

## *I Smell a Poem!* Writing Multi-Sensorial List Poems with Elementary School Students

### Overview and Goals:

- “I Smell a Poem!” is an interactive presentation/workshop designed to engage young students in a multi-sensorial approach to writing. Although the presentation focuses on poetry, the included lessons apply to other forms of creative and scholarly writing. The presentation/workshop is designed to be brief enough for young students (approximately 30 minutes to one hour), interactive and engaging, flexible, and able to be easily woven into an elementary school curriculum.
- The premise of the program is this: the strongest writing engages all the senses; children are fantastically creative and able to make varied concrete and metaphorical connections; teaching children how to use all their senses in writing poems, stories, and essays will encourage them to be more vibrant writers and observers of the world around them.
- The goals of the program are to introduce elementary age students to poetry; to help them generate list poems using the senses of sight, smell, sound, taste, and touch; and to encourage sharing the poems aloud.
- After students write the poems below, provide the opportunity for students to read their poems aloud.

### Materials and Methods:

- Introduction
  - Briefly introduce poetry—poetry is a special way of saying something; songs are poetry set to music; poems can rhyme or not rhyme.
  - Introduce the five senses—**sight, smell, sound, taste, and touch**. Often students will know the senses and will be eager to volunteer them. Writing the senses on the board or in some way making them visible will serve as a helpful reminder and frame throughout the class.
- Writing List Poems
  - Poems may be written together as a group with the teacher serving as scribe, students may write individual poems, or the teacher may utilize a mixture of methods.

- Students will need writing paper and pencils. Two pieces of blank paper can be folded in half to create a “book.”
- Below are various prompts that can be employed to generate **list poems**, which are poems created as a literal list of objects or ideas. These poems do not require complete sentences and may be composed of single words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc.) or sentence fragments running in a list down the page. The prompt (see below) can serve as the poem’s title.
- **Fragrant Objects**—have students smell items they can’t see in a paper bag or objects they can see but cannot identify in a plastic bag (e.g., peppermint extract-soaked cotton balls)
  - e.g., nutmeg, vanilla, almond, peppermint, cinnamon, toothpaste
  - Write down, together or individually, how the fragrant objects smelled, looked, felt to the touch (for cotton ball), what tastes they reminded students of, how the bags sounded.
  - Extra prompt: What color should each scent be?
  - Write a list of all the associations, memories, thoughts triggered by the smells, keeping in mind the five senses
- **Classroom Objects & Environment**
  - your shirt (how does it smell, feel, look? does it make a sound when you move? does it remind you of breakfast? does it keep you warm? does it make you think of your home, etc?), the clock on the wall
  - sounds/smells of school/classroom (books dropping, lockers clanging, students talking)
- **Places & Associations**
  - your kitchen (or a favorite food), the doctor’s office
  - the park, downtown in a city, the freeway
- **Weather & Experiences**
  - These sensory list poems about more distant objects/experiences will encourage students to stretch their imaginations and associations, often naturally fostering experimentation with simile and metaphor.
  - wind, rain, the sun, snow

- a birthday party, a family gathering, Mars
- **Color**
  - Pick a color
  - Write a multi-sensorial list of items (and/or thoughts, ideas, memories related to that color)
  - Part 2: Build another poem that deepens the associative exploration: What does the color *feel* like, *sound* like, *taste* like, *smell* like, *look* like? How does this color make *you* feel?
- **Sounds**
  - Play an interesting sound clip in the classroom (e.g., city sounds, ocean sounds, winter sounds, bird calls)
  - Write list poems while listening to these sounds, using all the senses and all the associations that can be made – what does the music *feel* like, *sound* like, *taste* like, *smell* like, *look* like? How does the music make *you* feel? Is the music a certain color?
- **Frames:** These frames may be helpful to help younger students formulate their ideas:

(I imagine) \_\_\_\_\_ smells (like) \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ sounds (like) \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ tastes (like) \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ feels (like) \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ looks (like) \_\_\_\_\_

**Conclusion:** Strong poetry engages the five senses in concrete and metaphorical ways. Writers become vibrant observers of the world around them—and the worlds they imagine—by describing what they see, hear, touch, taste, and smell. Most importantly, students learn through these exercises that poetry is all around them; they can write a poem about anything from their own shirts to outer space!