

Poetry from the Heart

*An anthology of children's poetry
with teaching suggestions*

Susan C. Anthony

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Introduction

In my first years of teaching, I didn't do much with poetry. I didn't know how to approach it with students and I lacked confidence, despite the fact that it had been an important part of my own life during high school and college.

In 1983, retired teacher Darlene Anderson volunteered to come into my sixth grade classroom at Chinook Elementary School in Anchorage, Alaska to teach a poetry unit. She had only one condition, that I continue to teach poetry in future years. As she taught, I participated as a student, getting her feedback on my own writing while observing how she worked with children who turned in good and not-so-good poems.

The results of her ten hours in my classroom were amazing! Before my eyes, my students wrote poems that were, in my opinion, better than many I'd read by adults! Nearly all of the children had one or more poems published in *Pencils Full of Stars*, an anthology of student poetry published in the Anchorage School District. Four of them received the Margaret Mielke Memorial Award for Promising Young Poets, in a district with thousands of students!

At the end of the unit, we displayed our work and hosted a tea for parents and other guests. An assistant principal left the room in tears, the poetry had so touched her heart. Clearly, the writing was powerful!

The following year I taught 5th grade, and I was on my own. I'd made a promise to Darlene to continue to teach poetry. I attributed the results of the past year to her personality and giftedness. I wasn't at all certain I could teach poetry. Still, I had promised to try.

To my surprise, the results were again good! The basic, essential secret to getting good kids' poetry, I discovered, is good kids' poetry. When they hear it read, it somehow opens doors in

their imaginations. Adult poetry does not seem to have the same effect.

This book was compiled to give you tools to begin teaching free verse using techniques that have consistently worked for me, based on what I learned from Darlene Anderson. The poems in this book were written by my own students, in regular 4th, 5th and 6th grade classrooms. I encourage you to add poems written by *your* students as the years pass.

This book is *just* a starting place for you. Adapt and expand these techniques according to your own creative ideas and interests. Experiment with different topics and different forms. Encourage your gifted poets to expand their ideas and horizons. There's no upper limit to what is possible. If *your* time and energy is limited, however, you can use the lessons in this book to quickly generate publishable poetry.

At the end of the 1983 school year, Darlene wrote this poem to the Chinook sixth graders:

*Like miners in dark tunnels
We came together to mine
A treasure of words.
There, where our lives crossed,
We picked away at the rock
Seeking color and sound.
Sparkling syllables and similes
Shone forth among the rubble,
And we strung them together
Like necklaces of precious gems.
Now, traveling the separate paths
Of our tomorrows, we can look to
The treasure we mined at the intersection
Of us and then,
For it will sparkle forever
And brighten all our darkest nights
Like midnight rainbows.*

*Thank you, young friends. You wrote beautifully
and my greatest wish is that you keep writing!*

What Is a “Good” Poem?

It's essential to know what you're looking for in children's poetry, so you'll recognize it when you see it. Of the following ideas, I introduce the first three—idea, shape, and sound—before we write the first poem. I then gradually introduce other ideas, generally by example from student writing. I also use student writing to review and reinforce what has been taught. Although tastes in poetry are largely subjective, the qualities listed below can be useful in helping children improve their poetry. Not all qualities will be present in all good poems.

- A good poem has a central **idea**. It has unity. Children may tend to ramble on and on. Encourage them to stick to one central idea per poem.
- A good poem is **shaped** like a poem. Contrast the shape of poetry with the shape of prose. I prepare charts with each of the works on pp. 3–7. I tape these up on the chalkboard as I teach this concept. The first is an example of prose, with indented paragraphs. This is *not* the shape of a poem. The second is lined up flush left. The third uses hanging indents when the poet runs out of room on a line. The fourth uses hanging indents to separate parts of the poem. The fifth, an adult poem, uses a shape which suggests the falling of a leaf. (Caution: Children may become fascinated by the idea of shape and experiment with it to the extreme, forcing words into a shape they've chosen. Discourage this unless the quality of the *language* is excellent.) Talk about hanging indentation as opposed to paragraph indentation. Many children have trouble writing in poetry form, and part of helping them revise their poetry may involve modeling for them how to rewrite their poems so they look like poems.
- A good poem uses the **sounds** of the words. *Alliteration* is repetition of the same first sounds in words: *A silvery snake slithers through the sand*. In this case, the “s” is reminiscent of a sound the snake may make. Discourage the use of *rhyme* for beginning poets because it tends to be forced and to limit expression. Some children think poetry must rhyme. “Free verse” poetry, such as that in this book, need not rhyme. Words that have the same consonant sounds (*consonance*) or the same vowel sounds (*assonance*) also contribute to a poem's “sounding” like a poem.
- A good poem uses **strong words** and avoids weak words. Mark Twain once said, “The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and the lightning bug.” Use present tense verbs and try to avoid *-ing* endings: *The snow sparkles* is better than *the snow is sparkling*. While revising, keep the strongest words and take out weak words or replace them with strong ones. A good poem has “punch” or impact.
- A good poem **avoids clichés** and worn-out words. Never use the words “nice” or “pretty” if you can help it. One writer claims the word “endless” should never be used in a poem. At the age of 70, Robert Frost said, “A poet is entitled to use the word ‘beauty’ three times. I have two coming.” You may wish to begin a list on a chart of clichés and worn-out words which should be avoided when possible. Emphasize that it's fine to use these in first drafts, but the poet should try to replace them with stronger words when revising.
- A good poem uses **imagery** to paint a picture in the mind of the reader. A poet uses words like an artist uses a brush.

Strong words may appeal to any of the senses. Snow, for example, may *fall in a glitter* (sight), *crunch and crackle* (sound), or *tickle your tongue* (feel). You may wish to have groups of children brainstorm and list strong words which describe various sights, sounds, tastes, smells and textures. Metaphor and simile compare items which may be quite unlike. Simile uses the word “like” or “as.” Metaphor does not.

Simile: Bubbling like water out of a fountain.

Metaphor: The sea is a giant tongue licking the sandy shores.

- A good poem sets a **mood** or elicits an **emotion** from the reader. Poetry is a way to express and affirm strong emotions. Aim to touch the reader’s heart and get him to feel what you’re feeling.
- A good poem may be quite **short**. Quality of language matters much more than quantity of words. This is one reason I like to teach poetry. Even reluctant writers can come up with good short poems, and revising/recopying three or four lines isn’t as intimidating as revising a whole page. This gives me the opportunity to teach and stress the importance of revising, and to show how it can dramatically improve the impact of writing. Someone once said, “There is no good writing, there is only good rewriting.”
- A good poem doesn’t tell all. It **shows rather than tells**. A good poet learns what to say and what *not* to say. The reader enjoys figuring something out for himself.
- A good poem may use **personification**. Write the poem from the point of view of a pencil, a puppy, etc.
- A good poem has a strong, memorable **ending**. Save the best phrase for last whenever possible. A strong ending can sometimes make an otherwise average poem shine.

“Look out, there is a moose ahead!” my dad yelled. I did not hear with the engine roaring like a lion. I just bounced along the muddy and bumpy dirt road. All of a sudden, I heard the echo of demand. I stopped immediately. I was looking face to face with a bull and cow moose. I was so startled I nearly fell off.

My cousin drove up slowly so she wouldn't get them mad. She told me to start it. I said, “I can't. It's not in gear.” She told me to gear up now! The bull's ears started to go back. My cousin came over to me fast. She started it and told me to get out of there fast. I did! I went as fast as I could. She soon caught up and when we got back I bragged.

*David Colwell
Grade 5*

I Am Music

*I am a candle
flickering on a cool winter's night.*

*I am the snow
slowly falling to the ground.*

*I am the rain
splattering on the roof tops.*

*I am the wind
moaning late at night.*

*I am the sun
coming over the horizon early in the morning.*

*I am all the beautiful sounds
of the world.*

I am music.

*Steve Resch
Grade 6*

Candle Light

Candle light flickers.

*Wisps of smoke curls form
in the air.*

*The flame dances from side to side,
Dancing to silent music.*

*It struggles for just one more
minute of life.*

Then, the battle is over. . .

Darkness falls.

Shawn Silverthorne

Grade 5

*Life is like a candle,
It flickers with excitement
Glowes brightly with joy,
Flames high with anger,
Melts away in sadness.*

*Life is like the stars,
It twinkles with enthusiasm,
Dances with gaiety,
Shines through disappointments.*

*Life is like the sun,
It blinds you with happiness,
Bubbles with anxiety,
Rises and sets in peacefulness,
Is covered up with despair.*

*Life is a collection of
Yesterday's memories and the
Dreams of tomorrow.*

*Rebecca Lambe
Grade 6*

*...fall colors
washed over
leaf and tundra
with the falling of the mercury
and now
the wind blows
hard and strong
testing summer's grip
and leaves
not yet ready
to fall
clatter in the wind
but
the time of change
the time
of
separation
is near. . .*

