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Why we wrote this book

As English teachers, we struggled for years with ways to reinforce grammar points in our lessons. We tried drills, worksheets, cloze exercises, and a host of other traditional activities as a means of practicing specific structures, but everything we tried was somehow disappointing. These activities lacked spark, imagination, and, most of all, the students' voices. So next we tried journals, free-writing, and focused-topic writing. Students explored their own ideas in writing, but they tended to use the structures they were familiar with rather than the newly learned ones we wanted them to practice. Not satisfactory for our purposes! Finally, we tried a few well-known poems with simple patterns, such as haiku and cinquain, in the hope that students would be led to practice *specific* grammar points while becoming engaged with language and communication at a deeper, more personal level. With the very first poems our students wrote, we knew we were on to something special. Not only were our students practicing the structures we wanted them to, but they were also engaged and enthusiastic about the process. And the poems they wrote were little jewels!

In analyzing the success of the first poetic adventures with our students, we determined that what worked about the haiku and the cinquain was that both followed a very specific pattern, almost like a mold. Like a mold, each line of the pattern poems (as we later began to call them) had a preset form that allowed students to focus on pouring out their ideas rather than on worrying about the form those ideas would take. Having such a pattern predetermined for them was (perhaps paradoxically) liberating for our students, and they responded by writing creative pieces while practicing the specific structures inherent to each poem.

Along the way we discovered that pattern poems not only allowed for practicing grammatical structures but also turned out to be useful vehicles for a host of other purposes: vocabulary, spelling, pronunciation, speaking, listening, reading, language awareness, critical thinking, literary appreciation, and, obviously, writing. Although our initial motivation for using the poems had been grammar practice, the unintended benefits of writing pattern poems sometimes delightfully overshadowed our original purposes.

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We shared our students' poems with anyone who would listen. We began compiling and self-publishing their pattern poetry and then circulated copies of the publications to other teachers and administrators. We gathered more poems, invented some, adapted others, and started presenting workshops to teachers from all levels – kindergarten to adult – teachers of native speakers and nonnative speakers alike. Those teachers were so impressed by the language learning and the quality of their students' pattern poems that they sent us copies to include in future workshops. They also invited us into their classrooms to share our lessons.

The result is the book of poetry lessons and poems you have in your hands. We have seen these poems work time and time again with both nonnative and native speakers, with students of all ages, and with students of varying levels of proficiency. We have seen students' language skills blossom along with their self-confidence as they produced poems that delighted and inspired us. We hope that you can use this book to help inspire the writing and language learning of your students, too.

Why write poems?

Hidden deep inside, each of us has a bit of the poet. Who among us cannot recite a short poem or nursery rhyme learned long ago? Or sing along with a tune on the radio even though we have not heard that song in years? Or recite our school song? Or sing a lullaby sung by our grandmother? Or recall an advertising jingle from years back?

How is it that many of us remember poetic language for years when we cannot remember the name of a person we met only minutes earlier? Poetry sticks with us because it resonates in our hearts and minds. The language of poetry grasps our imagination, emotions, and intellect with equal force regardless of our language backgrounds. Because poems often adhere to predictable patterns of rhythm and rhyme, they are pleasurable and easy to recall. Because they also easily tolerate unique word choice and phrasing, they help students overcome their sometimes paralyzing preoccupation with making mistakes. And because they are compact and economical in expression, they are a stimulating yet efficient medium for language learning. Although the poems in this book do not necessarily rhyme or have strict meter, their structure is often rhythmic, and they allow students to explore creative ways of communicating in writing without worrying about what form their ideas will take.

Poetry promotes language acquisition

Classroom teachers, teacher educators, and particularly parents know the value of using poetry to teach language skills. Children are often

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introduced to poetry early in their lives by parents, grandparents, and other caretakers who chant nursery rhymes or sing lullabies to soothe their children's anxiety – all before the youngsters have any consciousness of linguistic forms. Many children learn their first words from poems because the sounds of poetic language, with its patterns of rhythm, rhyme, and cadence, intrigue them and make them listen carefully. Linguists suggest that early knowledge of syntax comes from children listening to language forms from their environments. More often than not, those forms are poetic. Poetry teaches children to listen, develop vocabulary, learn to read and write, and think creatively. Poetry takes the structure and beauty of language and provides a personal world to explore.

