

Teaching English Through Writing Verse Poetry

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INTRODUCTION

Writing verse poetry is an activity that is little used in teaching language to foreign learners. It is usually regarded as being too difficult for foreign learners and having little relation to fundamental language learning. However, writing verse poetry has many beneficial effects for all areas of language learning. In addition, foreign learners of most all levels can do verse poetry writing. Poetry writing exercises can provide students practise with using grammar, using language creatively, improving one's command of a language, increasing one's vocabulary and repertoire, and expressing ideas and feelings. Also, poetry writing can get students more interested in using and learning a language. The purpose of this essay is to show how poetry writing can be used to teach English language. This essay focuses on verse poetry: poetry with rhyme and metre. Parts of the essay may hold true for free verse, but the focus is verse poetry. Also, this essay deals mainly with foreign language learners in Japan, but material in the essay may apply to native and foreign learners of English in any country.

WRITING POETRY

Poetry is not daily conversation. However, it is communication. What a student writes can help one with all areas of a language by making one more versed in the language. Molotsi (2001) found that using poetry greatly helps enhance a student's writing and speaking skills. "It is important for students to be aware of certain important features such as rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, metaphor, onomatopoeia, similes, and personification. These aspects of language are used more frequently in poetry than in any other written genre, and they add a rich dimension to the written word." (Molotsi, 2001:31) "One goal of foreign language instruction should be the ability to express creatively and freely the richness of relevant experience. Poetry writing is an appropriate vehicle for this type of

expression and it may be presented in a manner that stimulates creative thinking and creative oral production in the foreign language as well.” (Hiller, 1980:1)

“Teachers have a responsibility to teach the expectations of an English-reading audience to L2 writers.” (Takagi, 2001:7) Native speakers learn their language not only from grammar lessons but also from many kinds of experiences. They are fluent with their language from daily life experiences before even studying it at school. Poetry is a common part of these experiences. “Practically all children hear and learn nursery rhymes when they are very young, so they are somewhat conditioned to poetry that has metrical pattern.” (Powell, 1968:65) Native speakers are familiar with rhyme and metre. Learning how to write verse poetry gives a foreign learner a more rounded experience of English.

“Poetry can never be a surrogate for the mother tongue, but it can offer students whose first language is not English the opportunity for a success that they have not yet been able to achieve in more standard forms of evaluation. Most important, poetry helps students to become excited about words. This enthusiasm and sensibility for language will be transferred into other spheres of discourse: their reading, essays, and everyday conversations.” (Dean, 2002:28)

Not all students enjoy poetry writing, but some students may find a new interest in language through poetry writing. Hiller says that the limited, repetitious, concrete contexts and situations often presented in the foreign language classroom must tend to reinforce the learner’s feelings of limitation and inhibition. (Hiller, 1980:4) In art or music class, it is important to let students play with paint or musical instruments to discover and enjoy. Discovery leads to learning, and enjoyment leads to a desire to learn. Like writing skits for class presentation, writing poetry is a chance for students to discover and enjoy.

Though people usually focus on the artistic elements of poetry, an understanding of many linguistic points is necessary. Even when writing short poems, writing poetry gives students lots of practice with prepositions, articles, sentence structure, pronunciation, helping verbs, tense, and other things with which even high level students often have trouble. “Writing poetry helps a student improve one’s command of language.” (Powell, 1968:5) Dean’s study (2002) shows how a boy from Sudan, who had difficulty and frustration with English grammar, found it easier to communicate by writing poetry and learned how to use English grammar better.

Poetry writing is a creative activity. Although students are not specifically memorising facts, they do retain many of the skill and facts used in the exercises. Creative learning activities such

as teaching others, practising by doing, and demonstration have a higher rate of retention than passive learning activities such as reading, listening to lecture, or watching video material. (Hisama, 2001)

WRITING VERSE POETRY

Poetry writing also has extra memory enforcing traits not common in other creative activities: rhyme, metre, and rhythm. Television commercials use songs with rhyme, metre, and rhythm because they are more memorable than ones that do not. Many native English speaking students create poetic mnemonics to remember facts for tests, such as, “In 1492 Columbus sailed the ocean blue.” Dr. Seuss’s books are another example suggesting that verse poetry is more memory reinforcing than prose. For decades, Dr. Seuss’s books have continued to be widely popular in native English speaking countries for entertainment and education. The short, simple verses are catchy and easy to remember.