Brian Swett

General Notes on Teaching Poetry

- Don't be discouraged if the first lessons don't yield good poems. Focus on anything *remotely* good and keep trying with different topics. Once a few students begin writing good poems, you may see a great deal of improvement within a short time.
- Don't expect every child to write a poem every time. I view each lesson as a fishing expedition. Sometimes I may catch a lot of "fish" (publishable poems), sometimes very few. In a classroom, if just *one* student writes a publishable poem and 27 others turn in blank pages, the lesson was successful.
- Teach students that inspiration may or may not come on any particular day or topic. That's OK. Tell them, "If you can't think of anything to write, just relax, focus your attention on the topic, and let your imagination roam. An idea may come. As soon as it does, write it down, whether or not you think it's a good idea. Once there are some words on the paper, it's usually easier to think and write more, and you can always change things you don't like later." I believe that children have poetry "inside" them. It may take time to access it, so be patient and encourage children to be patient. There will be other chances if they can't think of a poem on a particular day.
- Tell children, "When writing, do not erase. Cross words out or go to the next line. You may want to recapture an idea later."
- I never "grade" poetry. My language arts grades come from objective assignments on which everyone can get an "A" with effort. Why? A grade of "A" may be interpreted as indicating excellence with no need for improvement. A grade of "C" is punitive and focuses on the negative. *All* children, regardless of the quality of their writing can improve. There is no way to give fair, honest, *objective* grades on poetry. Some children are naturally more gifted than others, and I do not want to penalize less gifted children. I look for *improvements* not deficiencies.
- Focus on what you want to grow. Underline strong words and phrases in rough drafts and share whatever is excellent with the group. In response to a child's poem, I generally nod, smile and say, "Good job." If there's something that stands out, I comment on it, with enthusiasm to match the degree of excellence. Generally, the first poems children turn in are not great. One year, in an early poem, a student wrote, *The Northern Lights slither through the black sky*. It was the most colorful phrase anyone had used on that assignment. I told her how much I liked it and asked if I could share her poem with the class. The other students liked the word "slither" and for weeks things "slithered" in everyone's writing! This led to a focus on words and the use of other strong, picturesque words.
- Set and enforce strict guidelines for silent writing time. Ernest Hemingway once said, "You can write anytime people will leave you alone and not interrupt you." Each child should be held responsible for not distracting anyone else during this time, including the teacher. In my classroom, silent writing time is sacrosanct. No one is allowed to get up from their seat, raise their hand, or make any noise. They are to write or think, and that's all. I sit and write my own poem. An announcement from the office can shatter concentration, so I request that none be made outside certain set times.

Standard Lesson Plan

Materials: Anthology
Music, pictures, or other materials appropriate for each topic

Review

“What are some things that make a good poem?” (idea, shape, sound, imagery, etc.)
Review and post examples of different poetry shapes each time until all students have the idea.

New information

New information is optional. You may wish to present a short lesson on imagery, personification, or some other idea from pp. 1–2, “What Is a “Good” Poem?”

Objective

“Today we’re going to be writing poems about _____ (fog, silence, etc.). Even though we’re all writing about the same subject, each poem is *flavored* with your individual ideas and personality, like cookies can be flavored with cinnamon, vanilla, or maple .”
Have students brainstorm words, ideas, feelings, etc. about the topic. Show pictures if available and talk about them.

Get ready

Every student should have two sharp pencils with erasers and at least two pieces of paper on their desks. That is all I allow. You may choose to allow a book for silent reading as well.
Review the rules for silent writing time, so there will be no distractions for anyone.
No getting out of seats for *any* reason (short of dire emergency).
No opening desks.
No raising hands.
No talking or other noise.
“Begin writing as soon as you have an idea, even if the teacher is still reading. If you can’t think of anything to write, sit silently, focus on the topic, and let your imagination go to work. When you have an idea, write it down, even if you don’t think it’s good. Once you start writing, it’s generally easier to continue, and you can change not-so-good parts later.”
Students are not required to write on the assigned topic. If they have another idea for a poem, that’s fine.

Set the mood

Depending on the topic, you may wish to dim the lights, play soft music, light a candle, etc.
Some ideas are provided for various topics.

Read aloud

Read aloud poems from the anthology on the topic. Stop reading when most or all of the kids have begun writing, or when you run out of poems.

Write

Children and teacher silently write one or more poems. When you judge that enough time has passed (maybe 15-20 minutes), quietly announce that there will be one more minute to write.

Share

When the minute's over, ask if anyone would like to share the poem they wrote. Be willing to share your own writing. After a child reads a poem, smile, nod, and say, "Good," or "Good job." Ask if anyone wants to tell the writer something they especially liked, based on what you've taught them makes a good poem. Share your positive observations. If no one has any feedback, say, "The whole thing is good!" and go on to another volunteer.

I teach students to "applaud" each other by "clapping" with two fingers together or clapping hands together just three times quickly.

Collect poems

Before the following day, if possible, read everyone's poem and lightly underline the strongest words and phrases, the places where the poem "comes alive." Do not mark spelling errors or other corrections at this time. If you like, you can write a response to the content of the poem or compliment the child on improvements, being as specific as possible. For example, "This really makes a picture in my mind." "This is my favorite so far! You used strong words." Select the poems with the most promise to revise in conferences one-on-one. Be sure to call up every student periodically to revise a poem regardless of the quality of his/her poetry.

Conference

While other students work independently, call up one child at a time to work with you. Begin the conference with words like the following, "I really like your poem on _____. I think you have a gift for poetry. If you don't mind, I'd like look at this poem again with you to see how we can make it even better." With students who are not especially gifted, say, "I think this is the best poem you've done so far. Good for you!" Ask the child what he/she especially likes in the poem and see if he/she can identify any of the things which make a good poem. The questions listed below can lead to productive revision. If the child is reluctant, don't go through all the questions. Make one or two revisions and say, "It's a good poem, and you just made it even better." Guard against rewriting the poem so it becomes your poem. Lead with questions. If you make a suggestion, be sure the child knows that he can accept or reject it.

What do you like best about this poem?

What are the strongest words and phrases?

Can you see any clichés or weak words that could be changed or taken out?

Are there any words ending with *-ing* that could be changed?

Does the poem read smoothly? Are there any harsh or clumsy parts that you could change or leave out?

Does the poem have unity? Could the lines or images be rearranged to make the poem more unified?

Does the poem have a strong, memorable ending? Could you replace the ending you have now with another line or image which would be stronger?

Does it look like a poem? (As teacher, you may have to model the rewriting of the words to look like a poem a number of times before children begin to use poetry form on their own.

Compliment them when they do!)

Display or publish poems

Collect copies of publishable poems. Try to get at least one from every child by the time the unit is complete. Some children may have several publishable poems. I emphasize that each person has different gifts and talents. If you have a talent for poetry, you are lucky. If you

don't think you're talented in poetry now, you may get better at it in future years, or you may just have other talents and interests. You may not even know what they are yet, but you have them. Encourage students to recognize and admire each other's unique talents and strengths. Hang poems on a Poet Tree, perhaps a potted tree in the classroom.

To make "Writing Stars": Take a photo of each child seated at a desk writing. Copy p. 12 and make a pattern of the large star. Trace it onto black (or dark) construction paper and cut one for each student (you can trace one and cut several at a time on stacked paper). Make a pattern of the small star with the inner circle cut out and trace it onto white construction paper. Cut one for each student. Be sure to cut out the hole in the middle. Glue a child's photo behind the white piece so that it is centered in the circle. Cut photo if necessary. Then center the white star on the black star and glue down. Write the child's name, perhaps in calligraphy, above and to the left of the photo. These stars can be displayed throughout the school year for attractive wall or bulletin board displays. Back child's writing paper with a 9x12 piece of black construction paper and staple it up with the writing star adjacent. Match poems with pictures and publish a calendar. This can be a good Christmas gift for family.

Print and distribute a group anthology

An example of one we did is reproduced on pp. 13–14. I typed and laid out the poems, organized by topic. My teaching partner drew illustrations. The book was reproduced two-sided on three sheets of 8½ x 14 paper, folded and stapled in the middle with a long-arm stapler. After the books were made up, children colored in the sparkles on the cover, the lightning (yellow), the snowflakes (light blue) and the rainbow (using correct colors).

We were now "published" authors and it was time for distribution. From the school office, I obtained a copy of the names of all staff working at the school: counselor, bus drivers, noon duty attendants, speech therapist, teachers and office personnel, janitorial staff, crossing guards, etc.

