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Tending Poetic Gardens: Weaving Poetry Into A Third Grade Curriculum

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TENDING POETIC GARDENS: WEAVING POETRY
INTO A THIRD GRADE CURRICULUM

by

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A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Arts in Literacy Education.

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DEDICATION

For Mom and Dad

May this capstone project inspire others to take time and explore the wonders of poetry with their students, and may poetry begin to seep into classrooms everywhere, put down its roots and grow into something beautiful.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks to Paul for your patience and support throughout this capstone journey.

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CHAPTER ONE

Planting Seeds and Growing Something Beautiful

Introduction: Tending the Garden

“Poetry Matters” are the first two words in the title of Ralph Fletcher’s (2002) book that he wrote to teach children how they can write poetry. Poetry matters to me. A tiny seed of poetry planted itself in my elementary classroom beginning in 1987. It has grown into a beautiful, thriving plant. Many educators do not realize that poetry is a part of the Common Core Standards (CCSS): RL.3.4, L.3.5, L.3.5.A, RL.3.5, RF.3.4.B, SL.3.5, and 10 (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices [NGA Center] & the Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2010). Poetry and the Common Core will be addressed in Chapter Two. For this reason, poetry should be flourishing in classrooms, not wilting. Poetry needs to creep back into each teacher’s classroom, like a mint plant, forever finding another place to put down its roots.

This leads me to my capstone question: *How can third grade teachers effectively expose students to the genre of poetry and teach them how to write poetry?* My question recognizes that with current demands on my teaching that include state testing mandates, pressures to make sure all children can read by a given age, and constant reminders from the media that students in the United States are not measuring up to their counterparts in other countries, poetry in the classroom is often withering from neglect. Holbrook (2005)

sums up how many teachers view poetry when she states, “You can’t afford to waste time on otherworldly froufrou poetry in the middle of a geometry lesson when the bottom line is banging on your classroom door demanding totals and percentages. Right?” (p. xiv).

Actually, nothing could be more wrong, as I hope to show.

In this chapter, I will first summarize why it is important to integrate poetry in the students’ classroom experience. Next, I will share my personal journey that has led me to be a third grade teacher with a passion for poetry. Then I will share what I hope to accomplish with this project and the impact it could have on other third grade teachers. Finally, I will summarize Chapter One and give an overview of chapters that follow.

The Importance of Poetic Gardens

After three decades teaching primary grades, poetry always had a place within my students’ day. It fit well among other grade level standards that needed to be taught. Poetry was an excellent genre to use to introduce phonics skills, find rhyming patterns, and to practice reading fluency. Research supports my use of poetry in teaching these skills, and Chapter Two will explore this research.

However, in the 2016-2017 academic year when I moved to third grade from first grade, I found myself tangled in seemingly more important things: longer, more complicated math lessons; genres that required student writing proficiency; testing, preparing for the state mandated tests, and more testing. My colleagues and I talk about how state mandated tests create an undeserved amount of stress for us. At my school there is an urgency to cover everything that needs to be covered before the spring, so that

our students can perform competently on required state tests a month before school is out. With all of these pressures present in classrooms, poetry has withered.

Diane Ravitch (2009) would argue that this withering is due in part to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). This act was an attempt to close the academic achievement gap of the students in the United States. Statistics showed that students in the United States were falling farther behind other industrialized nations in international tests on reading, math, and science (Ravitch, 2009). Ravitch observed that while “American students are spending endless hours preparing to take tests on their basic reading and math skills, their peers in high-performing nations are reading poetry and novels” (p. 35). Even though the NCLB was discontinued, the adoption of the Common Core State Standards (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010) created a new set of standards for students to master at each grade level. Having similar concerns as Ravitch (2009) is Holbrook (2005) when she states, “How do we convince those who write school curriculums that poetry is not just icing on the learning cake, but in fact is among the essential ingredients needed to make the cake rise?” (p. 1). To evaluate whether poetry is an essential ingredient in our district merits a look at the reading and writing curriculums.

In 2018 my district adopted *Making Meaning* (Center for the Collaborative Literacy, 2015) and *Being A Writer* (Center for the Collaborative Literacy, 2014) as new reading and writing curriculums. In the 30+ trade books that came with the curriculums, only one is a poetry book. A two week poetry writing unit is included during the spring. In this unit the students listen to twelve poems and then are expected to write their own. In the reading curriculum, a poem is used once during a unit on visualizing. Poetry does

not have a significant presence in the new curriculums. As a teacher, this exposure to poetry is not enough, and Georgia Heard (2013) agrees.

Georgia Heard (2013) believes that poetry should have a visible presence in every classroom, and that students should be read poetry regularly, have access to poetry books, recite poetry, share poetry, and write poetry. Heard (1989) states, “Every writer of poetry is first a reader of poetry” (p. 1). Heard (1989) describes how when students hear and read poetry regularly, they begin to learn about poetry, the different kinds of poems, the rich language used by poets, and add information to their schema about what poetry is. Building this background knowledge about poetry prepares them to be writers of poetry (Heard, 1989).

Poetry should be growing in every classroom, but it is hardly present in the new reading and writing curriculums in our district—even though it is part of the CCSS. This discovery has motivated me to do this project. As stated above, with this project I want to answer the following question: *How can third grade teachers effectively expose students to the genre of poetry and teach them how to write poetry?* In order to do this, I will develop a set of writing lessons to be used with third graders. Within these lessons, there will be a teacher modeling component and also examples of the types of poetry that the students are expected to compose for that lesson.

The journey I traveled before becoming a third grade teacher has had a significant impact on the decision to do this project. In the next section I will describe that journey.

The Many Paths Lead to One Road

My decision to be an elementary teacher led me down many roads before its final destination. Thinking back to being an elementary kid myself in the late 1960's, I have memories of Science Research Associates Inc.(SRA) reading kits that were used in our classrooms. As an elementary student, I did not read real books; I read a story on a card, answered questions about it, and then went on to the next card. I found the stories on the cards uninteresting and found myself constantly comparing myself to peers who were reading other colored cards at higher levels. I pretty much hated reading, and because of this, I was not a motivated reader. That may be the reason that I also went to remedial reading class. I went to another room for remedial reading services with a nun that couldn't ever remember my name. She always called me Beth (my middle name). Even when she was reminded that my name was Mary Beth, she still called me Beth.

My parents were of course aware of my reading abilities and lack of interest in books, so they tried various things to get me to like reading. They wrote positive notes in the books I read, and they took me on trips to the public library. But I still hated it. The books in my home were mostly Dr. Seuss, Golden Books, and encyclopedias. These reading resources were not anything like the rich resources available to children today, but it was what was available to kids in the 60's.

Even though I have vivid memories of disliking reading, I somehow miraculously learned to read. My family had two sets of encyclopedias in our house: a set of Britannica Encyclopedias and a set of Britannica Junior Encyclopedias. They were housed in a big bookcase in the hallway outside my own and my siblings' bedrooms, probably so we all

would have easy access to them. These encyclopedias were my go-to for everything: research on a president, the number of bones in a human body, and poetry.

I remember memorizing a poem for a class. I needed to find the poem in one of the encyclopedias because my family did not have any poetry books at the house. I found “The Tale of Custard the Dragon” (Nash, 1936) and memorized the fourteen stanza poem. Years later I was surprised to find a picture book of the same poem that I now have in my classroom.

I don’t have any other memories of experiences of poetry in my elementary years, so I was surprised when I found a “Collection of Poems” in a box of my elementary memorabilia. It consisted of a set of poems that I had found in books and which I typed up on a typewriter. My past experience as an elementary student who hated books is a sharp contrast to the book lover that I am in the 21st century. It is a known fact among my past and present students that I am crazy about books and poetry, so much so that one of my students wrote the following poem about me.

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>My Teacher Eats My Poems</u> By: Alex</p> <p style="text-align: center;">My Teacher eats my poems. She gobbles them up. POOF! They’re Gone!</p> <p style="text-align: center;">I’m S-C-A-R-E-D! She just freaks me out!</p>

Figure 1. A student poem written about me. Reprinted with permission.

