



# Poetic Writing: Personal Experience

LEVEL 1i 1ii 1iii 2 3 4 5

## My Special Place

### THE LEARNING CONTEXT

The teacher introduced the idea of places that are special to us, and encouraged her students to brainstorm a range of places that people might find important. She told the students about her own special place, and invited them to ask questions to help them focus on the details she was describing.

The students then thought of their own special place and were asked to visualise it with their eyes shut. This would help them to “zoom in” on the details. They could use the five senses to do this: What could they see? What could they hear? What could they smell, touch, taste?

They were also asked to think of something significant or interesting that they had experienced in their special place. They had to describe it to a partner, who asked them to elaborate.

The teacher demonstrated how to create and record a “sunburst of ideas” using this theme, paying particular attention to the information they had recorded about their senses. She modelled a first paragraph about her special place from this sunburst and encouraged the students to rewrite it, focusing on a strong introduction and the use of interesting vocabulary.

Each student wrote an initial paragraph and received feedback from a writing partner about its effectiveness as an introduction. They continued to write for a few sessions, and then edited and proofread their work before publishing it.

### Teacher-student conversations

The teacher gave the following instructions before the drafting stage:  
Be really specific; Zoom into the picture; I want you to use your senses.

During editing with Frank, she talked with him about some of the significant language features of his writing:

- Teacher: Does your opening paragraph contain enough information to hook the reader?
- Frank: I think so. It's got “what, when, and where”. First of all I wrote, “When I was riding my bike”, but I changed it to “Coming back from riding my bike” to make it sound better.
- Teacher: I particularly like the part of your writing that describes you and Daniel coming down the hill. Why do you think I like that part?
- Frank: Well, what I've tried to do is write short sentences to build up a sense of movement.
- Teacher: Exactly. I can envisage you and Daniel coming down the hill really fast.

### INTEGRATING READING AND WRITING

During shared and guided reading, students could explore a range of personal-experience writing in published texts and cameo writing, especially from the *School Journal* and the *Journal of Young People's Writing*. The skills and techniques these authors use could be explored, processed, discussed, and evaluated. Links could then be established to the students' own writing.

Students could be encouraged to find examples of:

- effective imagery in personal-experience writing
- vocabulary which enhances the impact of the text
- the development of personal voice.

### WHERE TO NEXT?

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

To move this writer toward achieving at the next level, the teacher might help him to focus on:

#### Ideas

- providing substantial illustrations and details for his main ideas.

#### Vocabulary

- using a greater range of adjectives and adverbs for description.

#### Language features

- using imagery to evoke mood and feeling.

#### Punctuation

- paragraphing more effectively.

This could be achieved through:

- a guided and shared reading programme that identifies and explores the skills and techniques used by published authors
- modelling of writing that uses these techniques, followed by discussion
- regular individual conferencing.



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### CURRICULUM LINKS

*English in the New Zealand Curriculum*

#### Level 1: 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 1 and 2: 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*

### REFERENCE

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



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**WHAT THE WORK SHOWS:** Frank uses a strong personal voice to bring alive a personally significant event. He engages his reader through humour, simple (sometimes colloquial) language, and even some direct conversations. To create atmosphere and tension in his story he uses the present tense, and short sentences and phrases, but concludes in a more reflective manner.

Student's second draft

### Deeper features

#### Structure

Uses introduction, narrative, and reflection.

#### Sentences

Uses a variety of structures for effect.

#### Language features

Uses language that is deliberately simple, and sometimes colloquial.

#### Vocabulary

Engages the reader through humour and direct conversation.

#### Ideas

Explores a significant experience, and conveys a sense of its significance.

Supports main points with illustrations and interpretive comments.

### My special Place

Coming back from riding my bike at Waterloo School, my best friend Daniel suggested he'd show me his Secret base up one of the firebreaks that divide the hills surrounding the Hutt Valley. It was during the Summer Holidays.

I left my bike at Daniel's house and started the climb. Daniel's pace was incredible up the 55° slope. I had shoes on which lacked grip. I looked back. We were just above the roofs of houses. Daniel spotted a man working in a carpark. "You stink!", he yelled. The man heard. Unfortunately, everyone else in the Hutt Valley did as well. After an exhausting walk we turned right and saw the clearing. But first we had to make our way down a steep, leaf covered hill. Daniel chose to walk down. But his walk broke into a run. "Can't stop!", he yelled and it echoed across the valley once more. He finally crashed into a tree. I tried to crawl down. Too slow. I walked down. The walk broke into a run. I couldn't stop. The hill was too steep. As I leapt over a log, I felt like I could fly. I chose the same route as Daniel. Crashing into a tree. But Daniel hadn't moved so I crashed into Daniel. I bounced off him and hit the ground. Half winded, Daniel said. "There's the base down there". I got up and looked. I couldn't see it. "It's not here yet", Daniel said. And that's the only time I've been there.

You're right. Why would it be my Special Place if I've only been there once? But why would I be writing this? I'm imagining a place where I can hang out and relax. It'll always be my special place. The view makes my House look 5 metres off the ground. And we got there first. So there.

### Surface features

#### Grammar

Uses most grammatical conventions accurately.

#### Spelling

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

#### Punctuation

Uses most punctuation forms appropriately and accurately.

Demonstrates some understanding of paragraphing.



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## My Special Place

Student's final draft

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[extract]