

POETRY OF PLACE AND MOMENT

Encouraging students to slow down and notice their response to a place and a moment in time helps them bring their personal perspectives onto the page and create lasting memories.

Turning everyday moments into poems can bring more meaning into our lives. When students include poems and creative writing in their journals, it can be a powerful experience of learning and sharing together. The roots of many poems can begin with the tools fundamental to inquiry—noticing, wondering, and making creative connections. Anything can become the subject of a poem when we observe it, then add memories, questions, or connections to ideas. This scaffold for writing poems gives students an approach they can use again and again to support their creative expression and integrate poetry into their journaling tool kit.

NATURAL PHENOMENA

Any place students can spread out, sit, and write comfortably will suffice. To support students in being able to slow down, reflect, and focus on their own experience, pick a place that is safe and/or familiar to them.

PROCEDURE SUMMARY

1. Sit and look around you, then write a poem inspired by this place and your response to it.
2. Use the sentence starters “I notice,” “I wonder,” and “It reminds me of” to describe your surroundings. Then, turn the sentence starters “I notice,” “I wonder,” and “It reminds me of” inward to describe your internal experience, emotions, and thoughts.
3. Alternate back and forth between looking out and describing what you see, then looking inward to write about what you notice about how you feel and what you are reminded of.

EXAMPLE POEMS

Instead of doing a demonstration of a journal page, read these example poems to give students some ideas of what their writing could look like.

I notice roots of a tree growing into the ground
They remind me of elephant legs,
or columns on a building.
I wonder, how many people
have visited this place?
How many birds
have sat on this tree?
I notice
sitting here leaning against the trunk,
with friends around me,
I feel calm,
like I have strong roots, too.

I notice big flowers all around.
They remind me of trumpets,
or the beaks of a hundred birds.
I wonder what it would sound like
if they could sing.
I notice they make me
feel happy.
I wonder, how do their
reflections sing in the water
like a shining star?

Time

Introduction: 10 minutes
Activity: 10–30 minutes
Discussion: 5–15 minutes



Materials

- Journals and pencils



Teaching Notes

Just as some students may be nervous to try drawing, others may feel intimidated by writing poems. Scaffolding the process and offering students a place to start give them a way to engage. Ideally, lead this activity after students have done the routine *I Notice, I Wonder, It Reminds Me Of*, so that they are familiar with the prompts they will use.



This is not a time to restrict students' creativity, judge their work, or limit what they write about. Although students are instructed to begin their poems with descriptions of the place around them, wherever students' ideas lead them after this is OK. As students freely notice, wonder, and make connections, their personal experiences and perspectives are validated and invited onto the page. This process leads students to develop a connection to nature and to craft poems that will help them remember that experience for years to come. The shared experience of writing poems in a group can build community and connection, and makes space for students to share their cultural perspectives and stories.

PROCEDURE STEP-BY-STEP

- 1. Tell students to take a moment to look at their surroundings.**
- 2. Explain that students will write a poem about the place and their experience in it, based on their observations.**
 - a. "In a moment, you will write a poem recording your experience in this place."
 - b. "Do not be intimidated. Writing a poem, like creating any journal entry, can begin with what we observe around us."
- 3. Tell students to use "I notice," "I wonder," and "It reminds me of" to describe their surroundings.**
 - a. "To start your poem, all you have to do is write down things you notice about your surroundings—for example, 'I notice ants crawling along the ground.'"
 - b. "You can also leave out the 'I notice' part, and say your observation: 'Ants crawl along the ground.'"
 - c. "As you observe, add 'I wonders' about what you are noticing, or any other questions that come to mind—for example, 'I notice ants crawling along the ground. I wonder how many times they have walked this path before.'"
 - d. "Add in connections, or things you are reminded of. These can be about your own experiences, something that a part of your surroundings physically looks like, or connections you can make between what you see and other parts of the world—for example, 'This reminds me of people walking back and forth, each day treading the same path' or 'Ants, their shiny bodies move like lines of seeds.'"
- 4. Tell students to turn "I notice," "I wonder," and "It reminds me of" inward, and write down how they feel and what they think about as they are in this place.**
 - a. "As you are describing your surroundings in the poem, turn the prompts 'I notice,' 'I wonder,' and 'It reminds me of' inward to describe your feelings and thoughts."
 - b. "What do you notice about what it's like for you to be in this place? What do you wonder about yourself? What does this experience remind you of? When you look at a tree branch, the sky, or another part of your surroundings, what connections can you make?"
 - c. "Write that down in the poem."
 - d. "After you have gotten some lines down, keep writing. As it feels right to you, shift between what you notice about the world around you, connections you can make to the rest of the world or yourself, and what you notice about your own experience."