Attending college in the early 1980's, I majored in theater and communications. It was not until my senior year that I had an experience that solidified what I wanted to do with my life: I took a Creative Dramatics class and watched a master teacher doing drama sessions with second and third graders. The teacher wove storytelling, theater games, and skits into the sessions. The students loved it, and so did I.

After graduation I did freelance work as a creative drama specialist, hired by schools and community centers to conduct creative drama sessions with children. The ages of the children varied depending upon the sessions. The creative drama sessions included storytelling, improvisation, theater games, and skits. Sessions varied from after-school classes at community centers to month-long residencies in schools. Shel Silverstein poems from *Where the Sidewalk Ends* (1974) and *A Light in the Attic* (1981) found a home in these sessions. In one of my sessions, for example, students would hear the first part of the poem, "The Peanut Butter Sandwich" (Silverstein, 1974), come up with a solution for getting the king's mouth unstuck, and then make up a skit to perform for the group. It was during this time that I made a decision to go back and get my elementary education license. My goal was to incorporate my love for drama into my lessons with the students.

Teaching and its resources have changed so much since I began teaching in the 80's. My favorite change has been the explosion of children's literature over the past several decades. A wealth of excellent texts are available for kids to read. In the United States, the children's book market in the last 14 years has shown more growth than the overall book market: "the overall book market has grown 33 percent since 2004, the

children's book market has grown 52 percent since 2004" (American Booksellers Association, 2016). In 2019, children like the students in my classroom can be surrounded by a classroom library of over 2,000 books and encouraged to find books that fit their interests to help them become motivated, lifelong readers.

Starting to teach in 1987, I did not know much about poetry, and there were not as many children's poetry books published. But these were the Shel Silverstein years. I loved his poetry and so did my students. We read his poems and acted them out. Because Shel Silverstein used rhyme in all of his poems, there was a false presumption that all poems need to have rhyming words at the end of each line. Because of this, my students would write poems and labor over trying to find words that rhymed to use in their poems. Because the students had only been exposed to poetry that rhymed, their poems were very limited. There was such focus on having rhyming words that the poems often ended up not making sense and being more of a list of phrases with ending rhymes than a poem. At this time I had limited knowledge about what a poem was, limited experiences reading poems by other great poets, and thus was very limited in teaching how to write a poem.

Fast forward to the last two decades of the 21st century. The boom that occurred in the publishing of children's literature not only included the publication of excellent books by wonderful poets that I had never heard of, but also the publication of teacher resources for using poetry in the classroom. I fell in love with poetry and not only began collecting poetry books for my classroom, but also reading how to teach children about poetry. I read books by Georgia Heard (1999), Regie Routman (2000), and Laura Purdie Salas' (2015) , cover to cover, processing everything they were writing about, taking

notes, and planning how I could transform my classroom into a place for poetry to flourish. I also worked with committees of teachers to bring published poets into our school. Since the turn of the century, we have had Laura Purdie Salas, Joyce Sidman and Lester Laminack visit our district.

Using poetry in first and second grade classrooms made me increasingly confident to do so. My poetry bin in my classroom library was growing. Students responded positively to hearing poems read to them and were exposed to many types of poems. They explored the ways in which published poets used alliteration, similes, metaphors, rhyming, and onomatopoeia. Their vocabulary grew as we talked about the new words they heard in the poetry. I made it a personal goal to read at least one poem to my students daily. Certain poetry books were earmarked as class favorites such as *Once I Ate A Pie* (MacLachlan & Charest, 2006). Books like these were often in someone's hands during independent reading.

Not only did my primary students hear poetry, but they also began to write poetry. We designated one day a week during writer's workshop (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001) as poetry writing day, and we all wrote and shared poetry. Another big change was that I started writing poems along with my students. I found it to be a great benefit for them to see me as a writer, writing next to them, and hearing me share my poems along with them. It was humbling to experience days when the students' poems were better than the teacher's.

Regie Routman (2000, 2000) has written a number of books on writing poetry with children. In her books, she encourages teachers to read other poems written by

children to students so that they hear the voice of their peers coming out in poems.

Taking Routman's advice, I started collecting favorite poems written by my students so that I could use them with future students as examples of types of poems and topics they could write about.

I started a poetry notebook with my primary students where copies of these collected poems written by their peers could be housed. A new poem was added to the notebook about once a week. The poetry notebook also included poems by published authors (taken from collections that gave teachers permission to copy them for their students) and poems written by me. The students loved reading the poems in their poetry notebooks. They often pulled them out during independent reading time and would read their favorite poems.

The poems in this notebook were used in a variety of ways. First, we read the poems together as a class and with partners to practice oral reading fluency. Because I have a reputation for using voices to represent different characters when reading to my students, the students started using different voices when reading the poems as a class. Personal favorites of my class from 2016 were the two-person poems like the one in Figure 2.

Dog and Cat
By: Mary Beth Youngblut

Dog: I'm a Dog
Cat: I'm a Cat
Dog: Grrrrrr!
Cat: Meow!
 I like to chase mice.
Dog: I like to chase cats.
 I think I will chase you!
Cat: Just try it!
 You can't catch me!
Dog: We will see!
Cat: Here I go up a tree!
Dog: Wait a minute! That's not fair!
Cat: What do I care about fair?
 I'm a cat!

Dog: I think I'll go chase something else.

Figure 2. A favorite two-person poem with my AY 2015/2016 1st graders.

Secondly, we looked for examples of alliteration, similes, metaphors, rhyming, and onomatopoeia. We used highlighters to highlight these examples.

Figure 3 shows an example of a poem where students would highlight the rhyming words.

The Bee and Me
 By: MB Youngblut

There was a bee up in a tree.
 That bee looked down and he saw me.

The bee flew down out of the tree.
 The bee he landed right on me.

Oh woe is me, there's a bee on me!

Hey you! Yes you! Can't you see?
 There is a bee right here on me.

Oh please Mr. Bee
 I said with a plea

Please set me free
 And don't sting me.

Then as if he heard my plea
 The bee flew back up to the tree.

Figure 3. A rhyming poem showing the highlighted words with the rime -ee.

Poetry was flourishing in my classroom, and I felt good about the place it had in my students' classroom experience.

In 2017 I moved to third grade and was surrounded by new reading and writing curriculums, new math concepts that took much longer to teach, and the huge added stresses of preparing my students to take the state mandated test for the first time in their young lives. The days of reading, writing, and sharing poetry came to an abrupt halt. I needed to find a way to survive and make my way through the tangle of all the newness and pressures of state testing. I would look at my shelves of cherished poetry books that I

have collected over the past two decades, and at the numerous binders of former students' poems that I have kept and put into "themes" over the years, and long to find a place for poetry to grow again in my students' lives (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Binders full of poem written by former students.

It is that longing that has led me to choose this as my capstone. With this project I want to research and share the benefits of using poetry with students. I want to validate its importance in third grade classrooms, not just as a genre within a classroom library, but also as a genre that needs to be read aloud to students, a genre that can inspire them to be poets themselves.

Looking Back and Moving Forward

In summary, although poetry is present in both the reading and writing curriculums at my school and is found in the CCSS (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010), it does not hold a place of priority in third grade classrooms, yet it should. There were

many roads I travelled before becoming a third grade teacher with a strong commitment to finding a way for poetry to thrive in my classroom. Based on my research, I hope to share evidence of the benefits of exposing children to poetry and teaching them to compose poems.

Moving forward, my first goal is to share my findings in the research and lessons I develop with the other third grade teachers not only in my building, but also in my district. The Center for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE) (2018) produced a paper citing ten things that educators and poets believe are successful ways of “encouraging a lifelong love of poetry” (p. 3). I hope the lessons I develop can be resources that teachers in and out of my district can use to accomplish the things articulated on this list and nurture a poetic garden to grow in their classroom.

The Chapters That Follow

In Chapter Two of this project I will summarize my findings relating to the research available on the benefits of using poetry in classrooms. I will also include findings on how teacher modeling of writing lessons can benefit students since this is a key component that will be present in the writing lessons in my project. Thirdly, I will go into detail about how poetry fits with the CCSS (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010).

