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INNOVATIVE K-8 CURRICULUM FROM THE ARBOR SCHOOL OF ARTS & SCIENCES

HALLOWING THE WORD

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Spring is in full riot in the woods and meadows at Arbor School, and chicks have hatched in the Primary classrooms. For the weeks they remain in our care before they voyage to the family farm of their forebears, these little lives are lovingly tended, studied, and drawn. Foremost in every child's mind, they are the subjects of math problems, songs, and poems:

*The chicks are as peaceful as snow
as sleepy as winter
as warm as the oven
as soft as silk
as fluffy as yarn
as happy as a kid on his birthday
as noisy as a backhoe
not as absurd as squirrels*

These simple but lively similes from Felicity Nunley's and Jeff Oliver's K-1 students are the first green shoots of what we hope will be cozy and enduring relationships with poetry. Rather than holding the genre at arm's length, whether in apprehension or appreciation, we want them to embrace it as a birth-right. Poetry is not the province of the gifted few, but a versatile and multifarious form of expression available to everyone. It is a natural tool to employ as children build vocabulary and learn to observe and describe the world around them and the creatures in it. To write a poem is to open your senses wide: to a tree, to an experience, to a loved one. A poet doesn't need grand words, just sharp

eyes and empathy. To read a poem is to see from someone else's vantage point; the view of a familiar landscape may be surprisingly vertiginous and stirringly beautiful.

We hallow the word at Arbor, teaching poetry formally in every grade and calling upon students to practice the arts of memorization and recitation as well as crafting their own verse. We gather in appreciation of those performances at school assemblies, warmly receiving a trio of tentative Primaries trading lines about the rain or a more boisterous group of Seniors singing José Martí's "Guantanamo" to a guitar accompaniment. But we also want our students to encounter poetry in unexpected places and to see what happens when you remove it from the confines of the English classroom: a poem can inspire a handsome block print; the familiar rhythms of language can open the gate to reading music or arranging a collaborative dance piece. As our Intermediates discovered, language that tickles the senses and satisfies the mouth lives in favorite novels, in newspaper headlines, on tea boxes, and even on a five-dollar bill. Our Seniors now know that a poem can help you ponder the great mysteries of life and might even let you write your way toward answers. And the skills of attuning oneself keenly to the world, of winnowing the full record down to the choicest plump grains, can only serve our students well.



ARBOR SCHOOL
OF ARTS & SCIENCES

GOOD NOTICERS

POETRY WORKSHOPS FOR THE VERY YOUNG

by Robin Gunn, literacy specialist



Poetry wends its way daily into our lives at Arbor. Poems quite literally festoon the campus as they hang from trees in the form of weathergrams, mark the entrance to gardens and classrooms, and connect to the thematic study on classroom walls. School celebrations are punctuated by students reading their own poems or reciting words by a favorite poet, of teachers joining in a reading of a poem for two voices. Poetry books are featured in the library, are included in lists for suggested summer reading, are given space in our classroom collections. It is no surprise, then, that when a focused unit on poetry is introduced during the second- and third-grade Writers' Workshop, the excitement is palpable.

What is it that makes poetry so appealing to young children? Is it the stack of tantalizing little blank books with the words "Poetry Journal" written on their yellow covers? Surely for some this is the appeal, but in reflecting on my experience of teaching poetry to Primaries and Juniors, I can only conclude that children are natural poets. I believe that poetry speaks to children's innate curiosity about the world around them, to the way in which their experiences are so visceral, to how they are guided by their senses, to their joy in playing with language. These characteristics provide a portal into the realm of poetry, allowing children to see this genre as an open invitation to explore. Where poetry challenges the child is in demanding him to slow down enough to see and hear what is around him. This genre inspires children to be "good noticers," to deeply observe their surroundings, as poets do.

Poetry offers unique promise as well as challenge. From a mechanical perspective, how exciting to find out that you are in charge of making the rules for your poem! Thinking about word placement, punctuation, and capitalization takes on a different weight when second and third graders are asked to consider what makes sense for their particular vision. These young students are encouraged to play with different ways of formatting their poems on the page. *How does it change the meaning if I move these two words to the beginning of the next line? Should I add a comma here so that another reader will know to pause? Every two lines of my poem go together; how will it look if I only use an uppercase letter for the first line?*

Poetry has an advantage over other forms for teaching the writer's craft, too. A poem can be long; a poem can be short. Juniors who follow tangent after tangent until their hero's adventure balloons to 38 pages with no end in sight, or who become absorbed in the daunting task of recreating the complexities of a favorite novel, can experience the rewards of concluding and polishing a piece of writing.

Poetry workshops allow them to practice all the components of the writing process (drafting, revising, editing, conferencing, producing a final draft) with a piece that is of manageable length.

So the invitation into poetry is extended in the Junior classroom, and we teachers facilitate the process by making sure that our students are exposed to different forms



Above, kindergarteners Bennett and Carly hang weathergrams.

