



Poetic Writing: Personal Experience

LEVEL 1i 1ii 1iii 2 3 **4** 5

Brussels Sprouts

THE LEARNING CONTEXT

This class had been focusing on personal experience writing for about one month before this piece was produced.

The teacher began this particular lesson by sharing a number of journal stories, and a variety of adult short stories and novel extracts. These included *Angela's Ashes* by Frank McCourt, *Nine Parts of Desire* by Geraldine Brooks, and *Mama Makes Up Her Mind* by Bailey White. She then questioned them extensively: Do you like this piece? Why do you like it?

As a result, the teacher encouraged the students to discuss and practise using a number of literary devices, including humour, language features and images, and linking the beginning and the conclusion.

After several story-sharing sessions, the students were encouraged to tell their own stories. Their partners questioned them about their experience, and each student focused on the most interesting part.

They began to write their initial drafts, having been reminded that they should include some of the devices they had already examined.

After the first drafting stage, the teacher began group conferencing. She selected one or two pieces from each group, enlarged them onto A3 paper, and pinned them onto a board. With her guidance, the group read and discussed each piece, providing positive criticism and suggestions. The teacher would ask the group for advice: What could they do with this?

Teacher-student conversations

The teacher's main concern was to encourage Robin to develop an interesting beginning, and make the language more evocative. He completed two drafts and a published copy over four days.

Teacher: You have things in this piece which are very specific to you and your family, like "in jokes". Do you think this works for the audience?

Robin: I suppose no one will understand them. I can alter that.

Teacher: I really think you need to provide the audience with more detail. For example where did you put the brussels sprout? In which pocket?

Robin: My left jeans pocket.

Teacher: Good, I can see that now. What about the window? Tell me more about that.

Robin: Um, it's a louvre window. It's difficult to open and to throw things through!

Teacher: Yes! Can you include that somehow?

INTEGRATING READING AND WRITING

This particular lesson started with reading aloud and discussing a range of literary texts. In general, the teacher could use guided and shared reading sessions to explore:

- extracts from adult literature. Students could question and analyse pieces, identifying characters in the narrative and techniques used to convey the setting, and attempting to discover the subtleties of a piece
- the literary devices that a range of authors use, and their purpose
- ways to apply the terms "pace", "structure", and "consistency" to pieces of writing.

WHERE TO NEXT?

To move Robin towards the next learning step, the teacher might help him to focus on:

Audience

- encouraging him to target the audience independently – who are they and how are they going to be interested in what you have to say?

Sentences

- modelling and encouraging the use of a variety of sentence structures.

Contexts for learning could include:

- analysis of these reading and writing points in guided and shared reading lessons
- modelling and shared writing of these points
- specific feedback on his practice with them.

CURRICULUM LINKS

English in the New Zealand Curriculum

Level 4: Writing Functions

Poetic Writing: Students should write on a variety of topics, shaping, editing, and reworking texts in a range of genres, expressing ideas and experiences imaginatively, and using vocabulary and conventions, such as spelling and sentence structure.

Levels 3 and 4: Reading and Writing Processes

Exploring 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: 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



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REFERENCES

Brooks, Geraldine (1995). *Nine Parts of Desire*. New York: Anchor.

McCourt, Frank (1996). *Angela's Ashes*. New York, London: Scribner, Flamingo.

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

White, Bailey (1995). *Mama Makes Up Her Mind*. London: Vintage.



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WHAT THE WORK SHOWS: Robin demonstrates a strong personal voice in this “slice of life” piece of writing. He engages and maintains the reader’s interest through humour, vivid language and images, and careful, clever structuring.

Student’s second draft

Deeper features

Ideas

Explores an idea which is significant to him – a family meal.

Focuses on the items of specific interest, e.g., “threatening green balls”.

Structure

Shapes ideas for particular effect – note link between beginning and conclusion.

Organises ideas into paragraphs.

Sentences

Uses a variety of sentence beginnings for effect.

Language features

Uses language features to amplify content, e.g., personification, onomatopoeia, imagery.

Vocabulary

Brings writing alive by selecting a range of vocabulary to suit audience and purpose, e.g., precise nouns and verbs.

“TWANG-THOP!” One of them must have landed on nextdoor’s climbing bean frame Throwing brussel-sprouts out bathroom windows is fun!

You see It all started when Grandad slopped some brussel-sprouts on my plate.

I HATE brussel-sprouts!! Mum and Dad never make me eat them as long as I eat other vegetables.

The threatening green balls sat on my plate for most of dinner and then I had an idea. I quickly and quietly slipped them into my left jeans pocket and headed for the bathroom. I opened the bathroom door and my eyes rested on the Luever window. “Yes!” I thought. Luever windows are quite hard to throw stuff through – but I soon got it.

“Stop!”, “Splat”, I heard them falling to the ground outside.

Brussel sprouts none, Me one.

Surface features

Grammar

Uses most grammatical conventions accurately.

Spelling

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

Punctuation

Uses appropriate punctuation independently.



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Student's second draft

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I HATE brussel-sprouts! Mom and Dad never make me eat them as long as I eat other vegetables.

The freatering green balls sat on my plate for most of dinner and then I had an idea.

I quickly and quietly slipped them into my left jeans pocket and headed for the bathroom.

I opened the bathroom door and my eyes rested on the Luever window. "Yes!" I thought.

Luever windows are quite hard to throw stuff through- but I soon got it.

"Slop!" "Splat", I heard them falling to the ground outside.

Brussel sprouts none, Me one.