



Poetic Writing: Personal Experience

LEVEL 1i 1ii 1iii 2 3 4 5

Snow Tears

THE LEARNING CONTEXT

The teacher selected three stories from her former students based on personal experience, and focused on the beginning of each. One had a strong personal voice (“I’m nervous and I don’t want to do athletics. I’m worried that people will laugh at me when I run”). The second began with dialogue (“‘Get up’, yelled mum, ‘It’s your birthday’”). The third began with the description of a scene.

In groups, the students then discussed: What makes a good beginning? and What type of openings capture your interest, and why? They all reported back and discussed these issues as a group.

They then brainstormed a list of “memorable moments” and put them into categories such as sad, happy, embarrassing, scary. Students were asked to close their eyes and picture their memorable moment, with the teacher “walking and talking” them through this experience, asking questions such as, What was in front of you? How did that make you feel? Which part is most significant? Why?

The students then brainstormed everything they saw and felt. They were reminded that it was a writer’s duty to enable the reader to experience their moment by painting a mind picture for them. They were also instructed to discuss their moment with a writing partner.

To avoid the problem of lengthy accounts that lacked audience appeal, the teacher asked the students to “zoom in” on the part that was most interesting to their audience.

The use of similes and metaphors was introduced, and models were provided for this specific teaching focus.

The students then received individual feedback on ways to improve their writing. Much of this was about providing a great beginning and maintaining a relationship with the reader throughout the piece.

Teacher-student conversations

After the first draft, the teacher questioned Loretta about some of the features of her writing:

Teacher: You’ve really captured the moment. Is there anything you can add so I can actually feel this moment?

Loretta: More description?

Teacher: What about using a simile or metaphor to do that?

Loretta: Yes, but I’m not sure where.

Teacher: You’ve used some strong images already. Let’s look at your ending to see if we can strengthen it.

Loretta: I could use personification to describe the mountain.

Teacher: Mmm, you could be thinking about that. I’ll leave you with it.

Loretta: I don’t like my beginning.

Teacher: Do you remember the piece we read that used ‘flashback’. Would that work?

Student: Yeah, that’s what I wanted to do but couldn’t think how to actually do it.

INTEGRATING READING AND WRITING

Opportunities should be sought in close and personal reading programmes for students to:

- relate their personal experiences to a variety of published texts
- discuss the meanings, language, ideas, and messages of published authors
- draw conclusions and make comparisons with their own writing
- focus on studying the audience and purpose of writing in independent reading
- discuss the organisational features that different authors use
- become familiar with a variety of reading and writing terms, such as consistency and pace.

WHERE TO NEXT?

To move Loretta towards the next learning step, the teacher might help her to focus on:

Ideas

- developing greater cohesiveness and fluency.

Language features

- developing an awareness of overwriting, particularly with regard to imagery and cliché.

Surface features

- encouraging closer final editing and dictionary use.

Contexts for such learning could include:

- continuing to expose her to a wide range of published texts
- modelling and regularly conferencing on language skills and techniques.



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CURRICULUM LINKS

English in the New Zealand Curriculum

Level 5: Reading and Writing Functions

Poetic Writing: Students should write on a variety of topics, shaping, editing and reworking texts in an extended range of genres, selecting appropriate language features and using conventions of writing accurately and confidently.

Levels 5 and 6: Writing Processes

Exploring Language: Students should be able to describe, discuss, analyse, and apply the distinctive conventions, structures, and language features of a range of texts, using appropriate terminology, and explain how they suit the topic and purpose.

Thinking Critically: Students should be able to interpret, analyse, and produce written texts, identifying and discussing their literary qualities, and explore and identify attitudes and beliefs in terms of personal experience and knowledge of other texts.

English in the New Zealand Curriculum, pages 35–36

NCEA (National Certificate of Educational Achievement)

Achievement Standard AS 90052: English 1.1 Produce Creative Writing.

www.nzqa.govt.nz/ncea/ach/English/AS90052.doc

New Zealand Qualifications Authority (2001).

PDF: www.nzqa.govt.nz/ncea/ach/English/as90052.pdf

Unit Standard 8813: Produce Poetic Written Text in Simple Forms.

www.nzqa.govt.nz/framework/explore/domain.do?frameworkId=973

New Zealand Qualifications Authority (2002).

REFERENCES

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



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WHAT THE WORK SHOWS: Loretta has maintained a strong voice in this deeply personal piece of writing. She has experimented with a range of images in an attempt to engage the reader and make the writing as vivid and honest as possible.

Student's second draft

Deeper features

Ideas

Supports ideas with substantial illustrations.

Structure

Shapes ideas for particular effect, experimenting with flashback in the beginning. Draws to a satisfying conclusion.

Withholds information to increase tension.

Sentences

Uses a variety of structures for effect.

Language features

Uses imagery, including metaphors and personification, with some impact.

Vocabulary

Selects and experiments with a range of vocabulary to suit audience and purpose.

Snow Tears

The engine in our creme station wagon moaned and groaned at every bump on the asphalt road, like a robot with flat batteries. I feel carsick, or maybe I just feel like my stomach's turned upside down when I think about yesterday.

It was a strange day in the classroom. I had little bumps on my skin and the rain was flowing like the Niagra falls off the guttering of the building. I know that rain come's from clouds but there wasn't a single grey cloud to be seen in the silent dull sky.

For no reason at all my stomach was filled with butterflies and the air was tight. I don't actually know why as I had no reason to be like that. As I was working, from the corner of my eye I could see the classroom door opening, a short figure with jet black hair appeared, I felt a shiver inside, I now knew straight away that, that woman was my mum. My mind suddenly twisted what was mum doing here? mum never comes into the classroom. As I looked into her eyes, the last butterfly in my stomach flew away. Her pale blue eyes howled a great sadness as she led me outside. I was paceing my steps at every chance. Then it clicked, the last migrating birds had flown, insect song had stilled as my mum blurted out the words the world turned upside down, cold and bleak, my cancer filled grandad was dead.

We had to travel to the funeral, it is 7 hours away, sitting for that long is depressing, memories keep flooding back. I glare out the window, I am feeling sick. I could see white fluffy snow on the banks of the road, and Mt. Reuapahu in its white Sunday outfit telling me to stop feeling sorry for myself ...

Surface features

Spelling

Spells most content and high-frequency words correctly.

Punctuation

Uses appropriate punctuation, generally.

Sometimes experiments, e.g., ellipsis to show omission.

Uses paragraphs effectively.

Grammar

Makes few intrusive errors.



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