

Vernal Pool Poetry



Grade Level: K to 2



Developed by Beth Brady and Carol Berner, R.K. Finn/Ryan Road School, Florence, MA, and used in Grade 2

Community Partner: [Hitchcock Center for the Environment](#), Amherst, MA

Overview/Rationale for Lesson:

Students record sensory observations during a guided nature walk and use this data to create poetry and watercolor paintings documenting their discoveries.

Learning Objectives:

- Students will learn to collect and record sensory data during a nature walk (I See, I Hear, I Smell, I Touch/Feel).
- Students will write a short poem or journal entry and make a watercolor painting based on field trip observations.
- Students will learn to look closely and ask questions about creatures and elements they discover on the forest walk.

Lesson Plan Procedure

Preparatory Activity:

Time: 15 minutes plus outdoor nature walk

Step 1. During circle time students read and discuss the poem “Polliwogs” by Kristine O’Connell George (see “Resources” for link). 15 minutes. Note: This activity may take place 1-2 days before nature walk.

- Write poem “Polliwogs” on chart paper and post it in circle area.
- Lead a pre-trip discussion about upcoming nature walk and ask children, “What do you think you will find at the vernal pool?”
- Read aloud “Polliwogs” and invite children to take turns reading it aloud.
- Ask children, “What do you notice about the poem?” Lead discussion based on children’s observations about the poem’s shape, use of describing words, comparisons, etc.
- Tell children they will be writing their own poems after their trip to the vernal pool.

Step 2. Children go on a nature walk and record on a handout things that they see, hear, smell and touch. (See “Resources” for link.) 1-2 hours.

- During pre-trip discussion, model how to use the handout for recording findings.

Teacher narrative: “You are going to see a lot in the forest, and also you will hear things, smell things and touch things.... You will write down words or make sketches to help you remember things you notice.” Model how to write or sketch observations in each column of the handout.

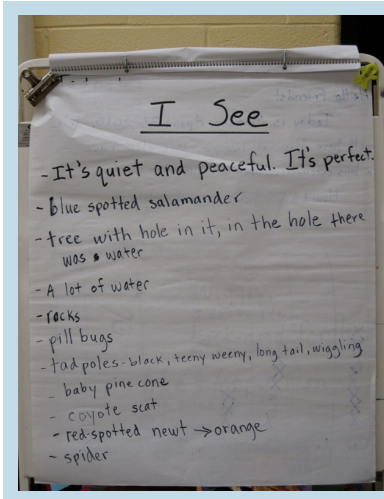
- Each child carries a clipboard with pencil and a handout for recording, “I see, I hear, I smell, I touch/feel.”
- During field trip, remind children to record observations and give them designated times to stop and write, including a five minute “Quiet Sit” when they arrive at the vernal pool.
- Children may be doing other fieldwork during the nature walk. This class was rolling over logs, looking at decomposers through magnifying lenses and gathering soil samples as part of a science unit on soil.

Main Activity:

Time: 60 minutes

Step 3. After the field trip (same day or next day), lead a whole group discussion asking students to share their observations. Write children’s words and phrases on four pieces of chart paper organized by senses to match the columns on their handouts. 10 minutes.

- Teacher narrative: “In the woods while you were collecting bugs and soil samples, you were also collecting words and ideas for writing poems. Now we’re going to share those words with each other to get more ideas for writing poems.”



- Start by asking children to tell one thing that they SAW on the nature walk and encourages them to refer to words they wrote down in the “I See” column of the handout.
- List children’s words on chart paper labeled “I SEE”. Student examples: Blue spotted salamander, rocks, pillbugs.
- After listing several words or phrases for “I See,” repeat the procedure for each of the other senses, listing several examples on each piece of chart paper.
- Prompt students with questions to add details to their descriptions, for example, “What did the moss feel like? What were the pill bugs doing?”

Step 4. Give children directions to write a poem or journal entry and paint a watercolor of their trip to the vernal pool, including details from their trip sheet and from class observations written on chart paper. 5 minutes.

Teacher narrative: “You may write a poem if you want, or write a journal entry or story about the trip today. Use describing words like the ones we wrote here on chart paper. You may want to choose one thing to zoom in on or lots of details. Pick what stands out to you. You can paint or write first, some people like to paint before they write.”

Step 5. Children write a poem or journal entry and paint a watercolor painting about the trip to the vernal pool. 45 minutes (about 20 minutes for each).

- Steps for watercolor painting: First draw the picture with watercolor pencils, then use brush dipped in water to paint the colors.



