

Literacy Tips



Tips for middle school educators on various topics such as grammar, writing, reading, spelling, vocabulary, cooperative learning and more.

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Tip #10: Dialogue with a Poem

This week's tip is a writing strategy that allows students to play with the language of poetry. With this strategy, students interact with a poem by responding to the poet's language structure. Because of this, they understand the poem's structure and comprehend its message better. I have written this tip up using the gradual release of responsibility method as a friendly reminder: model, shared practice, guided practice, and independent practice.

1. Choose a poem that you know will be of high interest to your students. Yes, go find a Shel Silverstein, Jack Prelutsky, or a Sara Holbrook poem!
2. **MODEL** - Type up the poem and leave some writing space after each line(s) of the poem. Display it on the overhead projector and demonstrate how you would use the strategy, Dialogue with a Poem.
 - Read the poem out loud several times to yourself.
 - Then focus on the first line of the poem and write back to it in some way underneath in the blank writing space. As you write, say aloud what you are thinking so kids can hear why you are choosing your words. Are you trying to keep the rhyme pattern?

Are you responding to the content of the poem?

- Continue doing this until you are done responding in writing to each line(s) of the poem.
 - Finally, read the new version of the poem out loud which includes the poet's original lines and yours added in-between! Voila! You have a brand new creation!
3. **SHARED PRACTICE** - Complete the same set of steps with another poem on the overhead projector. This time ask students to help you decide what to write after each line of the poem; however, you should be the one still doing the writing and demonstrating at the overhead projector.
 4. **GUIDED PRACTICE** - Choose another poem and in this practice have students complete the Dialogue with a Poem as a small collaborative group. As you float from group to group, assess whether they are imitating the poet's language structure effectively. Have groups perform/recite the new poems aloud to the class.



5. **INDEPENDENT PRACTICE** - Have students find their own poem and complete a Dialogue with the Poet independently. Students who are reluctant to find their own poem or are having difficulty doing so, have one ready for them.

Example

Here is an example of an 8th grade class response to Shel Silverstein's, *Somebody Has To*.

Somebody Has To
by Shel Silverstein

Somebody has to go polish the stars
Not me! I am not going up that far!
They are looking a bit dull.

So who cares?

Somebody has to go polish the stars,
Don't count on me.

For the eagles and starlings and gulls
Have all been complaining they're
tarnished and worn,

Well, they can clean them themselves.

They say they want new ones we can't
afford.

Spoiled brats!

So please get your rags

No way!

And your polishing jars,

No can do!

Somebody has to go polish the stars.

Why can't you?

Silverstein, Shel. *A Light in the Attic*. New York: HarperCollins, 1981.

Sample

Consider using the following turkey poem for one of the above practices. With this poem, I would place blank writing spaces after every two lines. By the way, this poem is chock full of powerful verbs, too. It would also make a great mini-lesson for word choice, so you may want to save it for that.

The Turkey Shot Out of the Oven
by Jack Prelutsky

The turkey shot out of the oven
and rocketed into the air,
it knocked every plate off the table
and partly demolished the chair.

It ricocheted into a corner
and burst with a deafening boom,
then splattered all over the kitchen,
completely obscuring the room.

It stuck to the walls and the windows,
it totally coated the floor.
there was turkey attached to the ceiling,
where there'd never been turkey before.

It blanketed every appliance,
it smeared every saucer and bowl.
there wasn't a way I could stop it,
that turkey was out of control.

I scraped and I scrubbed with displeasure,
and thought with chagrin as I mopped,
that I'd never again stuff a turkey
with popcorn that hadn't been popped.

Prelutsky, Jack. *Something Big Has Been Here*. New York: Greenwillow Books, 1990.