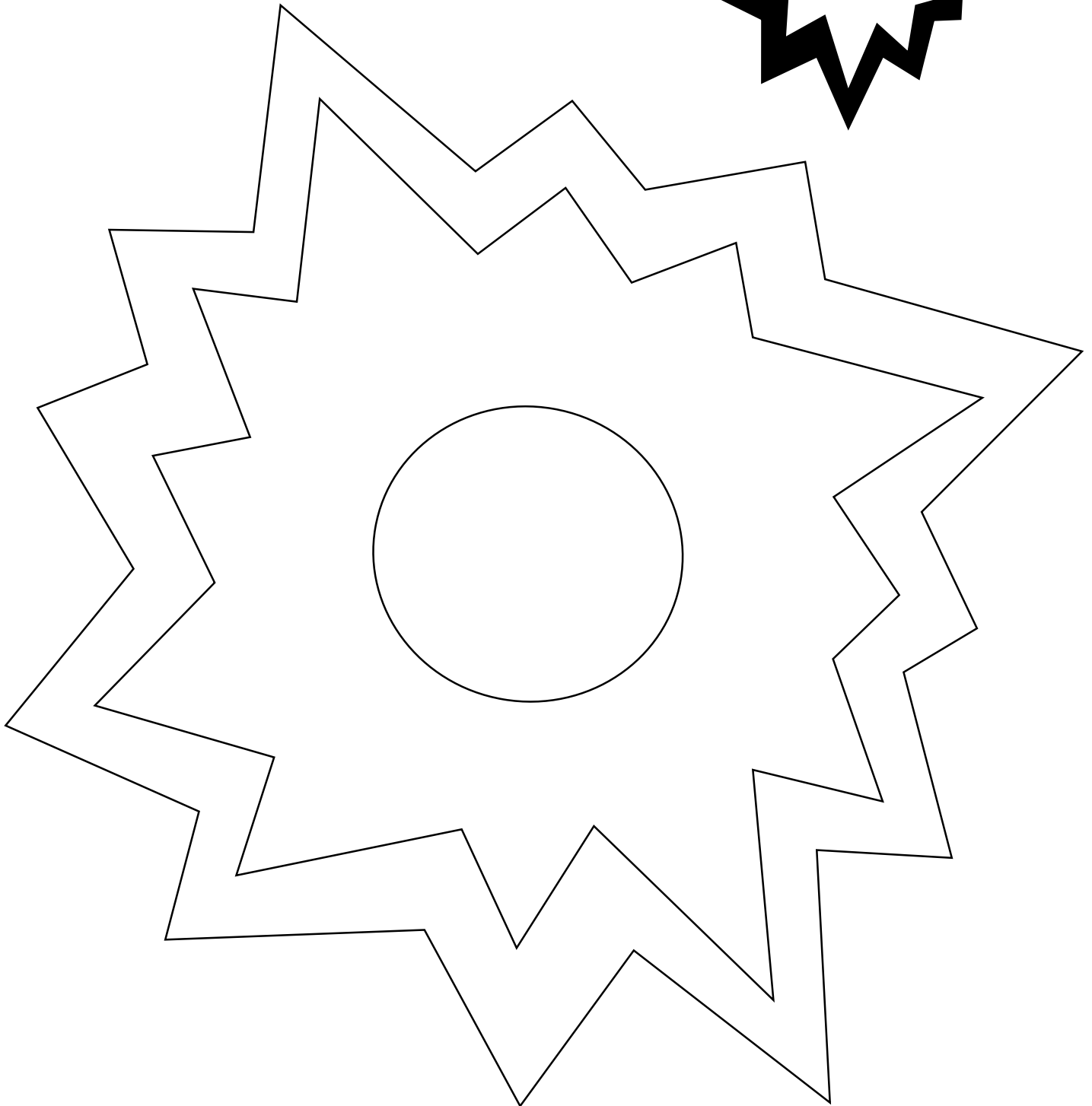
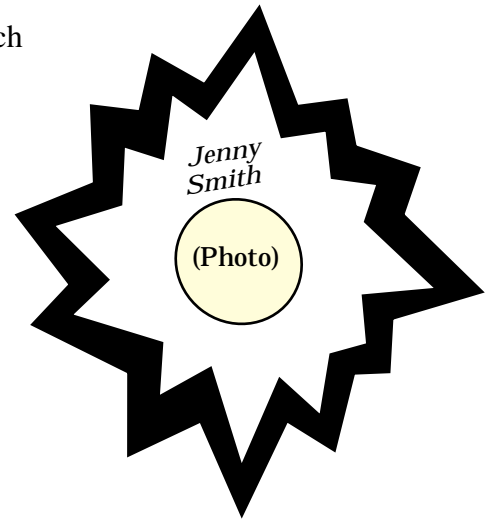
I listed these people and their jobs on the board. I told the children that it always amazes me how many people are at work every day to do what is necessary to help kids get a good education. "A lot of these people you might not know, but they are available in case you ever need them. These are people who *care* about you and your education. Many of them don't have the privilege I have of knowing you well and working with you every day. Many aren't recognized or thanked for what they do."

I then asked for volunteers to write a personal thank you letter to each person on the list, to accompany a gift copy of our poetry book. If possible, I matched up kids who had at least met the person to whom they would write, but if not, we talked about what that person does in his/her job so that the child could be specific in the letter. We brainstormed the kinds of things for which they could thank the person .

After the letters were written, each child personally went to the person to deliver the letter and book. I then encouraged people to *write* thank you notes to the students. The kids treasured these notes, and it taught them how much more special it is to get a written thank you note than just to hear someone say "thanks."

We also sent copies of the book to the superintendent, school board members, mayor, etc. as well as to every "Great Mail Race" letter we received and to people we knew in other states and countries. We kept track of where our book went in the United States and in the world on a wall map, as we became "nationally" and then "internationally" known authors.

Copy and cut the outline below to make a “writing star” for each student. The largest star should be black (or a dark color), the inner star should be white (or a light color) with the circle cut out. Take a photo of the child and place it between the white and black stars behind the circle. Write the name on the white star as shown in the sample to the right.



Alaska

This poem could be a good follow-up to a unit on Alaska.

Brainstorm with students what makes Alaska a special and unique place to live. Northern lights, moose, caribou, wolves, dogsled racing, rivers, etc.

Show pictures of Alaska, perhaps from a calendar. Add to the brainstormed list. These pictures can later be matched with some of the poems for a beautiful wall display.

Emphasize to students that they need not use all (or even many) of these ideas and images, but they might serve to “prime the pump” of their own ideas or serve as a starting place.

When students are ready for silent writing time, read the following poems aloud. Refer to the Standard Lesson Plan, pp. 9–11 for specifics.

Clouds finger their way across the vast sky
like flowers in the spring,
they sway softly. In the gentle
wind the clouds will wander away.

Diamond studded rivers gleam in the sun
like treasures of gold,
they shine like stars,
the waters will run on.

Trees reach up to catch the birds
like a hand reaches up
to catch its dreams;
new trees will grow.

Alaska stands ready to face the future.

Rebecca Lambe
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

I look down
on the snow that
glistens in the light
of the moon.

I see
the Aurora Borealis
dance to the airy tune
of the night.

I watch
the moon’s reflection
ripple on the slow
moving waters.

I catch
a glimpse of the morning star
and silently slip away.

Rebecca Lambe
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

Alaska, the Final Frontier

Crystal slopes glimmer in the winter sky.
Little Su, the Russian, and Knik Rivers
flow from river to river toward the
Cook Inlet.

The Northern Lights do a dance across
the diamond-clustered sky.
The most powerful of all men challenge
the Yukon and sometimes don’t stand
tall.

Alaska, the final frontier.

Pat Fagan
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

Alaska’s Melody

The feelings of Alaska weave themselves
into a beautiful melody,
into a song of tears and despair,
into a song of love and hope,
Those feelings make Alaska beautiful.

Sonya Harris
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

The Song of Alaska

The song of Alaska
sings the song of the stars
twinkling on the black velvet
sky.
It sings the song of the Iditarod
starting its trek to Nome.
It sings the songs of the
mountains towering over
the state from Mt. McKinley
to Sleeping Lady.
It sings the song of Alaska's
symbols, the forget-me-not,
the ptarmigan, the evergreen.
It sings the song of the winding
rivers from the Yukon
to the Susitna.
It sings the song of Alaska,
Alaska is my home!

Lisa Morrison
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

Northern Lights

As the northern lights
blow across the cold
Alaska
Wolves
howl.
Night has fallen.

Brian Anderson
Grade 4, 1990
Northern Lights

Northern Lights sparkle and
wrinkle the sky.
Way up high in that rainbow city.
Lights everywhere form colors
That make Alaska,
the Great Land, beautiful.

Lori Warrell
Grade 5, 1984
Chinook

My World

I live in a world of
sunrises and sunsets,
Mountains that reach up
to the sky.
My world is the sun on
lakes and rivers, reflecting
like mirrors.
My world is the Northern Lights
flashing across the sky
like lightning.
My world is Alaska.

Tawnya Sarazin
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

Alaska is fishing — salmon and trout,
Alaska is the taste of buttery crab,
the smell of wintergreen,
the sight of the midnight sun,
the sound of a river
splashing through the mountains.
Alaska is the Great Land.

Shannon Hill
Grade 5, 1984
Chinook

Fur Rondy

Hear the numbers spilled out of an auctioneer's
mouth selling furs.
See the Ferris wheel go round and round
at the carnival.
Feel the rumbling of the earth as big race cars
go by.
Hear the barking of dogs as they
go speeding on the track.
Most, feel the love, warmth and joy
of the Alaskan people at the celebration.
Fur Rondy!

Brooke Taylor
Grade 5, 1984
Chinook

Where Do I Live?

I live
where the soundless
song of winter
sweeps by the trees
where puffy white clouds
glide over my head
where the wolves
howl
at night.
I live in Alaska!

Jeanette Rowley
Grade 4, 1992
Inlet View

Animals

Here are a few animal poems to get kids started. I didn't fully explore this topic. You might wish to display pictures of a variety of animals during writing, for ideas and inspiration.

This topic would lend itself well to a question poem. There are two possibilities:

— *What is an elephant?*

Three positive statements, using metaphor whenever possible.

Conclude with a line which elicits a strong feeling.

— Think of a question in your head.

Give the poem a pictorial title so the reader doesn't know what you're describing until the end.

This topic also lends itself well to personification. Write three to six statements in the first person which describe what the animal sees, does, thinks. Conclude with the most powerful image along with the name of the animal.

Cry of the Eagle

A cry splits the silent air
as I look up, I see
a bald eagle
lifting itself into the sky
to glide easily through
the silent air.

Chris McCormack
Grade 4, 1989
Abbott Loop

The Mouse

The mouse,
squeaking like wet galoshes,
vanishes into his hole
like a winter's breeze.

Jason Hale
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

Eagles

The shadow of eagles in the moonlight,
look up at the dark and lonely mountains
clouds float gracefully overhead
as I watch in the dark.

Sonya Harris
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

Salmon

Splashing in the blue-white ocean
Fighting the waves and
the fisherman's hook
jumping for joy.
Fins rattling in the water!

Lou Caramanzana
Grade 4, 1990
Northern Lights

Candle

To introduce this topic, gather students in a circle on the floor, dim the lights, and light a candle in the center of the circle.

Talk about the fact that a candle can be compared to life. The lighting of the candle can be compared to birth. Its going out is like death. Have students watch the candle as it burns and think of other ways to compare it to life. For example, it burns only for a certain period of time, not forever. Sometimes it can be blown or snuffed out. It burns more strongly some times than other times. The flame bends one way or another depending on the movement of air in the room.

After several ideas have been mentioned, have students return to their desks. You may wish to leave the candle burning and the lights dimmed as children write.

Read the following poems.

My life is like a candle dancing
for the shadows
in the dark moonlight.

My life is like a candle
shedding tears
as its life goes on.

*Nolan Walther
Grade 4, 1990
Northern Lights*

Life is like a candle.
It flickers with excitement,
Glowes brightly with joy,
Flames high with anger,
Melts away with sadness.

Life is like the stars.
It twinkles with enthusiasm,
Dances with gaiety,
Shines through disappointments.

Life is like the sun.
Blinds you with happiness,
Bubbles with anxiety,
Rises and sets with peacefulness,
Is covered up with despair.