Below, first grader Ruby's butterfly poem adorns an apple tree.

within the genre. There are some wonderful compilations of the work of well-known poets, as well as volumes of poems written by children. There are whole books filled with acrostics, haiku, concrete poems, and rhyming verse, to name a few. We think about and discuss what it is that poets do, what we imagine a poem might be about, what sources of inspiration seem to recur for certain poets. We create a learning environment conducive to the exploration of individual poetic style by encouraging risk-taking and allowing time for writing. We celebrate as students read their poems aloud, assemble “published” collections (typed by parent volunteers and printed in booklets on the school copier, or perhaps carefully printed, illustrated, and bound by the children) of their finished poems, and revel in the simple joy of having an audience.

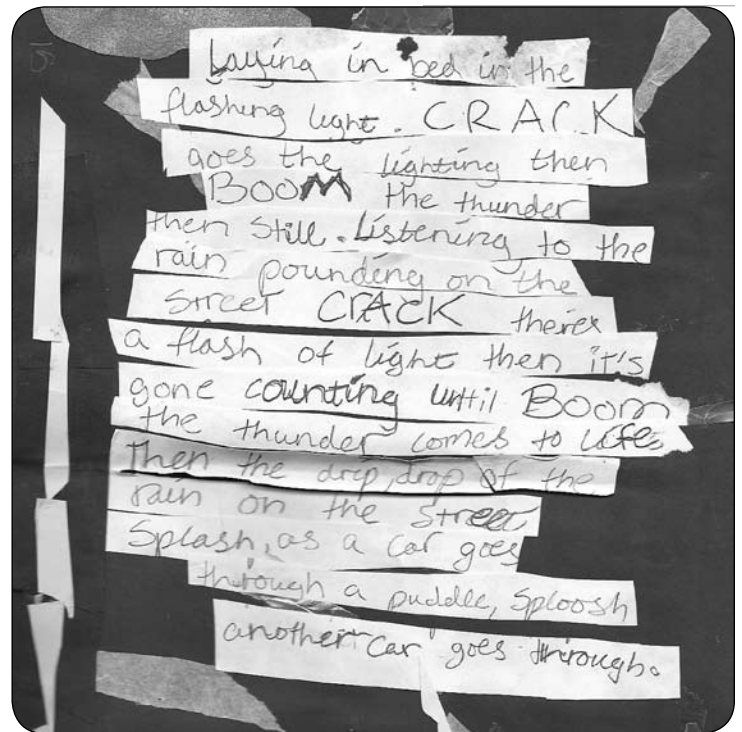
The following is a window into a lesson on haiku with the Juniors. Earlier in the week we had begun our poetry focus by reading poems and discussing what it means to be a poet. We realized that poets are “good noticers,” that a poem can be written about anything, that not all poems must rhyme. We thought about a poem as a picture in words. We made a camera with our hands, looked around the room and “clicked,” focusing on one thing. What is it? How would you describe it? The Juniors find ease in working with the concrete, with small things.

Now we head outside with our Poetry Journals, pencils, and our “hand cameras.” Children spread out to “photograph” what they see, finding inspiration in the chirping birds, the lily pads in the pond, a bee in the grass, the blossoms on the apple trees, even the pesky dandelions. Some take the invitation to write down observations; others slide right into the rhythm of haiku, fingers raised as they count out syllables. The little Poetry Journals are filled with words and phrases that capture the sensory impressions of smells, sounds, sights, textures.

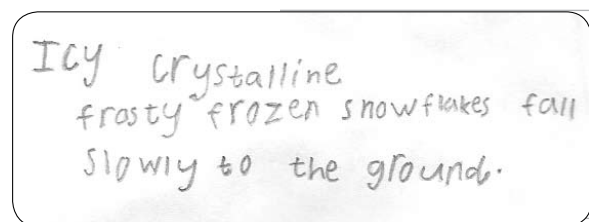
We gather again inside, share some of our observations, and write a group haiku on the board. We remember to write in the present, to keep the word “I” out of it, and we find ways to revise when syllables need to be added or taken away. Everyone has ideas; every poet is ready to head to her writing spot and turn her own “noticings” into haiku. There is a general buzz in the room as words are tasted and tried aloud, small mouths wrapping around the syllables and the way the words feel in combination. Journals reveal words with little numbers or tallies written above them. There are cross-outs, carets and other editing marks, illustrations — all pertinent parts of each child’s poetic process. Peers confer to share tricks of the syllabication trade or help a friend who exclaims, “Ooh, I just need one more [syllable]!”

This lesson spills into the next day and the next as children write more poems from the observations they recorded in their Journals. Requests are made to head back outside to favorite spots. Each Workshop culminates with students reading their poems aloud.