For some of the same reasons that poetry is useful in acquisition of a first language, it is an effective way of learning and reinforcing the sounds and structures of a second, or even third, language. Through listening to poetry, second language learners can reinforce target language learning in a natural way. Added benefits accrue when second language students engage in poetry writing – especially pattern poem writing. The uses and benefits of writing pattern poems are greater than their apparent simplicity suggests. Through writing simple pattern poems, learners can:

- play with words and see what fits because the burden of discovering a proper format for a poem is removed
- create a polished piece of writing in a relatively short period, thereby experiencing "instant gratification"
- rehearse correct spelling
- use familiar vocabulary
- discover new vocabulary while using the dictionary or thesaurus to find words that serve their vision
- practice specific language structures such as phrases, word order, and verb tense
- develop confidence in their ability to share ideas in writing
- nurture creativity by giving their imaginations free reign
- cultivate logical and sequential thinking skills through storytelling
- refine summarizing skills

Despite their simple, uncomplicated nature, pattern poems reinforce, and even teach, multiple language skills while challenging students to share their vision of the world around them in a nonthreatening way. Most patterns can be used with all levels and ages of learners. Even those who are not yet literate in English can dictate poems for their teacher to write.

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Using the book

Overview

Writing Simple Poems can be used in many ways. Although its specific purpose is for reinforcing language concepts, it can be used for encouraging creative writing, supporting literature, understanding content knowledge, building student confidence – or just for fun! No matter what your purpose, you can use the lessons side by side with your regular text to enrich instruction.

Writing Simple Poems is as easy to follow as a recipe book. And, as with a cookbook, each recipe (lesson) stands alone. This handbook can be opened to any lesson, where a complete, self-contained plan, set up in a predictable fashion following the same pattern, may be found. Thus, you will not need to invest a lot of time learning to use the book. Teach one chapter and you are a master chef! And, just as a master chef experiments with a recipe, we encourage you to spice up the activities and adapt them to your own uses.

To make the book user-friendly, we have set up each lesson with the following simple headings:

- *Teaching points.* These are points in language or writing that we believe can be taught through the pattern.
- *Pattern.* This is a line-by-line description of the form and content of the poem. To demonstrate the pattern, we include several models of the poem (which we wrote or adapted from student ideas) to give you a quick glimpse at what the poem might look like.
- *What to do.* This is a step-by-step process for introducing the poem and facilitating student writing. It can form the basis for a self-contained lesson plan.
- *Uses.* These are suggestions for integrating the poems into the overall curricula, linking them to content areas as well as language arts.
- *Variations.* These demonstrate modified forms of the poetic pattern, providing the bases for additional activities or lessons.
- *Student-written examples.* Examples of poems written by students of all ages and levels demonstrate the versatility of the patterns. Because the examples are authentic, they do not always follow the pattern *exactly,* thereby demonstrating the flexibility of the poetic forms and the creativity of the students and their teachers. These examples can be shared with your students to inspire their own creativity and to provide an enjoyable reading experience.

The teaching points in each chapter are cross-referenced in the *Index*. The *Glossary* provides explanations and examples of key language terms covered in the book.

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Teaching pattern poems

We, the authors, have strong beliefs (even biases) on how to teach grammar and writing – on how to teach anything, for that matter. Our beliefs are demonstrated in the instructions of each lesson plan. They include:

- *Interactive modeling.* One of the assumptions of social learning theory is that students learn from observation and interaction with others in their immediate environment. With many poems, we suggest that the teacher write the poem *with* the class so that students can participate in the process with a guide (interactive modeling). By thinking aloud with the students while writing their words on the board, teachers can demonstrate how writers decide what to write about, which words to use, where to place words on the page, and when revision is needed. For example, the teacher might say, "Let's see. You suggested writing: 'I like to swim.' But we have already used the word *like*. What other words could we use?" Students might volunteer the words *enjoy, love,* or *adore*. Through negotiation, the students decide on the best word to use. Students easily learn writing strategies from writing *with* the teacher, a learning process that then supports them in writing their own poems.
- *Collaborative groups.* Groups collaborate when they work on the *same* piece of writing together. Interactive modeling is one form of collaborative learning because the students have helped the teacher create the same poem as a whole group process. The logical extension is to use small groups of students as collaborative learning units for writing poems. Students become responsible for creating a single poem or part of a poem as a group rather than as individuals. They learn from and with each other as they negotiate the meanings of words, select which words to use, and construct phrasing. Pressure to perform, often resulting in writer's block, is minimized as the responsibility for writing is shared. The resulting poem becomes a tribute to the group's creativity and language control, bringing satisfaction and unity to the group.
- *Cooperative groups.* Cooperative group work involves students helping each other with *individually written* pieces. While students are writing their own individual poems, they can cooperate with others in their group by brainstorming for ideas and words, structuring their poems, or responding to each others' drafts. Peer response, through cooperative groups, reinforces the connection between readers and writers. It increases the flow of language and builds fluency.
- *Inductive thinking.* Most of the poems in this book have distinct structural patterns that can be shown and explained to students before they start writing. An alternative to this kind of deductive approach is

