

A Poetry Book of Their Own

Encourage budding writers with a classroom bookmaking center.

By Denise B. Geier

Nothing motivates children to write more than making a book of their own. Creating a simple bookmaking center in the classroom is one way to spark a poetry unit. Young students are capable and even eager to write poetry once they are introduced to it. Because poetry for children is generally short, students perceive it as something they are able to replicate. Often I have observed students who are asked to write a story stare at the blank paper in front of them for what seems to be an eternity. When questioned about why they have not started to write, they generally respond that they do not know how to begin. Writing a story

involves a lot of planning, and this is where students falter.

Not so with poetry. Even first-graders can write a few lines, especially once they realize that poetry need not rhyme. Introducing students to a variety of poetry books focusing on emotions is a great place to start. Humorous poems often capture children's interest, and students will be eager to try their hand at replicating this type of poetry. Moving from humor to more serious emotions and introducing students to poems organized around a theme or form of poetry can be the next steps. Focusing on the illustrations within published books may also entice those students with a visual learning style.

Creating a Center

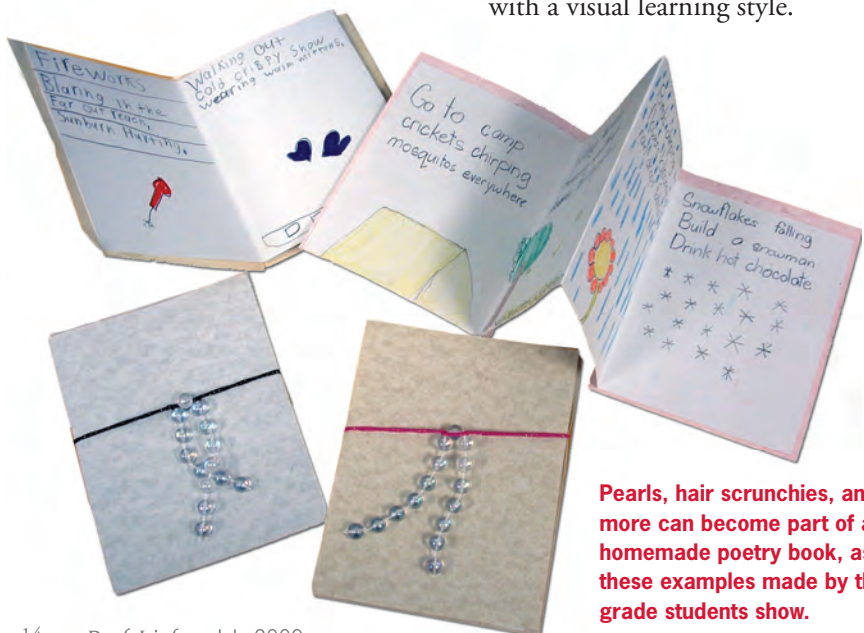
Because books can range from simple to complex, a bookmaking center can evolve throughout the year. Once the center is established, teachers can add new materials and new book formats as students become more proficient at bookmaking.

At the minimum, a bookmaking center should have colored and white paper, a stapler, scissors, colored markers, and glue sticks. Displaying samples of various books for children to use as a model is a must. I use a trifold presentation board for displaying samples, and as the year progresses, attach each new model to the board so that students can refer to them as they work independently or in small groups.

Introducing the Center

A bookmaking center can be a place where students work independently while teachers are involved in guided reading or small group or individual instruction, so it is essential that it be introduced to the whole class in a lesson. Discussing the rules for using the center and displaying them prominently within the center is important to its success.

My preference is to introduce the center as part of a poetry unit. I utilize a simple book format for the first project and introduce the idea



Pearls, hair scrunchies, and more can become part of a homemade poetry book, as these examples made by third-grade students show.

of creating a storyboard before book construction begins. The storyboard is simply a form with a box for every page of the book. Creating a storyboard template is helpful because it often takes students several tries before they are satisfied with their plans.

Encourage students to plan what they want the finished book to look like using a storyboard. Explain that often the illustrations are not added until the poetry is completed, although some students may find that drawing the picture first enables them to write with more ease. Requiring teacher approval of the storyboard helps avoid wasting book supplies.


The first book I introduce is a simple accordion book with covers. This book is easy for even very young students to create because it involves only folding and gluing. It's a perfect size for the first book because its small number of pages is manageable. Materials for this book include cardstock for the covers, paper for the pages, a hair scrunchie, ribbon, or piece of yarn, and some trim for an embellishment.

An easy first project is a seasonal haiku book. The accordion book format is perfect for this because its page format is ideal for the four seasons.

Extending the Center

Once the first book is completed, extension of the center is easy. Many teaching books contain models of easy-to-construct books. Asking parents to contribute supplies can help to defray costs. Plain construction paper can work fine for covers, but it is also nice to include some pretty scrapbook papers. Japanese origami paper is inexpensive and can add an exotic element to a book. Scissors with fancy edging and decorative paper punches make useful additions to the center, as do yarn or colored string for simple bindings. Glitter, pearls, fabric, and other embellishments promote creativity.

Starting with poetry writing allows students to see themselves as capable writers. After students have made several books of original poetry, I extend

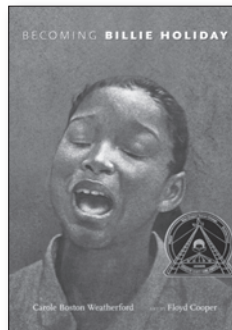
the bookmaking to include fictional stories and nonfiction. The bookmaking center promotes students' self-esteem and encourages sharing. They are proud of their finished products, and by the end of the year, they have a library of their own books. 

Denise B. Geier is an educational consultant in New Jersey.

WEB CONNECTIONS

Visit the *Book Links* Web site at www.ala.org/booklinks and click on "Web Connections" for a downloadable storyboard and directions for creating an accordion book. Also available is a downloadable list of poetry titles to share as part of a bookmaking center.

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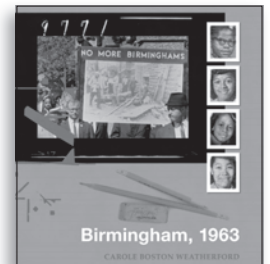
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