

- her some undivided attention provides important practice time and moral support.
- Invite the school reading specialist to discuss common reading problems in a simple and understandable manner.

Suggested Titles for Independent Reading and Research

- Bradby, Marie. *More Than Anything Else*. Illustrated by Chris K. Soentpiet. New York: Orchard, 1995.
- Hest, Amy. *When Jessie Came across the Sea*. Illustrated by P. J. Lynch. Cambridge, Mass.: Candlewick Press, 1997.
- Hopkins, Lee Bennett. *Good Books, Good Times!* Illustrated by Harvey Stevenson. New York: HarperCollins, 1990. (Poetry selections.)
- Johnston, Tony. *Amber on the Mountain*. Illustrated by Robert Duncan. New York: Dial, 1994.
- Kraus, Robert. *Leo the Late Bloomer*. Illustrated by Jose Aruego. New York: Windmill Press, 1971.
- Lautre, Denzie. *Running the Road to ABC*. Illustrated by Reynold Ruffins. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996.
- Lyon, George Ella. *Book*. Illustrated by Peter Catalanotto. New York: DK Ink, 1998.
- Marshall, Rita. *I Hate to Read!* Illustrated by Etienne Delessert. Mankato, Minn.: Creative Editions, 1992.
- McGugan, Jim. *Josepha: A Prairie Boy*. Illustrated by Murray Kimber. New York: Chronicle, 1994.
- McPhail, David. *Edward and the Pirates*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1997.
- Miller, William. *Richard Wright and the Library Card*. Illustrated by Gregory Christie. New York: Lee & Low, 1997.
- Mora, Pat. *Tomas and the Library Lady*. Illustrated by Raul Colon. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997.
- Polacco, Patricia. *Aunt Chip and the Great Triple Creek Dam Affair*. New York: Putnam, 1996.
- . *The Bee Tree*. New York: Putnam, 1993.
- . *Pink and Say*. New York: Philomel, 1994.
- San Souci, Robert. *A Weave of Words*. Illustrated by Raul Colon. New York: Orchard, 1997.
- Stewart, Sarah. *The Library*. Illustrated by David Small. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1995.
- Williams, Suzanne. *Library Lil*. Illustrated by Steven Kellogg. New York: Dial, 1997.
- Winch, John. *The Old Woman Who Loved to Read*. New York: Scholastic, 1996.

Lesson 4

A Poetic Explanation of Me—Writing an Autobiographical Poem

SKILL: Following a Format to
Create an Autobiographical Poem

CULTURE OF FOCUS: All

Materials

- Whoever You Are*, by Mem Fox (Harcourt Brace, 1997)
- Copies of the "Autobiographical Poetry" instruction sheet (see end of lesson)
- Chart paper, overhead projector, or chalkboard
- Pens or pencils
- Art supplies (for final copy)

Lesson Motivator

1. Hand each student three strips of paper (each approximately 3 x 8 1/2 inches).
2. Ask students to write down something they like very much on one strip, something they fear or worry about on another, and a wish or a dream on the final one. The small size of the paper should ease the worries of students who do not like to write very much because there is not much room to do so on each strip.
3. When students have completed the task, invite volunteers to share, getting personal examples for each category.
4. Write the three categories on an overhead, chart paper, or the chalkboard. Record contributions in the appropriate categories.

5. Review each category with the class. Ask if other students wrote something similar. If so, discuss the fact that even though the classroom is filled with distinctive individuals from a variety of backgrounds, they share many of the same feelings, worries, and dreams.
6. Invite the students to look for themselves in the faces in *Whoever You Are*, a seemingly simple book with a powerful message.

Suggestions for Teaching the Lesson

- Ask the students to put their strips of paper aside to be used later and to direct their attention to the book. Read the book, allowing students time to study the unique artwork. When you are done, invite discussion. What are the similarities shared by people around the world? List the responses on the chalkboard or overhead. Do the students agree or disagree with the message in this book? If necessary, set the tone for a sharing environment by reminding the learners that they need to be sensitive to the feelings of others. It is essential to respect the ideas and opinions of others as they explore who they are through words and poetry.
- Hand out copies of the "Autobiographical Poetry" instruction sheet for students to use in writing poems about themselves. Explain that one easy way to begin to write poetry is to follow a prescribed format. Because they will be writing about themselves, they will be writing an autobiographical poem. For a future assignment, they may choose to adapt the poem, writing in social studies about a well-known person, or in reading describing the main character in a novel they have just completed. Tell the students that at that point they will be writing a biographical poem because it is about someone other than themselves.
- Have students go back to their strips of paper and see how their initial ideas can easily transfer to this poem. Read a poem that you have written as an example of what the completed version might be like. It is usually heartening for students to see the messy creative process that even teachers go through, so include several of your drafts for their scrutiny as well.
- If necessary, have the class create a poem together, writing about a person with whom they are all familiar. Of course, in this context, they are working on a biographical poem. A popular member of the community or a revered sports figure might be the subject of the group poem. Give students time to brainstorm ideas for each category before listing them on the chalkboard or overhead. Once all ideas have been shared, talk about which three would be the best for each area and write out a draft of the poem. Discuss and polish the work together. Write a final draft and then turn the creative process over to the students, letting them begin on their own autobiographical poems.
- Working from the draft stage, go through the writing process as practiced in the classroom until polished versions of the poetry are completed. Provide a variety of materials for students to use to publish their poems, from interesting paper to supplies for artistic embellishments.
- Students might sit in an "Author's Chair" at the front of the room as they read their poems or they may simply stand by their desks if it is less intimidating for them to read their work aloud that way.
- Display the poems attractively on a bulletin board so that they can be read and enjoyed by the entire class. This activity can be done at the beginning of the year as a memorable way for students to get to know one another.