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to encourage students to figure out the patterns themselves. Showing students models and asking them to find the pattern is a wonderful exercise in inductive reasoning. Some of the patterns, such as the cinquain (Lesson 10), lend themselves particularly well to this approach. The ability to infer or discover structure in a grouping of words encourages hypothesis testing, which is essential for critical reasoning as well as language acquisition. We advocate using an inductive approach when the material allows. Discovering the patterns themselves, rather than having the teacher point them out, gives students a feeling of ownership and control over the poems.

- *Sensory stimulation.* Whenever possible, we have suggested that you use sensory stimuli (especially visual) to spur the creative process and give students something concrete to write about. For example, students find it much easier to write a haiku (Lesson 17) when they have a colorful picture of a nature scene to stimulate them. By the same token, students can discover and describe the differences between two items when writing the contrast poem (Lesson 12) if they have two contrasting items to study visually. Video clips also stimulate the production of words and concepts and make an exciting introduction to poetry writing. Music selections, textures that students feel, foods to taste, and other sensory stimuli can be incorporated into the poetry lessons to enhance the creative process.

- *Sharing students' poems.* We strongly believe in sharing students' writing within the classroom, in the school community, and beyond. There are so many ways to share students' work that entire books have been written on the topic. Some ways that we have experienced include:

  – big book anthologies made up of individual or class-written poems that can be used for reading activities in other students' classes
  – individual poetry readings in both private (e.g., classroom) and public (e.g., auditorium) forums
  – choral readings performed in class or for other classes
  – tapes of poetry readings for building oral skills
  – simple publications of both individual and group poems run off on the copy machine and distributed to family members, the school community, the local library, and so on
  – poetry greeting cards, calendars, recipe books, and so on
  – poetry tag, a game in which students carry poems they wrote in their pockets and can be "tagged" (chosen) to read their poems by another writer

  For us, the principal reasons for sharing student poems in the classroom are the following:

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- The poems turn out to be more interesting because students have a chance to hear and look at one another's ideas and writing styles.
- Students get to practice oral language as they help each other search for words and edit their poems during the writing process. They also practice oral language as they read their poems aloud for their groups and for the class at the end of an activity.
- Students learn from each other and about each other by writing for an audience other than the teacher. Not only do they learn language from each other as they swap words and ideas or negotiate the meaning of a phrase, but they also learn what other students think is important or meaningful.
- Students develop confidence in their ability to communicate in the target language. Seeing their poems posted on the bulletin board or printed on the page of a poetry publication becomes visual testimony to their evolving fluency. Hearing their poems read aloud in choral readings or reading them aloud themselves to an audience of fellow poets provides proof of students' communication skills.
- Students develop an appreciation and respect for one another as they compose side by side and together. Engaged in the same activity with the same associated risks, they become a community of writers with a shared identity. This feeling builds cohesion in the class, which carries over to other activities.
- Most students *enjoy* reading other students' poems and having their own poems read.

Sharing student poetry with a wider audience such as the school community, parents, relatives, friends, neighbors, and the community at large is very appealing for other reasons:

- Displays, publications, and performance of student poems give parents and teachers an opportunity to celebrate student success, and it makes all parties involved proud.
- Positive attention is focused on the students, a teacher, and/or the school involved in a poetry project that is shared publicly. This attention can be used pragmatically to attract needed resources to support other programs or simply be a point of pride. One elementary school in our district with mostly second language learners has chosen to become a "poetry school." Teachers regularly engage students in poetry writing, posting their poems on bulletin boards, in newsletters, and in the library. Being a poetry school has given this school a unique and positive identity, a source of pride for everyone in the school.