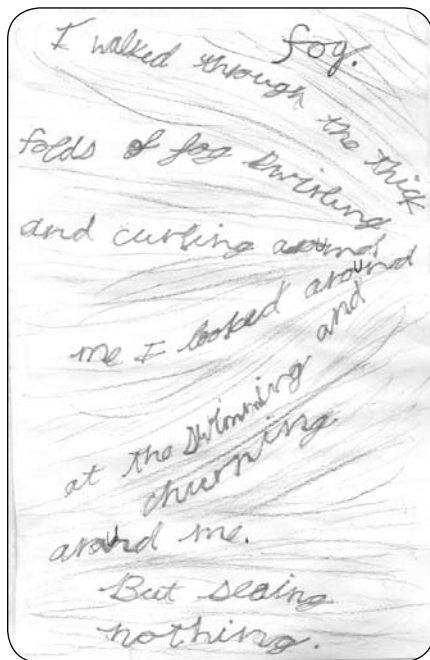
Later in the week it is recess and a third grader comes running over, breathless: “The problem is that I can’t stop thinking of poems!” During Writers’ Workshop a hand goes up: “Can we do those cement things [concrete poems] again?” The poem “I Was Walking in a Circle,” by Jack Prelutsky, becomes a favorite as students embrace the humor in reciting a poem that repeats itself endlessly. Yes, children are natural poets, and long after those yellow Poetry Journals are filled the appreciation for this genre lingers.



Weather-inspired poems written this winter by Sarah (above) and Gordon (below). Gordon's repeated sibilants mimic the hiss of wet Oregon snow.



Resources



Poetry collections:

- Fleischman, Paul, *Joyful Noise and I Am Phoenix*
(poems for two voices)
Florian, Douglas
Hackett, J.W., *Bug Haiku*
Issa, *Today and Today*
Lewis, Richard, *In A Spring Garden*
Prelutsky, Jack, *The Beauty of the Beast*
Prelutsky, Jack, *The 20th Century Children's Poetry Treasury*
Prelutsky, Jack, *The Random House Book of Poetry for Children*
Sandburg, Carl
Sandford, Lyne, *Ten-Second Rainshowers: Poems by Young People*
Schenk de Regniers, Beatrice, *Sing a Song of Popcorn*
Wise Brown, Margaret, *Nibble Nibble*

Teacher resources:

- Cassedy, Sylvia, *In Your Own Words*
Heard, Georgia, *Awakening the Heart*
Koch, Kenneth, *Wishes, Lies, and Dreams*
Steinbergh, Judith, *Reading and Writing Poetry*



Concrete poetry, which takes the form of its subject, by Vivian, grade 3 (above), and Greta, grade 1 (below)

Cow grazing in the field / chewing and chewing all day long / sleeping in the barn / In the morning, udder's full / It stumbles into line to get milked

ANTENNAE UP

INTERMEDIATES SEEK OUT RICH LANGUAGE

by Becca Blaney, grade 4-5

Cruising down Borland Road on a dry day, a passing driver might well wonder what that gaggle of children is doing in the woods, nestled in the crooks of trees, perched on logs, and sprawled along the path, pencils in hands. Though perhaps it is not apparent at 40 mph, these are poets at work.

Poetry permeates the very core of Arbor and is woven through the curriculum at every level. The Intermediate classroom is no exception; this year, as the fourth and fifth graders explored the creation of the universe, they also composed poems of their own, contemplating the cosmos. As they immersed themselves in the most ancient civilizations, they also encountered modern poets' own musings on the same night sky that entranced the Mesopotamians. As they learned of the accomplishments of the ancient Greeks, they heard aloud a version of one of Homer's epics. Every student subsequently created her own graphic novel to retell an adventure from *The Odyssey* or acted in a dramatic performance of the tale, memorizing portions of the translation by Robert Fitzgerald. Odes and Shakespearian sonnets rounded out the year as we explored the medieval period and the Renaissance.

By the time they reach the Intermediates, these students are already well acquainted with the rhythms and rich language of poetry. They are familiar, too, with some of the mechanical aspects of composition. They arrive at our fourth-grade doorstep able to draft haikus, acrostic poems, and rhyming verse. More instruction builds on this exposure in the two years that follow as they explore other poetic forms. Rich language and poetry are a part of everything we study.

Exposing young people to the best writing out there and helping them learn its tricks is only part of the process, however. Some of the most enjoyable and the most challenging aspects of creating poetry have little to do with mechanics; arguably, the skills that are most critical to creative writing are habits that exist apart from line breaks or stanzas or familiarity with iambic pentameter. Poetry (and powerful writing in general) springs from an intimacy with one's surroundings and emotions, from the confidence to play with language, and from a critical and exacting eye for revision. These less tangible lessons — noticing the world, appreciating language, and revising — are folded into our creative writing curriculum also. Which brings us back to those kids in the woods.