Life is a collection of
Yesterday's memories and the
Dreams of tomorrow.

*Rebecca Lambe
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook*

My Tomorrows

Like a slowly burning candle,
my life seems to be melting
away.

I struggle through each
day of my life in darkness.

I stumble through the week
in loneliness, needing a friend.

Like a clock, ticking away,
months pass by like minutes.

I look into the dark
tunnel to the future, what is at the
end of the tunnel for me?

A candle that will light
my path of life, or a bitter wind
that will blow the future's light out?

*Rebecca Lambe
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook*

My Life

My life is like a candle
flickering with happiness,
wavering with death,
blown out by despair,
Only to be relighted again with
hope.

*Sonya Harris
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook*

My Life

A harsh war is raging between
Life and Death.
It is happening even now.
Living
in the past,
not understanding the future.
Knowing one thing . . . to push on
through the limited halls of life.
I am a light that flickers
and goes out.
I am only a small struggle in
history.

Thomas Davis
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

Death of a Candle

A candle flickering
on the day of its death
dancing softly and trembling
dropping tears one by one.

A candle using the last of its life
in the dark somewhere
in the dark somewhere.

Nolan Walther
Grade 4, 1990
Northern Lights

Our lives are as candles
trying to stay lit in the changing wind
to stay powerful and tall.
We are the candles of this world.

Jessica Stich
Grade 6, 1987
Abbott Loop

Old Candle

I am a candle
on a window sill
tears in my eyes
waiting to flow
now I feel the warm light
the circling halo perched above my head
my tears are flowing for I am growing old
my warm light is flickering . . .
flickering . . .
flickering . . .
gone.

Laura Butler
Grade 6, 1987
Abbott Loop

Burning

My life is a candle glowing with
personality,
Wavering with the slightest change
in the winds of my life.
Slipping down through time.
Burning feelings lit,
painfully scorching tomorrow.

Tandi Christensen
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

Candle

Tears, slowly rolling
down her cheeks
Very tall and proud,
Smaller and smaller she gets,
soon her life will die out.

Lissa Sakata
Grade 4, 1990
Northern Lights

Colors

Brainstorm ways that color is used to describe feelings. For example, red often symbolizes anger, blue can stand for sadness, green may represent envy, black may mean despair. Purple can stand for royalty.

In advance, cut squares of different colors of paper. Pass these out and tell students that their first color poem should be about the color of their square of paper. After that, they may write about any color they choose. You may want to give them a few minutes to exchange colors. If you allow them to write about their favorite color, everyone may choose the same few colors.

After the poems are written and revised, have students write a final draft on a square of white paper. Display the colored squares and the white squares in a Crazy Color Quilt for a wall display.

Blue

Blue is forget-me-nots that blow
from side to side,
and the rain falling from the sky.
Blue is a bluebird flying so high.
Blue is the first color
of every rainbow,
and the bright summer sky,
Blue is the foamy ocean
that washes up against the
beach.

Deborah Helvey
Grade 4, 1990
Northern Lights

Yellow

Yellow is
the sun rising
over morning dew,
a bee buzzing in my ear,
the aroma of freshly baked
bread,
daffodils sitting in the
morning sun.
Yellow is
the taste of a freshly
picked banana, and
a soft yellow rosebud
in spring.

Jennifer Massey
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

Brown

Brown is like cinnamon
with its soothing taste.
It tickles your tongue
with its warmth.

David Olivera
Grade 4, 1992
Inlet View

Pink

Pink sweetens the world
with amazing tenderness.
It changes the scene
to happy thoughts,
While making a child
full of delight
for people who care.

Teri Gardner
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

Orange

Orange is curiosity inside.
It's a wheat field in August,
fall in New England,
looking at Ayers Rock
in the distance.
It's caution and distress.

Matt Witthoef
Grade 4, 1990
Northern Lights

Grey

Grey is the essence of evil,
it's the brother of black.
Grey traps you
and gives you
to night.

Brian Pryzbyla
Grade 6, 1987
Abbott Loop

Yellow Paper	Yellow (Poem)	Red Paper	Red (Poem)	Green Paper	Green (Poem)
Purple (Poem)	Purple Paper	Blue (Poem)	Blue Paper	Gold (Poem)	Gold Paper
Orange Paper	Orange (Poem)	Black Paper	Black (Poem)	Purple Paper	Purple (Poem)
Grey (Poem)	Grey Paper	Pink (Poem)	Pink Paper	Brown (Poem)	Brown Paper

Gold

Gold is the color of hay on a sunny
afternoon.
It is the sun setting far beyond the
ocean.
Gold sounds like a glistening waterfall
as it runs down a mountain.
Gold smells like daffodils on a sunny
spring day.
Gold tastes like sweet honey on a freshly
baked muffin.
Gold feels like fur on a puppy in the
sunlight.

Larissa Money
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

Black

Darker than the darkest night
I feel a sense of terror
As I walk into a cave
That I have never been in before.
I see a strange thing in the shadows
And I turn tail and run.
Black thrives on imagination.

Peter Ellsworth
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

Blue

Blue is the color of a glacier
slowly edging its way to a lake.
Blue is the sound of water
as it quietly trickles down the rocks
on its long journey to the ocean.
Blue smells like the cool, brisk air
of the northern lands.
Blue is the color of my homeland.

Daniel Gilbert
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

Red

Red is the ranch
of happiness.
It is like a barn
full of hay
with chickens clucking.
Alexis Roberts
Grade 4, 1990
Northern Lights

Green

Green is the fresh grass in a meadow.
It's the color of luck in a four leaf clover.
Green is a frog, leaping from log to log.
But best of all, green is the color of
spring!

Christine Kemp
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

Blue

Blue is . . .
the brilliant forget-me-nots
growing in a field,
the clear blue sky painted
with clouds,
the thin line in a giant rainbow
that arches across the sky,
the sprinkle of rain dripping
from the heavens,
the frigid winter wind,
a rapid river rushing
to its destiny,
the foamy ocean spray.
Blue is . . .
the beautiful things in life.

Lisa Morrison
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

Cycle of the Day

Sunrise, sunset, darkest night, a warm afternoon.

These have been favorite topics for poets through the centuries. I didn't use this topic to full advantage, but here are some poems to get you and your students started.

Quietly, the sun rises
forming colorful prisms all around.

Hushed, a cloud wanders
aimlessly in the vast, endless sky.

Ever so quietly a rainbow
forms after a gentle rain,
A rainbow that connects
the dreams of yesterday and tomorrow.

*Rebecca Lambe
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook*

God's World

I wake to a soft pitter-patting on the roof.
It quietly pats out a song that puts me
back to sleep.

When I wake, I walk into a world of soft
meadows,

Dewy spider webs, and rainbows arched
across a pinkish-colored sky.

I hear a sparrow's peaceful voice singing
very softly.

The sun is quietly trying to rise up into
the world.

And cover us with its bright rays.

The world is all aglow and I can smell the
fresh morning air.

The sun and the moon shift for the day.

The little crickets start to play their
violins.

It's as if I'm already in heaven!

*Deanna Eunice
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook*

The Morning Sun

Watch the morning sun go by
as seagulls continue with their flight.

Hear the waves crash
as they struggle to climb
the walls that surround them.

Breathe the fresh clean air
that swirls around you.

Taste the salt of the ocean
that rests upon your lips.

Touch the calm sea
in the morning sun
in the morning sun.

*Nolan Walther
Grade 4, 1990
Northern Lights*

You can see sunlight
as it flickers through the sky
a teardrop from the leaf of a flower
the sky as it gets bluer day to day
color that goes beyond the rainbow
and you can see
the earth as it gets the beauty
everlasting.

*Mona Kohler
Grade 6, 1987
Abbott Loop*

A silver sliver of moon
and a midnight star
Whistle the airy tune
of the night,
Follow the ebony path of sky
to the dawn;
From the city lights to the
lonely ocean they stroll
On a midnight walk.

*Rebecca Lambe
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook*

Disaster

Violent thunderstorms, earthquakes, volcanoes—these disasters are frightening and leave us awed at the power of nature and aware of the frailty of life. This topic has special appeal to boys. To introduce it, we talk about disaster and use reference books to learn some amazing facts about tornadoes, hurricanes, avalanches, fires, and so on. I collected photos from *National Geographic* which depict a variety of natural disasters. I tape them to the front board while we are writing, and later display them with related poems.

You may wish to use ominous or otherwise appropriate background music, if available.

One of my favorite disaster poems, *Hot Lava*, was written in response to a night photo of Kilauea erupting with red hot lava flowing to the sea. The student who wrote it was a reluctant writer, but this three-line poem won him a Margaret Mielke Memorial Award for Promising Young Poets. What a boost to a child's confidence and self-esteem!

Hot Lava

Crashing down the mountain.
A river of red flowing into the sea.
The Earth is bleeding.

Rick Unger
Grade 5, 1985
Chinook

The roaring Mt. St. Helens
Spits out its anger through its head
Blows its top.

Denver O'Brien
Grade 5, 1985
Chinook

The sky is getting dark.
You feel a breeze
It's getting stronger.
You see a long spinning top
tearing buildings apart
like paper houses.
You hear the breaking of wood,
hear windows shatter.
The sky is dark as
the evil spinning top
tears
houses
apart.

Tony Bessette
Grade 4, 1992
Inlet View

Lightning . . .
the generator of the earth
sparking white roars
from this tremendous powerhouse,
deafens all living things.

Paul Kesely
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

Lightning

Spinning in a ball,
Crashing on the countryside,
Like giant slashes of a paintbrush.
At last all is quiet.

Hiedi Zaumseil
Grade 5, 1985
Chinook

On Grandma's porch . . .
watching the lightning
watching the rain
hearing the pitter-patter
on the roof
Bang! goes the thunder!
Flash! goes the lightning!
Electricity lights the sky.
Then all is dark.
Flash!
"Far away," says Grandpa.
Grandma sits on the swing chair.
We watch the storm.

