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Painting the Sky

writing POETRY with children

Shelley Tucker, Ph.D.

Illustrated by Margaret Anne Suggs





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This book is for Caitlin Wilson, age 4,
who speaks and lives poetry.

“The hearts are writing poetry.”

Caitlin Wilson




“He...who aspires to be a great poet,
must first become a little child.”

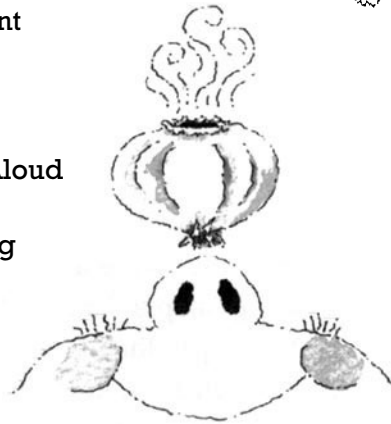
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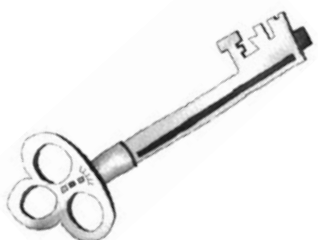









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POETRY WRITING IS A BRIDGE

Poetry writing is a bridge that connects children to the relevance of writing, reading, learning, honesty, and community. Passage on this bridge is open to all children, and successful crossings are guaranteed. This is because poetry writing relies on the senses, emotions, and history of each child. Success as a poetry writer is not dependent on academic achievement. Rather, poetry writing and sharing pave the way for greater social development and academic success.

Concepts vs. Structures, or Why It Is Easier for Most People to Write Personification Than Haiku

Poetry writing is usually taught to children through the use of structures, like limericks, haiku, and cinquains. This structured approach often stresses rhyme patterns, word counts, and syllabication rather than content.

There are a number of limitations in the use of set structures to teach poetry writing. Children often feel locked into forms which neither adhere to standard English language nor provide enough space for them to express their thoughts. As a result, they change their ideas to fit the forms, losing the immediacy and accuracy of their original thoughts and feelings. Because children often see poetry structures as external to the ways they think and speak, they usually stop writing poems after a unit of poetry instruction.

Teach children to write with poetic elements, like metaphors, similes, and personification, and they learn ways to easily express their thoughts and emotions. Rather than limit ideas, feelings, and memories to fit forms, poetic elements are the concepts that carry and expand thought. Children find poetic elements easy to understand and apply because these forms are present in everyday language. When children write with poetic elements, they learn