Noticing

Before they write essays or odes, writers observe carefully the world around them and develop a store of information about their subject, whether it is how a snake moves through the grass or how people experience grief. It is this quiet research by poets that produces exciting connections for readers when a particular description or characterization rings true, a private inkling becomes shared and laid bare on the page. Seeing is not innate, however, but a learned behavior. One of the ways we encourage insightful writing is simply by providing children opportunities to look. As the Juniors do, we go outside, often silently, to permit these young writers a quiet moment, alone, with something interesting to gaze upon and think about. We wrote poems about mud after first tromping out to the soccer field to poke it, fling it, pack and crumble it. Several students literally jumped into the muck when they discovered a watery pit, taking off their shoes, squishing mud between their toes and caking it upon their shins. The excursion built enthusiasm for the assignment; it also pushed these writers to abandon their pre-conceived (and often clichéd) ideas of what mud felt or looked like. When they wrote their mud poems, the students were able to focus on the actual textures, smells, and sights they had recently experienced.

The guidelines we establish for a walk in the gardens or woods help to direct students' attention to the particular skills they are refining. Many students this age find it quite difficult to draw their minds to attention and hone in on the tiny details that color or crystallize an experience. Developmentally, they still are plot-driven readers and writers. (A frequent complaint is that any book that lacks dramatic battle scenes is a book in which "nothing happens.") When such concrete thinkers are asked to write poetry without careful scaffolding, the results are often hastily built on immature ideas of the conventions of the form: we get lofty language about vague concepts like "love" or "nature" that lacks real connections to the authors' thinking or experience. For this reason, we required in one woods walk that the subject of the students' writing be something that they found and was small enough to fit in their hands. In response, the Fours and Fives got down on the ground, sifting through decomposing leaves on the trail, looking where plants joined the earth, wondering about a tiny snail with a broken shell and a delicate white fungus sprouting from the path. They observed the "moist lime carpet" of moss and the "shards of grass" emerging in patches of sunlight.

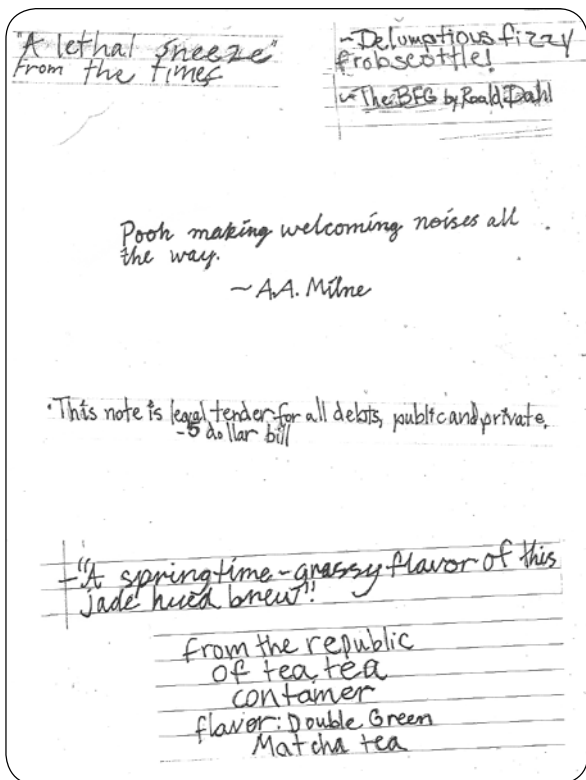
Homework assignments try to replicate this focus in a different environment, one in which these writers are surrounded by family, time pressures, and distractions. One week the Intermediates were asked to describe a favorite object by focusing on a single aspect of its appearance: how can you tell that object is *old*, for instance? Another time we set this prompt: When you watch a family member at a task (bringing in the garbage cans, or puttering around the kitchen) what are the minutiae? What does their face express, what do their hands do? A familiar refrain in the classroom is "show, don't tell." We exert a steady pressure on students to train their eyes and minds to notice and describe details instead of telling their readers that a character is angry or the night is dark.

Appreciating Language

Another form of noticing we ask our students to practice is becoming attuned to rich language. Reading and memorizing poetry provides writers a tantalizing bite of what is possible, but the perfectly polished work of professionals can be intimidating, too. We want our students to appreciate what a Pablo Neruda or William Butler Yeats is capable of, but ultimately, most importantly, the focus of our aspirations is the Intermediates' own comfort with language and willingness to experiment with expression. So we sometimes let ourselves in through the side door, approaching poetry from a non-traditional route.

Beautiful language, even poetry, tucks itself into unexpected places all around us. Just as new readers eagerly call out the messages of every passing billboard, we want our students to be constantly scanning their surroundings, storing up delightful phrases, comparisons that make them pause, or simply delicious new words. With that in mind, a recent assignment sent the Intermediates on a poetry hunt around their houses, collecting snippets of language that seemed particularly engaging or rich to them. Poetry books were the only forbidden source. The inspiration came from Naomi Shihab Nye and her poem "Having Forgotten to Bring a Book, She Reads the Car Manual Aloud." The scavengings we received that week demonstrated that kids had been scrutinizing photo captions, instruction manuals, cookbooks, newspapers, letters, phonebooks, novels, encyclopedias, and food containers with fresh eyes. Once they started looking, interesting and beautiful language was everywhere; they had only to pluck it off the cereal box. This preliminary assignment did not require that the products of the hunt be transformed in any way, simply collected and shared.

