

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 #65: Poetry in the Content Areas

I have been feeling a bit guilty that my tips generally focus on language arts /social studies teachers, so this tip is for science and math teachers who give our academic lives balance. You know that I can't resist infusing some language arts into this!

Science Verse

Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith have done it again. This time they have teamed up on the book called *Science Verse*. I checked Web Cat, and ten schools already have added it to their collections. (Math teachers have been enjoying the *Math Curse* for a couple of years now. I wonder what these authors have up their sleeves for social studies?)

www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0670910570/qid=1103303155/sr=2-1/ref=pd_ka_b_2_1/102-2213254-8548122

I shared this book with the science department chairs a week or so ago, but I cannot seem to put it down. I am [attaching their version of *'Twas the Night Before Christmas* called *'Twas the Night*](#). It is a poem that describes the Big Bang theory in verse. Can science content be taught through poetry? Scieszka and Smith seem to do it with ease.

Before I move off of this topic, I must tell you there are an amazing number of such parodies out there. Use the following web site to find 721 versions of *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*. Perhaps you can find one that connects in some way to your current content. (Beware! There are “adult only” versions on this web site so preview them carefully. A direct quote from the web site: "The versions range from innocent and cute to vulgar and obscene, so read at your own discretion.")

<http://jjorg.chem.unc.edu/personal/monroe/twas/twasallmain.html>

OK, now back to *Science Verse*. The language arts teachers will love the fact that you are reading parodies of classic poems such as *Trees* by Joyce Kilmer and *The Raven* by Edgar Allan Poe. They can use this as an opportunity to read the originals. Parody can then be introduced as a literary device as well as rhyme and meter patterns. Use pp. 202 –203 of the *Write Source 2000* for background information of the five basic feet (iambic, anapestic, trochaic, dactylic, and spondaic) as well as the eight types of verse (monometer, dimeter, trimeter, tetrameter, pentameter, hexameter, heptameter, and octometer.) Math teachers must be drooling right now! Hey, make an 8-flap vocabulary book and use it both in math and LA to teach the types of verse as well



as mathematical prefixes. Go language scouting for other vocabulary words using these prefixes.

And one last thought on Jon Scieszka... He has a wonderful web site called Guys Read at www.guysread.com. You will find excellent book choices for guys and their interests. If you haven't seen his web site, you really should take a moment to look at it. He really is an advocate for trying to motivate boys to read.

Math Talk: Mathematical Ideas in Poems for Two Voices

Math teachers can play with poetry, too, using the book *Math Talk: Mathematical Ideas in Poems for Two Voices* by Theoni Pappas. Web Cat shows that only a couple schools have this book in their collections. It was added to the summer school poetry tubs this past summer.

www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0933174748/qid=1103303482/sr=2-1/ref=pd_ka_b_2_1/102-2213254-8548122

Language arts teachers are already familiar with this unique writing style through Paul Fleischman's books, *Joyful Noise* and *I Am Phoenix*. Poems for two voices are best read aloud by using two different readers. One reader reads the left-hand side of the poem while the other reader reads the right-hand side of the poem. When the lines are on the same horizontal, the readers read their parts simultaneously. It really makes for a dramatic reading and can help emphasize the deeper meaning of a poem. [Attached is one such poem](#) from *Math Talk*.

After reading this poem aloud as a fluency activity in math, teachers can then use it as a springboard for writing other

mathematical poems for two voices. Have students brainstorm opposites in math like negative/positive numbers or primes/composites. Partner students into writing teams and have them compose a poem trying to teach a mathematical concept through poetry. Use Venn diagrams as a graphic organizer to help students map out the differences as well as the similarities. The similarities can then be used for the same horizontals thus providing a chance for that simultaneous reading.

Language arts teachers will want to take your lead and use this type of poetry for creating responses to literature. Imagine how much easier it will be for students to understand character development by writing poems as partners highlighting differences and similarities in protagonists and antagonists. Social studies teachers can jump in, too, and use this to strengthen students' understanding of concepts such as democrats/republicans, democracy/communism, United States/Australia, etc. Truly, poems for two voices are a great vehicle to practice oral reading fluency as well as compare and contrast big ideas. (Please see Email Tip #6 for more ideas with poems for two voices.)

Have a wonderful holiday break. I hope you can find time to relax, to play with your family, and to read a good book. No grading of papers allowed! See you in 2005. (Hm, maybe this would be a good writing topic for Monday, January 3. Write a poem for two voices comparing 2004 to the hopes and dreams we have for 2005.)



‘Twas the Night

Twas the night before Any Thing, and all through deep space,
Nothing existed – time, matter, or place.
No stockings, no chimneys. It was hotter than hot.
Everything was compressed in one very dense dot.

When out of the nothing there appeared with a clatter
A fat guy with reindeer and something the matter.
His nose was all runny. He gave a sick hack.
“Oh, Dasher! Oh, Dancer! I can’t hold it back.”

He huffed and snuffled and sneezed one AH-CHOO!
Then like ten jillion volcanoes, the universe blew.
That dense dot exploded, spewing out stars,
Earth, Venus, Jupiter, Uranus, and Mars,

Helium, hydrogen, the mountains and seas,
The chicken, the egg, the birds and the bees,
Yesterday’s newspaper, tomorrow’s burnt toast,
Protons and neutrons, your grandma’s pork roast.

The universe expanded. The guy said with a wheeze,
“Who will ever believe the world started by sneeze?
So let’s call it something much grander, all right?
Merry BIG BANG to all! And to all – Gesundheit!”

Mathematics

(A poem for two voices)

Mathematics

the word has been
known

to conjure up

love

hate

delight

despair

recreation

anxiety

joy

fear

Mathematics

is a variety of
subjects

and ideas

restricted only

by our imagination.

by our imagination.

Computation,

Arithmetic,

geometry,

algebra,

trigonometry,

calculus,

topology,

tessellation,

hypercubes,

Klein bottles,

chaos theory,

fractals,

Pythagorean

Möbius strip,

knots,

theorem.

Mathematics touches

of our world-

art,

music,

history,

economics,

so much of our lives

of our universe

nature,

science,

architecture,

literature.

Mathematics is

everywhere,

a recreation,

games,

problems,

a way of thinking.

a pastime,

conundrums,

puzzles,

solutions,

a way of thinking.