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# FOR TEACHERS

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## Some Suggestions for Creative Writing Using *my dog has flies*

by Sue Cowing, illustrated by Jon J. Murakami



Poems children hear can get their own imaginations going. They may enjoy working as a class or individually, but either way some class discussion before writing will help bring out their ideas. A few guidelines I would suggest:

- Allow plenty of time to discuss, to list on the board, and to write. A relaxed, unhurried atmosphere allows more ideas to surface.
- Treat this as you would brainstorming, with no comparison or judging of efforts. Accept any contribution unless you are sure it is a deliberate attempt to hurt someone.
- If students are writing individually, circulate and show friendly interest. Some students can express their thoughts better if they can try them out on you one-on-one. But respect privacy if they prefer. Just encourage production without comments about how good something is.
- Feel free to adapt these exercises in any way that works for your students.

### **What-if? (group poem)**

Read the poems “The Empty Lot” and “Kyle’s Questions” aloud. Ask the students what kinds of things they wonder about when they have time alone to think. Make a list of their “What if?” or “Why?” questions. Students could each write their own and then share with the class, or this could be a class activity, with the responses written on the blackboard by the teacher. Accept all responses and edit as little as possible. Then, treating each of the questions as a “line,” have the group help arrange them in a pleasing order to make a class poem, combining similar ideas into one line. You can get the process started by asking which question might make a good beginning or a good ending, which ones sound good together, etc., and let the class decide. When the group is satisfied with

the order, write the poem out and read it aloud, then post it. Some students may want to write more about their own or others' questions or even try to answer them. Let them do this in any form they like.

### **An Unusual Pet (poetry or prose)**

Read "Darin's Pet" and "Pet Exchange" aloud. Talk about the different kinds of pets the students have had. Then talk about more unusual pets in a what-if mode. What unusual pet they would like to have if they were allowed, and why? What arguments would they use to persuade their family to let them keep it? What would they enjoy doing with this pet? After some discussion, let them write in poetry or prose, but if they write in prose, ask them to include at least one word that rhymes with their pet's animal name, even if they have to make it up (llama, comma; rattlesnake, battlesnake). Don't be surprised if one or two students turn this exercise around and write about why people shouldn't keep pets at all, or about what it would be like to *be* an unusual pet and what kind of owner they would want to have.

### **True Stories (poetry or prose)**

Read "The Wallaby" aloud, then ask the children, "Have you ever told your parents or teachers something that was true but hard to believe? What was it and how did you know it was true? How did you feel and what did you do when they didn't believe you?" Have them write about the incident. Be prepared for anything from revelations to heartbreak to whoppers here!

### **Dream Excursion (poetry or prose)**

Read "Field Trip of Dreams" aloud. Divide the class into "committees" and ask each one to discuss what the class could do on a field trip if there were no limits. Then ask the "committees" to report and write their "recommendations" on the board. Make a class poem by re-arranging the list, perhaps adding some rhyme, or have the students write individually, in any form, about going on any one of the trips. (Can you incorporate any of the elements of their pieces into a real field trip?)

### **The Simple Life (poetry or prose)**

Read "At Home with Mrs. Gomes" aloud. Discuss how Mrs. Gomes lives and why. Is she happy? Have the students talk about the things and conveniences that they feel they couldn't do without—television, computer, family car, air conditioning, telephone, ipod, etc. Then ask them to discuss and write about how they *would* get along without one of those things if they had to. How would their lives change? Might there actually be something *good* about living without that thing in their lives?

**Sue Cowing is an award-winning writer whose poems and stories for children have appeared in *CRICKET* and *SPIDER* magazines. Her novel for ages eight to twelve, *You Will Call Me Drog*, will be published by CarolRodha Books in September, 2011. She is available to do a limited number of classroom author visits or creative writing workshops on such topics as "Writing in Rhythm" or "Writing in Rhyme without Sounding Cheesy," E-mail her at [niuki@hawaiiintel.net](mailto:niuki@hawaiiintel.net).**