Chapter Three will include a description of the project that I will create. Secondly, the demographics and setting of the project will be described. Then I will discuss who will utilize the project. Finally, Chapter Four will be my final reflection on the project.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

My capstone question, *How can third grade teachers effectively expose students to the genre of poetry and teach them how to write poetry*, has led me to three areas of research. The three areas are: the benefits of poetry; teacher modeling as an effective teaching method; and poetry and the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices [NGA Center] & the Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2010). My hope is that the research will then assist me in the development of a set of poetry lessons that can be used with third graders.

This chapter, will include first, a summary of the benefits of poetry that were identified in the research. Second, since a teacher modeling component will be part of the lessons developed for this project, it will consider what experts view as the benefits of using teaching modeling as a teaching method. Third, it will dig into the CCSS (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2018) to uncover which standards include elements of poetry, and also to discern which of the standards could be accomplished by using the genre of poetry.

The Benefits of Poetry

The “forgotten genre” (p. 34) is how Rasinski (2014) refers to poetry— a genre that, although experts in the field of education cite many benefits of reading and writing

poetry with students, is not a visible part of many classrooms. As Holbrook states, “How do we convince those who write school curriculums that poetry is not just icing on the learning cake, but in fact is among the essential ingredients needed to make the cake rise?” (p. 1). Poetry should be a part of every classroom because of the many benefits that students can reap from a poetry-rich environment where they hear poetry being read aloud, have poetry resources available for them to read, recite poetry, share poetry, and write poetry. Georgia Heard speaks about a poetry-rich environment in her books *Awakening the Heart: Exploring Poetry in Elementary and Middle School* (1999) and *Poetry Lessons to Meet the Common Core State Standards* (2013). Heard (2013) states, “we need to build an environment where poetry is part of classroom rituals and structures throughout the year, so students’ experience with poetry is successful and their understanding grows over time” (p. 14). In this section, the benefits of reading and writing poetry with children will be discussed.

Foundational Skills

Livingston (as cited in Olson, 2017) states that teachers who have their students read and write poetry are helping them attain the foundational skills necessary for reading success. The foundational skills are identified as phonemic awareness, word recognition, and reading fluency.

Phonemic awareness. Pinnell and Fountas (2009) define phonemic awareness as “the ability to hear individual sounds in words and to identify individual sounds” (p. 546). Rasinski (2014) concludes that poetry is an excellent genre to teach these skills because of the rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, and assonance that can be found in poems.

According to Rasinski (2014). Teachers who read poetry to their students and have their students do repeated choral readings of poems with these components (rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, and assonance) are helping their students master rimes or word families.

Figure 5 is an example of a poem that could be used to help readers learn the rime -ake.

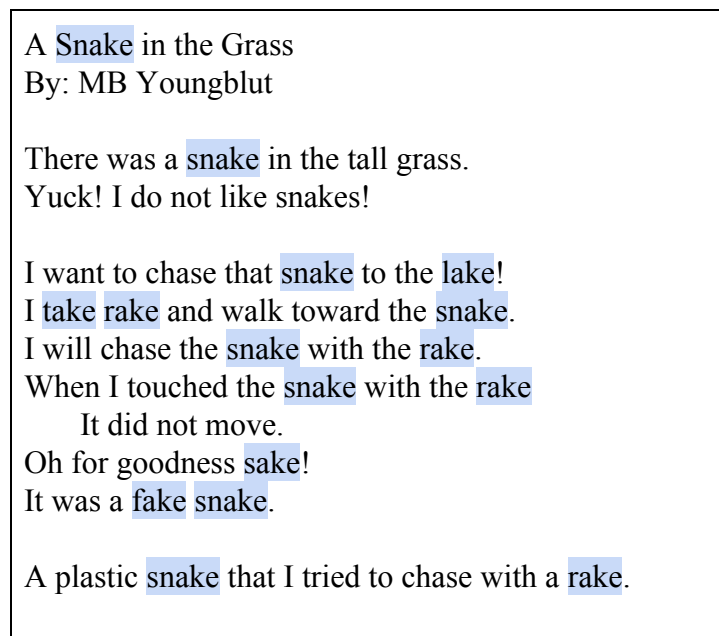


Figure 5. An example of a poem that can help students learn the rime -ake.

Phonemic awareness is like a building block for word recognition, another foundational skill. Once students have an awareness of the sounds in words they then are equipped to strengthen their ability to recognize printed words.

Word recognition. Word recognition is “the ability of a reader to recognize written words correctly and virtually effortlessly” (Wikipedia contributors, 2018, March 8). Rasinski (2014) found that poetry can also help with sight word recognition. This is due to the fact that poems are easy to remember, and through repeated readings, students

begin to read them effortlessly and are able to recognize the sight words within the poems. Figure 5 on page 24 is an example of a poem that contains sight words. This poem could be used with beginning readers to help them learn these sight words.

Word recognition is a key component in reading fluency, the third foundational skill that will be discussed. The students need to be able to read words correctly and effortlessly in order to be able to read fluently.

Reading fluency. Rasinski (2014) states that according to the National Reading Panel, “fluency is crucial for reading success (p. 32). Pinnell and Fountas (2009) define reading fluency as the reading of “continuous text with good momentum, phrasing, appropriate pausing, intonation, and stress” (p. 544). Students need to practice reading a text a number of times to strengthen their fluency.

Poems are an excellent genre for students to use when practicing fluency because they are short and can be less dense than other texts. Heard (2013) notes how the brevity of poems can be less intimidating to students, especially students that find reading challenging. Heard found that since poems can be very engaging to children, they are often more motivated to read them repeatedly. She also states that because of the way poems are arranged on a page, with stanzas and white space, they tend to be easier to read than other texts. Figure 6, below, is an example of a poem that could be used with students to practice their fluency.

Haunted House
By: Kai

Goosebumps crawling up my skin.
The lights in the house start to dim.

I'm out of here!

But wait.
The doors locked.

OH NO!
Monsters start to creep and crawl around.
What the heck is going on?
I guess I'll have to run.
AHHHH!

Figure 6. An example of a poem that can be used for fluency practice. Reprinted with permission.

The foundational skills of phonemic awareness, word recognition, and reading fluency are critical skills for early learners. In addition to these important skills, Pinnell and Fountas (2009) state, “Learning new words is a lifelong activity” (p. 152). They believe that vocabulary development is an integral part of learning.

Vocabulary Development

As Pinnell and Fountas (2009) state, “Vocabulary is important not only in early literacy but also in long-term proficiency in reading, writing, and speaking” (p. 152). Because of the great care poets take in selecting words, readers often encounter words that are new to them in poems, thus growing their vocabulary. Heard (2013) speaks of how poetry helps students “ponder” the meanings of words and “savor” words (p. 20).

When poets put words such as “missile,” “preen,” “satellite,” “mesmerizing,” “funnel,” and “symphonies” into their poems, like Joyce Sidman (2010) does in her poem “Dark Emperor” (p. 12), a poem about horned owls, students are exposed to new vocabulary words that they can ponder. When teachers share poems like this with their students and talk about the meanings of the new words, students’ vocabulary grows.

The words in poems not only can grow a student’s vocabulary but also open a door for students to learn about how powerful words can be.

Power of Words

When students have experiences of being read poetry and when they have access to poetry to read on their own, they become aware of the power words can have in a text (Holbrook, 2005). They learn that the word choices and how words are arranged on a page within a poem can evoke certain emotions in a reader (Nichols, Rasinski, Rupley, Kellogg, & Page, 2018).

Heard (2013) refers to this power of words as “word awareness” (p. 45). She believes poetry nurtures word awareness. She defines word awareness as “. . . a growing understanding of the power, variety, and playfulness of words” (p. 45). When teachers foster word awareness in their students they are modeling what it looks like to be passionate and curious about words, and how to savor words and use them well.

Through their experiences hearing and reading poetry and discussing with their teachers the power of words, students will have the tools necessary to begin to write poetry of their own where they can play with words and choose words for their compositions that they hope will create images in their reader’s mind.

Figurative language can be some of the most powerful: threads of figurative language are woven into poetry. Through their experiences with poetry, students are introduced to similes, metaphors, onomatopoeia, and personification. The ability to use figurative language adds more tools to young poets' tool boxes of choices when composing poems. Figure 7 is a student poem that includes a number of examples of figurative language.

