

## PROJECTS

# Rare Air / Aire Raro

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GRADES 4-5

TYPE

POETRY

## SESSIONS

1. Let's Take a Walk
2. "I Am From" Poetry
3. The Poet's Eye
4. Relationship Poetry
5. Editing and Revising

In this project, students explore poetry as a way of explaining and defining the world around them via the people, places, and events that make up their life.

## WHAT YOUR STUDENTS WILL LEARN

Explore the various forms of poetry that created Rare Air/Aire raro, a book of poetry by fourth-graders at Roberto Clemente Learning Academy in Detroit. Students will reflect on their community, relationships, and experiences in life to create a series of poems that vividly capture their observation of the world around them.

## SESSION 1 : LET'S TAKE A WALK

Poets see the world in a special way -- everyone walks down this street, but as a poet, you see that street a little differently. When you write your observations in a poem readers can see how you see the street, and feel how you feel. In this lesson, students create a list poem from observations around their community.

## YOU WILL NEED

- Pencils
- Paper
- Clip boards (enough for students to have one in

each group of three)

- Chart paper
- Markers

## **STEP 1 : 40 MINUTES**

### **Take a Walk**

Split up students into groups of three. Each group should get a few pieces of paper, one clipboard, and one pencil (bring some extras outside in case any break). Students will work in their groups to create a list poem using their senses around the school. Each line is a singular image/observation. Students should be super descriptive and use simile/metaphor when possible.

Establish any rules for when you are outside: (ex: stay where the teacher can see you, do not play on the playground equipment, do not leave the school grounds, etc...) If your students perform better in groups with assigned roles, use a scribe (writes down the ideas students come up with), material handler (gets all of the materials for the group), and coordinator (makes sure group is following the route/teacher and is back in line on time).

Have a route in mind when going around the school. If there are parents/support staff available to assist on this project, then you can be a little more spread out, but if you are the only one outside, we'd suggest leading the group in "sections." (Ex: "From this sidewalk to that gate is our first section, we'll write in this space for 10 minutes. When I say, we'll meet at the gate and prepare for the next section.")

Once outside, have students go around with their groups, observing different things and writing lines for their list poem. Encourage them to use all five senses, specific details, and simile/metaphor as they are

writing. Each line does not need to start with “I see” or “I feel”, but can just get right into the image/sensory experience. The time outside should last around thirty minutes.

## **STEP 2 : 20 MINUTES**

### **DEBRIEF**

Once back in the classroom, have each group pick out one or two lines to add to a list class-wide list poem. Discuss the following questions:

- Does the list poem you created during the free-write look different than the one you created outside? Why or why not? (In the first list, there was only recollection, no physical experience. We can more efficiently describe things as we are observing/experiencing them).
- Does your list poem look different than the class list poem? Why? (Hopefully different groups were noticing different things, and perhaps various themes might show up. One group had more sounds, or used more imagery, or more metaphor, perhaps).

See the attachment “Our School” for an example of a class draft.

## **STEP 3 : 5 MINUTES**

### **HOMEWORK**

For homework, students will go around their neighborhood/house (with a parent if necessary) and create a list poem like they just did (at least fifteen lines long). They be working on them in class the following day.

## SESSION 2 : “I AM FROM” POETRY

We have looked at the community we live in and the people around us, now it’s time to think about how all of these things tie into our memories, and use brief vivid details to create a poem out of them.

### YOU WILL NEED

- Paper
- Pencils
- Copy of George Elle Lyon’s poem [“Where I’m From”](#) for each student

### STEP 1 : 15 MINUTES

#### BEFORE YOU START

Attached is the teacher’s example of the first step of the I Am From poem. It is ideal for you to create your own example poems so that you can talk more about the experiences that inspired them.

#### How to Begin

Discuss: “Where are you from? What does that question mean? Are you from your home? From where you are born? Where you live? Does it have to be a place? Today, we are going to think about the objects, people, and memories that shape the answer to the question: where are you from?”

## **STEP 2 : 15 MINUTES**

### **Exploring the Form**

Read together *Where I'm From* by George Ella Lyon. Discuss: "Why does the poet say he is from items and memories? What is he telling us about himself? Is he from a specific place?"