Jordan RoseFigura
Grade 4, 1992
Inlet View

Hail

Little rocks falling from the sky
tap-dancing on cars
chasing each other around the street.

Crystal Ray
Grade 4, 1989
Abbott Loop

Thunder beats the ground.
Crystal tears
as big as raindrops
roll quickly down my face.
I try not to think . . .

Monica Winkler
Grade 4, 1992
Inlet View

Drought

The land is dry,
The sun beating down
like a streak of heat from the sky.
The famine has been going on
for almost six months.
My family is hungry.
They're begging me for food.
The sun is sucking up the water.
The fish are dying.
Will we?

Jennifer Lee
Grade 5, 1985
Chinook

Lightning
Thrashing down fast
like a lit up finger
pointing
with tremendous power.
Lightning.

Diane Smith
Grade 5, 1985
Chinook

Fire

Red and yellow glazed together,
It spears across the land,
Crackling.
Killing trees and animals as it goes.

Jason Wolfersheim
Grade 5, 1985
Chinook

Lightning . . .
zig-zag lines of gold
crash through the night.

Crystal Downs
Grade 4, 1992
Inlet View

Forest Fire
dry and hot
orange and yellow
Crackling and snapping
along the earth
Flaming trees.

Ben Wilkins
Grade 4, 1992
Inlet View

Dreams

This is another topic which I felt I could have done much more with—dreams, daydreams, nightmares, dreams of the future. . . . Maybe your students will come up with some great poems to add to the ones below.

Some relaxation music suggestive of dreaming may be great to play in the background.

Dreaming isn't fair.
It may be fun, but
It isn't fair.
It's not fair to see the way
things should be,
Then to open your eyes
To the hurting reality.
In some dreams,
You see the reality,
The horror of it all.
You have no choice,
You see the reality.

Tawnya Sarazin
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

We are always
grabbing,
groping,
waiting for a place to rest.
We wind and twist,
leap and fall.
We are dreams.

Sonya Harris
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

A dream is
a land of fantasy
with puzzles
that you have to
put together.
David Davis
Grade 5, 1985
Chinook

Floating clouds,
Drifting thought,
Good and bad dreams
passing you by.
Wishing, wondering, hoping
this dream will last years
before it disappears.
The night will leave,
taking along the wondrous dream,
Just leaving a thought,
a memory,
a wish in your lonesome eyes,
And that will be gone, too.

Luz Vera
Grade 5, 1985
Chinook

Fall

This is generally the first poem we write together. On a crisp, clear autumn day, I introduce the topic and talk about the five senses: sight, sound, smell, taste and touch. I then invite students to get a piece of paper and a pencil and come with me into the woods adjacent to the school. Once there, there is to be no talking. Each person should sit down or walk around silently and note sensory observations on their piece of paper. You may also wish to have children collect leaves for an art project at this time.

After a period of time, I call everyone together. We return to the classroom and share some of the things we saw, heard, and felt.

Then we get ready for a silent writing time and I read aloud the following poems.

For display, final drafts can be posted next to a fall art project or written on large “leaves” cut from red, green, orange, brown and yellow construction paper.

As
the
wisp wind blows
knocking
crisp leaves
off
the trees
the last little bit of sun
shines on my hair
and brings
out
the orange in the
golden leaves
that are
still
clinging
to the
trees.

*Annie Stefany
Grade 6, 1987
Abbott Loop*

Golden leaves,
Slippery ground,
The sound of crackling whenever you take a step.
Birds fly south for the winter.
The tops of the mountains look like crystal.
Get the skates ready.
Winter is around the corner!

*Denver O'Brien
Grade 5, 1985
Chinook*

Sitting on golden leaves
crunching under my weight
moss and mushrooms
growing at my feet
a cool crisp wind making me shiver
at the trunk of a dead pine tree.

*Laura Butler
Grade 6, 1987
Abbott Loop*

Fall is . . .
wind blowing on trees
making a gold path of leaves
of different colors and shapes.

birds flying south for the winter.

squirrels climbing from tree to tree
gathering walnuts.

The sound of fall is the leaves
leaving a soft crunch behind them,
the trees swaying back and forth.

*Eric Kimmel
Grade 5, 1984
Chinook*

Fog

This topic is a favorite of mine and of the students. It's great to introduce it on a foggy winter day, but kids seem to have no trouble imagining a foggy day anytime.

Brainstorm sights, sounds, feelings, and so on, or go outside in the fog and make observations, before reading from the following poems. Photos of fog in the forest, on the seashore or in the city can be shown if available and later displayed with the poems children write. Photos may also encourage variety.

Fog dances
in the untamed world.
She leaves soft footprints
in the air.
Her wispy hairs
cool down the sky.
She slithers past me
on the ground
and wraps around the trees.

Kimberly Fyfe
Grade 4, 1992
Inlet View

Fog silently lurks when you're asleep,
stealing the stars away,
turning the trees white,
forming figures that aren't really there—
Fog is the thief that steals the night.

Jessica Stich
Grade 6, 1987
Abbott Loop

Fog creeps around.
It chills the city
and the grass turns crunchy
covered with icy plating.

Angel Robles
Grade 4, 1992
Inlet View

Clouds of fog come
like ghosts in the sky
they block the road
and eat up our world.

Emeka Ibe
Grade 4, 1990
Northern Lights

Fog

Like a snake
slithering
in the air around me
Like long skinny fingers
closing behind me
blinding me
It surrounds the street lights
making them dim
It wisps around me
and hides behind me
I see shapes walking slowly
and cautiously
and the voices
get dimmed
all around me.

Gabby Walker
Grade 4, 1992
Inlet View

I approach the fog
as it cringes
back
from me.

I extend my
arms to
touch it
but my
hands
go right
through.

Angie Pratt
Grade 6, 1987
Abbott Loop

Fog
slides through the night
sneaks up on the town
creeps through the streets.
Then the sun hits it
with golden flames
and the fog
fades
away.

David Olivera
Grade 4, 1992
Inlet View

As the fog
 slips into
 the thin
 cold
 wind in the
 air.
The skies are
 cloudy,
 the city
 is silent.
As I walk into
 the misty fog
 my hands lead
 the way into
 a
 new world.
No one can
 see
 for all are blind,
 No birds
 are chirping
 in the sky.
The fog is
 a venture
 in a new world!
Mary Jane Villanueva
 Grade 6, 1987
 Abbott Loop

Fog
It slyly settles in,
Creeping around the city,
Teasing me when I try to catch it,
 but when I get closer it's gone.
It makes my day gloomy
 until the sun comes out
 and melts it like ice cream.
Maleen Merritt
 Grade 6, 1983
 Chinook

I am a cloudy ghost
that creeps toward the sunset.
I am the cold icy fingers
of that ghost.
I am the thick blanket of white.
I am the tears
I am the fears
of the misty ghost.
I am fog.

Rashelle Phelps
 Grade 4, 1989
 Abbott Loop

Fog . . .
 dense and moist
 thick as a blanket
It wraps you in its coils
 squeezes you in warmth.
Dense air pushes your sides together.
Small shadows appear
 in the thick fog above you
while silence
 fills the air.

Zach Silverstein
 Grade 4, 1992
 Inlet View

Friendship

What makes a good friend? How can you be a good friend to others? What makes a friendship last?

Children are very familiar with this topic and it is close to their hearts.

This topic lends itself well to acrostic poetry, where the first letters of the lines spell F-R-I-E-N-D or the name of a friend. When that is the case with the poems below, the first letters are in boldface type.

Suggest to students that friendship poems make excellent cards to the people for whom they're written. They show your love and how special the person is to you. Poetry is one of the best ways to express deep feelings.

Far above the trees the clouds wander aimlessly
while

Rivers glisten like your eyes when you are
excited, still

In the sun's light your hair is honey
gold.

Endlessly time flows on like a river
to the sea,

Never parting, never ending, always together,
you and I.

Distant mountains are topped with snow;
beautifully they remind me of you.

*Rebecca Lambe
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook*

Like a river to the sea, it
runs on forever.

Like a bird soaring through the
endless sky.

I remember the good times
we had, and yet I grieve
over the sad.

I grieve over time,
like a black room with no door,
like a puzzle with missing pieces.

Why did you leave me?
Why did you go?

My feelings escape me like
midnight prowlers.

I am left looking at the
beauty of the night.

Then morning breaks into a
wonder of its own.

I am left . . . alone.

*Rebecca Lambe
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook*

A loss of
friendship
is like a loss
of life
and
a life
without
a friend
is darkness
in the face of
fear.

*David Davis
Grade 5, 1985
Chinook*

Far away and near
Rays of sun remind me of you.
I'm sad when you go,
Endlessly happy when you're near.
Never do you lose faith in our
Days and nights together.

*Hiedi Zaumseil
Grade 5, 1985
Chinook*

Friendships are special, like a sunrise
Rising above all other things;
Instinctively growing, like flowers,
Encouraging blossoms of
Never-ending smiles that stay all day and
Delight with happiness.

*Tandi Christensen
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook*

We were always together
laughing, loving, caring, sharing.
When I went somewhere, you
always went with me.
When I was happy, you were happy,
when I was sad, you were sad.
When I was feeling low and
depressed, you were always there to lean on.
Your smile brightened my day
more than anything.
Your eyes were the color of
the ocean at night.
They sparkled like the stars
reflecting on the crystal blue waters.
I miss you more than anything.
Someday I'll build a bridge
of love and kindness to cross
the river of sorrow.

*Rebecca Lambe
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook*

Starry eyes look up at me.
When I'm sad you're
Always smiling, showing your
cheery face.
Rosy cheeks at the end of
a smile, like
A rainbow connecting two clouds.
Happiness is having you around.

*Rebecca Lambe
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook*

Together

We have walked the
bridge of kindness
together.
We have drunk
from the fountain of love,
together.
We have walked the
golden streets,
together.
And that's how it will
always be,
together!

