The One-Sentence Poem: Creating An Uncommon Simile & Choosing Line Breaks

Grades: 1st through 10th

Description:

In this writing exercise students will experience the ease and excitement of creating a descriptive one-sentence poem of unusual imagery through the use of one uncommon verb for the subject and an extension of the image with an uncommon simile. Students will be required to consider good word choices and precise details. This is also a good experience with line breaks.

Activity: (1st and 2nd grade teachers note adaptations at the end of instructions.)

1) Recite the "Spiders" poem on the handout without revealing the title. Let students guess the subject. After a few have guessed, tell the group to think about the verb, "blossom," to mean "appear," the way a bud, when opening, appears as a flower for the first time. Ask students to make a fist and slowly open their hands, in the motion of a bud opening.

2) Invite them to continue guessing the subject, thinking about things that appear at different times in different places. Some students might guess the subject to be stars, since the subject is "searching for the moon," and the "ceiling" could be a metaphor for the sky. If they guess stars, remind them that the poet used stars as the comparison. Some might guess clouds. (Be open to acknowledge all responses as valid, since a response is a student's feeling about the poem, and those feelings should be validated.) If no one guesses the poet's subject, tell them the title and recite the poem again.

3) Write the "Spiders" poem on the board and point out how the simile in the third line is not flowers, even though the verb is "blossom." You might change the poem from that line to the end to focus on how a common simile would not maintain the imaginative feeling. (They blossom/on the ceiling/like flowers/growing beautifully/in a garden.) Then recite the Spiders poem again so they can hear the difference.

4) Point out the structure of the poem. Note that the one-sentence has been broken into five lines. Next to the first line write "what the subject does." Next to the second line write "where." Next to the third line write "simile" or "like what." (At this point have them consider the simile again and note how it is an uncommon simile for the verb, "blossom.") Next to the fourth line write what the simile is doing and point out that the verb is not the common one for stars like "twinkling" or "shining." Next to the fifth line write "where."

5) Try a collaborative poem on the board about a subject like a river, and have the uncommon verb be one like "slithers." When you get to the third line, emphasize that the simile should not be a snake.

6) Give each student a different subject/verb slip which you have cut out of the handout sheet. Tell them they will be writing a poem which follows the five-line format. Let them know they will be able to share their poems afterwards, so if they want the class to guess the subject, they should not let anyone see the slip they receive. They also might not write the title on their paper. Remind them that this is not a "what am I" riddle poem, so they need to keep that in mind by concentrating on the five-line format.

It might be helpful if a few prepositions are listed on the board to help students make the transition at the beginning of the second and fifth lines: above, across, around, below, in, on, through, etc.

Sometimes, in the process of writing, some students will end up with a slightly changed form, but if the poem works, avoid asking them to change it to conform strictly to the suggested format. For example, some might develop the concept of "when" instead of "where" for the second or fifth lines. In my experience with this technique, I have received some poetry gems from students who have veered somewhat from the exact five-line designations.

Teachers of younger grades may want their students to stay with the word, "blossom," and choose a subject from a list the teacher has written on the board.

Supporting Documents: "The One-Sentence Poem" Samples
                                         "The One-Sentence Poem" Subject/Verb List