A few days later, the students collected language again and this time transformed it into verse. The exercise was suggested by Stephen Dunning and William Stafford in their engaging book of poetry-writing exercises, *Getting the Knack*. In small groups, the Intermediates cut up newspapers, collecting words and phrases from headlines and advertisements that commanded their attention. Once they accumulated a pile of clippings,



the students worked cooperatively to turn the pieces into poetry. In the course of about half an hour, they haggled over line breaks and word choice, they reminded each other about necessary verb endings or tense changes, and contemplated what made a particular arrangement on the page appealing or dramatic. With glue sticks and scissors still in hand, they made final revisions and titled their poems. At the end of class, a representative shared aloud each group's final piece, like beat poets. Some of the poems were almost haunting, many were silly, and still others were nonsensical, but they were all triumphs of poetic thinking.

Our students love to share their own writing with each other, and their willingness to do so provides a perfect opportunity to further sharpen their attentiveness to language.

Several times a year, they are given opportunities to review others' work and comment on it, noting in particular what the author did well, either in the form of a sticky note or aloud in a sharing circle. On other occasions, we have tried the "popcorn method" of response, in which students quickly play back for the author the words or phrases that struck them. During read-alouds, too, we often ask the Intermediates to listen not only to the information or plot they hear, but to notice also how the author conveys his ideas. These exercises perk up their ears and give us all reference points for discussing rich expression. The mere mention of Roald Dahl's description of a face "like a boiled ham" reminds and inspires them to choose delicious and memorable words.

Revision

In addition to observing the world around them and appreciating rich language, an aspiring poet must be willing and able to revise her writing. Although some lucky few can create good first drafts, all writers benefit from revisiting their work. Writing in the Intermediate years includes a particular focus on developing this skill. To our students, this focus may seem a bit perverse, initially, if not outright cruel. Why, after asking them to labor to produce a piece, would we ask them to reduce it, reimagine it, or completely rewrite it? Only a two-year, sometimes sugar-coated, incremental process allows them to eventually answer that question for themselves and persuades them to make the habit a regular part of their writing.

In a way, revision is simply the process of putting all that noticing and appreciating into action. These writers demonstrate their observational skills and affinity for language by carefully crafting their own words to match a particular vision. Intermediate teacher Eliza Nelson has developed a system of gentle guidance that nudges our students into



A headline poem by Katie, Louise, and Julia

revision by small but effective steps. In writing exercises early in the year, she might ask them to revise simply by finding and highlighting their favorite part of their written pieces. In one exercise, after students wrote poems on a shared topic, the favorite lines were compiled into a final group poem that showcased everyone's favorite phrases. Another low-pressure revision assignment challenged the class to develop a list of words and comparisons that they agreed were too common or trite to do justice to their topic. Once their list of "forbidden words" was finalized, students reviewed the first drafts of their writing to find any culprits from the hit list and substitute more colorful, unusual language for the clichés they had used. They enjoyed sharing with each other their "before and after" phrasings, appreciating the improvements.

Not all pieces are revised, but when we do select a particular assignment for revision, we also identify a specific goal or focus. In that way, our reluctant revisers have an immediate foothold as they approach the task. They might be asked to circle their verb choices and reconsider whether richer language could be substituted, or directed to include a single, stunning comparison if they haven't already. Over time, these instructions multiply; by the time they are fifth graders, these students will be asked to review and improve several aspects of their drafts in a single assignment.

Our aim is to send these students forth to the Seniors with skills that will serve them well as writers, and maybe even poets. If we have succeeded, their eyes are open, contemplating the world around them; their antennae are up, receptive to fine language; and their pencils are poised, ready to review critically and desirous to improve their own writing.

Ode to the Cheeseburger, by Seth

*Juicy sizzling satisfying
Fat-filled piece of heaven.
Golden cheese bubbles
Flavor explodes
Over the greasy, grimy grill.
Condiments smother tender meat
Sweet Spicy Savory sauces
Perfect combinations in your backyard.
The aroma
Blocking out all other thoughts.
When can I have the first bite?
Grab your milkshake
Juicy, meaty, satisfying
Cheeseburger.*

Ode to the Cat, by Hannah K.

*Calico lioness tumbles across dew-wet field
Her paws jerk with every step
Ears up, soldiers on guard.
Eyes shining, moon and stars in a deep black pool.
Bumblebee, unaware of danger.
She crouches,
 paws glide silently
And pounces.*

Clouds, by Sam S.

Clouds clouds
I want to reach up and grab you
Bring you down
And snuggle you
Soft
Warm
Poofy
Creamy
I wish I could clamber
Up those ten ton pillows
You are the whipped cream
On the ice-cream of the earth.
You are perfect.