Mom's Hug
By: Genevieve

Mom's hug
Is like a wrap of love
As soft as a teddy bear
As sweet as a million pieces of candy
The love is floating in the air
It's the perfect cure for sadness
Mom's hug

Figure 7. A student poem showing examples of figurative language. Reprinted with permission.

Through their word choices, poets are able to evoke certain emotions in their readers and can create images in the reader's mind, as discussed in the next section.

Visualizing

Visualizing is one of the comprehension strategies (Miller, 2002). Miller refers to visualizing as students "creating mental images" in their mind (p. 77). She states that these mental images occur when readers "engage with text in ways that make it personal and memorable to them alone" (p. 77). Because poets strive to evoke vivid images in

their poems, poetry is cited as a genre that works well to teach visualizing. Miller states that since poetry is “short, thought-provoking, and full of images” (p. 81) it is one of the best texts to use for teaching students about visualizing. In chapter six (pp. 73-92) of Miller’s book *Reading With Meaning* (2002) she gives several examples of lessons she uses with students to teach them about creating mental images using poetry. She also describes a “Coffeehouse Poetry Day” where the students wrote their own poems and then asked the people in the audience to try to create mental images as they listened to the student poems.

Figure 8, below, is an example of a poem that can be read to students. During a second reading of the poem, students can draw what they visualize.

<p>Stray By: Nika</p> <p>Paws beating across the ground, A scratch on my nose, Digging through the trash can, Eating all the scraps Knotted Terrier fur, Nobody knows how hard it is to be a stray.</p>

Figure 8. A student poem that could be used for a visualizing lesson. Reprinted with permission.

Visualizing was on a list Miller (2002) shared that research has shown to be a strategy that proficient readers use when they are comprehending text. Another strategy on the list is drawing inferences which will be talked about in the next section.

Inferring

Another comprehension strategy is inferring. In her chapter on inferring, Miller (2002) discusses how students infer in a variety of ways when they are reading. One way they do this is by determining the meaning of unknown words by using their schema and paying attention to clues within a text. She also talks about readers using their prior knowledge to draw conclusions about a text and “form unique interpretations” (p. 111). Because of the use of figurative language in poems, poetry is an excellent genre to use to teach students about the comprehension strategy of inferring.

In this section of the literature review the benefits discussed have been predominantly related to reading and listening to poetry. However, as the children experience the power of words, they learn that they too can choose words to evoke emotions and promote the formation of mental images in the minds of their readers. Students can demonstrate their knowledge of figurative language by putting examples of it in their poems. Figure 8, above, is an example of how a student used figurative language in her poem. In the next section additional benefits of writing poetry will be cited.

Writing Poetry

Olson (2017) found that struggling writers did well writing poetry compared to other genres because when they wrote poetry there were fewer “rules.” These rules included the usage of capital letters, punctuation, and paragraphs. Writing poetry helped them develop a more positive attitude toward writing.

Frida (2015) cited another benefit of writing poetry: it can be written about anything. Poems can be written about something imaginary or real, a personal experience or a concept. They can be written from the point of view of a person, animal, or an inanimate object. Giving students the freedom to write about a topic of their own choice is something with which Heard (1989) agrees. Heard believes that students should be encouraged to write about things that are important to them.

The poetry writing discussed so far has been writing that has been composed during a writing block during the students' day. The next section considers the use of poetry in other content areas.

Poetry Across the Curriculum

Graves (as cited in Stange & Wyant, 2008) and Holbrook (2005) say that poetry should be used in all areas of curriculum, not just during literacy learning. There is value in having students compose poems about science, social studies, and math. Holbrook (2005) asserts "Poetry can be a practical vehicle for teaching across content areas" (p. 88). In Holbrook's (2005) book *Practical Poetry: A Nonstandard Approach to Meeting Content-Area Standards*, she offers ideas and sample lessons for integrating poetry writing into these areas.

In addition to resources like Holbrook's 2005 book that can be used to integrate poetry into content areas, there are poetry books readily available for teachers to use to enhance their math, science and social studies curriculum. *Remember the Bridge: Poems of a People* by Carole Boston Weatherford (2002) is a collection of poems about Black Americans, slavery, and civil rights. The poems in this collection are thought provoking,

evoking emotions and potentially stimulating conversations about the injustices of slavery. Reading these poems with students can help them dig deeper to learn more about slavery.

And Then There Were Eight is Laura Purdie Salas' (2016) book of poems about the solar system. One of these poems could be read at the beginning of a science unit on the solar system to spark the students' interest and begin a discussion on the topic of the poem.

Research shows that there are many benefits of poetry. It helps students improve their foundational skills, and it improves their comprehension skills as they practice the strategies of visualizing and inferring. Experiences with poetry can also teach children about the power of words. Nichols, et al., (2018) state: "We feel that with the absence of poetry, students are missing out on a genre that allows them to appreciate the beauty of language from a number of vantage points: meaning, sound, rhythm, and expression" (p. 4). Poetry can also build vocabulary when students are given opportunities to learn the meanings of new words they encounter in poems. These are all strong reasons why children should hear, read, and write poetry.

Taking Poetry Off the Shelf

In light of the benefits listed above, we ask ourselves: why are educators not enhancing the lives of students with poetry experiences? Holbrook (2005) asserts that part of the reason is that teachers are feeling so pressured by reading proficiency tests that they feel there is not time for poetry. She also believes that some teachers have to get

beyond their prejudices about poetry. She speculates that some educators still have bad feelings about poetry because of experiences they had when they were students.

The Center for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE) (2018), a charity in the United Kingdom, cites ten successful ways of “encouraging a lifelong love of poetry” (p. 3) and that this love should be developed in schools. Some of the things on this list include:

- Finding ways for people in the school community to share poetry. Examples could include poetry performances, videos and poetry and musical creations.
- Providing opportunities for students to write poetry about their lives.
- Providing the necessary staff development for teachers so they feel confident about teaching poetry to their students.
- Finding ways to integrate poetry into all the areas of the curriculum.
- Giving students opportunities to read a wide variety of poetry in different forms.
- Acknowledging that poetry can be used to teach reading, phonics, and language development.
- Exposing students to professional poets either by bringing poets in as a poet-in-residency, or by watching videos of them reading their poetry.

(pp. 4-13).

It is evident after reviewing the research on the benefits of poetry that poetry should be part of the educational experiences of the students in our schools. When students listen to poetry as it is read to them, and as they read poetry themselves, the

poems serve as models, examples of texts that they can write. In the next section teacher modeling will be discussed and how it can benefit students.

Teacher Modeling

Spandel (2005) states, “If a picture is worth a thousand words, modeling is worth a thousand pictures” (p. 79). Spandel believes that using modeling to teach writing is an efficient method because of the limited time in the day to teach writing (p. 80). What was evident in all the sources was that teacher modeling is an effective method of teaching that is used in classrooms not only ranging in the topics taught, but also the age of the students. For example, Parr (2006) uses modeling with elementary poets, Fisher and Frey (2015) discuss ways middle school teachers used modeling within their reading lessons, Haston (2007) discusses the benefits of using modeling when teaching music to older students, and Yuan (2018) talked about using modeling when teaching preservice teachers.

In this section, types of modeling will be shared and the specific type that will be used in this project will be identified. Next will be a summary of the benefits of teacher modeling. The last section will discuss the role of the teacher as a writer and a member of the classroom writing community.

Definitions and examples. Modeling, in its simplest form, is when an individual (in this case a teacher) demonstrates a concept. Roehler and Duffey (as cited in Sweet, Riley, Robinson, & Conaty, 1993) separate modeling into two types: implicit and explicit. Implicit modeling is when a teacher models a certain behavior. For example, when a teacher demonstrates for their students what it looks like when they are asked to

write independently during writer's workshop, they are doing implicit modeling. Explicit modeling is when teachers demonstrate the "how to" of a task. An example of explicit modeling would be demonstrating how to start a new paragraph by indenting. Another form of modeling that is defined in Colwell's (2018) research is cognitive modeling.