- *Linking poetry to content.* One powerful aspect of poetry writing is that it can – and should – be linked to content that students are learning

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in their classes. Language does not operate in a vacuum. We use the language we acquire to communicate about the world we live in and about the things we are discovering. Many teachers have used pattern poems to reinforce concepts learned in mathematics, social sciences, hard sciences, history, and the like. Some have used the poems as a form of report or summary of short stories or books that students have read. We provide multiple examples of how poetry can be used in the various disciplines to reinforce not only language and structure, but also content. See, for example, Lessons 1, 7, and 22.

- *Celebrating diversity.* In multilingual classes, students enjoy sharing their languages and cultures with other learners. Many of the poems in this book lend themselves to cultural topics such as holidays, foods, historical events, and famous people. Even specific words from students' native languages can be incorporated in poems to add authenticity and diversity. Some poems can take on a bilingual, bicultural flavor when they use two languages (see student poems in Lessons 1 and 14). We encourage you to let your students – especially those at the early stages of fluency – experiment with their native language and English together. The results are often stunning.

Keep in mind

Age versus language proficiency. English-proficiency level and age are not always directly related. As you read the student-written poems, you will notice that some of the more "sophisticated" poems are written by younger learners, whereas some of the "simple" poems are written by adult learners. This demonstrates that English proficiency arrives at all stages of life and that these poems lend themselves to student use during all phases of learning. Adult learners are not put off by simple poems if they are appropriate to their level of English acquisition.

Cultural connections. Poetry and culture are intimately entwined, so you will notice that the poems in this book are very American; the poems' subjects (holidays, brand names, and sight-seeing attractions), as well as some of the terms we have used (*scratch paper* and *cooperative learning,* for example), may seem like "Americanisms." That is because we *are* Americans, and the students we worked with were learning English in the United States. If you live elsewhere, we hope you will substitute examples and terms more appropriate for *your* students and the countries in which you live and teach English. This should not be an issue, for students are eager to write about what is familiar to them.

Editing student writing. Deciding how much to edit student writing when that writing will be published is a thorny issue. We were torn

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between feelings of wanting to maintain the authenticity of the students' voices while not wanting to embarrass student writers by publishing multiple mistakes. We resolved the problem by asking students to edit their work as much as they could. We then corrected spelling, word-form errors, and minor grammatical mistakes such as subject-verb agreement. We did not correct word order, word choice, or any "mistake" that would alter the students' creations.

Origins. Some of the patterns presented in this book may be familiar. Like your grandmother's favorite recipe, they have been passed from one person to the next, adapted and changed over time. Because they are hand-me-down poems, it is impossible to acknowledge their origins, but, as you use them, we hope you'll add your own seasonings to suit your and your students' tastes.

Alphabetical organization. Originally we arranged the lessons according to our perceptions of the difficulty of the poems, starting with the "simple" poems. As we taught the lessons to students of varying ages, language backgrounds, and English proficiency, we soon learned that this sort of organization was unrealistic. We saw that *any* of the poems could be made simple or complex depending on how they were introduced and on the language level of the student involved. It occurred to us that the only nonprejudicial way to organize was alphabetically. Therefore, we recommend that you not attempt to start at the beginning with "A" and work your way through the book. Better to use the Index to find the language point or topic you want to reinforce with your students and go from there!

Poetry is infectious. Once you use several of these poems, we predict that both you and your students will be hooked. We also predict that when other teachers hear about your students' success, they will want to join in. Through working with our own adult students, as well as with younger learners in other classrooms, we discovered that poetry writing is infectious and habit-forming. Because the process is so enjoyable, students look forward to poetry-writing sessions. And because the poems are so original and inspiring, teachers and students want to share their work in a public forum. Soon the word gets around and everyone wants a copy of the "recipe." Like a good recipe, the student-written poems these patterns inspire are meant to be shared and savored. We urge you to encourage the poetry habit and to get other teachers in on the act.

Practical tips

We have actually used the lessons in this book with students of different ages and English-language levels. Using the trial-and-error method, we

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learned from the students what worked and what didn't. We also learned from the other teachers who worked with us. We revised the lessons and taught them again with other teachers and to other students until we got them right. During the process, we made some observations that you might find useful:

Timing. We had lots of issues regarding timing:

- when to introduce the poems
- how often to use them
- how much time to allow to complete a lesson
- how much time to allow for revision
- how much time to set aside for sharing

We were able to resolve all of our timing issues, but not without some false starts. First, we learned that the poems work best when they are introduced *after* students have studied a language point through direct instruction. We had our best results when students already understood the parts of speech or phrasing of a given poem and merely used the poem to practice language. We did use some poems with groups for the purpose of teaching a language concept for the first time. The results were mixed, so we recommend that you use the poems for reinforcement rather than for introducing language points.

