularly in the mouth that holds the intimate sounds touching each other, and in the leg that dances the rhythm.”

Sample Poems:

Saying Caboose Out Loud

I can feel the bumps of the tracks
on my lips as the train jerks me
back and forth and sideways
and I hang on to the seat
feeling sick in my stomach.

Alex Rodgers, 4th grade

Saying Thunder Aloud

I can feel the rolling madness
of darkness,
strong and unrelenting,
as its mysterious syllables
move my tongue in lines of grey.

Ali Wilson, 8th grade