Ode to the Flashlight, by Kobi

My electronic lantern
Unexplainable, unpredictable.
In a tree, bed: a gift.
Camping, reading: you do good deeds.
Your brightness tempts me
Green and purple everywhere.
Through darkness, a spotlight
Reading lamp
Leader
Spy.



A headline poem by Solomon, Maxwell, and Elena

YOU DON'T NEED FANCY WORDS

GUEST POET KIM STAFFORD VISITS THE SENIORS

by Cara VanGorder-Lasof, grade 6-8

On an average morning in May, we strode into the classroom, set down our binders, and found ourselves staring at a guitar, a laptop, and a smiling man seated on a stool. I suddenly remembered that today was our writing workshop with Kim Stafford. He began with a song, one he said he used to sing with his son Guthrie. Soon the entire class was singing and laughing, our voices echoing through the Senior building.

—Grace

This year of the three-year curriculum cycle for Arbor's sixth- through eighth-grade class has been centered around a study of the Americas. In addition to exposing students to the work of such giants as Walt Whitman, Robert Frost, Carl Sandburg, Langston Hughes, and José Martí, we always invite a poet from the community into the classroom as a guest teacher during the Americas year. This spring, Kim Stafford, founding director of the Northwest Writing Institute at Lewis & Clark College, graciously accepted the invitation to visit and, in his words, help students "explore and store up those treasures that are poetry."

It seems to be quite common for students to decide early in life whether or not they can write poetry. Part of the magic that Kim worked was to challenge this assumption and inspire all the Arbor Seniors to see their potential in this realm, as Reed, a self-confessed reluctant poet, explains:

When Kim Stafford stepped in our classroom and began talking to us, I was surprised by what we did. For starters, instead of writing a bunch of poems, he went around the room asking each of us what was something we have always wondered about in life. When he asked me I said, "What is the meaning of life?" That statement triggered others to add on to my idea. He then asked us to take our question and use it to create a poem.

Kim suggested that students use a memory or experience to try to answer their question, reassuring them that, "You don't need fancy words to be a poet. Ordinary words and experiences can make a song or a poem if you find a true voice." He also gave them free rein to write prose if it felt more natural for them. Claire recalled a recent dream to investigate her question about whether or not dreams can predict the future:

Once, I had a dream that I was standing on a cloud, at night. The sky was dark blue, and the stars were shining. I felt a sense of power and walked towards it. Soon, I came to a place where all the Greek gods sat on huge thrones before me. Everyone who had been a role model to me was there: Neil Armstrong, Leonardo daVinci, my great-grandfather who I never met, and more.

Then Zeus, who was on the middle throne, spoke. He said something like, "You were not put here on this world to do nothing. You must do something great with your life. Around you are people who accomplished something, or inspired you in some way; you must try to, as well." Then something happened, and I was back on the original cloud, with the sky above me.

Kim's writing prompt for the seventh-grade class was to have students list three words related to the Civil War, which we were studying in Humanities, and then three

words related to everyday life. Jonathan chose the words *horses, gunfire, wounds, sunrise, clouds,* and *night* to create the following poem:

*In the morning
the horses arrive*

*The sound of gunfire
still ringing in their ears*

*The wounds on the men
break my heart*

*As the sunrise starts, all
is well*

*Except for the clouds
in the sky*

*The night is singing,
so closely here*

*The horses lay down to rest
in the hollow night.*

Kim suggested that the students think of at least three possible titles for their poem. Claire considered titling her dream piece “Standing on a Cloud,” “Dreaming,” “When I Had a Chat with Zeus,” or simply, “Can Dreams Predict the Future?” She noticed that imagining more than one title for her piece caused her to reflect on her writing “more than usual.”

Once students had drafted their poem, Kim confessed, “I find it strangely consoling that there are only three things we can do to revise: add something, take something away, or change the order.” He encouraged the Arbor Seniors to look to their poem’s strongest line as a guide to help strengthen other parts of the poem. He also proposed looking for where the poem truly begins — sometimes it takes a few lines to get warmed up — and, likewise, to find where it really ends.

Ursula, whose eighth-grade class wrote to the Six Words prompt on the theme of graduation, expanded beyond the six-line form and reordered her words to create the following poem:

*Sitting in our hard-backed chairs, we are waiting
waiting, sitting, breathing.*

*Slowly the person before me rises.
Rises, and I am next.*



Grace and Jonathan at work revising their poems

Prompts Kim suggests:

1. Make a list of titles you like — titles of books, songs, TV shows ... then select one, and write variations on it. ... then write a poem that begins with that title.
2. Choose three words you associate with the Civil War and three you associate with home, with peace: musket... blood... surrender / moon... candle... whisper. Then write a poem in which you use these words in this order.
3. Write half a poem on the top half of a sheet of paper... then exchange with someone, write the other half of the poem, and give it a title... then turn over the page, and write a title... give the page back to your partner... write a poem to that title.
4. Write four questions; write four answers. Take your favorite question and match it with your favorite answer — to make odd sense.
5. Write a poem that tells the story of your name.
6. Write four lines that describe an object in the first person (a riddle).
7. “There’s a thread you follow...” (write about the thread you follow)