By writing poetry with rhyme and metre students are required to be aware of English stress and pronunciation, not in a passive way of listening and reading, but in an active way. To form rhymes, a student cannot rely on Japanese kana pronunciations of words but must work with English pronunciations. Students are required to think of pronunciation of English words by comparing them to pronunciation of other English words. To form lines with metre, a student cannot rely on the number of kana in a Japanese equivalent of the word but must use English syllables. Writing verse poetry in English challenges one to think in English. “When writing in English, Japanese writers may experience problems if they transfer the values, organisation, and structure of their first language to the second language.” (Takagi, 2001:7) “The very limited parallels between Japanese accent and English stress mean that English stress patterns have to be deliberately learnt and practised.” (Cross, 2002:11) “The rhythms of a language are easier to assimilate through poetry.” (Perrine, 1977:4)

A common problem that comes up when students write poetry is faulty rhyme and metre. The main reason for this is that the students are thinking in Japanese. First, Japanese poetry uses metre but not rhyme. Students need to be reminded to have rhyme. Second, one cannot properly use metre and rhyme in English while thinking in Japanese kanas. For example, in Japanese, the words ‘bat’ and ‘but’ are written with the same kana: 「バツ ト」. Students think they rhyme when in English they do not rhyme. Also, Japanese students need to understand that a rhyme usually includes a vowel sound. All words ending in ‘n’ do not rhyme. Many students think ‘l’ and ‘r’ are the same sound and try to rhyme words like ‘beautiful’ and ‘year’. Likewise, students often have trouble with metre. The word ‘friend’ is one syllable in English, but in Japanese it is

four syllables: 「フレンド」. These problems show where doing verse poetry can be helpful. Students who have trouble with metre can use a dictionary to check the syllables of a word.

There are other benefits to writing verse poetry. Having a set metre and rhyme require a student to be more resourceful and flexible. Corrigan noticed an increased vocabulary in students even though they are not doing vocabulary exercises. (Corrigan, 2002:36) Molotsi noted that, “because they (the students) are being so expressive, their vocabulary base broadens immensely. Most important of all, their writing ceases to be dull and non-captivating and becomes rich and interesting.” (Molotsi, 2001:33)

“Poetry has taught me that injecting what I used to think of as an ‘artificial’ element into the writing process — having to come up with a rhyme or stay in a rhythm, for instance — often breaks us out of thinking ruts and produces something fresh and less superficial.” (Dehtier, 2002:277)

In order to fit the rhyme and metre, a student needs to think of different, acceptable ways to say the same thing. Sometimes this may be as simple as using the word ‘lovely’ or ‘beautiful’ in place of ‘cute’. Thus, a student is challenged to expand their vocabulary. Another common tactic is to contract or un-contract: ‘do not’ into ‘don’t’, ‘it is’ into ‘it’s’, etc. Other times a solution is more complex such as switching the sentence from active to passive, changing the subject, adding helping verbs, adding adjectives, or even changing the tense throughout the entire poem. In order to do this, one needs to think of a sentence not as single words but as units: subject, verb, phrase, clause, etc. As a result, a student becomes more aware of and more practised with grammatical structure.

A teacher may be concerned about the difficulty of requiring a metre and rhyme scheme. However, the set frame is actually helpful to the student. Powell says that, “the student enjoys having a specific structural model for each writing session. One then knows by the end of the period whether one has achieved the goal, and one has definite criteria against which to measure success.” (Powell, 1968:59) He also says people enjoy pieces that have a distinctive sound movement, much as they appreciate music that has a pronounced beat. (Powell, 1968:65) Many of my students regard the set metre and rhyme as a kind of puzzle, and they feel victory when they can finally make everything fit together.

In addition, the rules of rhyme and metre are not so strict as one might think. The rules are a bit flexible in areas. For example, ‘been’ can be made to rhyme with ‘bean’, ‘bin’, or ‘Ben’. ‘Violets’ may be pronounced in 2 or 3 syllables. Usually a line of metre has an even number of

syllables. A line of poetry may go one over the metre, but not one under. A poem with 4 syllables per line could have a line with 5 syllables but not one with 3. However, poetic liberties like these are not really necessary until doing more complex poems. By doing preparatory exercises with rhyme and metre, students can write simple poems using rhyme and metre.

