13 Ways of Using Poetry in the EFL Classroom

Narva College
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The World Comes Together at TESOL

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How to Eat a Poem by Eve Merriam

Don't be polite.
Bite in.
Pick it up with your fingers and lick the juice that may run down your chin.
It is ready and ripe now, whenever you are.
You do not need a knife or fork or spoon or plate or napkin or tablecloth.

For there is no core
or stem
or rind
or pit
or seed
or skin
to throw away.
Today I would like to...

Discuss the benefits of reading and writing poetry in the EFL classroom.

Share some great poetry

Describe and demonstrate activities for reading/writing poetry with students at various levels.
WHY POETRY?

- Poetry Helps with Language Acquisition
  - Pronunciation (phonemic awareness, syllabification, rhyme, stress and intonation)
  - Vocabulary
  - Pattern and repetition
- Poetry is Fun/ny!
- Poetry is great for content-based EFL (CBT/CLIL)
  - Teaching ‘target cultures’
  - History, Science, etc.
- Length – Poems are generally short!
- Poetry helps students find their own VOICE
  - Break the rules!
- Poetry teaches us about ourselves
NATIONAL POETRY MONTH
APRIL 1991

I HEAR AMERICA SINGING,
THE VARIED CAROLS I HEAR
—WALT WHITMAN

Additional support for this project was provided by the American Bookstore Association, the American Library Association, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the Lilly Endowment's Diker Fund. To receive a free copy of this poem, please write to the Academy of American Poets, 80 Varick Street, Suite 210, New York, NY 10013-7490. Visit the National Poetry Month website at www.poetry.org.
I ask them to take a poem and hold it up to the light like a color slide or press an ear against its hive. I say drop a mouse into a poem and watch him probe his way out, or walk inside the poem's room and feel the walls for a light switch.

I want them to waterski across the surface of a poem waving at the author's name on the shore.

But all they want to do is tie the poem to a chair with a rope and torture a confession out of it. They begin beating it with a hose to find out what it really means.
maggie and milly and molly and may
by e.e. cummings

maggie and milly and molly and may
grew down to the beach (to play one day)

and maggie discovered a shell that sang
so sweetly she couldn't remember her troubles, and

milly befriended a stranded star
whose rays five languid fingers were;

and molly was chased by a horrible thing
which raced sideways while blowing bubbles: and

may came home with a smooth round stone
as small as a world and as large as alone.

For whatever we lose (like a you or a me)
it's always ourselves we find in the sea
Using e.e.cumming’s
maggie and millie and molly and may

Students can:

• put the poem in order
• compare their poem to the original
• identify essential elements of poetry:
  rhyme, rhythm, topic, rule-breaking...
Zebra Question
by Shel Silverstein

I asked the zebra,
Are you black with white stripes?
Or white with black stripes?
And the zebra asked me,
Are you good with bad habits?
Or are you bad with good habits?
Are you noisy with quiet times?
Or are you quiet with noisy times?
Are you happy with some sad days?
Or are you sad with some happy days?
Are you neat with some sloppy ways?
Or are you sloppy with some neat ways?
And on and on and on and on
And on and on he went.
I'll never ask a zebra
About stripes
Again.
Students can....

• find antonyms (opposites)
• answer the questions themselves
• think of questions for other animals
Louder Than a Clap of Thunder
by Jack Prelutsky

Louder than a clap of thunder, 
louder than an eagle screams, 
louder than a dragon blunders, 
or a dozen football teams, 
louder than a four alarmer, 
or a rushing waterfall, 
louder than a knight in armor 
jumping from a ten-foot wall. 
Louder than an earthquake rumbles, 
louder than a tidal wave, 
louder than an ogre grumbles 
as he stumbles through his cave, 
louder than stampeding cattle, 
louder than a cannon roars, 
louder than a giant's rattle, 
that's how loud my father SNORES!
Louder than a clap of thunder,
 louder than an eagle screams,
 louder than a dragon blunders,
 or a dozen football teams,
 louder than a four alarmer,
 or a rushing waterfall,
 louder than a knight in armor
 jumping from a ten-foot wall.
 Louder than an earthquake
 rumbles,
 louder than a tidal wave,
 louder than an ogre grumbles
 as he stumbles through his cave,
 louder than stampeding cattle,
 louder than a cannon roars,
 louder than a giant's rattle,
 that's how loud my father
 SNORES!