## **STEP 3 : 45 MINUTES**

### **Time to Write!**

Now, students work on their own version of the *I Am From* poem. The idea is that students will start with *I am From*, then a specific thing (listed below) followed by 3-5 lines following it that vividly describe the thing you mentioned. There are 6 stanzas to it.

- I am from (a room in your house), then lines describing memories you have in that room
- I am from (a specific memory you have with someone you love), lines describing that memory
- I am from (a vacation/trip you took), lines of memories/descriptions from that trip
- I am from (a memorable food), memories/descriptions about that food
- I am from (a memorable object you own), memories/descriptions about that object

Example for the first stanza:

I am from a tan, warm living room at my grandparents house  
Saturday nights spent flipping through hockey cards, watching Hockey Night in Canada,  
tastes like the sausage and crackers my grandpa scarfed down  
Sunday mornings imitating WWF wrestling moves on my hulking stuffed animals,  
sounds of hair dryers frantically warming wet hair

Students can write this as a class, going through each stanzas as a class for several minutes, or if there is a large variety in ability levels, at their own pace with a handout for each student showing off the form.

#### **STEP 4 : 10 MINUTES**

##### **Reflection**

Give students a chance to share out one of their poems either as a class, or through a pair and share.

### **SESSION 3 : THE POET'S EYE**

As a poet, how do you get your reader to feel what you are feeling? In this session we examine the devices that poets use to create vivid images in our minds and show off our world in a new way.

#### **YOU WILL NEED**

- Pre-cut strips of paper (roughly 1.5"x8.5")
- Scissors
- Pencil
- Paper
- Previous step's homework completed

## **STEP 1 : 10 MINUTES**

### **How to Begin**

Discussion: “Yesterday, we all experienced the same thing (our walk outside), but we described it differently. Why? What sort of things did you experience on the walk you did in your neighborhood? Share take a few minutes to share your poem with a partner at another table.”

## **STEP 2 : 50 MINUTES**

### **Reconstructing the Poem**

Display the example poem:

#### **My Neighborhood**

*by Brandan Pierce*

Black long-haired stray cat I named Scrappy snacking on 9Lives,  
A haunted house, unkempt. Over eighty types of weeds grow in the yard,  
Fallen leaves feel like cold spaghetti  
The warmest November I can remember  
A church with many doors, shaped like frowns. Tiny windows are eyes.  
New LED street lights, replacing the ones that never worked  
Patrolling police car, white, with blue stripes interrupted by the word  
Detroit  
The ambassador bridge, full of trucks, full of boxes, full of foods  
Scrappy is rubbing his body against my leg, his fur is a cheap blanket

Cushionless, black, porch chair once probably sat at a dining room table,  
Sounds like someone is scraping two giant rocks together, constantly  
No people walking  
Goodbye, Scrappy

As a class, talk about what you notice about it. Identify:

- Simile: Comparing two things using “Like” or “As”
- Metaphor: Comparing two things using “Is”
- Personification: Describing a nonhuman object using human
- Vivid or Sensory details: Giving more adjectives and placement to the things in your poem, using the five senses

Have students share out if they have these things already in their poems.

Then, students write each line of their poem they completed as homework on a different strip. On each strip, they edit the line to add an experience “Where I...”, personification, specific details, or simile/metaphor. If they need more lines to add to their piece, then they should grab more strips of paper.

Then, students move their lines around to create the best flow for their poem. Have students think about if they want their poem to rhyme, length of lines (they can cut their strips up even more to make more lines out of a single strip).

### **STEP 3 : 15 MINUTES**

#### **Getting the Draft Down**

Once students have picked a final order, they should copy their poem on a final draft paper.



## SESSION 4 : RELATIONSHIP POETRY

Students will think about the people in their life and create vivid descriptions of an experience they attribute to them with relationship poems.

### YOU WILL NEED

- Paper
- Pencils
- A copy or copies of the poem “Hairs / Pelitos” by Sandra Cisneros from the book *The House on Mango Street*
- “Relationship Poem Form” Handout

### STEP 1 : 20 MINUTES

#### BEFORE YOU START:

Attached are example relationship poems. It is ideal for you to create your own example relationship poems so that you can talk more about the experiences that inspired them.