A teacher does not need to deal with stress patterns such as iamb or trochee. Using them makes poetry writing unnecessarily difficult. As it is, most native speakers have difficulty with them. Many poems, songs in particular, ignore stress patterns or impose a different stress pattern on a word and yet are still fine poems. Foreign learner students have enough of a challenge with metre and rhyme. Requiring proper stress patterns can be a nice challenge to an enthusiastic student who begins to find writing verse poetry too easy. It would require students to be aware of the stress in individual words. However, for most learners it adds more frustration than learning, and it should be avoided.

EXERCISES

Most students already have a deeply set conviction that poetry is too difficult or boring. Thus a teacher needs to be careful to use exercises that work in small, clear steps so that students can see the connections between them. Any sentence, no matter how long and complex, can be broken down into small, simple sentences. It is important for the student to see how poetry can also be made in small simple steps.

Before even telling students that they are going to do poetry writing, a teacher can have students do preparatory exercises. Usually I use vocabulary exercises with rhyme and metre. The goal is to familiarise students with the concepts and give them a store of words for fitting rhymes and metre. Many exercises not related to poetry can be adapted to help with rhyme, metre, or poetry writing.

One simple exercise is to divide students into groups. Then the teacher writes a word on the board and asks students to find words that rhyme with it. Each successful rhyming word gets the group one point. This exercise can also be done with metre, asking students to come up with words that have only one syllable, two syllables, etc. When doing 3 or more syllables, a teacher may allow students to use compounds such as 'summer vacation', but many students come up with very long words like 'communication', 'university', and 'electricity'. Sometimes one person in each group becomes a caller while the others try to find or think of words. This exercise may be done verbally to get students speaking in English. However, a teacher could give the students one minute and have each student individually write down as many words as they can think of. This can be done as a quiz and the teacher could collect the papers.

Another exercise is to play 'I Spy' using rhymes. The original game has one person look around and think of something one can see. For example, a person could decide on a tree outside the window. Then the person says, "I spy with my eye something that starts with 'T'." However, in the rhyme version the person says, "I spy with my eye something that rhymes with 'sea'." Students must look around and try to guess what the person is thinking of.

A third activity is one called 'Echo'. Students form a circle. Normally the first person says something that can be added to: I went shopping and I bought garlic. The next student repeats the line but adds an item at the end: I went shopping and I bought garlic and chocolate. So it continues until one person makes a mistake and the game starts anew. This game can be done using not a sentence but rhyming words. The first person says a word. The next student must say the word and then add one that rhymes with it. This activity can also be done in teams, allowing students to work together.

Another activity is one that doesn't focus on rhyme or metre but uses lines of verse poetry. There is a game called 'dengon' game in which students form rows. The teacher whispers a sentence to the first person in each row, and the students continue to whisper it down the row until the last person gets the message. This can be done using lines of verse or even lines from songs to give students some experience with verse lines.

Powell (1968) has students do numerous kinds of exercises. There are many in his book, but they fall mostly into two categories. First, they do exercises to help students become more conscious of words and their uses. Second, he trains the students to sharpen their powers of observation so that they may become increasingly aware of senses and emotions. One exercise is to have students divide words into categories such as quiet words, noisy words, slow words, and quick words. The key point is that students need to divide words based on how they sound or feel not on what they mean. After dividing words, the students are asked to write small, simple lines of prose using only quick words or only long words, etc.

Molotsi (2001) uses an interesting exercise to work on the students' senses and ability to describe. Beginning with sight, Molotsi brings an apple into the room and asks students to describe the colour without using the word 'red'. Some student responses were the following:

It is the colour of blood.

It is the colour I feel after drinking too much. (Molotsi, 2001:32)

The same can be done with other senses and objects.

When starting poems, one should take the same care as when starting prose writing. Students

should do very short poems at first. Short assignments are easier to do, and a student can do many, gaining more experience more quickly. Poetry forms should progress from concrete to freer forms. Having less freedom and fewer choices makes it easier for a student to make decisions. When teaching paragraphs, one doesn't start by asking students to write anything. Rather, one gives a specific assignment such as writing a description of another student or telling what job one wants and why. The concrete form should act as a guide to make the assignment easier to understand.

A good first poem for students is one called the form poem. The form poem is just a list of things that all relate to one topic. The first step is to choose a topic and write down 16 things that relate to the topic. This can be done as homework.

