



Poetic Writing: Personal Experience

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The Dove

THE LEARNING CONTEXT

The students in this class were asked to write about a personal experience that they had really enjoyed, and remembered well. The teacher modelled a brainstorm about a memorable experience of her own. She recounted the experience and then recorded the brainstormed details of that experience. Then she zoomed in, as on a video, to freeze-frame on one small part of her experience. She recorded her impressions as she saw them.

The students talked about their own experiences with a buddy and recorded key words on paper. Then they discussed their stories with the class in a sharing circle. As they spoke they were asked to close their eyes so that they could "see" the experience as it unfolded. As a class, they listened and shared their ideas as to what each student could focus on as their moment in time.

The teacher then told them to enlarge this snippet with lots of detail, step by step. They were asked to think about it and discuss it with their family at home that evening. They were to explain what they were doing and why they were taking such a detailed look at just one moment of the whole experience.

The next day the teacher modelled the planning of her snippet, while the students did their own planning. She began to turn her plan into the first stages of her draft. She shared this first phase with the class once they had completed their planning.

The teacher's writing was crafted with particular reference to using effective sentence starters, including plenty of detail and a strong sense of personal voice. This became the success criteria for their writing.

The students' next step was to begin their drafts, using their planning as a guide. They wrote in silence for about ten minutes and then returned to the mat, where they took turns reading in a sharing circle. They offered each other advice about their writing and suggested ideas when a student was not sure of the next step to take.

They were guided and led by the teacher, who encouraged them to use descriptive language and to enlarge on the detail. She shared her story with the class, and the students discussed her writing, considering ways to increase the quality of the writing. In this way their attention remained focused on the deeper features of their writing.

This process was repeated throughout the stages of writing. At the end of each conferencing session, the students wrote their own drafts sequentially and recrafted their work as and where necessary. Once the drafts were finished the teacher modelled the recrafting and proofreading of her writing, and then asked the students to do the same. They were reminded about checking their punctuation and spelling.

Teacher-student conversations

After writing, the teacher commented on features of the piece that linked to the success criteria:

Teacher: I think your opening sentence is great. What have you tried to do?

Temuera: I've tried to hook my readers in by creating an image in their heads.

Teacher: Wonderful. I love that phrase 'A white swirl sped past me'. Another part that stands out for me is when you talk about Dad and you nearly touching noses. Why do you think I like that part?

Temuera: It's a detail that helps people see it in their heads as well.

They also discussed ways of clarifying the sense of the dove's fragility, e.g., the phrase, "Suddenly a flutter sprang out of my hands".

INTEGRATING READING AND WRITING

With a shared reading, guided reading, and sustained silent reading programme of personal-experience texts, students can explore writing skills and strategies. Examples of these can be found in the *School Journal* and the Journals of Young People's Writing.

The teacher could also read the students' serial stories that involve sharing personal experiences. Examples might include *The Silver Sword* by Ian Serraillier or *I Am David* by Anne Holm. (Note: these are suggestions only. Choose a range of books that are appropriate for your students.) Such stories provide powerful models of the range of writing techniques that may be used when writing with impact; for example, the use of personal voice and the ability to engage and touch the reader.

Students could:

- identify ideas in the texts that are personally significant, and discuss how they have been developed
- locate personal voice in the writing and talk about its role and effectiveness
- examine the vocabulary and look at the range of verbs, adverbs, and adjectives
- identify the types of sentence structure, and discuss the rationale for varying sentence structures
- identify various language features, and discuss the purpose of each.



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WHERE TO NEXT?

To move Temuera towards the next learning step, the teacher might encourage him to focus on:

Impact

- have appropriate endings which are less abrupt.

Sentences

- develop more complex sentence structures and use conjunctions.

Spelling and punctuation

- identify and use punctuation and spelling strategies effectively through proofreading.

This could be achieved through:

- modelling of writing, with discussion about when and how to use the identified techniques
- exploration of appropriate writing models, such as other students' writing or published work
- regular individual conferencing.

CURRICULUM LINKS

English in the New Zealand Curriculum

Level 3: Writing Functions

Poetic Writing: Students should write on a variety of topics, shaping, editing, and reworking texts in a range of genres, and using vocabulary and conventions, such as spelling and sentence structure appropriate to the genre.

Levels 3 and 4: Reading and Writing Processes

Exploring Language: In achieving the objectives of understanding and using written language students should be able to identify, discuss, and use the conventions, structures, and language features of different texts, and discuss how they relate to the topic.

Thinking Critically: In achieving the objectives of understanding and using written language students should be able to discuss and convey meanings in written texts, exploring relevant experiences and other points of view.

English in the New Zealand Curriculum, pages 35–36

REFERENCES

Holm, Anne (2000). *I Am David*. London: Mammoth.

Ministry of Education (1994). *English in the New Zealand Curriculum*. Wellington: Learning Media.

Seraillier, Ian (1959). *The Silver Sword*. England: Penguin.



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The Dove

WHAT THE WORK SHOWS: The reader's attention is engaged through Temuera's strong sense of personal voice and effective use of imagery. A sense of the dove's fragility pervades this writing, which captures the sense of wonder that the writer experienced during his encounter.

Student's second draft

Deeper features

Voice

Personal voice apparent.

Ideas

Develops ideas that are personally significant, adding detail and comment.

Structure

Attempts to shape ideas for effect.

Sentences

Uses a variety of structures, including complex sentences.

Language features

Appeals to the senses. Adds interest through use of imagery, especially similes.

Vocabulary

Uses a range of vocabulary, for example, verbs denoting strong actions, specific nouns, precise adjectives and adverbs.

The Dove

A white swirl sped passed me then I noticed that it was a snowy white dove I picked it up it felt like a piece of soft velvet. I walked up the pit that I found it in and showed it to mum she said that I should be careful with it because I might damage it's wings just then dad came riding up the hill. He shouted what have you got in your hand I replied "a dove" he came closer and closer untill we were nearly touching noses he exclaimed "a dove a dove I said yes". Suddenly a flutter sprang out of my hands and I realized that it was the dove then it started to fall I sprinted over to were it fell and put it back were I found it and walked up the pit and mum said time to go.

Surface features

Grammar

Uses most grammatical conventions correctly, although there are a few errors.

Spelling

Spells most high-frequency words correctly.

Demonstrates good understanding of all basic sounds and patterns in written English.



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Student's second draft

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