Second, using the poems too frequently (i.e., too many days in a row) is not a good idea, from the perspective either of language acquisition or of lesson planning. Students need to have time to digest what they have learned from writing the poems, make revisions to their work, and practice language in other ways as well. We recommend that you use the poems to *punctuate* your lessons – sort of as a reward to students for learning a new concept – rather than in a habitual, predictable way.

No matter how simple the poem, we discovered that it takes about one class period (50 minutes) to introduce and complete a poetry lesson. That does not count time for revising and editing, which we believe to be an essential and rewarding step for the students. On several occasions, we had planned to teach two very simple (or so we thought!) poems to a group of fairly fluent students. It did not work because the students merely took the poem to another level *because of* their fluency and it still took a class period to finish one poem. We recommend that you allow at least one class period for each poem. Don't rush the process.

How much time you allow for revision will depend on a number of factors, not the least of which is the level of proficiency of your students. We found that revision generally takes less time for beginners than it does for advanced students, even though the beginners might have more "errors" to address. Beginners often do not have the language

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skills to recognize their own errors, nor do they have the vocabulary to make many changes in content. Advanced students often take longer. No matter what level you are teaching, we suggest that you *do* leave time to help students "clean up" their poems. We believe that students prefer to have good, sound writing they can proudly share with others, and that they are willing to take the time to revise if there is a clear purpose.

We suggest you make time for students to share their poems *soon* after they have written them – preferably the same day. The time needed for sharing will depend on the size and fluency of your class, the length and complexity of the poem, and the number of poems written (e.g., twenty individual poems or five group poems). These points need to be considered so that you don't run out of time, leaving one or two students' or groups' poems unread. When this happened to us, it had a discouraging effect on the students. Consequently, we made sure to plan sufficient time for sharing, which could vary from 5 to 15 minutes for oral readings.

Supporting writing. How much support students need while writing the poems depends on their level of English proficiency as well as their resourcefulness and motivation. How much support you *choose* to give them, however, depends on your philosophy as a teacher and how you answer these questions:

- Should I suggest vocabulary?
- Should I offer ideas to write about?
- Should I help with spelling?
- Which materials should I have in the classroom?
- How can I help reluctant writers?

Because there are no right answers to these questions, we can only share what we did and what we observed other teachers do in the way of supporting their students' writing.

Like most of the teachers we observed, we tried to coax as much out of the students as possible by giving hints, clues, and resources that would help them with word selection, idea generation, or just getting started. Most teachers, like us, tried to avoid handing students the "answers." For instance, when the third-grade students wanted help with brainstorming adverbs for the "Adverb poem" (Lesson 4), the teacher told them to think of at least one adverb on their own and then use a thesaurus for ideas for more adverbs. Her suggestion was very effective because she had the resources available in her classroom. Another teacher had students create word banks (of adjectives, for example) that covered the whole board so students could select from among those generated by the group rather than depend on themselves alone for all the vocabulary. But if students

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just didn't have a word at their command to express a concept they wanted in their poem, we, like other teachers, weren't averse to using that opportunity to teach a new word. A perfect teaching moment!

We used that same philosophy when it came to idea generation. We learned that some students get "stuck" trying to decide *what* to write about, and they waste a lot of time just getting started. To avoid wasted energy, we had the class generate lists of ideas to write about before turning the students loose to write on their own or in small groups. We covered the board with those ideas or wrote them on small slips of paper that could be drawn from a hat. In the case of students who had ideas but seemed afraid to write them down, we helped them get started by taking dictation from them. Other times we provided them with handouts on which the first words of the poem were already written. Just having something on their paper seemed to loosen up the reluctant writers enough to begin writing their own ideas.

With regard to spelling, few teachers sent their students to dictionaries. Most spelled the word for the students or, better yet, told them to do their best and worry about spelling later. Like us, they believed that if the students are in the process of writing, then stopping to look up words interferes with their train of thought. We recommend that you teach your students that correcting spelling is part of the editing process. Initially, getting ideas on the paper is more important. They can correct spelling later.

