

Collaborative Poem: Blue Is

Lenore Balliro, First Literacy -April 2018

Intention:

To engage students in a collaborative poetry writing exercise that promotes collaboration and to build understanding of the power of imagery in poetry.

Preparation:

- Read some poems aloud to students that offer rhythmic language and strong sensory images.(See suggestions below.)
- Explain to the class that you are going to create a piece of writing where everyone contributes lines anonymously. Guide students through the process as follows. Give each person a piece of paper. Papers will be circulating until they are filled.

Pre-writing:

- Close your eyes and think of the color blue. What images come to you?
- Do you remember blue from your childhood?
- How does blue feel?
- What does blue smell like?
- Where do you see blue today? Is there anything blue in front of you?

Writing – Drafting:

- Take a piece of paper. On the first line, write Blue is _____
- Then finish the sentence.
- For example: Blue is Mary’s veil.
- Blue is the blue suede shoes my boyfriend bought me in high school.
- Blue is Maine’s freezing Atlantic and the Caribbean's gentle warmth.
- Now, fold the paper over backwards so the next person cannot see what you have written.
- Pass your paper to the next person. Then that person writes another line: Blue is _____
- The paper will come back to you, and you will add another line, and so on, until each piece of paper is filled. Try to use memory as well as all of your senses—sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch—when you write your sentences.
- When the papers are filled, each person opens up the paper in front of her, then reads all the entries out loud. This becomes the draft of a poem, filled with the contributions of everyone in the room.

Follow-Up Discussion:

Ask students which images stood out for them, and why. Which ones made them feel, smell, hear, taste something? Was there repetition in the drafts? Could the repetition make the poem stronger? How? Were there clusters of similar images? For example, were there images relating to water, ice, eye color? Could grouping them make the poem more powerful? Explain that poets often revise their poems many, many times before they consider them done. They cut

lines out, rewrite them, and reorder them to make the poem fit together. The activity can end here, or it can be taken to the revision stage, outlined below.

Revising:

- Break students into groups and assign each group a number of drafts to work with. (For example, if there are 12 students, break into four groups and give each group three drafts).
- Discuss the editing process with students: Ask them to
 - identify the lines they found most powerful and circle them;
 - identify “throw away” lines that do not contribute much to the poem. (Explain that even experienced poets write throw away lines sometimes; it is not an insult to take them out);
 - identify patterns or repetitions;
 - identify clusters of images around certain things.
- Based on the review process, ask them to rearrange the lines to revise the poem in a way that could make it stronger. They can cut lines, add new lines, rearrange lines.
- Ask someone from each group to read the revised poem out loud.
- If time allows, or at the next class, continue the discussion of the group’s choices to revise the poem.

Other prompts:

- Comfort is...
- Stress is...
- Red is....
- Fear is....
- Joy is...