

Illinois State Museum – MuseumLink Prairie Prairie Activity: Imagist Prairie Poems

Museumlink Web sites used:

Prairie: <http://www.museum.state.il.us/muslink/prairie/index.html>

Behind the Scenes: Palynology:

http://www.museum.state.il.us/muslink/behind/htmls/cr_bot_pal.html

Heartfelt/Handmade: <http://www.museum.state.il.us/muslink/art/htmls/hh.html>

Other online resources:

<http://www3.sympatico.ca/ray.saltz/poetry.htm> Outta Ray's Head - The Poetry page -- an Oregon teacher's Web site of language arts lessons. Imagist poems lesson most appropriate for short poems by students under grade 6.

<http://www.prairiepoetry.org/index.html> Marc DuPlan's online magazine, 1996-1999. Bookmark appropriate poems for students 8th grade and above.

<http://www.mcps.org/linkous/creativity/prairie.html> Sample prairie poem by a student at Gilert Lincus Elementary School in Vermont.

Objective: After viewing the Museumlink Web sites for inspiration, and the poetry sites for examples, and discussing the concept of imagist poems in class, students will write an imagist poem that creates a mental image in the mind of the reader/listener by its descriptive language.

Time Required: two 30-40 minute class periods; one for motivation, Web exploration, and first draft; half a period or more for editing and other drafts.

Motivation: Lead a whole class discussion on imagery in poems, using some examples. Have students identify which words or phrases gave them the mental image. Choose a prairie topic, such as a flower, or a settler's tool or artwork printed out from the Web site. Then have them list words that describe this object. (*see sample poem on page three of this plan*)

Discussion questions about an object or image of an object:

What is this an image of?

What words can you think of that describe this image that appeal to the sense of sight?
hearing?

touch? smell?

What are some feelings you have when you look at this object?

What words would you use to describe this feeling?

Let's create some sentences that create a feeling image.

Using poetry examples for form, have them decide if the poem will rhyme, have metre, etc., according to grade level. Tell them they will be writing a first draft the first period, and edit it the second period, finish it, and read it aloud.

Discussion questions using a written poem: (read aloud by the teacher)

What is the subject matter of the poem?

List the words in this poem that appeal to the sense of sight. ...to hearing...to touch..to smell.

What is the mood or feeling of the poem? What about the poem makes you feel this?

What is the attitude of the writer about the subject? How do you know?

What do you think might have inspired the writer to choose this subject?

Then assign them to find an object of the prairie in the Web sites to write a poem about-- choose something

that really appeals -- within a 20-minute time period.

Procedure: Each student will:

- choose an image of the prairie to work with (artwork, object, plant, animal)
- brainstorm a list of sensory words that describe the image
- choose a mood or feeling to convey (preferably one the writer feels-- e.g. love of beauty, fear, nostalgia, awe)
- compose a number of sentences to use in the poem
- arrange the sentences
- read the poem
- edit it for content
- edit it for form
- word-process the final poem
- print it

Image- display their poem with their image printout or on the computer import a copy of the image onto their word processing document and type in the poem on the same page; printout.

Publication: Post poems online, in a file, or on display in the school.

Assessment: Reader should be able to visualize a picture and feel a mood when reading the poem (not necessarily the same for every reader). Sensory words should be present. Use standard assessment criteria for your curriculum on the poem's form.

Illinois Goals and Standards addressed:

Language Arts

Goal 3: All levels: compose well-organized and coherent writing for specific purposes and audiences.

Goal 5: All levels: speak effectively using language appropriate to the situation and audience.

Sample Poem

word list

brown green yellow
tall golden
seeds honeycomb
fringe leafy
waving swaying
flower bee

feeling words

joyful beautiful
bright cheery

Sentences made from research:

Sunflowers wave in the sun.
Sunflowers feed the bird with their seeds.
The petals are a fringe of yellow.
Bees leave pollen on the flowers.
Pollen lands on the style.

The Poem:

Sunflowers on the Prairie

A million yellow sunflowers
are waving in the sun,
turning their faces
from dawn to dusk.
The sticky styles wait for bees
to drop some pollen from their feet.
Each style leads to an ovum,
a tiny factory for a seed.
This bird-feeder of the prairie
is a honeycomb of treats,
fringed in yellow,
nestled in leaves.