"Poems hide....What we have to do is live in a way that lets us find them."

—Naomi Shihab Nye

- 5. Tell students that their poems do not need to rhyme and do not need to follow any exact order, sequence, or topic.**
 - a. "Your poem does not need to rhyme or have a specific rhythm, but it can if you would like."
 - b. "You also do not need to follow the exact order of 'I notice, I wonder, it reminds me of.'"
 - c. "You could have several 'I notices' about your surroundings in a row, then a series of questions. Then you could focus on the connections you feel to your own experiences or memories."
 - d. "Anything is fair game. Do not limit yourself. If you are reminded of memories, people, experiences, ideas, or knowledge, that is all welcome. Write down what feels meaningful to you."
 - e. "If the poem takes you in a completely different direction, to a totally unrelated topic from where you began, that's OK. Follow it. An exciting part of writing poems is being surprised by where they lead you."
- 6. Let students know that if they feel stuck, they can always just go back to "I notice," "I wonder," and "It reminds me of" and write down what they see or sense.**
 - a. "If you run out of things to say or feel stuck, don't worry; you can always go back to noticing and describing your surroundings."
- 7. (Optional) Encourage students to look back at previous journal entries and incorporate lines or writing that speaks to them.**
 - a. "If you want, after you've gotten started, flip back through some of your journal entries and take a look at what you've written."
 - b. "If there is a line you wrote down that speaks to you and connects to the poem you're writing, take it and add it in."
- 8. Tell students to begin, then give them 10 or 15 minutes to write.**
- 9. As students work, follow the instructions of the prompt yourself to model engagement with the activity. Circulate if students need support or are struggling to focus.**
- 10. (Optional) If you've done journaling activities such as *Zoom In*, *Zoom Out* or *Comparison*, make an announcement partway through the activity explaining how students can use these strategies in writing poetry.**
 - a. "Last week, we did the activity *Zoom In*, *Zoom Out*, where you sketched [a tree, a plant, etc.] from close up, at life size, and far away."

- b. "Try taking this technique into your poem and shifting perspectives. What do you notice when you look at something up close?"
 - c. "How does what you notice shift as you pull back and look at it from far away, and look at the context around it?"
 - d. "If anything interesting comes up, add it to your poem."
- 11. When students have had time to write, but before they become disengaged, call the group back together.**
- 12. Facilitate poem sharing in a way that works for your group, being clear that students only need to share what they have written if they want to.**
- a. Students could share poems in a number of ways. If there is time, individuals could read a whole poem or part of a poem to the group. Students could also pair off and share a poem or part of a poem with a partner.
- 13. After each student shares a poem, respond evenly, thanking them for their vulnerability and avoiding judgmental or evaluative statements.**
- a. Have an even response after each student shares. Do not, for example, say "OK, thanks" to one student and "Wow, oh how amazing, what a great poem!" to the next.
 - b. Thank each student who shares for their courage and vulnerability, giving a similar response each time.
 - c. Avoid evaluative statements. This can shut students down. The goal here is for students to notice and record their experience. As long as they did that, they are successful.
- 14. Point out how sharing poems is an opportunity to learn from each other as a community.**



- a. "Thank you all for sharing your words with us."
- b. "We all have different perspectives, ideas, and experiences. Listening to one another helps us learn from one another, and this strengthens us as a community."

15. Tell students that they can include short poems in their future journal entries and use this technique in the future, reminding them to distinguish between what they observe and what they feel.

- a. "When you have personal thoughts, ideas, or feelings that arise while you are journaling, you can write them down in your entries along with your observations."
- b. "This can help you form deeper memories of your experiences, and can be a way to keep learning about yourself and enrich your experience."
- c. "As you do this writing, remember to make note of when you are recording an observation and when you are recording an idea, emotion, or thought."

DISCUSSION

Lead a discussion using the general discussion questions. Intersperse pair talk with group discussion.

General Discussion

- a. "What was it like to spend time writing a poem in nature?"
- b. "Did anything surprise you as you were writing?"
- c. "What were some interesting or unexpected observations or insights you came to?"
- d. "How might you include poems in your future journal entries?"

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITY

Simile and Metaphor Poems

Engage students in writing simile and metaphor poems. Encourage students to look for parts of their surroundings that remind them of themselves, and to write them into a poem. You can say, for example: "Maybe, like the squirrel, you are watching everything closely, storing seeds for a more difficult time. Maybe you feel you are a spider web, because you make connections between many things. Maybe you are like a butterfly, like a cloud, or like a tree. Only you will know! You can include these thoughts in your poem, describing what you see and connecting that to who you know yourself to be."

Sharing Poetry

Look for examples of short, relevant poems to share with students in the field. This may become a part of your regular opening or closing ritual.