Students can....

- learn vocabulary through sound
- illustrate the poem
- write their own poems

Softer than....

Faster than....

Smellier than....

Sillier than....
Keep it Simple (at first)

This Is Just To Say
by William Carlos Williams

I have eaten the plums that were in the icebox and which you were probably saving for breakfast

Forgive me they were delicious so sweet and so cold

Students can:

• find the poem manageable in length
• access the poem’s simple vocabulary
• realize how great ideas can be expressed in simple ways with powerful effect
Explore Complexities of Culture and Identity

I Hear American Singing
by Walt Whitman

I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,
Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be blithe and strong,
The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam,
The mason singing his as he makes ready for work, or leaves off work,
The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat, the deckhand singing on the steamboat deck,
The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, the hatter singing as he stands,
The woodcutter's song, the ploughboy's on his way in the morning, or at noon intermission or at sundown,
The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at work, or of the girl sewing or washing,
Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else,
The day what belongs to the day --

I, too
by Langston Hughes

I, too, sing America.
I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.
Tomorrow,
I'll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
"Eat in the kitchen,"
Then.
Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed
—
I, too, am America.

from I, too, Sing América by Julia Alvarez

"I know it's been said before
but not in this voice
of the plátano
and the mango,
not in this voice the
of inglés
colombino...

So, let it not be!
give us that Latin beat,
¡Uno-dos-tres!
One-two-three!
Ay sí,
(y bilingüe):
Yo también soy América
I, too, am America"

Students can....

• compare the three poems (before knowing anything about the authors)

• learn about the three authors, their times and ethnic backgrounds

• search for other poems on the same topic, but from different perspectives
Linking Poetry and Song

“Yippee! I'm a poet, and I know it
Hope I don't blow it”

Bob Dylan

*I Shall Be Free No. 10*
Everyone Can Write Poetry!

I Can't Write a Poem
Forget it.
You must be kidding.
I'm still half asleep.
My eyes keep closing.
My brain isn't working.
I don't have a pencil.
I don't have any paper.
My desk is wobbly.
I don't know what to write about.
And besides, I don't even know how to write a poem.
I've got a headache. I need to see the nurse.
Time's up? Uh oh!
All I have is this dumb list of excuses.
You like it? Really? No kidding.
Thanks a lot. Would you like to see another one?

-Bruce Lansky
Poetry Getting to Know You

J
E
N
N
I
E

Joyful,
Energetic,
Needs to learn to say
No
I am an
English teacher

Acrostic Poetry
Writing Poetry

Beginning with the Self: BioPoems

Line 1: First name
Line 2: (three words to describe you)
Line 3: Who loves...(three ideas or people)
Line 4: Who feels...
Line 5: Who needs...
Line 6: Who gives...
Line 7: Who fears...
Line 8: Who would like to see...
Line 9: Resident of...
Line 10: Last name
Writing Poetry

Beginning with the Self: BioPoems

Jen
Bright, traveling teacher
Lover of books, people and things new
Who feels at home in the North
Who always needs new challenges and more sleep
Who fears boredom and bad choices
Who would like to see the stars
Resident of many places
MacArthur
Writing Poetry

- A terrific resource: Kenneth Koch’s “Wishes, Lies, and Dreams: Teaching Children to Write Poetry”

- Koch’s advice:
  - Avoid requiring rhyme
  - Build upon a heritage of collaborative poetry writing
  - Creative an environment for experimentation
  - “permit children to discover something they already have”
I used to be _____, but now...

I used to be a pest, but now I’m nice.
I used to live in New Jersey, but now I live in New York.
I used to have an apple dress, but now it doesn’t fit me.