*Jennifer Lee
Grade 5, 1985
Chinook*

Friendship is you . . .
When you smile, the stars rise in the sky.
When you talk, everyone listens.
When you sing, it sounds like music in the air.
Oh! and when you move, it is like floating.
And most of all, you're the greatest
And most beautiful person I have ever seen,
Mom!

*Christina Melendez
Grade 5, 1984
Chinook*

I Was Born

Children have aspirations and ideals, interests and passions, which they may not always communicate in a school setting.

To introduce this topic, we talk about how different people come into the world with different talents, temperaments and interests. No two people are the same. Each of us is unique and has something special to contribute to others. Each of us truly enjoys different things. We are created that way. Part of finding out who you really are as an individual is exploring many activities to discover which ones you sincerely *love* and want to pour yourself into.

Brainstorm some things that students enjoy, such as sports, music, nature, or other extracurricular activities. Brainstorm some things they aspire to do in the future.

I Was Born poems encourage children to think about and explore their unique interests and dreams. Although poems may begin with these words, encourage children to try to think of another way to begin a poem with this topic if they can.

I was born to . . .
challenge deep mysteries in foreign lands

to search for the wondrous beauty
of the lands known

to be free and fulfill my wish
of seeing nature's beauty
in this wondrous world.

I was born to . . .
glide across a pool of a waterfall

to see the beauty of the jungles
and the unknown flowers

to live where no human
has lived before.

I was born . . .
to see the sunrise and the sunset
to look over the sacred land
and to find the unknown.

*Marcy Hawkins
Grade 6, 1987
Abbott Loop*

I was born to
Move my fingers across ivory keys.
To read notes in different songs,
Share the beauty of my music,
To float on a musical note to a far-off land,
Music land.

*Diane Smith
Grade 5, 1985
Chinook*

I was born
To run free, to be successful,
To help others learn and enjoy life,
To be a friend, help others understand
And fulfill their dreams,
To enjoy my family and raise a happy one,
To pursue my career with a chalkboard,
To sit back and relax in my big
Comfortable house, be respectful
and respected,
To run forever through the meadow of
Life.

*Romonica Sharper
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook*

Water World

I was born to live in the blue of the deep,
To say "hello" to all that swim by,
To explore the unexplorable,
And with each deep breath I take,
To watch the bubbles slowly dance to the
world above.

John Messenger
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

I was born to love the summer sun,
the sunrise and sunset.
To watch the birds and
butterflies growing up in our world.
To watch the waterfalls and mountain
rivers sprinkle down to the ground.
I was born to follow the rainbows that
light up the sky after a warm rain,
And to watch the beautiful
first snow.
I was born to smell the flowers and
to sit under trees.
I was born to enjoy nature.

Tawnya Sarazin
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

I was born to be
a dancer, to laugh and run free.
To skip along the
rainbows of life,
to jump along the
cottony clouds of wisdom,
to be swept along by the
tide of an ocean of tears,
to be rocked gently by the rhythm
of the sea of time.
Yesterday's sorrows
are soon to be forgotten as
I glide joyously to meet the
dreams of tomorrow.

Rebecca Lambe
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

All my tomorrows sit
behind the wheel
of a monster with
tremendous power.
My whole future lies
behind this great
mass of steel
Rolling down a great concrete
slab of America.

Paul Kesely
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

Personification

One very effective poetic device is personification, giving personal qualities to something which is not a person. Often, poems are written from the point of view of that something.

There are many excellent short adult poems which use personification. You may wish to have children try to locate poems which use this device in the library.

Before beginning, have students think of some things which can be written about using this approach. You may wish to jointly brainstorm one or more of the following ideas:

Be a flower trying to get through the hard ground.

Be a new colt just stretching his legs after birth.

Be a puppy on a sunny day.

Be a kitten playing with yarn.

Be a new stamp starting out on a letter.

Be a rabbit just given to a child.

Be a fire, creeping, climbing, towering, plunging.

One of the poems below is the one I wrote when Darlene taught this lesson.

I am a candle
flickering on a cool winter's night.

I am the snow
slowly falling to the ground.

I am the rain
splattering on the roof tops.

I am the wind
moaning late at night.

I am the sun
coming over the horizon early in the morning.

I am all the beautiful sounds
of the world.

I am music.

The Camera's eye
looks straight at you
until it blinks its eye happily,
a pretty picture in its mind.

Jason Hale
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

Time

I leave behind
tears of sadness
and tears of joy.
I float endlessly,
never able to stop,
never able to care.
I am time.

Sonya Harris
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

Steve Resch
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

A Pencil

I scratch in whispers across the page.
Short notes,
Great thoughts,
Screaming anger or
Soft love flows from
my dark point.

I speak softly but strongly
And give shape to worlds of mind and soul.

I am a piece of cloth to your eyes,
but what am I to the land?
I stand for the wars that have made
the land red with fury,
For peace, justice, and the people's way of life.
I am the flag.

John Messenger
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

Susan Anthony
Teacher, 1983
Chinook

Poetry reaches in me
grabbing for my heart,
catching it and slowly
drawing out my feelings
making them flow, bubbling
with mirth
or weeping with despair.

Sonya Harris
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

Bicycle

I am a creation of twisted tubing,
Of various metals and parts.
I run gracefully,
As my tires hug the street.
My only friends are me and
my
owner.

John Messenger
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

The peaks reach up
grabbing,
groping,
reaching for the sky.
They reach for happiness,
and find sadness.
They reach for company,
and find loneliness.
You cannot find these
peaks
for they are in your heart.

Sonya Harris
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

Life as a Flower

I grow tall
opening my yellow arms
having bees come in, come out
with honey day and night
until
I grow old
sending seeds for new plants.

Otis Stokley
Grade 6, 1987
Abbott Loop

Description

Poems which describe objects in unusual or unique ways can be short and quite powerful. Here are two examples.

Icebergs
big, bluish-white
diamonds drifting slowly
across the sea.

Veronica Davenport
Grade 5, 1984
Chinook

Comet

A fiery ball flying through
space,
A startling slash of white in
the sky.
Comet.

Jeff Smith
Grade 5, 1985
Chinook

Sea

Water and the sea have been popular topics for poetry through the centuries. Talk about or show photos of the sea in various moods, calm and gentle, angry, menacing, soothing. You may wish to play a recording of waves, rain or other water sounds in the background as students write.

Lonely Water

All alone the water sits,
Moonlight dripping into the waves,
Branches slowly waving in the wind.
Up above two black shapes fly over,
Leaving shadows on the darkened water.
Droplets fall from the darkened sky,
Running like tiny feet across the water.
Gently the water laps against the shore;
The moon watches over all.

Sonya Harris
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

I am the sea that birds soar over;
I catch the sun's glare.
I am the sea that floods, bathing
the land.
I am the sea of white foam,
like fog over a city.
I am the sea that gives the fish a home,
use me wisely.
I am the sea of life.

Romonica Sharper
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

The waves crash on the beach
as they lick the salty sand.
The waves bring up their treasures
as they splash against the shore.

Chad Cray
Grade 4, 1990
Northern Lights

Sea

Swift waves hit a beach hungrily.
Living oceans, calm and
quiet, waiting for their prey.
Crystal, smooth, silent seas.
Then . . . gigantic waves thrash and roar.
They are the works of a
vast shiny kingdom of water.
Foaming waves, casting above the
sheet of glass.
Tiny sparkling drops
of age do nothing but fall harmlessly
against the ocean's surface.
As the ocean can give out power,
it can bring about peace.

Thomas Davis
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

A waterfall brushes the sea below
A quiet breeze rushes over the water
Waves touch softly on the shore
The sun brightens the sea with glory.

Chareef Williams
Grade 4, 1989
Abbott Loop

I watch the waves lapping on the rocks
below.
The tide begins to slip away as it
erodes the sandy beach.
The seagulls call their mournful cry,
Then leave me, alone.

Larissa Money
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

Storms beat their heavy rains
against the sea
Waves clash against each other
Climbing and falling
back to the sea
Little ships toss back and forth
Shipwrecks lean against naked
islands.

Josh Leutzinger
Grade 4, 1990
Northern Lights

Roaring waves crash to the ground,
Blue skies cloud over.
The slight breeze changes to a whistling wind
Blowing the ocean onto the shores
Of the Hawaiian beaches.

Tracey Raskey
Grade 5, 1985
Chinook

The winter sea is like the raging surface of the sun
cooled by a chilling wind.
The summer sea is doing a dance
dressed up in blue with a white hat
it takes off every now and then.
The sea is an unlimited underwater world
that kids can dream about.
Then when they grow older
They can dive deep down
into their underwater dream.

Brooke Taylor
Grade 5, 1984
Chinook

What is the Sea?

What is the Sea?
The sea is a giant tongue
licking the sandy shores.
It is a lion as its waves
roar and crash on bare rocks.
It is life for fish
And death from pollution.
The sea is a never-ending
highway of water.

John Messenger
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

Silence

In our frantic, fast-paced world, it can be a great blessing to rest and listen to silence. This topic generally elicits good poetry. We make it as silent as possible in the classroom, but mostly use our imaginations to remember times when all has been still.

Brainstorm synonyms for silence as well as related ideas: quiet, still, the tiniest sound, whispers, soundless, hushed, tranquil, peaceful, etc. An image I once had was silence as soft clay, ready and waiting to be molded by me into music and laughter or into noise. The choice was all mine. This topic lends itself to mixed sensory images. We don't generally think of blossoming flowers, melting frost, or a baby's smile in terms of sound, for example. Depicting them in terms of sound can create a striking, memorable poem.

Silence roams through the night
with its tickling laughter.
It floats through the leaves in the forest.
It corners the meadow
and only comes out when nobody's
around.
It comes in the night and it
comes in the morning.
It will never be found.

David Olivera
Grade 4, 1992
Inlet View

Quiet is
a dream being thought of,
a scent being chased by the breeze.
Quiet is
the nothingness of space.
Quiet is
a morning's dew chilling a spider's web.
But the quietest sound of all is
a boy's still shadow.