Fruit

apple, orange, banana, strawberry

pear, peach, lemon, melon

pineapple, kiwi, watermelon, cherry

grape, seed, sweet, eat

The next step is to find out how many syllables each word has. The third step is to find which words rhyme and choose two to use. The last step is to choose words and arrange them so that there are four syllables per line, and so that the ends of lines two and four rhyme. Sometimes this means coming up with new words or using previously rejected ones. It may also mean choosing a new topic.

Apple, orange

Peach, pear, cherry

Watermelon

Grape, strawberry

The form poem is free of most grammar restrictions, and that makes it easier for students to do. There are no sentences. Nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc. may be used. The only requirements are having proper meter and rhyme, and using words that all relate to the topic.

The form poem also works on a student's ability to associate words and ideas by finding words that relate to the topic. For more advanced work one could try to add alliteration, alphabetical order, order of importance, etc. A student could try writing a form poem with

longer metre or more lines. One could try a poem with a more complex rhyme scheme, such as making the odd lines rhyme too, or making all lines rhyme. One could even try adding sentences. Regardless, a teacher can have students do more than one form poem before moving on to a different poem form.

As a next step, the teacher can have students rewrite the poem 'Roses Are Red'.

Roses are red
Violets are blue
Sugar is sweet
And so are you

This uses the same metre and rhyme scheme that was used in the form poem so students are already familiar with it. When introducing anything new, it is easier on the student to introduce as few changes as possible. When going from the form poem to the 'Roses' poem, the new change is using sentences instead of single words. As with the form poem, after students have done a few poems in the 'Roses' form, a teacher can add more lines, longer lines, alliteration, or other details.

When doing the 'Roses' poem, a teacher can allow deviation from the basic form, but this should be done only when it helps the student. For example, a student may write a good poem that end up having 6 to 8 syllables per line. Instead of having the student cut it down to 4 syllables per line, a teacher could let the student write it with 6 syllables per line. After all, the necessary thing is not that the poem has 4 syllables but that it is balanced. It should have the same number of syllables per line.

DETAILS

There are some things a teacher needs to remember when doing poetry writing exercises. A teacher should remember that the practise is more important than the product. The purpose for doing poetry writing is to practise skills, not to make a collection of perfect poems. Sculptors, writers, chefs, and other artists do not try simply to follow directions perfectly and make flawless copies of things that already exist. They seek to master an art, to be able to make anything they like, and to have their works enjoyed. A teacher should not expect perfect poems with perfect grammar. A student who never makes a perfect poem in the day's lesson may still learn a lot from the work they do. The teacher should not let the exercise become frustrating by making it demanding.

“One must make provision for the pupil who, though of good intention, is simply not in the mood to produce anything on a particular day.... Any impatience by the teacher at a lack of on-the spot results would be unwise. Creation simply doesn’t work this way.” (Powell, 1968:110)

When first writing poetry, such as the ‘Roses’ poem, most students take 30 minutes to an hour to do just one, whereas a native speaker could do one in 5 minutes. Some students finish their first poem in 10 minutes, but a teacher should be patient. With practise, students become able to make poems more quickly.

Often, what seems to be laziness or lack of confidence can be dealt with by modifying the assignment so that it is easier to do or understand. A student having difficulty may begin by writing prose and then converting it into verse. A student who feels they cannot do all four lines may keep the first two lines the same and rewrite only the last two lines. This relieves the student of having to choose a rhyme. They just need to find a word that rhymes with ‘blue’. For example, one student wrote this:

Roses are red
Violets are blue
Nice to meet you
How are you?

The fourth line has only 3 syllables, and there is no connection of meaning between the first and second half of the poem. Regardless, the class loved it, which meant they could identify with it. All that remained was for the writer to add one more syllable to the fourth line.

On rare occasion, a student may even claim to be unable to redo even only the last two lines. A teacher can ask students to keep the entire poem the same, but find different words to replace ‘roses’ and ‘violets’. The words don’t have to rhyme. They only need the same number of syllables. When they have done that, ask them to redo only line four. As with the above poem, there does not need to be any connection of meaning, so long as the metre and rhyme fit. After that, they can redo line three. This may feel like spoon feeding a student, but the teacher must remember that many of the students may have never done any creative work in English. They need very clear goals in little steps. Asking another student to help the struggling student is another way to deal with the situation.

