

## AASL Exploratorium October 6, 2005

Poetry club might just be the best thing I've ever done in my library. We're into our second year and nothing has happened the way I expected, but at the same time the results are considerably better than I had hoped. I believe we're on to something and I'm hoping to lure a few of you to join in the experiment.

Here are the basics of what we've been doing. With poetry club we create in the library a place for young poets to grow. We believe that it's important that the process occur in the library as opposed to English class. In English class students learn about poetry. In poetry club they learn how to make poetry, or more accurately, they learn how to teach themselves to make their own poetry.

The process takes into account various levels of individual motivation and talent. It embraces the principle of the orality of language and the idea that growth in language skill is largely an unconscious process. It provides the opportunity and means by which young poets, each at their own pace, can acquire and hone the specific skills of the craft. It instills a basic understanding of what it means to be a poet and foster the courage to create. And it does these things in a relatively low-pressure atmosphere in which students are encouraged to take their writing seriously and at the same time have fun with it.

We have indeed had a great deal of fun, but there were times when I was ready to tear my hair out. Toward the end of last year I was beginning to believe that none of my writers would ever find the will to self-edit and rewrite their work. Then out of nowhere, as though it were his own idea and to the universal agreement of his peers, James announces that "my poems get a whole lot better when I put them side for a while then come back and work on them some more."

Please peruse our material. This may be the right time for you to bring a little creative fun to your library.

### Contact Information

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**Goal:**

1. Provide an extracurricular setting for the art and craft of poetry
2. Create an environment in which young artists learn how to teach themselves to write poetry

**Principles**

1. The world of poetry divides itself into 3 parts, poetry lovers, poetry scholars, and poetry makers. Poetry club is about poetry makers. English class is about poetry scholars. The world of the English class must be kept entirely separate from the world of poetry club. Poetry lovers are avid readers of poetry.
2. Although being a poetry maker is the most essential part of being a successful poetry club member, members still need to recognize the fact that being a poetry lover and scholar is important to provide an all-around view of poetry and a more fulfilled appreciation for poetry as a whole.
3. This experience occurs a number of simple principles
  - a. Poets are not taught to write poetry, they learn to write poetry
  - b. Activities of poetry club are designed to empower that learning
4. Poets learn to write poetry by reciting it. Poetry is the art of oral language. Acquiring skill as a poet, as is the case with the acquisition of all oral language skills, is essentially an unconscious process. It occurs as a function of the physical, emotional, and intellectual experience of oral speech.
5. The driving engine of poetry club is that it is fun. In the end students need to enjoy what they are doing.

**Techniques (methods)**

1. Poetry club will foster a particular kind of attitude in each individual poet – an attitude simultaneously characterized by
  - a. Absolute arrogance (Arrogance to support the courage to create)
  - b. Abject humility (Humility to support the clarity of vision to see flaws and therefore to create better)
2. Poetry club advisor will facilitate this process by providing appropriate resources.

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## History of Gilbert High School Poetry Club

### I. Background

- a. Brod Bagert and Janet Boltjes decided to experiment with a seminar for high school students who wanted to write poetry.
- b. GHS signed a contract with Brod Bagert to spend a day at Gilbert High School composing poems for science classes based on topics given to Brod by science department.

### II. Poetry Club meetings before poet visit

- a. At our first poetry club meeting, I distributed an introduction to the topics we would discuss for the next few weeks. Each student received a CD with seventeen poems performed by Brod Bagert and printouts of these poems with his comments.
- b. After the first meeting, Brod and I revised our original plans when we realized that students needed an outlet to read their poems as well as hear each other's poems
- c. Brod created a series of essays for students about the making of poems.
- d. We listened to one or two essays for subsequent weeks until Brod's visit. Students also selected poems to send to Brod for his input. He didn't critique the poems, but gave suggestions for improvement. In each case, he gave the student the freedom to accept or reject suggestions. He also had several comments about poetry writing in general that he had observed in reading the poetry.

### III. Brod Bagert visit to GHS

- a. On the day of Brod's science class presentations, I got special permission for the young poets to stay in the auditorium with Brod. They got to see him create poems, as well as ask questions in the breaks between his presentations.
- b. After school, students met with Brod for an in-depth study of poems. By this time, the poets were comfortable with Brod and willing to share. Each poet discussed one or more poems with Brod and each other. We ordered pizza and continued to discuss poetry.