Mike Cvitash
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

Quiet is . . .
the sun setting on a soft fluffy cloud,
when the birds and the chipmunks fall asleep.
Quiet is . . .
the moon playing hide and seek with the stars
when the snow flakes flutter to the ground.
Quiet is . . .
softness and silence together as one.

Torrey Morris
Grade 6, 1987
Abbott Loop

Quietness is . . .
A flower breaking open,
a new beauty to behold.
The sun shining through a window.
Stars popping out of nowhere.
Snow gracefully falling to meet the ground.
The chinook warmly passing by.
A balloon rising across the sunset.
A caterpillar making a cocoon
to become a new wonder in spring.

Maleen Merritt
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

Hushed is the sound of light
Flowing through a window.
Silent are the stars that shine in the dark.
But the softest, most beautiful sound
Is that of the snow falling on a cold winter night.

Daniel Gilbert
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

I sit
nothing around me.
Voices of silence fly overhead
like ghosts playing with my mind.

Mike Riley
Grade 4, 1989
Abbott Loop

When the birds stop singing
and the bees stop buzzing
the wind stops blowing
and leaves don't fall
when the butterflies stop fluttering
and chipmunks stop scurrying
then nothing is left
but
silence.

Gabby Walker
Grade 4, 1992
Inlet View

Silent is a mouse on Christmas Eve,
the sun,
dropping behind the mountains,
the seconds,
ticking away on a clock,
a feather
fluttering to the ground,
a dream
forming in your mind.

Larissa Money
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

Silence is my cat,
creeping into my room like a sly fox.
A hot air balloon,
silent as it rises up into the blue sky.
Silence means peace
for the whole world.

Christine Kemp
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

Quiet is a snowflake gliding out of the
sky or a fox walking on air.
Quiet is the morning dew on the grass
and plants
or a snake zig-zagging through the
grass and rocks.

Ron Wierzbicki
Grade 6, 1987
Abbott Loop

Silence is a cloud
drifting in the air
A lake in the morning
The night
when everyone is asleep
but you.

Chad Renfro
Grade 4, 1992
Inlet View

Silent Sounds

A silent sound is
A flower blossoming in the summer sun,
A cloud endlessly floating through
the sky,
Water lapping against the doors of time,
And an eagle soaring through the sky.

Sonya Harris
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

The Tiniest Sound

The small sound of buzzing lights
isn't the tiniest sound.
The sound of a writing pencil
isn't the tiniest sound.
Not even the tick-tock of a watch
but the pitter-patter of a ladybug
walking on the ground—
now, that's the tiniest sound!

William Senungetuk
Grade 6, 1987
Abbott Loop

The Silence of Peace

Silence is the sound
of night awakening,
peace between each word,
raindrops falling
through the air,
a quiet lake.
Silence is peace.

Heather Elkins
Grade 4, 1992
Inlet View

Sorrow

This topic includes sadness, blindness, loneliness, and death. Nearly all children have felt intense grief, perhaps at the death of a pet or the departure of a friend or parent. Children are often more in touch with their deepest feelings than adults. Although many of the children had not experienced the specific situations about which they wrote, they knew the feelings.

I talk about the stages of grief: denial, rage, despair, and finally, after time has passed, acceptance.

Poetry is a way to get strong feelings out of your heart and onto paper. It can give shape to grief and help you move through it. I use this opportunity to talk about the importance of finding a safe time and place to cry when your heart hurts. Crying heals the heart. In the words of an adult poet:

*Tears on the outside
fall to the ground
and are slowly swept away.*

*Tears on the inside
fall on the soul
and stay, and stay, and stay.*

Donald Wayne Rash

For this topic, I made a tape of Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata* played through four times. This allows enough time for everyone to finish one or more poems. Dim the lights, put on the music, and read from the poems below.

I often use this topic if I work with a group of children only once. It almost always generates powerful poetry which touches the heart. One year, I did this lesson during an observation by my principal. As the children were sharing their poems, he wrote the poem to the right. He shared it with the kids and they were delighted.

An Observation

*I see your faces and
Recognize that you are you.
I see you in the hallways,
the lunchroom,
on the bus.
And then I visit your class.
Again, I see.
The faces are the same.
And yet, I see you in a different way.
Is it really you
Or is the difference in me?*

Silently, the peaceful sun rises;
it will never be the same without her
the future doors won't open
there's terror without her
puzzle pieces slowly fall
with grief upon them
blue velvety loneliness surrounds me.

*Marcy Hawkins
Grade 6, 1987
Abbott Loop*

The World of Darkness

Quiet and lonely
In a world of darkness and ebony
A permanent feeling of agony and guilt.
Lost from all beautiful sights forever
Dreaming of help behind doors
Which remain closed always.

*Michael Cvitash
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook*

Death

Everything's silent as my life goes by,
grief comes to me this very night.
I am old and have no heart for others.
That could have changed, but my life is
fading, oh, so slow.
Please, leave me alone.
Please, I must rest my eyes
For I can feel I'm going to die.
Don't cry! Our hearts will be together forever.
Now, please go, I must rest my eyes.

Deborah Helvey
Grade 4, 1990
Northern Lights

Chapters

A book of wasted lives
collects dust on a lonely
shelf.
Painful memories turn
pages in the chapter of my
life.
The chapter of lost love,
disappointment and sorrow.
Paragraphs of nothing
fill my mind with emptiness,
just to be ended with a
period.

Tandi Christensen
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

Fading Light

I awake to realize where I am,
The light is slowly drifting away.
Darkness encases me like a glove.
My hands are at the bottom of a long
brown thread.
It's slipping away,
A new black world awaits me.

Tandi Christensen
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

Sadness

Sadness is a lonely thing
that burns inside my heart.
Crystal tears roll down my cheeks.
Darkness covers me
and flowers fade in misery.

Rainbows go away and birds
stop singing
It seems the sun
will never shine again
Ballerinas stop dancing
and the whole world
turns gray.

Jeanette Rowley
Grade 4, 1992
Inlet View

Little Ghost Boy

Little ghost boy, why do you suffer?
What scary sights have you seen?
Black rooms with no doors?
Puzzles with missing pieces?
How could they leave you?
Just walk off and forget about you?
Smiles without sincerity,
Laughing without joy.
You must walk in constant
terror.
Always reaching out, never finding;
Always listening, never hearing.
You live in death itself,
crawling along the tunnel of life,
always scraping your knees
on the concrete of spite.
You will never see the light
of life . . . again.

Rebecca Lambe
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

This poem was written in response to the
book *Ghosts I Have Been*.

Blindness
no moon to guide me
through the forest
no comfort, no love
nobody to help me
when I fall.
Can you see the light of love?
Is the light not shining?
Is it not shining because
no one loves me?
Please tell me why
you do not see me.

Priscilla Conrad
Grade 4, 1989
Abbott Loop

Death is a black cloud in the mist,
it's a broken heart
tears drop down my cheek
I keep my feelings inside
when I'm with someone
like a bird in the sky
going on and on.
The grief goes back to my heart
and stays.

Isha Steenmeyer
Grade 4, 1990
Northern Lights

Darkness

I loved him.
Why did he have to go?
He walks in a shadow of darkness
as time goes by.
I lie down and cry
when others laugh.
God, please bring him back to me.
My lonely father
walks in a shadow of darkness.
My heart goes with him.
I can never see him again.
Why did he have to go, Mom?
Please tell me why.

Heather Anderson
Grade 4, 1989
Abbott Loop

Blindness
Black velvet,
swimming all around me,
scared of
the things I cannot see.
Trying to see,
but my eyes are broken.
Black space,
but no moon to guide me.

Maleen Merritt
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

My feelings are twisted
and broken in half
as I sit beside him
watching silence
take over his body.
Now he is gone . . . gone
forever into eternal silence.

Chris McCormack
Grade 4, 1989
Abbott Loop

Death

Why him?
I hate him.
Why did he have to go?
I have to keep it inside.
He left me alone.
I don't understand.
I can't face life without him
I want him here.
I want him now.
I wish he was here.
Please God,
Bring him back.

Peter Ellsworth
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

Loneliness

My mother
sits staring at the picture.

Why, Lord,
Why did you take my father?
Now, my mother
sits in darkness
trapped in loneliness.

Mary Jane Villanueva
Grade 6, 1987
Abbott Loop

No color, no light,
just the black mist
blindness . . .
Who are the friends I play with?
What does my mother look like?
I may never know
my own appearance.

Lissa Sakata
Grade 4, 1990
Northern Lights

Dying . . . Why?

My mother . . . died.
Why?
I remember
those big hollow eyes
tear-stained
reaching out to me
then . . .
gone.

Laura Butler
Grade 6, 1987
Abbott Loop

Lonely, in the dark of night,
Listening to the wind howl,
fireflies buzz by.
Waiting for the door of life to open;
Hoping that someone
will lead you into the future.

*Teri Gardner
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook*

Sadness drowns within me
flowing through my veins
weeping through my heart
cracking in my bones
I rest with death.

*Joanna Thompson
Grade 4, 1990
Northern Lights*

Death is . . .
saying goodbye to someone special
forever.
looking at the sky,
wondering where they will go.
Loneliness . . .
nothing to live for
anymore.

*April Davis
Grade 5, 1985
Chinook*

Loneliness is. . .
A feeling that you're withdrawn
from the whole world
like the pieces will never fit together.
There is a cold, dark feeling.
It's like reaching out and there's no
one to catch you.
Jealous that everyone else isn't alone.
All past time memories of fun gone,
Stuck in a cage with no doors.
Crying and there's no one to stand
by your side for all eternity,
Like a midnight loner.
Wasn't there anyone who could have
been there!

*Romonica Sharper
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook*

Sorrow

I can't believe it!
She would never do a thing like that,
or would she?

I never knew she would do a thing
like that!

I loved her; I hated her.
What is going on inside me?

He loved her, my brother loved her.
Why me?
What did I do? What?