Cognitive modeling is when a teacher not only demonstrates how to perform a given task, but also shares with the students their thought processes and reasoning while demonstrating the given task (Meichenbaum, as cited in Colwell, 2018). An example of cognitive modeling would be a teacher demonstrating how to write an acrostic poem. Not only would the teacher write an acrostic poem in front of their students to show them how to write one, but would also think aloud, sharing the thoughts that are going through their brain while composing the poem. The thinking aloud may be about possible words to use or how to reread a poem in the middle of composing it to help them write the next part. While thinking aloud the teacher can share any important information that will be beneficial for their students to know before they head off to compose their own poems.

In the majority of the research related to writing, the modeling discussed is cognitive modeling. Colwell (2018) also addresses a type of modeling similar to cognitive modeling that is referred to as "writing from the inside out" (p. 19). Writing from the inside out refers to teachers who not only show the students how to do a task but share with students how they have accomplished this task in their own writing. Teachers who "write from the inside out" not only are teachers of writing, but are writers themselves. These teachers write outside of work, and also write alongside their students. The benefits of this type of modeling and teaching will be discussed later in this section.

Benefits of Modeling

“As instructional strategies go, modeling is invaluable” (Spandel, 2005, p. 80). In support of this, Fisher and Frey (2015) found that teacher modeling has proven to be an effective instructional strategy that helps build student proficiency and skill in reading. Salisu (2014) states similar findings, and paints an even broader picture of the benefits of modeling by stating that people in all cultures have relied on models to pass on important values, customs, and beliefs to the younger generations.

Gallagher’s (2011) work with the National Writing Project (NWP), stated that teacher modeling stood out above all other instructional strategies as the one that improved student writing the most. The reason for this is the great benefits of students being able to watch and listen to a teacher while they write and share what they’re thinking with the students. He cites this as a huge benefit because the students see that the words do not “magically spill out” (p. 16) of a teacher’s brain. For Gallagher, as for many others referenced in this section, modeling is key.

Colwell (2018) did a study with preservice and inservice teachers. These teachers each picked a genre and created a book. Then they were required to use their books to model for a group of elementary students some aspect of writing that they had used while writing their book. One of Colwell’s conclusions was that “teacher modeling was a powerful pedagogical approach to teaching young writers” (p. 31). Colwell refers to the teacher modeling that the preservice teachers did as teaching “from the inside out” (p. 19). This modeling happens when teachers “demonstrate and think aloud about how they

used a writing strategy in a piece of their own authentic writing” (p. 19). The benefits that were cited in the study because of teaching “from the inside out” were:

- concrete writing models were shared with the students;
 - the teachers’ original books served as a useful example for the students as they began working on their own writing projects;
 - the teachers’ books and their experiences writing them gave their students an authentic experience of the stages a writer goes through to get to a final writing product;
 - the students learned about the challenges the teachers encountered in the process of publishing their books which helped the young writers to persevere when they encountered difficulties in their own writing; and
 - the students viewed the teachers as part of their classroom writing community.
- (Colwell, 2018).

Considering this list of benefits, it is wise for teachers to ponder ways to integrate teaching from the inside out as they plan writing experiences for their students.

Spandel (2005) emphasizes that a teacher should not assume that students already know something. Sometimes modeling what seems like a small concept or detail can be very valuable to a student. Even if it is only one student that finds it valuable, it is one more writer that better understands something. Clarifying for even one student helps teachers to strengthen the writing community.

Being a Writer and a Part of the Classroom Writing Community

Colwell (2018), Parr and Campbell (2006), Gallagher (2011) and Spandel (2005) are some of the authors that stressed the importance of teachers being writers like their students. DeFauw (2011) emphasizes that if teachers are going to be good writing teachers and teach children how to write, they need to be writers themselves. She believes that teachers need to become active, participating members of the classroom writing community. When teachers are part of the writing community and share with the students examples of times they have writer's block or get stuck, or when they show their students pieces they've taken from a messy first draft to a finished piece, or when they reveal the pieces in their writer's notebook that have been abandoned, they are modeling for their students what it means to be a writer. As I mentioned previously, Colwell (2018) found that when teachers become an active part of the writing community within a classroom students benefit.

Parr and Campbell (2006) have a similar message in "Poets in Practice." They believe that teachers need to not only teach their students poetry, they need to be actively engaged in writing poetry themselves (p. 36). Glover, (as cited in Parr & Campbell, 2006) states that teachers need to "know first hand what it's like to struggle to find a topic, to find the line, to select words which exactly express what is in our hearts" (p. 39). It is their belief that if teachers want their students to be risk takers, then teachers also need to be risk takers.

Routman (2001) sums up the importance of a teacher's role as a writer within the classroom when she says:

If we want students to be writers and risk takers, they need to see us as writers and risk takers. So gather your courage and write a poem on the spot. Don't worry about bungling. Students will appreciate your efforts-as well as your struggles.

(p. 28)

Sitting down and writing with their students is something that is out of many teachers' comfort zone. In the next section Gallagher (2011) touches upon this.

Gallagher (2011) addresses the issue that some teachers choose not to write with their children because they do not feel comfortable writing in front of them. Although he understands why some teachers feel this way, he emphasizes that this reluctance needs to be overcome. He believes this because he views teacher modeling as the most effective way to teach students to write. Seeing the teacher experience some of the same struggles that they experience in their writing can be invaluable. "When my students see me wrestling with decisions as my writing unfolds, it gives them insight on how to compose their own pieces" (p. 15). When teachers write with their students and model writing in front of their students, they become part of the classroom writing community.

Spandel (2005) discusses the benefits of being a part of the classroom writing community in her chapter "The Right to See Others Write" (p. 78). According to the author, when teachers think out loud in front of their students, showing them how they take a broad topic (like a trip to California) and narrow it down to something that is manageable to write about, it empowers the students to feel they can do the same in their writing. Even after reading about the many benefits of modeling and being a part of a classroom writing community, some teachers may still feel that even though writing with

their students many be beneficial and empower their students, it still is something they feel very uncomfortable about doing.

The following are suggestions for teachers who are apprehensive about writing with their students, but want to take the leap and begin living a writing life and being part of their classroom writing community. Colwell (2018) includes many of these in his research.

1. Take time to write with your students on a regular basis, even if it is for only for 10 minutes a day.
2. Challenge yourself to do the writing assignments you ask your students to do. Share with them how you approached the assignment and any challenges you encountered while doing it.
3. Begin keeping a writer's notebook and share with your students types of things you write in it.
4. Take a piece of your writing that you have completed and share with your students your drafts, revisions, edits, and the completed piece.
5. Take time to sit with your classroom writing community and share pieces of writing together.
6. Share with your students your successes and challenges as a writer.
7. Celebrate you and your new role as an active member of your classroom writing community!

(p. 32).

So far in this chapter, the many benefits of poetry have been discussed, and the benefits of teacher modeling and the benefits of teachers becoming active members of the classroom writing community have been explained. In the final section of this chapter, the Common Core State Standards (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010) will be examined to find which standards have elements of poetry in them. This examination will enable us to discern which of the standards could be supported by using the genre of poetry.

Poetry and the Common Core

Inconsistencies in educational institutions and a desire to have students better prepared to enter the workforce and college were two of the motivating factors for the development of the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010). These standards were adopted by 41 of the 50 states of the U.S. in 2010. The standards provide educators with the skills that students are expected to be able to perform at each grade level. The English Language Arts and Literacy Standards (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010) are broken down into four main strands: 1) Reading, 2) Writing, 3) Speaking and Listening, and 4) Language. Each strand has a set of College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards (CCR) that are the same across all grade levels. Under each CCR standard is a list of grade specific expectations (standards).

In this section I will discuss the third grade standards that speak specifically of the genre of poetry and also standards where poetry could be used to accomplish the expected outcome.

Standard RL.3.4. Standard RL.3.4 in the Reading Literature strand states that grade three students will be able to “determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, distinguishing literal from nonliteral language” (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010). Literal language is defined as the dictionary definition of words. Nonliteral language goes beyond the dictionary definition. It is often considered synonymous with the term figurative language. Examples of figurative language include similes, metaphors, onomatopoeia, personification, and idioms. Writers use figurative language in their writing to make the reading experience more fun and exciting for their readers.

