

## Lesson Plan: Hurrah for Poetry!

By [Sarah Sahr](#)

For years, I have enjoyed helping English language learners explore the joys of poetry. And because April is National Poetry Month in the USA, what better time to share the crazy fun students can have with creating poems of their own? Now, I'm not talking about the kind of poems that rhyme, I'm talking about the poems that our students might not recognize right away as poems. For example, have you ever hear of Cinquain Poems? These simple 5-line poems help students to touch base with parts of speech and description (more information can be found on [PIZZAZ](#)). However, we're going to go a bit further... I like to have students create poems about what they love the most.

<b>Materials:</b> Poem print-outs, brown lunch bags, several slips of paper or 3" x 5" cards cut in half (at least 10 per student), glue, and construction paper
<b>Audience:</b> Middle school students, ages 11–13; upper intermediate
<b>Objective:</b> Students will be able to analyze two distinct forms of poetry. Students will be able to differentiate between poetry styles.
<b>Outcome:</b> Students will write a poem of their favorite things.
<b>Duration:</b> 50–65 minutes (times are approximate)

### Introduction (15 minutes)

It is important that you start class without students knowing what they are about to do.

Have students line up in alphabetical order by their first names. From there, form groups of four to five students. This can be by counting off (all "1s" are a group, all "2s" are a group, etc.), or you can just take the first four to five student and make a group, the next four to five students and make a group, etc. Hand out the following poems, one to each group:

1. [The Game of Fives](#)
2. [A Boat Beneath the Sunny Sky](#)
3. [Echoes](#)
4. [The Crocodile](#)
5. [You are old Father William](#)

(These are all Lewis Carroll poems; more Lewis Carroll poems can be found [here](#). Also check out PoemHunter's [Top 500 Poets](#) list to access thousands of other poems.)

After about 5 minutes, ask students, what are these?

Next, hand out the following poems to the groups (do not change the print formatting). Ask students to try and make sense of them. What are they?

1. [because it's](#)
2. [r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r](#)
3. [l\(a](#)
4. [silence](#)
5. [!blac...](#)

(These are all e.e. cummings poems; more e.e. cummings poems can be found [here](#).)

After about 5 minutes, ask students, what are these?

Hopefully, by now, you have reached a point in class where students are inferring that poetry can take on many different forms. Ask students, “Which type of poem do you prefer? Why?”

### **Preparing** (15–20 minutes)

For the actual construction of a poem, students will leave their groups and find a place where they can focus on their work. Give each student a brown paper page and several slips of paper. On each slip of paper, students will write down a thing they enjoy; we'll refer to these as poem starters. It can be something they enjoy doing, being, having, hearing, feeling, and so on. Remind them to write only one poem starter per piece of paper. As they finish writing their starters on the slips of paper, the papers go into the brown paper bag. It would be great if each student came up with at least 10 starters.

### **Organizing** (10 minutes)

Once students have all their slips of paper in their bags, have them shake the bags up! (There needs to be randomness to the next part of the activity.) Each student will pull a single slip of paper out of his or her bag, one at a time. The first slip of paper goes in the middle of the desk. Students pull a second slip and decide if it goes before or after the first. Students pull a third... where does it go? It is important to note to students that their starters do not have to be in any particular order. It can be completely random, they can arrange them in order of most to least favorite, or they can arrange them any other way they'd like; there is no set pattern in this type of poetry.

### **Closing** (10 minutes)

Once students have pulled all their starters and arranged them on their desks, allow students to pick a colorful piece of construction paper. Students should glue their slips of paper to the construction paper in the order they appear on their desk. The arrangement on the paper does not have to be linear; some lines can be crooked (if space permits). It's poetry... anything goes.

If needed, here is an example of what a student might come up with:

*feeling loved*  
*a cat purring while nestling close*  
                   *being healthy*  
*making a huge dinner for friends and family*  
                   *tennis*  
*whispering new secrets to old friends*

*being hugged by someone twice your size  
getting that song out of your head  
    living simply  
receiving another stamp in your passport  
    sitting by a campfire  
knowing you have another 45 minutes of sleep  
                    feeling safe  
learning new things  
    having someone read to you  
singing along with that song on the radio  
haggling for a good deal  
    cookouts & croquet  
                    72 and breezy  
being at peace with all things*

There is no need to collect these poems.\* However, you are the teacher. It is your classroom. It might be nice to see what your students came up with.

Let me know how it goes...  
Leave a comment below!

*\*Writing poetry can be very a very private event, especially for middle schoolers. It is important for students to know that their poems will be kept safe. As a teacher, I would use a lesson like this as an introduction to poetry; nothing more. I wouldn't necessarily collect my students' poems for grading. I might suggest that students can put them in their weekly journal entry or turn them in for a writer's workshop piece.*

You can find past *TESOL Connections* lesson plans and activities in the [TESOL Connections archives](#), or you can visit the [TESOL Resource Center](#). From there, search keyword "connections," and you will find about 20 resources by Sarah Sahr.

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