Evaluation

- List the criteria for evaluation on a poster or on the chalkboard for students' use. Focus on spelling, punctuation, and neatness. Include criteria for reading the poems aloud. Students should evaluate their success in meeting these criteria and discuss their assessments with you.

Extensions

- As mentioned previously, this format can be adapted to highlighting a memorable historical figure in social studies. The artwork can extend the poem—for example, write the poem on a silhouette of the character, or depict key events in the person's life in small sketches around the border of the paper.
- To introduce a favorite character in a novel, students can write a biographical poem. This activity is one way to evaluate how critically a student read and thought about the main character and the changes that individual underwent as the story evolved. Have students illustrate appropriately.
- Have students celebrate a parent or grandparent following the format and present the polished product on Mother's Day, Father's Day, or Grandparents' Day.
- Move from this format to a student's choice of poetic form. Often an exercise such as this is an invitation to enter the world of poetry by overcoming the worry of having to rhyme, opening the doors to experimentation and resulting in some beautiful personal writing.
- Work in small groups to select and set short descriptive poems to music. Present an "Autobiographical Review" backed with music or a general "Poetry Review" highlighting a series of the short, descriptive poems.

Post the poems on a website (such as one of the websites suggested in Appendix III), as an additional way of publishing.

Suggested Titles for Independent Reading and Research

Begay, Shonto. *Navajo: Visions and Voices across the Mesa*. New York: Scholastic, 1995.

Carlson, Lori M. *Sol a Sol: Bilingual Poems*. Illustrated by Emily Lisker. New York: Henry Holt, 1998.

———, ed. *Cool Salsa: Bilingual Poems on Growing Up Latino in the United States*. New York: Holt, 1994.

Cooper, Floyd. *Coming Home: From the Life of Langston Hughes*. New York: Philomel, 1994.

Giovanni, Nikki. *Grand Mothers: A Multicultural Anthology of Poems, Reminiscences, and Short Stories about the Keepers of Our Traditions*. New York: Holt, 1994.

———. *Spin a Soft Black Song*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1987.

Greenfield, Eloise. *For the Love of the Game: Michael Jordan and Me*. Illustrated by Jan Spivey Gilchrist. New York: HarperCollins, 1997.

Grimes, Nikki. *A Dime a Dozen*. Illustrated by Angelo. New York: Penguin/Putnam, 1998.

———. *Meet Danitra Brown*. Illustrated by Floyd Cooper. New York: Mulberry/Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Books, 1994.

Hirshfelder, Arlene, and Beverly Singer, selectors. *Rising Voices: Writings of Young Native Americans*. New York: Scribners, 1992.

Hoberman, Mary Ann, selector. *My Song Is Beautiful: Poems and Pictures in Many Voices*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1994.

Janeczko, Paul B. *Looking for Your Name: A Collection of Contemporary Poems*. New York: Orchard/Jackson, 1993.

Navasky, Bruno, trans. *Festival of My Heart: Poems by Japanese Children*. New York: Abrams, 1993.

Nye, Naomi Shihab. *What Have You Lost?* Illustrated with photographs by Michael Nye. New York: Greenwillow, 1999.

Slier, Deborah. *Make a Joyful Sound: Poems for Children by African American Poets*. Illustrated by Cornelius Van Wright and Ying-Hwa Hu. New York: Scholastic, 1991.

Soto, Gary. *A Fire in My Hands*. Illustrated by James M. Cardillo. New York: Scholastic, 1991.

———. *Neighborhood Odes*. Illustrated by David Díaz. San Diego, Calif.: Harcourt Brace, 1992.

Step toe, Javaka, ed. *In Daddy's Arms, I Am Tall: African Americans Celebrating Fathers*. Illustrated by Javaka Step toe. New York: Lee & Low, 1997.

Strickland, Dorothy S., and Michael R. Strickland. *Families: Poems Celebrating the African American Experience*. Illustrated by John Ward. Honesdale, Pa.: Wordsong/Boyd's Mills Press, 1994.

Thomas, Joyce Carol. *Brown Honey in Broomwheat Tea*. Illustrated by Floyd Cooper. New York: Harper Trophy, 1993.

Turcotte, Mark. *Songs of Our Ancestors: Poems about Native Americans*. Illustrated by Kathleen S. Presnell. Chicago: Children's Press, 1995.