I wish she would come back.
Things aren't the same without her,
They aren't.

I love her.
My Mom.

*Tom Rush
Grade 5, 1984
Chinook*

Sadness

A creepy feeling inside of you
ready to flow out
all that comes are watery tears
dripping one by one
down they drop on and on
with grief written on them.
What is there to do?
Crying is your answer
when you stop
the inside is dripping water
never stopping
your soul is broken down
by the sadness
of the never-ending cry.

*Oliver Nowak
Grade 4, 1990
Northern Lights*

Winter / Snow

A good time to do this poem is during the first big snowfall of the season, or during any snowstorm.

Talk about snow—how it looks, feels, sounds, tastes. You may wish to put some snowflakes under a microscope or go outside to make sensory observations.

Have you ever noticed how the snow looks like marshmallows on top of fence posts? Have you seen how it sparkles like a pile of jewels under the lights at night? Think of more metaphors and similes to describe snow.

You may wish to play some soft instrumental music which suggests snow, perhaps harp or harpsichord. Have children watch the snow fall outside the classroom window as you read the some of following poems. This was one of the most popular and successful topics.

For a display, I covered a bulletin board with light blue paper and cut an icicle border (reduced size sample of the border pattern is on p. 45). I had the students cut snowflakes out of white paper. I transferred several of the best poems onto white construction paper in large italic letters and arranged them among the snowflakes.

The Crystal Forest

Hear the crunching of snow,
While you walk through a crystal forest.
And watch the birds fly south.

Hear the wind breezing through the trees,
And feel the snow hitting on your cheeks.

Walk up the crystal steps to the grey sky,
And smell the misty smell.

Watch the animals frolic and play,
And little people make snowmen while the
frosty limbs sway.
Walking through the crystal forest,
a crystallized dream.

Brooke Taylor
Grade 5, 1984
Chinook

Snow is gliding gently to the ground,
Dancing to the moon's song.
Icicles are glistening in the moonlight
And trees are covered with silvery
snowflakes.
It is a Winter Wonderland.

Andrea Rayt
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

Thoughts of Snow

The snow blankets the trees
as it falls in a pattern of elegance.
A pattern that all the earth matches
as in the pieces of a puzzle.
Nothing so beautiful has ever touched
the earth before.
Like a dream,
Like the sands of an hourglass,
The magical powder slips off the trees,
leaving only a body of silence.

Mandi Lamberson
Grade 5, 1984
Chinook

The world is a silent gem
Covered by sparkling diamonds.
As I walk, a pearly necklace
Of white snowflakes
Forms around my neck.
Trees reach to the sky with
icy fingers.
Our city is covered with ivory
cotton candy, while
A silvery button lights up the sky.

Tandi Christensen
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

Song of Winter

Who can hear the tender snow getting
crushed by wondering people?
The frozen trees with a big blanket
of snow?
Icicles break off of the snowy trees.
Cold bark is peeling off.

Who can feel the snow that has
fallen off trees?
The dead leaves all sagged out and
frozen pinecones covered with
a white sheet of snow.

Who can see the snow looking like
crystal shrouds?
The frozen nest which a little bird
rests in after flying in a
big winter storm.

Who? *Tracy Pride*
Grade 5, 1984
Chinook

Who Is She?

Gently she falls
with no force at all.
Shiny and white
she comes in a glitter.
Beautiful shapes
she makes in the sky.
Brightly she shines
as night falls upon us.
Wind blows and rushes her
into heaps and piles.
Children
leap and play in her.
She is snow . . .
beautiful and white.

Ashley Van Hemert
Grade 4, 1992
Inlet View

Waddling into a different world.
A world of icy diamonds,
Silver carpets,
And white glistening snow castles.
A soft wind blows the silvery flakes.
It is winter.

John Messenger
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

The Enchanted Forest

We are walking through a crystal forest
to the ice kingdom.
The northern lights come swirling
through our kingdom
as they do a little dance for us.
Our hair is frosty white and
sparkles in the glistening moon.
We dance all night until dawn.
Everything is quiet and
the northern lights say,
“Goodbye”
the sparkles go.
It was a magic night.

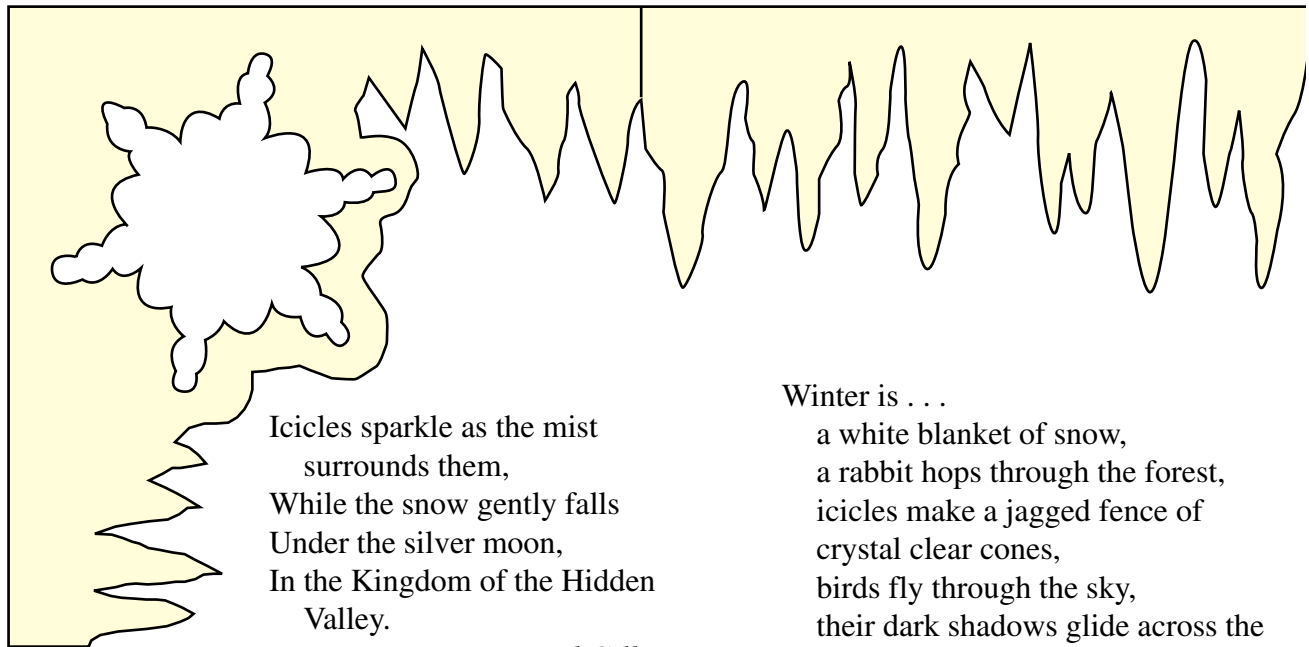
Anna Wedemeier
Grade 4, 1990
Northern Lights

Snow is . . .
glistening patterns of
milky white snowflakes,
miniature feathers dancing
in the wind;
a sugar world teeming with
diamonds,
tiny puffs of cotton
fluttering from the sky.
Snow is a pearly blanket that
covers the city.

Lisa Morrison
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

The fortress of glistening power
takes over again.
Now, everlasting worlds of silver spells
cast their light upon the frosty planet.
Sparkling patterns rising from old.
Giant crystal trees dance.
Kaleidoscopes of color twinkle
in ways never before thought of.

Thomas Davis
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook



Icicles sparkle as the mist
surrounds them,
While the snow gently falls
Under the silver moon,
In the Kingdom of the Hidden
Valley.

Daniel Gilbert
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

Winter is . . .
a white blanket of snow,
a rabbit hops through the forest,
icicles make a jagged fence of
crystal clear cones,
birds fly through the sky,
their dark shadows glide across the
glistening snow,
ivory skeletons sway with the breeze.

Jaymen Floyd
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

The Beauty of Winter

Winter is white blankets
under your feet.
It is the sound of blackbirds and ravens
looking for food.
Winter is like diamonds
shining in the moonlight.
In the snow, trees are
reaching out for help.

Monica Schott
Grade 5, 1984
Chinook

All my dreams . . .
I've left them behind.
Now I'm alone in a winter wonderland.
All the questions of life
I've forgotten.
You have to forget.
You start a new life in the snow.

Confide in the snow
There's no other friend like it.

Annie Stefany
Grade 6, 1987
Abbott Loop

When everyone is asleep in bed,
something is happening outside.
There's a wintry snowy wonderland
appearing out there.
The trees are turning to soft, cold,
white ivory.
The leaves have turned to icy pearls.
When you awake and look outside,
There's a wonderland of fun waiting
for you out there.

Tim VanDerhoof
Grade 5, 1984
Chinook

White fluffy cotton balls everywhere.
Jack Frost comes,
and paints beautiful pictures on your window.
Glistening icicles dangle from the rooftops.
The wind blows feathers everywhere.
The world has just changed its sheets.

Maleen Merritt
Grade 6, 1983
Chinook

A Final Word

I wish you all the best as you begin to explore poetry with your students. There are, of course, *many* poetic possibilities other than those in this book, including limericks, haiku, humorous poems, cinquain and diamonte. Because this anthology is limited to poems written by my students, the topics are limited to those I actually used year after year. I encourage you to consider this anthology a *starting place* for your own collection of favorite children's poems on a wide variety of topics, acquired from any source available. In the Anchorage School District, *Pencils Full of Stars* is an excellent resource. Past issues are available from Creekside Elementary School. As you collect special poems through the years written by your own students, add them to your anthology. Then, long after you've said goodbye to your young poets, even after they're grown and have children of their own, you can look back and remember them, and recall the sparkling moments you shared as you wrote poetry together.

*Through the years, my student,
You've touched my life,
Shared with me your joys, tears and fears.
You left me with the echoes of your childhood.
Your poems.*

Susan C. Anthony