#### How to Begin

Read “Hair” by Sandra Cisneros. Discuss: “Many people consider Sandra Cisneros’ book *The House on Mango Street* poetry. Why? How is it different than other poetry? In her book, she describes lots of the

people and places in her neighborhood using vivid details that focus on one aspect of their relationship (like hair). Today, we'll practice doing that."

## **STEP 2 : 15 MINUTES**

### **Discussing the Form**

Display the "Relationship Poem Form" handout and show students the generic example. Then, show the specific example. Discuss: "What do you notice? How are they different? What makes you picture something clearly? Today, you're going to create brief, vivid images for the reader of your poetry. We are not writing long memoirs/personal narratives that describe entire experiences, but brief series of vivid details that explode off the page!" Show the last example as a final piece for students to draw from.

## **STEP 3 : 30 MINUTES**

### **Relationship Poems**

Now, students work on their own! Remind them to include our poetic devices (simile, metaphor, personification, vivid detail) and think about relationships other than just mom, dad, and brother. What about your relationship with the clerk at the corner store, or the lunch monitor, or your neighbor?

When you are thinking of the experience, don't tell us everything. Pick just a few, important images or moments from your memory.

## **STEP 4 : 10 MINUTES**

### **Reflection**

Give students a chance to share out one of their poems either as a class, or through a pair and share.

## **SESSION 5 : EDITING AND REVISING**

Revising and editing is an important point of the writing process and an essential part of all 826 publishing projects. Students should be given time in class to revise and edit their poems. An additional session (or several!) could be used to allow students to revise their poems. At the end of this session we have also included tips for organizing an optional translation event, if desired.

### **STEP 1 : 75 MINUTES**

Students should be given time in class to revise and edit their poems. An additional session (or several!) could be used to allow students to revise their poems. Here are some suggestions for helping students revise:

- Look at the types of sensory details you are using in your poem. Is everything sight? Sound? Try to use a variety of senses in each poem to give your reader a whole body experience.
- With poetry, there are fewer rules than in story writing. Each line does not need to be a complete sentence, nor should it. It can be as short as one word! Try splitting up lines, and see how that makes your poem look and sound. Line breaks help the reader know when you take pauses.
- Use specific details when describing your experiences. This helps the reader understand your world, and thus message, more clearly.

### **STEP 2 : BONUS**

**Translating the Poems — A Family and Community Event!**

In the book we created with this project, *Rare Air / Aire raro*, the poems were translated into Spanish. We did this because a vast majority of the families primarily spoke Spanish at home. In an effort to make the project accessible to their community they wrote about, we built in a translation aspect to the project. These are some of the steps we took to do that:

- After-school meeting with families to ask them about their interest in such an event. Or check-in if you see them at parent teacher conferences about the idea. Ask about ideal timing, family interest, knowledge of people that could help be translators, donation of food, etc...
- Coordinate with the school to host an event where families and community members work with students on their poems to translate them into the chosen language.
- Either after-school or at the end of the day were ideal for the families we worked with.
- Older siblings are a great support for the event. In our experience, they have been the translator for their families for many years. They can also help entertain younger siblings during the event.
- Be sure to have lots of translation dictionaries, borrowing from libraries or other teachers/rooms in the school.

- If some families do not speak the intended language, try to pair them with a community member translator that could help them look stuff up in the dictionary and model the sentences for them.
- If you have friends/other teachers/volunteers that are available, but don't know the desired language, they can still come and help everything stay organized or facilitate games and activities for younger siblings.
- Some translation services might be interested in helping with a program like this and offer a reduced rate, or donate their services for the project. Search locally for those partnerships. If you are unable to copy edit the translations, see if one of these services would be able to copy edit them for you at the reduced rate.
- Also, local University that offer upper-level language courses might be willing to help with the project, as it is a great way for them to engage with the local community and it's a positive service learning experience for their students. Even a local high school might be willing to help.
- Send notes home in both languages, so that families are aware of your plans, well in advance of the translation event, with lots of reminders in class.