Heard (2013) states, “If students haven’t had some exposure to nonliteral language, they will have difficulty with reading comprehension” (p. 71). Because students will encounter nonliteral language in texts throughout their lives, it is pertinent to explicitly teach what it is. However, before jumping in and doing a lesson on nonliteral language/figurative language, teachers need to determine whether their students have basic background knowledge about the literal meanings of words. They need to be cognizant of the literal meanings of words in order to be able to comprehend nonliteral language in text.

Poetry is an excellent genre to teach students about nonliteral language because of the wealth of figurative language that is found in poems. Heard (2013) includes a helpful demonstration lesson in her book, *Poetry Lessons to Meet the Common Core State Standards*, to show teachers how they can introduce their students to nonliteral language.

Although she used a specific poem about a dragonfly in the lesson (p. 73), the lesson could be adapted using other poems.

Standard L.3.5 and L.3.5.A. The importance of understanding figurative language and literal and nonliteral meanings of words is reiterated in the Language strand of the CCSS under the anchor standard of “Vocabulary Acquisition and Use”. For these standards, students need to “demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships and nuances in word meanings” and “distinguish the literal and nonliteral meanings of words and phrases in context” (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010). Recognizing the importance of skill in the comprehension of word relationships, nuances of meaning and figurative language, Vardell and Wong (2012) have woven “tips” (p. 15) related to words into their poetry lessons for third graders in their book *The Poetry Friday Anthology: Poems for the School Year with Connections to the Common Core*. These tips are intended to help students reach a deeper level of meaning from the poems. An example of this is found in the teaching tip to use after reading the poem “A Plague of Penguins” (p. 150). The tip refers to alliteration and how poets often like to use a string of words that start with the same sound. The tip then asks the students to identify in the poem the alliteration that the poet used (p. 150).

Standard RL.3.5. Standard RL.3.5 states that third grade students will be able to “refer to parts of stories, dramas, and poems when writing or speaking about a text, using terms such as chapter, scene, and stanza; describe how each successive part builds on earlier sections” (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2018). Third graders have learned about stories. They know that stories are often divided into chapters and within each

chapter are paragraphs. In order for students to be able to accomplish this standard they will need to learn about scenes in plays and stanzas in poems. (In this document specifically regarding poetry, the task of assisting the students in learning about scenes in plays will not be addressed.) Stanza in Italian means “room.” Heard (2013) in her demonstration lesson in *Poetry Lessons to Meet the Common Core State Standards* encourages students to think of the stanzas within a poem as rooms.

Poets intentionally use stanzas in their poems for a variety of reasons. Heard (2013) shares a list of reasons why poets use stanzas. These reasons include:

- Separating certain events, images or thoughts,
- Giving the reader time to slow down and think,
- Drawing attention to certain images within the text, and
- Shaping the visual presentation of their poem on the page.

(p. 93).

Throughout their book, Vardell and Wong (2013) have woven tips for teachers to use with their students to get them talking about stanzas and why poets choose to use stanzas in their poems. Discussing the poem “Bluebirds” (p. 154), the authors point out that each stanza could be read as if it were a separate poem. This can lead into a discussion about the choices poets make regarding line breaks and stanzas.

It will take more than just a few interactions with poems for students to be able to effectively understand and discuss how stanzas within poems build upon one another. Because of this, educators like Heard (2013) believe that poetry should be an integral part of every classroom.

Standard RF.3.4.B. One of the Reading Foundational Skills for third grade in CCSS is fluency. RF.3.4.B states that students will be able to “read grade-level prose and poetry orally with accuracy, appropriate rate, and expression on successive readings” (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010). In the first section of this chapter under the benefits of reading and writing poetry with children, I explained how poetry is an excellent genre to use for practicing the foundational skill of fluency. Poems are often short. Therefore, they can be less intimidating to students. Also, since poems can be very engaging, students are often more motivated to read them repeatedly (Heard, 2013).

Standard SL.3.5. In the Speaking and Listening strand of CCSS third grade, students are expected to “create engaging audio recordings of stories or poems that demonstrate fluid reading at an understandable pace; add visual displays when appropriate to emphasize or enhance certain facts or details” (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010). Such recordings might be used in assessment.

Graves (1992) states, “Poetry is meant to be read aloud” (p. 9). The writers at the Center for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE) (2018) agree. They state, “Children need opportunities to read poetry aloud” (p. 5). They believe that teachers should show their students videos of poets performing poems because it can inspire students when they are asked to do their own performances. They encourage teachers to “allow time and space for children to rehearse and polish performances before presenting to audiences” (p. 5). CLPE (2018) suggests that teachers encourage students to respond creatively to poetry by integrating dance, drama, music, and art into their performances (p. 12). This idea would be an excellent suggestion for teachers to accomplish Standard SL.3.5.

Standard 10. Standard 10 of the CCSS states the range of text types that students in K-5 should be exposed to during their elementary years. Within the poetry section it lists the following types: nursery rhymes, the subgenres of the narrative poem, limerick, and free verse poems (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2018). The subgenres of the narrative poem include the narrative poem, lyric, and dramatic poem. Heard (2013) defines the subgenres in her book *Poetry Lessons to Meet the Common Core State Standards*. A narrative poem usually tells a story and is written in the second person. A lyric is often written in first person and emphasizes the poet's "feelings, observations, thoughts, and perceptions" (p. 112). A dramatic poem "is a drama written in verse or in poetic form" (p. 112). An example of a dramatic poem would be one of Shakespeare's plays adapted for young readers. Heard (2013) defines free verse as "poetry that is written without the use of strict meter or rhyme that uses the natural rhythms of speech" (p. 113).

It will not be enough to show students a single example of each of the different text types of poetry listed in Standard 10; it will take numerous experiences for them to become confident in the different types. For this reason, it is critical that teachers create a classroom environment where poetry flourishes. Heard (2013) dedicates an entire chapter in her book to making sure poetry has a place in classrooms (pp. 14-18). She encourages teachers to read poems to their students every day, to have poems hanging around the classroom, and to have poetry books available for students to read. She also includes a sample schedule to show teachers how they can intersperse poems throughout their day. The Center for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE) (2018) agrees with this. They too believe that educators need to develop "poetry friendly" classrooms (p. 4). They believe

it is the job of teachers to “ensure poetry of all kinds is a prominent part of the reading environment” (p. 4). Exposing elementary students to many forms of poetry on a regular basis can yield the many benefits described.

Standard W.3.3. Writing standard 3.3 states that students will “write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences” (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2018). At first glance, it would seem to educators that the writing of poetry is not part of the CCSS. However, when defining narrative texts on page 23 of Appendix A, it states, “The narrative category does not include all of the possible forms of creative writing, such as many types of poetry. The Standards leave the inclusion and evaluation of other such forms to teacher discretion” (NGA Center & CCSSO, Appendix A, 2010).

Educators like Lain (2017) believe that having students hear and write poetry is one of the best ways to give students hands-on ways to get to know and understand figurative language. She states, “Poetry teaches language play, encourages kids to fool around with their words and lines” (p. 24). Burkins and Yaris (2018) on their blog also support having students write poetry. They state that “one of the ideas central to the Common Core writing goals is that students use writing to clearly communicate their thinking, and writing poetry is an exercise in precision” (p. 2). They further explain that the efforts a poet goes through to choose just the right words to convey their ideas helps them to improve their writing abilities (p. 2). They conclude, “poetry offers added texture to our writing instruction as it can legitimately serve as a platform for narrative,

informational, and persuasive writing” (p. 2). So just as reading poetry enhances learning in a myriad of ways, so does the writing of poetry.

Summary

After reading what experts say about the benefits of poetry, the benefits of modeling as a teaching method, the importance of teachers being a part of the classroom writing community, and delving into the CCSS, the following conclusions can be made:

- Poetry should be a part of every classroom.
- Classrooms should be poetry-rich environments. Students should hear poetry being read aloud, and they should have access to poetry resources to read, recite, share, and write.
- Teacher modeling is a highly effective teaching strategy.
- Teachers should be active members of the classroom writing community.
- As members of the classroom writing community, teachers should write with their students, and share their writing successes and struggles with their students.
- Poetry is present in the CCSS (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010).
- According to the CCSS (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010), poetry is one of the text types students are expected to be exposed to in the elementary grades.
- It has been shown that students develop proficiency in several of the skills of the standards when they are taught through the genre of poetry.