Some students force themselves to write a poem from start to finish as if writing an answer to

a question. A teacher should remind students that a poem does not need to be written linearly. One can start with any part of the poem and do it in any order. In fact, this is easier than writing linearly. When students do poems in the 'Roses Are Red' form, I find it easier for the students to write line 4 first. Then, find a rhyme and write line 2. Then, fill in the other lines. Writing the rhyming lines is harder than writing the unrhymed lines. Having students think of writing in a non-linear way may help them with writing prose since it encourages thinking of the text as a whole and going back to redo parts.

Another problem some students have is forcing oneself to work with a difficult rhyme. For example, a student may want to write a poem that uses 'sandwich' at the end of line four, but they cannot find a suitable rhyme for line two. The teacher can suggest a different way to rewrite line four using a word that is easier to rhyme.

Some students copy poems. Some students turn in poems that are almost exactly like the original 'Roses' poem, with only a few words changed. Some students turn in poems that are almost identical, though the poems are different from the original 'Roses' poem. Copying is one way of learning. In fact, students need examples. However, a student who adds nothing original and only copies can feel no achievement. A student needs to feel that they are doing something. Instead of criticising the student, the teacher should encourage ways to add originality. Ask the student to write another poem or rewrite the first poem with some changes: use different rhyme words, write the same kind of poem about a different topic, change line four, etc. As a student feels more competent, they begin to take larger steps of originality.

Before having students do the 'Roses' poem, a teacher should demonstrate on the board how to create a few poems as examples. A picture is worth a thousand words. Choose poems that are easy to understand and poems that show tactics students can use. Here are some examples.

Summer is hot
 Winter is cold
 Will you love me
 When we are old?

This poem shows that one doesn't have to use colours. Some students don't understand that until clearly shown. It also shows that one line does not have to be a complete sentence. A sentence can continue to the next line.

She is pretty

We are happy
We are free
We have fun

This poem intentionally has errors. Lines two and four do not rhyme. Also, lines three and four have only 3 syllables. A teacher can ask students to find the problems and fix them. One value to do doing poems on the board is that a teacher can explain their thoughts as they write. In this case, the teacher can show students how to deal with problems such as having faulty rhyme or metre. This poem also shows that even very simple sentences are acceptable. The poem is not beautiful, but it is good enough if it has proper poetic form. One can work on making a poem beautiful after one feels comfortable with writing verse.

Some students have no problems with the mechanics but have difficulty choosing a topic. Students need to forget any ideas that poetry is lofty or difficult, that it must be about nature or philosophy, or that it must have deep, secret, or profound meaning. Exaggerated ideas of poetry only make it more difficult and intimidating for students to try writing. A poem is often said to evoke or express feeling. It doesn't have to do so. It is enough for the poem to simply be interesting. Poetry can be about anything: school, cars, movies, chocolate, Sapporo, Doraemon, pirates, etc. Understanding this makes it easier for students to choose topics and write. "Too often the beginner thinks that exaggeration is a mark of good writing. One should be encouraged, if anything, to understate." (Powell, 1968:17) The goal of poetry writing exercises is not to turn students into poets, but to get students to use language in a creative and enjoyable way.

In all writing, poetry or prose, it is easier to write about what one knows. This is true for topic choice and word choice. A student does not have to use difficult language to write a good poem. A familiar topic is usually more enjoyable to write about because one already has thoughts and feelings about it. However, a student may eventually get bored with writing about things they like or writing about the same topic such as a pet.

One solution is for the teacher to assign a choice of topics. A teacher can make a list of topics such as hobbies, winter, school, animals, blue things, the beach, countries, movies, etc. Another idea is to use sensory stimuli: play music, show a picture, take students outside, etc. Have students write a poem inspired by the stimulus. A third option is to make the poem personal. Write about a favourite possession, a personal experience, something happy or sad, etc.

Poetry writing is suitable for almost any level of learner because one is free to write at one's own grammar level. Even in a class of mixed levels, all students can participate in the same activities.

“My experience has been that, given some guidance in form, content, and evaluation, almost every pupil in a group will eventually be able to produce something that satisfies him.” (Powell, 1968:104)

“It offers the less able pupil an outlet for self expression which one needs but is seldom able to enjoy in school. Achievement in creative work need have no direct relationship with native intelligence. Slower pupils see and feel like others, and they may write of their experiences as directly as faster pupils.” (Powell, 1968:7)

Non-English major students often write poems that are as good as but more creative than the poems from English majors. Some students who never stand out all year write three or five poems when other students write only one.