### IV. Remainder of 2004-05 school year

- a. After Brod's visit, we experienced a bit of a let-down and had to regroup. The students decided it was important to continue to meet weekly, so we began to experiment with formats and programming ideas.
- b. Videotape and evaluation - worked really well for one week, but two weeks in a row was too much
- c. Create a poem from a painting - I used the twelve-volume set entitled, *Looking at Art*, as a prompt for the students. Each student selected an image to use. The students really enjoyed this activity, but we didn't have enough time to complete the activity. Although they assured me they would bring back their poetry the next week, only two students did.

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- d. Allow students to read their poetry the entire session. - The students wanted to do this, but it didn't work well at all. They just couldn't keep their attention focused the entire time. I was frustrated trying to keep them on task.
  - e. Publication of poems
    - i. Tried to work with business teacher for illustrations and layout
    - ii. MANY copyright problems – led to teaching a copyright lesson to the business class
    - iii. Ran out of time so poems were not illustrated.
    - iv. End of year party – discussed ideas for upcoming year
- V. Summer 2005**
- a. ALA conference
    - i. Attended as many poetry sessions as I could
    - ii. Purchased poetry books
  - b. Read professional books and journals about the teaching of writing poetry to try to understand how poetry is addressed in English classes. Most of these activities were based on formal evaluative criteria.
- VI. Fall 2005**
- a. Second year of poetry club
    - i. Five students graduated
    - ii. Five decided not to come back
    - iii. Five are continuing to come to poetry club
    - iv. Ten new members
  - b. Meeting structure
    - i. 15 minutes – refreshments and general discussions
    - ii. 30 minutes – poetry exercise
    - iii. 45 minutes – students read poetry
  - c. Exercises
    - i. Discuss rhyming and abcb format for stanza (8-24-05)
    - ii. Rhyming dictionary (print and electronic) (8-31-05)
    - iii. Katrina poems (9-7-05)
    - iv. Create poem to describe a verb you do not know (9-14-05)
    - v. Survey of student opinions about poetry club (9-21-05)
    - vi. Word choice in poems (9-28-05)

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**Bibliography**

Holbrook, Sara. *Practical Poetry: A Nonstandard Approach to Meeting Content-Area Standards*. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2005. ISBN 0325-0076705

*Looking at Art*. Danbury, Co.: Grolier Educational, 1996. ISBN 0-7172-7595-7

Wormser, Baron and David Cappella. *A Surge of Language: Teaching Poetry Day by Day*. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2005. ISBN 0325006067

Write Express – software for rhyming – available from WriteExpress Orders, PO Box 50661, Provo, Utah 84605-0661, Telephone 800-974-8339

Young, Sue. *The Scholastic Rhyming Dictionary*. New York: Scholastic, 1994. ISBN 0-590-96393-7

**Brod Bagert's books**

*A Bullfrog at Café DuMonde: Poems from the Heart, Soul & Funnybone of New Orleans* – Juliahouse Publishing. ISBN 0961422815

*Chicken Socks and Other Contagious Poems* – Boyds Mills Press. ISBN 1563972921

*Elephant Games and Other Playful Poems to Perform* – Boyds Mills Press. ISBN 156397293X

*Giant Children* – Dial Books for Young Readers. ISBN 0142401927

*The Gooch Machine* – Boyds Mills Press. ISBN 1563972948

*The Hormone Jungle* – (for middle school students) To be released by Maupin House – Spring 2006

*Let Me Be THE BOSS: Poems for Kids to Perform* – Boyds Mills Press. ISBN 1563970996

*Poetry for Young People: Edgar Allan Poe* – Sterling Publishing Company. ISBN 0806908203

*Rainbows, Head Lice and Pea-Green Tile: Poems in the Voice of the Classroom Teacher* – Maupin House. ISBN 0929895282

*SHOUT!* – (for preschool children) – To be released by Dial Books for Young Readers – Spring 2007

*Steel Cables: The Poetry of Permanent Love* – Juliahouse Publishing. ISBN 0961422882