Finally, two lists were included in this chapter that can help educators make their classrooms poetry-rich environments and can help teachers become active members of their classroom writing communities. The first list is on page 33 and is a list of ways

teachers can encourage a love of poetry (CLPE, 2018). The second list, on page 40 contains suggestions for teachers who aspire to become a part of the classroom writing community with their students (Colwell, 2018).

In response to the question, *How can third grade teachers effectively expose students to the genre of poetry and teach them how to write poetry*, the research confirms that the development of a poetry unit would provide a beneficial addition to the current literacy curriculums of my district. Chapter Three will first go into detail about the project that I will create. Secondly, the demographics and setting of the project will be described as well as who will utilize the project.

CHAPTER THREE

Planning the Garden

Introduction

My research question for this project has been: *How can third grade teachers effectively expose students to the genre of poetry and teach them how to write poetry?* Chapter One described my personal journey that led up to being a third grade teacher with a passion for poetry. Chapter One also elaborated on my rationale for this project: although research has shown that there are benefits to creating poetry-rich classrooms (Heard, 2013), my district has adopted reading and writing curriculums that have very little poetry in them. Secondly, because poetry is part of the Common Core State Standards (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010) which my state has adopted, there seems to be a disconnect: research says poetry is beneficial; poetry is part of the CCSS (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010); but it is not flourishing in classrooms. My project fills this gap. Chapter Two summarized the research in three specific areas: 1) The benefits of poetry, 2) The benefits of teacher modeling, and 3) Poetry and the CCSS.

In this chapter, first I will describe the project that I have created. Second will be a brief summary of my findings in the research. Third, I will describe the setting of the project, and fourth discuss the target audience. After that I will summarize the chapter.

The Project: Sowing Seeds

For this project, I developed a set of 12 poetry lessons to be used with third graders. Within the writing lessons there are examples of the types of poetry that the students will be expected to compose and a teacher modeling component. In the introduction to the poetry unit there is an explanation to teachers of what teacher modeling looks like and the rationale for why teacher modeling is a good teaching strategy. I used *The Understanding by Design (UbD)* (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011) to develop the poetry unit and the individual lessons. I picked UbD because of its emphasis on the importance of students not only learning material but truly understanding the material.

The UbD approach is grounded in a “backward” approach to curriculum planning where you begin with the the results you hope to accomplish and then move forward. This approach has three stages in the process of planning units: 1) Begin with the desired result, 2) Determine what evidence will show the students’ understanding, and 3) plan the actual learning experiences and instruction. Also included in the Wiggins and McTighe’s book are a list of helpful qualities that I needed to be cognizant of when planning the unit (p. 10).

After writing the poetry unit, I gave it to my two readers for feedback. One of the readers is a literacy coach who is an expert in the field of poetry. The other reader is a retired elementary teacher. I also asked my capstone project writing group to read the unit and give me feedback. Based on the feedback, I made necessary changes to the poetry unit.

After each poetry lesson, I included questions that teachers can use to evaluate what went well in the lesson and how to better meet the needs of their students. These questions can also be used to help gauge whether the students are making progress toward reaching the learning objectives.

I also developed a reflection for the students to fill out at the end of the unit to find out how they feel about poetry and about writing poems. This will give me feedback from the students' perspective.

The Findings: The Fertilizer for the Garden

Research shows that poetry should be a part of every classroom and there are many benefits students can reap from a poetry-rich environment. In Rasinski's (2014) research, he found that poetry is a good genre to use when teaching many of the foundational skills students need to read. Heard (2013), along with other experts, have found that poetry is an excellent genre to use to practice fluency. Heard (2013) describes how poetry can broaden a child's vocabulary.

Olson (2017) found that struggling writers did well writing poetry compared to other genres because when they wrote poetry there were fewer rules. Holbrook (2005) believes that poetry can be used to teach topics in science, social studies, and math. She has written a book about how to integrate poetry writing into these areas.

Spandel (2005) states, "As instructional strategies go, modeling is invaluable" (p. 80). Gallagher (2011) stated in his work with the National Writing Project (NWP) that teacher modeling stood out above all other instructional strategies as the one that improved student writing the most.

Setting: Where the Garden Will Be Planted

The setting for this project is a small urban elementary public school in the upper midwest. The school is located 45 minutes from a major metropolitan city. It is a K-5 elementary school with four classes of each grade. The enrollment of the school averages about 480 students per year. Approximately 64% of the student population is White, 26% is Hispanic, 2% is Asian, 4% is Black/African American, and 4% are categorized as other other races. About 18% have English as their second language (EL students).

Approximately 42% of its students receive free or reduced price lunches. Special Education services are provided to 15.8% the of students. In AY 2017/18 the yearly state required reading and math assessment indicated 57.7% of the students were proficient. The percentage of students that were proficient has increased compared to the previous year.

Of the 24 classroom teachers, 21 are white females and three are Latino males. Three of the classroom teachers have less than five years of experience. Seven of them have six to ten years of experience. Four have between 11 and 15 years of experience. Eleven of the 20 teachers have more than fifteen years of classroom teaching experience.

Participants: The Gardeners

This project will first be implemented by me. Adjustments will be made to the lessons after looking at the formative assessments and the student reflection piece. Following the first year of implementation (2019), the project will be shared with the other third grade teachers, not only at the school described above, but also the other elementary schools in the district.

Summary

In this chapter, I described my project which was to develop a poetry unit consisting of poetry lessons to be used with third graders. The lessons were developed using *Understanding By Design* (UbD) (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011). The setting of this project along with the target audience were discussed. Finally, related theories that were discussed in detail in Chapter Two were named.

Chapter Four will be my final reflection on the project.

CHAPTER FOUR

Cultivating Gardens

My love for poetry and the lack of it in the current curriculum in my school district was the reason I chose to do this capstone project. To delve into the research and find reasons why teachers should expose children to poetry was like getting the soil ready to plant a garden of beautiful flowers. With the soil prepared, I was ready to do the work that would answer my capstone question: *How can third grade teachers effectively expose students to the genre of poetry and teach them how to write poetry?*

In this chapter readers will find a description of my experiences of working on this capstone project. Next, they will learn significant findings from my literature review. Then they will find discussion of the project created as a response to my capstone question. After that a section will include possible implications and limitations of the project, and finally, a glance toward the future and where the writing of this capstone project could lead.

Hidden Gems on the Capstone Journey

The first gems I encountered on my capstone journey were the 13 wonderful people in my cohort who signed up for the on-campus option of the MALED (Masters of Arts in Literacy Education) program. Little did we know when we met each other that first September evening in 2017 that we would become good friends, a network of

support and encouragement, and resources for each other as we travel the path toward our degree. I believe these connections with my colleagues would not have happened in an online program. The experiences of meeting face-to-face each week with my cohort were invaluable. We not only got to know each other professionally, but also personally. I am grateful for each one of them.

When our cohort began the Capstone Practicum, the class where we would write the first three chapters of our capstone, I started to feel overwhelmed. The professor of the class made us all jump into the writing very quickly. The writing task ahead seemed very daunting. I had finished my undergraduate degree in 1984, and the types of writing I have done since then (which included friendly letters, correspondence with students' parents, and stories and poems written with my students) were very different than writing a capstone. Another cloud that hung over my head was remembering a professor during my undergraduate years making a comment to me about my writing which made me conclude that I wasn't a good writer and never would be. For years my husband willingly proofed newsletters before they went out to parents, knowing that I needed reassurance that they were ok.

Along with the hours of writing chapters one, two, and three, came many uncertainties. Was I doing it right? Did they make sense? What if it wasn't good enough? The professor of my Capstone Practicum was the second hidden gem in my journey. Although at first her feedback and the high expectations she had for us and our writing was exhausting, it was her comment to me during a conference that changed me. She told me that I was a good writer. This comment made all the difference moving forward. Not

only did it help me change my mindset about myself as a writer, but it empowered and challenged me to strive to always be that person with my current and future students that not only believes in them, but challenges them to do their best.