The only exception is true beginners. In order to write poetry, one needs experience upon which to draw. One needs to be familiar with some basic grammar and vocabulary. So far I have done poetry writing successfully with adults learners, college students, and high school students, even first year high school students. However, I have not yet tried it with junior high school students, and I would like to do so when the opportunity arises.

A teacher may wish to do the activities with the students. Students have more respect for a teacher who not only assigns work, but does it oneself. The teacher’s enthusiasm for writing can spread to the students. I try to encourage students by writing some humorous poems and sharing them with the class. The teacher can use their own writing experience to help the students, and a teacher can use their poems to show good and bad points.

Normally all writing takes place in the class period. Because students are novices, students need to be able to get help from the teacher at any time during the writing process. When students are skilled enough to complete a poem on their own, then a teacher may assign poetry writing as homework. However, even if no homework is assigned, a teacher should let a student work on poetry as homework if the student wishes to do so. If a student shows enough enthusiasm to assign oneself homework, the teacher should not discourage it.

Most students can complete a poem in a single class period. However, the teacher should be careful that an assignment can be done in time. Powell found that most students welcome the tension of the writing session, and derive benefit from the discipline that the time restriction imposes, benefit that extends even into such areas as the writing of examinations. (Powell, 1968:110) However, a teacher should make sure any tension is encouraging, not demanding or oppressive.

During class, students should be allowed to work alone or with others. Dean allowed students

to share ideas aloud. This not only created an imaginative environment for their writing and helped kids who were blocked, it also clarified what was expected for children who did not fully understand (the) initial directions. (Dean, 2002:26) For adult language learners, this process of group writing can be especially useful: The group discussions generate the vocabulary and structures needed to write in the second language, and the learners develop teamwork skills, which are skills needed in today's world. (Peyton, 1999:1) Even a student who works alone can gain encouragement by seeing others around one writing. At the same time, the teacher should make sure the class does not become so noisy as to disturb any of the writers, and the teacher should make sure students are not just socialising.

EXPANDING POETRY WRITING

A poetry writing programme can expand beyond creating poems. Anything done with prose writing can be done with poetry writing. Students could compile a book of poems. Poems could be printed in a school newspaper. Students could print their poems on large sheets of paper and embellish them with artwork. Students can even make riddles in poem form and present them to the class. An activity one can do with the form poem is to have students read their poems without giving a title. Then others try to guess the topic.

A teacher can assign poems to focus on specific grammar points. Any grammar point can be made into an additional requirement for a poem. For example, a teacher can require students to use past tense or 'if' clauses. Another example is this exercise. Each student writes a 'when' clause on a slip of paper: When I ate breakfast today... When I went to the park... When I was 12 years old... Students exchange papers randomly and complete the sentence so it makes a rhyming couplet. Likewise, a poem can focus on a theme that requires research. A teacher could assign students to each write a poem about a place they wish to visit. One could describe the place, tell why one wishes to visit it, etc.

Because most English songs are poems, poetry writing can be related to song activities. Understanding poetry helps one to understand songs. Students can write poems in the same form as songs they like. For example, the form in the 'Roses' poem is the same form in the chorus and verse of the Beatles song 'Love Me Do'. I have had students rewrite English songs they like. Then the whole class goes to karaoke to sing their lyrics with the songs' music.

Poetry writing can be used to practise pronunciation, intonation, and other speaking skills by having students perform their poems aloud and use voice to emphasise moods and images. A poem about a forest can be relaxing and focus on senses while a poem about soccer can be fast and focus on actions. The teacher can ask students simple questions about the poem to check

comprehension. An advanced class could even discuss the poem and performance.

Poetry evaluation is another way to add a new dimension to class. It provides many benefits. First, it adds discussion. Second, evaluation helps a student become better at writing poetry. By reading published poetry and classmates' poetry, a student is exposed to new schemes, ideas, metaphors, etc. Judging others' poetry practises skills and gets a student into habits that help one to better judge one's own poetry. Also, it is easier to judge something from an outside viewpoint. Third, learning to evaluate poetry can make reading and writing poetry more enjoyable by increasing one's understanding of it. To make a parallel, a sport is more enjoyable to watch and play when one better understands the rules and has enough experience to judge what are exciting plays.