8. Write a poem about your favorite song, in which you use phrases from the song in your own writing.

9. Write a poem about how you experience a day, but in the third person.

*She starts to speak. "Graduation."
"Graduation" wanders through my mind, in search of something to connect with.*

*I step onto the stage in my rickety heels
heels that reach up to grab my ankles, pulling, twisting, maiming*

*I realize the crowd is waiting for me to speak
SPEAK! They call, speak!*

*But flames are licking around my paper, consuming
Consuming, devouring my speech!*

*Slowly a monster advances up the aisle. Oh please
Please, I want to call. Take me away... away... away...*

*Hot breath on my neck. Someone grabbed my wrist
But I can't turn around, I can't run away*

*So I grab my burning speech, I face
all the monsters that are the audience*

And I begin to speak.

Grace followed Kim's advice to underline the strongest line in her poem and let it guide a revision, fleshing out "A new beginning, a sense of freedom" to achieve the more potent "They can sense a new beginning, almost tasting their freedom." Meanwhile, Claire went back to her first draft to add detail for a richer atmosphere:

Once, I had a dream that I was standing on a cloud, at night. The sky was a dark velvet blue, and the stars were shining brighter than they do on earth. I felt a sense of immense power, and walked toward it. Soon, I came to another cloud where all of the Greek gods were sitting before me on huge thrones, like they do on Olympus.

Kim Stafford's visit accomplished precisely what we had hoped — that students would see poetry as a vehicle through which they can explore thoughts, ideas, and questions. Lianna's short poem encapsulates the sense of power and freedom Kim was able to help our Seniors tap through poetry:

*The answers pour into my mind
I am soaring through a sky of knowledge
I am swimming in a sea of answers
I am running through a field of questions*

LANGUAGE GUIDES OUR DRUMS

K-8 SONG, SPEECH, & DANCE

by Sarah Pope, publications editor

“Jack be nimble, Jack be quick. Jack jump over the candlestick.” This rhyme of fortune-telling — jumping a candle without extinguishing it was said to augur good luck — has been familiar to English-speaking children for at least two hundred years. Today, Laura Frizzell is using it to help a class of second- and third-grade Juniors grasp the concept of accented notes in music. Equipped with hand drums, the students beat the cadence of the rhyme, emphasizing Jack’s name each time it occurs. Some of these children have experience reading music from piano, violin, or guitar lessons, but for many Laura’s classes are their first encounter with musical notation. They are gaining fluency in the language of quarter rests and eighth notes, but most would still struggle to read and play the rhythm they are now producing with ease on the sure foundation of the nursery rhyme. “The language is guiding our drums,” she reminds them. Some of the students mouth the words to stay focused as the class divides and plays “Jack Be Nimble” in canon.

Now Laura changes the game, placing the emphasis in a different spot and asking the children which syllable of the rhyme she has accented. The students can easily identify it as the “ble” of “nimble” and can play the new rhythm back to her.

An hour later, eighteen Intermediates are poised with their drums, awaiting a turn to tap out a mystery rhythm based on character names from the Irish stories they have been learning: PAT-rick-o-KELL-ey. LEP-re-chaun-KING. Brows furrow in concentration as each fourth grader tries to master the technique of striking the drum loudly, softly, softly in accordance with the language. Laura points out that what makes Irish drumming exciting is where the accent falls. “And remember, we’re trying to *pull* sound *out* of our drums,” she tells them. To produce a clean tone, the arm must be gentle and relaxed and the hand must rebound from the drumhead rather than falling upon it. The students must partner their drums almost as dancers.

The exercises Laura is leading this morning are just a few of the guy-wires that will support a performance of poetry, storytelling, dancing, and student-composed drum and tonebar accompaniment at the all-school Ceili. This celebration rooted in Irish tradition has been an annual event at Arbor since Una Whitcomb, a beloved Dublin-born teacher, came to the school nearly 20 years ago. Ceili honors the inextricability of word, music, and movement, the fluid shift from poem to song to dance. This spring, the K-1 Primaries memorize “Up the Airy Mountain;” the Juniors dance over a sound carpet of percussion as they sing “There Was an Old Woman Tossed Up in a Basket” and “On Saturday Night I Lost My Wife.” The Intermediates give us “At Galway Races” with a galloping 6/8 arrangement on tonebars and recorders; later they perform the story of Patrick O’Kelley’s blarney and the ring of truth gifted to him by the leprechauns. The Seniors offer poems, sing of the Sally Gardens, and lead the school in Irish dance: 1-2-3, 2-2-3, 3-2-3, 4-2-3. The whole community joins in favorite songs: “The Gypsy Rover,” “Roddy McCorley,” “Whiskey in the Jar,” “Wild Mountain Thyme.”



Penelope, Isabella, Paris,
and Jasper practice their
Irish drumming.