Having a class set of dictionaries and thesauruses on hand is very helpful for error correction or for brainstorming vocabulary. Unfortunately, many of the classes we taught in had neither, so we toted along sets for students to share. We didn't need one for each student, just one for each group. We found that students enjoyed leafing through the pages looking for just the right word. If your school cannot provide these resources, you might find yourself acting as the word genie because, once students get involved in poetry writing, they realize the importance of having that one "right" word!

As to helping reluctant writers, we have found that some of the same devices that help *all* writers seem to be almost *essential* for those who have a hard time getting started: for example, word banks written on the board, topic starters written on slips of paper or note cards, video clips taken from action movies, or colorful pictures torn from magazines. For especially hesitant writers, however, we like to use pair work. We have observed that pairing hesitant with eager writers and having them write *one* poem together allows the enthusiasm and confidence of the eager writer to "rub off" on the reluctant one. Over time, reluctant writers often develop a sense of confidence as they see their poems – even though written with a partner – in print and hear them read aloud. They can then

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be freed from the support they derive from working with a confident writer to work on their own!

Sharing. As we've already said, we believe that sharing is essential. We observed several different methods for sharing the first day's efforts at writing a poem. The third-grade teacher had everyone sit in a circle on the floor to indicate that it was sharing time. She began each sharing time with a poem she had written during the same time period, reading it loudly and slowly to model good oral reading. The fourth-grade teacher had each student stand and face the class to read aloud to make sure everyone could hear. Middle-school, high-school, and adult teachers had their students do the same.

Students at lower levels of language proficiency seemed to share their poetry better when we had them rewrite their finished draft on a transparency so that the other students could *see* the words at the same time that they heard them. Students' being able to see and hear at the same time nullifies some of the pronunciation errors and inaudible voices that interfere with oral comprehension. With pairs or small groups, the writers often performed choral readings to take away the pressure of having to read alone in front of their peers. Poems written by the whole class were always reread aloud as a group. The important point is the visual aid. We recommend that you use some form of visual aid, be it transparencies, board, or flip charts, to assist students with their oral presentations.

In every case, the students applauded each other's work after hearing it read. They basked in the praise the applause signaled. We recommend that you lead the applause if the students don't start it spontaneously.

As well as being shared orally, the poems in every case were also published in various ways. With word-processing programs that make font size and formatting easy to control, these publications took various forms. The youngest students enjoyed having their own poems printed in large type on a single sheet that they could illustrate and "frame" on construction paper. After displaying their illustrated poems for a while, some teachers laminated each one and bound them all together in a "big book" for students to look at later. Other teachers created anthologies. One teacher saved her students' work and created individual books of all the poems that each student had written. Other teachers created anthologies of all the students' poems together. These anthologies used a colorful cover sheet and were bound with plastic spirals. No matter the age, students autographed one another's books and, again, basked in the praise they received from other students, their teachers, and their relatives. The books were easy and inexpensive to create and, based on the students' expressions of delight, well worth the time and effort.

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Enjoyment. Don't underestimate the value of the poetry writing for the sheer joy that it brings the students. Our students often cheer when we announce that it is time to write poetry. Perhaps that is because writing pattern poems offers a nice break from normal routine while providing plenty of opportunity for language work and self-expression. Perhaps it is because students enjoy the chance to be involved in an activity that doesn't seem like "work." Or perhaps they enjoy the writing because it results in the creation of a visible mini-monument that they can point to and say, "I did that!"

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1 Acrostic

Teaching points: Spelling
Vocabulary
Dictionary usage

The acrostic can be a simple poem to write, but it can be made more challenging. Spelling is emphasized for the key word of the acrostic, but use of the dictionary can also be taught to enrich vocabulary.

Furry face	**F**unny	**F**ew people are
Red hair	**R**eal	**R**eal friends
Intelligent eyes	**I**nteresting	**I**n my life. I
Ears that hear everything	**E**njoyable	**E**njoy seeing true, not
Nose that sniffs	**N**ice	**N**ew friends every
Dog of my dreams	**D**elightful	**D**ay

Pattern

Select a word or name and write it in a column on the left side of the paper (as has been done with "word" below).