Before starting poetry evaluation, a student should have written and read a number of poems. By doing so, the student have some ideas of what is enjoyable, boring, interesting, confusing, etc. A student needs experiences with which to compare new poetry. Reading poetry is not enough to prepare a student to evaluate poetry. A student should have experience writing poems too in order to understand the work that goes into the creation.

The teacher needs to teach good evaluation techniques. Evaluation should be encouraging and constructive for the student to see it as a way to learn how better to create poetry. Evaluation should show students how to gain more enjoyment and understanding from poetry in order to help them enjoy poetry more. The teacher should avoid evaluation techniques that are negative, boring, or overly critical. However, evaluation should be sincere or the teacher is only teaching students how to flatter. Also, evaluation should not be above the students' head. A teacher who is well versed in poetry and English may need to remember to lower their standards to avoid boring students with evaluation criteria they cannot yet understand.

Poetry evaluation can start from simpler and more objective criteria. A teacher can ask students to check the rhyme, metre, and grammar. If there are any problems, students can think of and discuss ways to redo the parts. Usually there are many ways to redo part of a poem. This encourages the idea that English is not a puzzle with one solution but communication with many possible forms. Students can learn techniques from each other. After that, a teacher can ask students comprehension questions. Who is the speaker in this poem? What did they do? Why did they do it? What happened? This is no different than asking comprehension questions of a prose text. When students are comfortable with those questions, they can move on to more subjective and complex methods.

Dethier tells his students not to make suggestions or offer advice. Instead, he encourages them to be active listeners and just tell the writer what the poem tells.

“I can get a clear sense of whether the poem is working as intended if readers just narrate their mental odyssey: “Your title got me thinking about donkeys, but then the first line showed me you had a different kind of ass in mind, and the second stanza convinced me we were really at the beach, marvelling at what people will show off.” I have more useful information than I would have had if a reader has said, however tactfully, “I don’t think the donkey theme works,” or “I love donkeys.” (Dethier, 2002:281)

Powell has a more developed four stage plan for basic evaluation. (Powell, 1968:52)

First, he gives simple yes/no questions to the students.

Content: Has the writer really said anything?

Technique: Has the writer expressed oneself adequately?

Impact: Has the writer got a point forcefully across to you?

Students may add more commentary if they wish, but the teacher should not expect much at first. Second, students begin constructive criticism. The teacher gives students some poetry that is intentionally poorly written. Then the students comment and try to improve it. Third, students make notes about their thoughts and events as they write poetry. What worked well? What didn’t work well? Why didn’t it work well? Why did one choose a particular topic? Students may write anything they like. The main point is to get students thinking about their writing. Fourth, the teacher gives students more detailed questions. Is the poem easy to understand? What feelings did it evoke? Are the images interesting?

Another evaluation tactic Powell teaches students is how to evaluate metaphors. He asks students to look at how appropriate, concise, and original a metaphor is. (Powell, 1968:19) Is there a clear connection between the two things being compared? Is the metaphor short and simple? Is the metaphor original? These criteria can help students avoid exaggerating and remind them that poetry can be simple.

Comparing two poems is another way to evaluate poetry. Abstract concepts are easier to understand by comparison. One would be at a loss if given a poem and asked to tell how much it evokes feeling. However, it would be easier to say which of two poems evokes more feeling.

Regardless of the method one uses, it shall be new to the students. As a result, students probably shall not say much at first. In fact, they may say nothing at all. Just as students need examples of poetry before they begin writing, they need examples of evaluation to follow. Asking a student to comment on poetry without giving examples is like asking a student to describe something without teaching the relevant vocabulary such as words for colours, shapes, sizes, etc.

A teacher can make worksheets with evaluation questions. This way the students can discuss the questions with classmates and prepare answers. As students continue to do the same questions over many sessions, they stop needing the worksheets because they are familiar with the format, vocabulary, and kinds of responses.

CONCLUSION

Exercises involving writing verse poetry offer a lot of ways to practise all areas of language. In addition, they can help get students more interested in using language. In conclusion, here are some main points.

