

A Guide for Instructors: Teacher to Teacher

As a 22-year veteran in the Missouri public school system, I believe in the importance of exposing students to all forms of writing, especially poetry. I particularly enjoyed diving into poems with the younger elementary students, but when I transitioned to 7th grade, I struggled with how to approach poetry with middle school students. Then along came *The 7GP 7th Grade Poetry Lesson Plan*—no more struggling. I found the plans to be easy to follow and most engaging for the students. I ran the *7GP Contest* in my classroom at Antonia Middle School for three years, and each year looked forward to implementing these lessons. So, when asked by Aaron Williams, Founder of The 7th Grade Poetry Foundation, to update the lessons for the 2016 contest, I was thrilled.

By implementing these lessons early in the school year, it enabled me to build stronger bonds with a majority of my students, even the most apprehensive ones. I learned so much about my students that I may not have otherwise. As middle school teachers, we all know that students at this age are dealing with many social and emotional issues. Poetry can be a tool that offers students an outlet to deal with such issues. I received a letter from an 8th grade student expressing to me that poetry helped her through the contemplation of suicide. I was shocked. This confirmed my belief that poetry does impact students.

The ultimate goal of this poetry unit is for students themselves to be excited about poetry as a means for self-expression. Believe me, it can and will happen. It became apparent the impact this plan had on the students when the contest began making a “buzz” with the 6th graders who then looked forward to their 7th grade year—what more could a teacher ask for? Even my most reluctant students would express to me that, through poetry, they feel they have a “voice” and that their voice matters.

This plan may seem overwhelming, but just take it one day at a time. Do what works best for you and your students. On several of the Lesson Goals pages (lessons one, three, four, seven, nine, ten, and bonus lesson two) you will find “Teacher Tips.” These are ideas that I have found to be helpful in my own classroom. The most helpful tip I can offer is to always give your students the opportunity to write and to read aloud their writing in an environment free from judgement. Not only does this aid in speaking skills, it also builds a student’s self-confidence.

Another important component of reading poetry aloud is that it helps with the process of revision. I cannot stress enough the fact that students need to understand and value this process (see **Lesson Three**). Aaron Williams, 7GP Founder stresses, “If we want students to become better readers, we need to have them become, and want to become, better revisers. Every student’s poem should be celebrated as a trophy.”

Lastly, and most importantly, have fun with these lessons and be flexible. You will be astounded by what your seventh graders have to say.

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