The idea that music, movement, and language are mutually supportive, like three legs of a stool, is central to the Schulwerk approach to elementary music education developed by Carl Orff (most famous as the composer of *Carmina Burana*) in the 1920s and '30s. The Schulwerk has been influential on Laura's practice, as it has been for music teachers throughout the world who seek to build upon children's innate musicality. Young children quite naturally gesture and move while speaking, vocalize over a large range of notes, and respond to rhyme and predictable rhythms. Traditional schoolyard games often link all three performative elements with hand-clapping or jumping, chanting, and singing. Hand-jives and jump-rope rhymes are often heard above the happy din of recess — the satisfying slap of the rope on the beat,



punctuating a wild tale of “forty robbers at your door,” seems to appeal to children all over the world. The Schulwerk recognizes that bringing those games into the classroom is a simple and effective way to teach music without losing its connection to dance and language. Has “Jack Be Nimble” survived for centuries because children are clamoring to transcribe it into rhythmic notation? Not exactly. Nursery rhymes have endured because of their concentrated musicality and rich imagery.

Laura demonstrates with a class of Primaries: “Queen Queen Caroline / washed her hair with turpentine / Turpentine made it shine / Queen Queen Caroline,” they chant as they practice stately, regal movement to the pulse of the rhyme. They develop Queen Caroline's character, composing new verses, and they begin to use a rudimentary music notation to mark out the rhythm. They clap it, play it on drums, and lay out a twisty lane of quarter and eighth notes for Queen Caroline's “garden path.” Although the Primaries don't stay long with the Queen, the quarter and eighth notes travel forward into new lessons.

In the Junior class, the music reading progresses on the backs of other rhymes and poems. Laura lays out flash cards printed with the words of the poem on one side and the corresponding rhythm on the other, this time written in the standard musical notation for quarter and eighth notes. The students can mix up the cards to create new rhythms to play — as well as nonsense poems when the cards are flipped over. In this way, the rhymes and chants serve as kindling for the children's own compositions, illustrating their understanding through individual performance and in ensemble. When the Juniors create their own compositions inspired by poems, they begin with a close reading of the language, underlining their favorite words or phrases and deciding how best to emphasize and illustrate those passages musically. A word like *sizzle* might suggest the introduction of a cymbal played with a wire brush, while *shiver* might require a light frisson of windchimes. Carl Orff and his partner, Gunild Keetman, titled their collection of music for the Schulwerk “Musica Poetica” and wrote that the kinds of speech exercises Laura leads should be thoughtfully selected:

See that each word is spoken in such a way that it becomes alive, and concentrate particularly on the sound of each word. “Crocus” compared with “fritillary;” the sharp sound of “blackthorn” and “buckthorn” in contrast to the legato “winter heliotrope;” the gentle “daffodil” compared with the dark-sounding “rose.”

Inviting students to attend to the music and movement of individual words sensitizes their ears to nuances that will make them stronger writers as well as musicians. Language can help to develop musical intelligence, but music can simultaneously help to develop linguistic intelligence. As the poet Ezra Pound wrote, “The poem fails when it strays too far from the song, and the song fails when it strays too far from the dance.” The inflection, analysis, expression, and collaboration Arbor students practice in their music and in their writing come beautifully into harmony this Ceili, as the Seniors recite Seamus Heaney’s “Alphabets” and William Butler Yeats’s “The Lake Isle of Innisfree.” Trading lines or speaking together, each voice blending with its neighbors or rising solo at the appointed moment, the performers must be perfectly attuned to one another and to the movement of the poem itself: they hear the music of the language “in the deep heart’s core.”



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Cambium

INNOVATIVE K-8 CURRICULUM FROM THE ARBOR SCHOOL OF ARTS & SCIENCES

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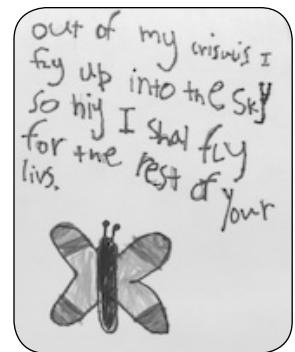
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Masthead by Jake Grant, after an 1890 botanical illustration.

The Arbor School of Arts & Sciences is a non-profit, independent elementary school serving grades K-8 on a 20-acre campus near Portland, OR. Low student-teacher ratios and mixed-age class groupings that keep children with the same teacher for two years support each child as an individual and foster a sense of belonging and community. An Arbor education means active engagement in learning, concrete experiences, and interdisciplinary work. For more information on the Arbor philosophy, please visit www.arborschool.org.

The Arbor Center for Teaching is a private, non-profit organization created to train teachers in the Arbor educational philosophy through a two-year apprenticeship while they earn MAT degrees and licenses, and to offer guidance to leaders of other independent schools. In 2007 its mission expanded to include the publication of material underpinning the Arbor School curriculum.



Butterfly weathergram by Zia, grade 1

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