- 1: Poetry writing does not need to have difficult language or topics. Simple is best.
- 2: Poetry writing can help with all areas of language.
- 3: Using rhyme and metre requires a student to think in English.
- 4: The practise is more important than the product.
- 5: Although students are not intentionally memorising facts, they retain much of what they use.
- 6: Most native speakers are familiar with verse form. Poetry writing helps provide students with a more rounded view of English.
- 7: A teacher should proceed in small, clear steps and understand that it takes time for students to do the work.

STUDENT POEMS

I left the poems in their original forms so there are some errors.

Student form poems with metre and rhyme

Vocal, guitar	Rock, classical	Paul McCartney
Band, stage live	Mixture, hip-hop	John, George, guitar
Play, piano	Heavy Metal	Revolution
Speaker, dive	Punk, dance, jazz, pop	Drum, Ringo Starr

Student, teacher	Blue, red, white, pink	Text, library
Desk, library	Black, colourful	Print, bind, paper
Notebook, homework	Gold, green, yellow	Word, read, autumn
Dictionary	Brown, beautiful	Novel, cover
Cloud, blue, moon, star	Headlight, windshield	Motorcycle
Sun, afterglow	Steering, bumper	Jet airliner
Mercy, need, rain	Gasoline, tire	Unicycle
Disaster, blow	Fender, number	Roller coaster
Basketball, shoes	Neptune, Venus	Watch, performer
Dribble, offence	Mars, beautiful	News, announcer
Passing, player	Shooting star, sun	Emotion, sport
Teamwork, defence	Moon, wonderful	Program, sponsor
Comic, bookshelf	Train, rail, bus, ship	Book, comic, wall
Desk, radio	Travel, country	Table, wall, door
Bed, calendar	Flight, tour, world, map	Telephone, desk
Clock, video	Voyage, journey	Pen, light, chair, floor
Guitar, cello	Buy, non-fiction	Speak, drink, think, look
Play, violin	Read, mystery	Shake, throw, catch, write
Flute, castanets	Genre, comic	Hear, eat, run, walk
Harp, mandolin	Funny, story	Jump, cry, laugh, bite

Student poems in the 'Roses Are Red' form

Roses are red	I like her	The sky is high
Violets are blue	She likes you	The sea is wide
My ears are hot	You like me	And children play
When I feel you	We are blue	You're at my side

My guitar is	The sea is blue	I love the place
Like work of art	The sky is white	Sea is my mother
It is as if	The sun is red	I live in here
The woman's heart	The day is bright	Earth is my father
You hit my heart	A, B, C, D	White and elegance
You make me fun	E, F, G	Cute and lovely
You look like art	Lost my contacts	The smell is sweet
You are my sun	I can't see	It is the lily
I have mistakes	The sky is blue	I love sweets and
I don't know how	The sea is blue	Chocolate ice cream
But don't worry	I am lonely	If they were lost
I'm live in now	I'm without you	In whole world I scream
I find a job	What a wonder	Snow is lovely
Work on a farm	It is magic	Snow isn't old
But next Monday	I'm so happy	So beautiful
I broke my arm	I like music	But snow is cold
Roses are red	The sky is dark	I am so hungry
Violets are blue	Stars are delight	I made curry rice
The snow is cold	If you are alone	How does it taste
And so are you	See me as light	It is very nice
The sky is blue	Roses are red	I am a small
The sea is blue	Violets are blue	But he is tall
My heart is red	If you stay here	When I look at him
I want to you	I don't leave you	He look like wall
I'm feeling good	The sky is blue	I walk my way
You look like bad	Look like your face	I like my wife
Your face is blue	Are you OK?	No pain, no gain
I feel so sad	Welcom to space	No rock, no life

I want to fly	You are my sun	The wind is flow
It is for you	You are my treasure	I feel so blue
Stay by your side	Even if I died	Can't get the wind
That is the true	You will shine forever	It is like you

A student's rewrite of the Carpenters' song 'Sing'

Cats

Cats, cats are good
Cats are cute
Cats are clean
A cat is mewing, not sad
Cat's like fish, me too

Cats, cats are good
When the cat is
Away the mice will play
Don't worry that it's not good enough
Because cats meant no harm
So cats, cats are good

Mew mew mew mew mew...

Cats, cats are good
I want to have a cat
But I don't have a cat
I'm allergic to cats

Cats, cats are good
When the cat is
Away the mice will play
Don't worry that it's not good enough
Because cats meant no harm
So cats, cats are good

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