I used to be smart, but now I’m smarter.
I used to be pretty, but now I’m prettier.
I used to be little, but now I’m bigger.

I used to be a book, but now I’m a ladybug.
A LIE Poem

• Written in pairs, every other line.
• Each line must be untrue.

I was bought from a store.

I am three hundred years old.

I was a bear before I was born.

I am a boy of bananas.

I go to a school of apples.
A WISH Poem

Each person contributes one line. Each line must begin “I wish....” and include (1) a European country, (2) a color, and (3) a part of the human body.

I wish I were the golden sun warming the heart of Greece.
I wish my skin was as white as Spain’s sand.
I wish I were a turkey with red eyes.
I wish England’s rains were not so grey.
I wish every Finn in Finland would dunk his fingernails in fuchsia paint.
Exquisite Corpse
"Adjective, Noun, Verb, Adjective, Noun"

- traces its roots to the Parisian Surrealist Movement.
- is played by several people, each of whom writes a word on a sheet of paper, folds the paper to conceal it, and passes it on to the next player for his or her contribution.
- articles and verb tenses may be added later or adjusted after the poem has been written.
- The only hard and fast rule is that each participant is unaware of what the others have written, thus producing a surprising--sometimes absurd--yet often beautiful poem.
- The name comes from a line of poetry created using the technique: "The exquisite corpse will drink the young wine."
Among twenty snowy mountains,  
The only moving thing  
Was the eye of the blackbird.

I was of three minds,  
Like a tree  
In which there are three blackbirds.

The blackbird whirled in the autumn winds.  
It was a small part of the pantomime.

A man and a woman  
Are one.  
A man and a woman and a blackbird  
Are one.

I do not know which to prefer,  
The beauty of inflections  
Or the beauty of innuendoes,  
The blackbird whistling  
Or just after.

Icicles filled the long window  
With barbaric glass.  
The shadow of the blackbird  
Crossed it, to and fro.  
The mood  
Traced in the shadow  
An indecipherable cause.

O thin men of Haddam,  
Why do you imagine golden birds?  
Do you not see how the blackbird  
Walks around the feet  
Of the women about you?

I know noble accents  
And lucid, inescapable rhythms;  
But I know, too,  
That the blackbird is involved  
In what I know.

When the blackbird flew out of sight,  
It marked the edge  
Of one of many circles.

At the sight of blackbirds  
Flying in a green light,  
Even the bawds of euphony  
Would cry out sharply.

He rode over Connecticut  
In a glass coach.  
Once, a fear pierced him,  
In that he mistook  
The shadow of his equipage  
For blackbirds.

The river is moving.  
The blackbird must be flying.

It was evening all afternoon.  
It was snowing  
And it was going to snow.  
The blackbird sat  
In the cedar-limbs.
Poetry Online

- Poems
- Information about poets
- Lesson plans
- Publication possibilities
- Ideas for celebrating poetry
- Daily poetry digests
April is National Poetry Month
March 21 is World Poetry Day

https://www.poets.org/national-poetry-month/home

• Poet-in-your-Pocket Day
• Poetry readings
• Poetry competitions
• Daily poems
• Poetry in unexpected places
Goals:

Highlight the **legacy** of American poets past and present

Introduce more people to the **pleasures** of reading poetry

Bring poetry to the public in **innovative** ways

Make poetry a more important part of the school **curriculum**

Increase the attention paid to poetry by the **media**

Encourage increased **publication sales** of poetry books

Increase **philanthropic** support for poets and poetry
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American Teens Talk!
Looking for ways to use the audio and text of American Teens Talk in your classroom? These classroom activities will show you how.

PICK OF THE WEEK
American Rhythms
Use these engaging songs and lyrics in your classroom. Check out the teacher's guide for many ideas on incorporating these tunes in class.

ENGLISH TEACHING RESOURCES
Looking for resources to use in your classroom? Explore our engaging and free materials, including lesson plans, stories, music, games, and more.

ENGLISH TEACHING FORUM
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