W (select a word, phrase, or sentence beginning with the letter of the word being spelled down the left column)

O (select a word, phrase, or sentence beginning with the second letter of the word in the left column)

R (select a word, phrase, or sentence beginning with the third letter

D (select a word, phrase, or sentence beginning with the fourth letter)

Continue the pattern for each letter in the word.

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Lesson 1

What to do

1. Explain what an acrostic is, that it spells out a word in a column and then explains the word in words or phrases beginning with each letter of the word. Show the students some samples and ask then to identify the word each one is about by having them read the first letter of each line.

2. Select a word or name that is an example of the acrostic students will be writing: your name, a place-name, a character's name, a book title, an animal, a science or math concept, or any noun about which the students have knowledge. For a short poem, for instance, you might select the word *school,* whereas for a longer example you might select the proper name of your school. Using capital letters, write the word on the chalkboard in a column:

   <div align="center">
   S
   C
   H
   O
   O
   L
   </div>

3. Explain to the students that you are going to write a poem made up of words (or phrases or sentences, depending on the level of students) that begin with these letters and that express your knowledge and attitude toward it. If, for instance, you selected the word *school,* you might then say, "I know that 'students' and 'studying' are part of school. I think I like 'students' better, so I'll use that." Using the *s* in the column that spells *school,* write the word *students:*

   <div align="center">
   Students
   </div>

   Make sure the first letter is larger and bolder than the rest so that it is obvious you are spelling the word in the left column.

4. Continue with the next letter of the word, asking students for suggestions of words. Continue until all the letters have a word, phrase, or sentence attached. A very simple poem on school might turn out to be something like this:

   <div align="center">
   Student
   Community
   Helpfully
   Offering
   Opportunities
   Learning
   </div>

   A more sophisticated poem might wrap from one line to the next to form a single sentence, as in the following:

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Acrostic

Students learn from teachers
Cool stuff that will
Help them earn credits in
Order to go to college and have
Opportunities to better their
Lives.
– Joannie Monroy's class (ages 15 to 17)

5. Read the entire poem aloud. Ask students if they can think of anything they want to change or add. In the simpler poem above, you might suggest adding the word *for* to the fifth line:

Student
Community
Helpfully
Offering
Opportunities for
Learning

Making such a change allows you to point out not only the need for revision, but also the freedom this poem allows.

6. Your students should now be ready to practice writing their own acrostics individually, in pairs, or in small groups. This is a good opportunity to encourage them to browse through dictionaries or the glossaries of their course books for words that start with a particular letter.

Uses

- to introduce each student and his or her name
- to explore attitudes and emotions toward an idea
- to define or describe an animal, a geographic location, an abstract concept, or some other content-related idea
- to explain a concept in the student's native language that may defy direct translation but could be described
- to summarize the plot or describe a character in a book the student has read

Variations

- To teach dictionary and spelling skills, you can select words that students know but have difficulty spelling. For instance, many students misspell *friend, which, responsible,* and *grammar.* Have students use a word that has been marked as a spelling error on a paper and look it

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Lesson 1

up in the dictionary, copy the correct spelling, and then write an acrostic of the word to focus students on the word's spelling in connection with its meaning.

• To teach specific types of phrases, require that students use only the type you have selected. Noun phrases (e.g., "big black cat") and verb phrases (e.g., "hurrying to the classroom") work especially well with the acrostic.

Student-written examples

Dinosaurs
Iguanodon
Nodosaurus
Oviraptor
Stegosaurus
Allosaurus
Ultrasaurus
Raptor
—Elizabeth Gordon
   Taylor's class
   (ages 6 to 7)

About 13 feet long
Live a long time
Like to eat a variety of food
Insects and tadpoles make a meal for babies
Grow to weigh up to 500 pounds
Adults eat fish and small mammals
The babies grow 12 inches a year
Once widely hunted for their skin
Related to the Chinese alligator
—Jasmine Espinoza, Andrea Cabrera,
   Antonio Arias, Jose Ramirez, Leslie
   Ramirez, Davis Martinez
   (ages 8 and 9)

Grape lover
Always looks in the mirror
Bossy (Hey!)
Redheaded
Intelligent ($5 \times 5 = 25$)
Excellent student (Yes!)
Likes the library
Loves money ($$$)
Extra nice
—Gabrielle McAdory (age 9)

Many kinds of methods to use in
Almost everything you do.
Thinking is required, and so are
Hundreds of terms and numbers.
—Davin Tso (age 12)

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