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Poetry and Language

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April is National Poetry Month! It is a time to celebrate poetry by increasing the awareness and appreciation of it. Haiku, sonnets, limericks, diamante... there are many different types and styles of poetry to appeal to all readers! (For more information about different styles of poetry, check out Handy Handout #337, "Types of Poetry.")

Benefits of Poetry

From the whimsical poetry of Dr. Seuss to the thought-provoking sonnets of Shakespeare, there are many benefits to reading and writing poetry.

- **Improve listening skills.**

The ability to listen is a foundational skill for all of language and learning. Hearing poetry read aloud naturally encourages students to listen and concentrate on the poet's message.



- **Develop phonological awareness skills.** Phonological awareness is the ability to think about language in terms of its structure. (i.e.,



Sentences are made up of words. Words are made up of syllables. Syllables are made up of sounds.) A lot of poetry is written while giving considerable thought to syllables so that the poems have rhythm. Other types of poetry use rhyme, which is another important part of phonological awareness. The more students are exposed to the rhythm and rhyme of poetry, the more opportunities they will have to develop phonological awareness skills that are critical to reading success.

- **Learn about historical events.**

Historical poetry teaches us about past events by using the careful and thoughtful composition of words in a poem. Poetry of this type can make events and facts easier to remember.



- **Express thoughts and feelings.** Poetry is often written to convey a speaker's thoughts and feelings about a topic. It allows us to reflect on our emotions and express them in an acceptable way.



- **Inspire writing.** Because the style of writing poetry is so different from other forms of writing, some students who don't enjoy writing essays may enjoy writing poetry.



- **Enhance vocabulary.** Poets express their thoughts with limited, carefully chosen words. Because of this, they may use words that are less common in everyday language. Exposing students to poetry also exposes them to new vocabulary words.





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(cont.)

- **Explore language.**

When students write poetry, they explore language as they carefully choose words to use to express their thoughts and ideas.



- **Boost critical thinking**

skills. Poetry can be simple or it can be complex. Likewise, interpreting poetry can be simple or it can be complex. Poetry that uses a lot of figurative language (like metaphors and similes) can be interpreted in different ways by different readers. As students search for meaning in poetry, they exercise their critical thinking skills.



- **Practice perspective-taking.**

Often interpreting a poet's message involves looking at an event or situation from the author's perspective.



Discover the benefits of reading and writing poetry by taking some time this month to explore language and meaning in poetry. The Academy of American Poets' website (www.poets.org) provides lesson plans, essays, activities, and other online resources to inspire teachers and parents and to help students celebrate poetry.



A Good Poem

A good poem paints a picture for both your heart and brain.
It doesn't need a second chance to make its meaning plain.

A good poem is like the flower - the lily or the rose.
God plants it in a poet's brain and there its beauty grows.

A good poem, like a cardinal, is pregnant with song
You can't help but hear its message as it sings what's right or wrong.

A good poem helps us remember what the joys of life are for
It makes us want to love someone till death comes knocking at our door.

—Tom Zart

Resources:

"National Poetry Month," accessed April 11, 2018, <https://www.poets.org/national-poetry-month/aboutcelebration>

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