- Steps for writing: First write a draft, then meet with teacher to conference about word choice, spelling, structure of writing, etc. Copy over the draft with revisions onto final copy paper. (See “Resources” for link.)

At the vernal pool
I see a blue spotted salamander
I hear loud birds
I smell fresh air fresh green leaves
I feel smushy moss
I see scaly pillbugs
I see some leafy plants
I see some bugs crawling
I see some water moving
At the vernal pool.
~ Hannah

Conclusion/Follow-Up to Activity:

Step. 6. Children read poems aloud and show their watercolor paintings during a circle sharing. This may take place on subsequent days.

Step 7. Teacher makes a bulletin board display of poems and watercolors (and photographs from trip if available).

Additional Notes on Lesson Plan:

The context for this lesson was a nature walk to a vernal pool in the Sawmill Hills conservation land adjacent to the school grounds. Ted Watt from the Hitchcock Center for the Environment guided the walk with a focus on observing decomposers and collecting soil samples.

Materials Checklist:

- Poem “Polliwogs”
- Handout for nature walk
- Sample Student Poems
- Lined paper and pencils for writing poems.
- Watercolor pencils and large unlined paper for paintings.

Extension:

Teacher creates a Power-Point presentation of poems, watercolor paintings and photographs from the nature walk to share on a class website.

Developer’s Comments on Lesson:

Beth decided to make the poetry writing activity open-ended instead of modeling how to write a poem, “because children tend to copy what I model.” Her second graders were excited to try writing their own poems after reading and discussing poetry throughout the year. She wanted children to feel free to pursue their own forms of poetic expression and she offered watercolor painting as a choice for, “people who like to paint before they write.”

—Carol Berner

Useful Links and Downloads are available at http://row.ctriver.org/?page_id=214.

CURRICULUM STANDARDS

SCIENCE (Connections to the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks)

Framework: Science and Technology/Engineering

Strand: Earth and Space Science (preK-2)

Topic: Earth's Materials

1: Recognize that water, rocks, soil, and living organisms are found on the earth's surface.

Strand: Life Science (preK-2)

Topic: Characteristics of Living Things

3: Recognize that plants and animals have life cycles, and that life cycles vary for different living things.

Topic: Living Things and Their Environment

6: Recognize that people and other animals interact with the environment through their senses of sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste.

8: Identify the ways in which an organism's habitat provides for its basic needs (plants require air, water, nutrients, and light; animals require food, water, air, and shelter).

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS (Connections to the Common Core State Standards, <http://www.corestandards.org>)

Reading: Literature » Grade 2

Craft and Structure

RL.2.4. Describe how words and phrases (e.g., regular beats, alliteration, rhymes, repeated lines) supply rhythm and meaning in a story, poem, or song.

Reading: Foundational Skills » Grade 2

Fluency

- RF.2.4. Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension.

Writing » Grade 2

Research to Build and Present Knowledge

- W.2.7. Participate in shared research and writing projects (e.g., read a number of books on a single topic to produce a report; record science observations).
- W.2.8. Recall information from experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer a question.

STANDARDS, cont.**Speaking & Listening » Grade 2***Comprehension and Collaboration*

- SL.2.1. Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about *grade 2 topics and texts* with peers and adults in small and larger groups.
- SL.2.2. Recount or describe key ideas or details from a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.

Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas

- SL.2.5. Create audio recordings of stories or poems; add drawings or other visual displays to stories or recounts of experiences when appropriate to clarify ideas, thoughts, and feelings.

Language » Grade 2*Vocabulary Acquisition and Use*

- L.2.5. Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships and nuances in word meanings.
- L.2.6. Use words and phrases acquired through conversations, reading and being read to, and responding to texts, including using adjectives and adverbs to describe (e.g., *When other kids are happy that makes me happy*).

ARTS (Connections to the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks)

Strand: Arts Disciplines: Visual Arts

Topic: Elements and Principles of Design

2.1: For color, explore and experiment with the use of color in dry and wet media. Identify primary and secondary colors and gradations of black, white and gray in the environment and artwork. Explore how color can convey mood and emotion.

Topic: Observation, Abstraction, Invention, and Expression

3.1: Create 2D and 3D artwork from direct observation.

River of Words-CT River is a place-based poetry and art program designed to promote watershed awareness, literacy, and the arts. It is offered in partnership with the Connecticut River Watershed Council and funded, in part, by Mass Humanities and Mass Center for the Book. Find us at <http://row.ctriver.org>