The final gems I found on my journey were ones I discovered during my research, which will be discussed in the next section.

The Fertilizer For the Garden: Significant Discoveries in My Research

Every year when my students leave me to go on to the next grade, I know they are leaving with many poetry experiences: listening to poetry, reading it, performing it, writing it, and illustrating it. Up until now, it had always just been something that I added to the required curriculum because of my love for poetry. But now, I have the evidence of why all teachers should be making an effort to find ways to plant poetry seeds in their classroom and let the students experience its beauty. My research found that using poetry with students can help them improve their foundational skills. Evidence shows that poetry is a wonderful genre to use when teaching the comprehension strategies of visualizing and inferring. Poetry can also teach children about the power of words. Nichols, et al., (2018) state: “We feel that with the absence of poetry, students are missing out on a genre that allows them to appreciate the beauty of language from a number of vantage points: meaning, sound, rhythm, and expression” (p. 4). Poetry can also build vocabulary when students are given the opportunity to learn the meaning of new words they encounter in poems. These benefits were not the only findings in my research as to why poetry should be present in elementary classrooms.

Also uncovered in my research was the fact that poetry is not only present in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010), but is one of the text types students are expected to be exposed to in the elementary grades. After discovering this, since my state uses the CCSS, it is critical for teachers in my district to get the poetry seeds planted in their classrooms and begin fertilizing the seeds.

Two resources that will be valuable to revisit when planning future poetry experiences for my students pertaining to the CCSS will be Georgia Heard's book *Poetry Lessons to Meet the Common Core State Standards* (2013) and Vardell and Wong's book *The Poetry Friday Anthology: Poems for the School Year With Connections to the Common Core* (2012). Both of these resources have sample lessons to do with students that relate to accomplishing the goals of the specific standards in each grade level.

Another finding in the research for this capstone was the confirmation that teacher modeling can make a positive impact on students' learning and performance. I had a hypothesis that there were benefits to modeling for students what you are expecting them to do, and that is why I planned to put a modeling component into the poetry writing lessons for this project, but my research on teacher modeling confirmed its importance. In Gallagher's (2011) work with the National Writing Project (NWP), he stated that teacher modeling stood out above all other instructional strategies as the one that improved student writing the most. The reason for this is the great benefits of students being able to watch and listen to a teacher while they write and share what they're thinking with the students. He cites this as a huge benefit because the students see that the words do not "magically spill out" (p. 16) of a teacher's brain.

Moving forward, knowing now what research says about the benefits of teacher modeling, a personal goal of mine will be to find ways to integrate modeling into other areas of the curriculum, not just the writing lessons.

A final discovery in the research was finding the Poetryline, a Center for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE) online resource <https://clpe.org.uk/poetryline>.

Poetryline includes teacher resources, a section of poetry forms and devices, poems to share with students, and videos of poets reading their poetry. This is one of the most comprehensive teacher resources on poetry I have ever encountered, and one that I plan to use with my future students. It is organizations like CLPE that confirm the importance of poetry and why it can enrich the lives of all people.

This concludes a summary of discoveries made through research done for this capstone, the benefits of poetry, its presence in the CCSS, and the importance of teacher modeling. In the next section I will explain the project developed for this capstone.

Growing Third Grade Gardens: The Project

For my project, I wrote a set of 12 poetry writing lessons. The writing of these lessons came out of a need I perceived in my district after noticing a significant absence of poetry in the current third grade literacy curriculums, *Making Meaning* (Center for the Collaborative Literacy, 2015) and *Being A Writer* (Center for the Collaborative Literacy, 2014). The amount of poetry present would not prepare students to successfully master the standards in the CCSS (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010). In addition to the standards, I thought of the many benefits of having poetry-rich classrooms that were

cited in the research and how having a classroom where poetry blossomed was a personal priority.

Georgia Heard (1989) states, “every writer of poetry is first a reader of poetry” (p. 1). Since my focus for this project was poetry writing lessons, in the introduction to the lessons I list ways for teachers to immerse their students in the genre of poetry before beginning the poetry writing lessons. These experiences include: 1) reading a poem a day to students, 2) creating poetry-rich environments by designating sections in classroom libraries for poetry books, and 3) having individual poem books for each student as growing collections of poems for independent reading, partner reading, and choral reading. Each lesson includes a teacher modeling component. It was a priority to include this because of the clear evidence in the research of the benefits of modeling.

In addition to teacher modeling, a teacher reflection and evaluation is also part of each lesson. Because of this, each lesson includes a teacher reflection/assessment section with questions that the teacher can use for formative assessment. Feedback will also be collected from the students periodically throughout the poetry lessons asking them to reflect on what they are learning and how they are feeling about writing poetry. This student feedback can also be used by teachers for formative assessment.

The 2019/20 school year will be the first year of implementing these poetry lessons. With a new year, a new group of third graders, a new garden of poetry will be planted.

In the following section the implications and limitations of the project will be addressed.

The Harvest: The Implications and Limitations

With the discoveries gleaned from my research on the benefits of poetry, and that poetry is one of the genres expected to be taught in the CCSS (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010), I feel obligated as a member of the district literacy committee to share this information. One implication of this sharing could be that administrators in the district take action and put together a plan for all elementary teachers to create poetry-rich classrooms. Of course, this is a dream! But if it were to happen, I would be ready and willing to help teachers set up their poetry section in their classroom libraries and share ideas of how to integrate poetry experiences throughout their students' day.

A second implication could occur with the sharing of the data that modeling is an effective teaching strategy that can positively impact student learning. Again, if measures were taken to encourage teachers to do more modeling with their students, I would offer assistance to teachers who are reluctant and nervous about modeling certain things in front of students, like writing. In his research, Colwell (2018) included great suggestions for teachers who are apprehensive about writing in front of their students. This list, along with other resources, are things I would have available to share.

I have listed two of the implications that could occur as a result of this capstone project. What follows will be two of the limitations of the project.

The first limitation is time. I would have loved to have had time to write a set of poetry lessons to be used with the students over the course of the entire year, one

lesson a week. Because there are deadlines and endings to all projects, like the writing of this capstone, I chose to do 12 lessons. I included a section at the end of the lessons with additional ideas for lessons, ideas that next year (2019/20), when I implement the lessons the first time, I hope to write and do with my students.

A second limitation is that this capstone was on poetry, definitely not a topic that is brought up at literacy meetings or written about in the monthly literacy magazines. In fact poetry is a genre that Rasinski (2014) referred to as the “forgotten genre” (p. 34). Because poetry is not a hot topic of discussion in literacy, I discovered when in seeking resources for my literature review that there was a finite number of articles and books on poetry. With perseverance, I was able to find a wonderful collection of resources that helped in writing this capstone.

This section discussed the implications and limitations of my capstone project. The final section of this chapter will present future interests that I hope to pursue related to my capstone, and my conclusion.

Future Gardens

For years I wanted to get my Masters, but the time never seemed right. I decided at the age of 55 it was time. It is a decision I will never regret. I have met many wonderful people on the journey. I have learned so much in classes and in all the stages of writing this capstone. The journey has changed me.

Moving forward, I feel empowered; learnings from this journey have opened up new possibilities for my future. I hope to network beyond my district, share with other educators what I have learned from my research, and give others tools to plant their own

poetry gardens in their classrooms. Some of this networking may take place on social media, or it may involve submitting proposals to literacy institutes, on sessions related to poetry and teacher modeling. We all hope to make a difference in our world. Working on my masters has ignited a spark in me to look at new possibilities.

In the children's book *Miss Rumphius* by Barbara Cooney (1985), the main character, Alice, promises her Grandfather that one of the things she will do in life is to find a way to make the world more beautiful. The way Alice accomplishes this is by sowing lupine seeds all over her village. I read this book every year to my students and ask them what they could do to make the world more beautiful. Creating a poetry-rich classroom for my students is one way that I hope to make the world more beautiful by offering them an environment where they can experience the beauty of poetry not only by reading poems composed by others, but by creating and sharing their own poems. In this way, the poetic seeds that I plant in my classroom will grow into strong, thriving plants spreading out roots that will sprout up not only in other areas of my classroom, but hopefully wherever the poets who leave my classroom go.

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