

Poetry & Resilience

3 Workshops, January - March 2012



Program Summary | Developed by Amy Small-McKinney, MCPL 2011

The idea of using poetry to support children, teens, and young adults probably germinated years ago, when Amy Small-McKinney, with poet therapist, Anjana Deshpande, facilitated an all-day workshop for women in their community. Through poetry and journaling, in a safe environment, the women examined and expressed feelings. It was a wonderful day! Amy and Anjana felt as though they had discovered something special. As 2011 Montgomery County Poet Laureate, it occurred to Amy that she could offer this to kids who needed to find a way to communicate their emotions and the challenges of their lives. Amy credits a Middle-School teacher for helping her, a shy girl, by encouraging her own poetic voice. Teaming up with Montgomery County Poet Laureate Program's Executive Director, Joanne Leva, and Anjana, Amy hopes to reach out to surrounding counties, and children, teens, and young adults. A pilot program partnering with NHS Human Services of Montgomery County's Youth Advisory Board is an exciting first step.

An Invitation from Amy

Dear Friends,

I remember the first time I read a poem and thought, "Wow!" When I was a teen, and even before, I felt as though no one understood me and I couldn't find a way to communicate so they would understand. I remember being sprawled across the couch and picking up an old book from the shelves. I opened the book to a Dylan Thomas poem, Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night.

I remember feeling as though I had finally found a language I could "understand." From that day on, I began to write. I wrote poems constantly. It was as though someone had opened a door and let in fresh air. Today, I have published two small books of poems and have finished another full-length book of poetry. I have even won some awards. I have had people come to me, after having listened to me read my work aloud, and thank me for writing something that touched them, that echoed their own lives.

I did, eventually, find teachers who read my poems and encouraged me. Now, it is my turn to reach out to you. I am so excited to work with you! I want to encourage you to use poetry as another tool for resiliency, and to be heard. Let's walk together through the opened door.

*I look forward to listening to your words.
Amy Small-McKinney*

LESSON PLAN

Session 1

Setting the Tone for Permission

Opening Discussion:

- Have you ever been lonely?
- » Read Mary Oliver's poem, Wild Geese
- » What line resonates with you?
- » How does it make you feel?
- » Writing exercise in journals to process feelings

Reading of poems

- » Announcing your place

Closure

- » Who or what is your family now?

LESSON PLAN

Session Two

Part One

What is a simile?

Define: A simile makes a comparison between one thing and another, usually using the words "like" or "as." In this exercise, we are using the comparison word, "like."

Examples:

- I am silly like clay.
- I am silly as asparagus.
- I am shy as cement.
- I am shy like a sparrow.
- Ask if anyone can give an example?

It is important to know that your simile does not have to make sense to anyone else. You can compare your feeling to anything you want and let your imagination go.

Writing Exercise:

Rules:

We will be using similes in this exercise, which means we will use the word "like" to make a comparison between one thing and another. In this exercise, we will be comparing a feeling with something else. Always use the word "like."

- Pick a feeling word like anger or sadness or happiness or whatever word you want.
- First line must begin with _____ looks like_____.
- Each following line must describe feeling as one of your 5 senses. For example, anger tastes like _____.
- Your poem should have 5 lines: looks, feels, tastes, smells, sounds.

At the end, title your poem but you cannot use the feeling word in the title.

Part Two

Define Haiku loosely: Three lines

Read Haiku by Gary Snyder (Snyder called his own form of haiku: Hitch Haiku)

After Weeks of Watching the Roof Leak
By Gary Snyder

After weeks of watching the roof leak
I fixed it tonight
by moving a single board

Share thought: In this poem, something was repaired by fixing one small thing and yet it made all the difference. Note: Change comes in tiny steps.

Writing Exercise:

Pick something you feel good about and write a 3 line poem:

- When?
- What?
- How?

Part Three

(on your own in your journals)

- 5 minute sprint – remember time yourself for 5 minutes and just write
- Write about any subject
- Try to use "like" or "as" in your poem

Group Share (10 min.)

LESSON PLAN

Session Three

Warm-Up: (5 min. sprint): "Since we last met, what has been going on with you?"

Group Share (10 min.): Ask if anyone would like to share anything in their journals they have written since we last met.

IMAGINATION & PERSONIFICATION

I. Use a painting/photograph as workshop theme (15 min)

- Ask: what gets your attention? First thing you notice? Why?
- Ask: what do you think is happening in this picture, from girl's perspective?
- Ask: what title would you give to this picture?

II. I am an object with an emotion

- First, go around the room and each person share what object they are. For example, I am a teapot.
- Next, go around again and everyone give an emotion to the object they are For example, I am a caring teapot.

III. Giving voice to whatever you want to describe in the picture (15 min.)

- Return to the picture
- Become an object in the picture
- For example, be the bars, the balloon, the color red.
- Give the object/thing human thoughts and feelings and a voice
- Remember surprising comparisons and similes: I am as ___ as the ___

Example: If you are the bars, you might say, "I am as soft as the nighttime" or "I am cold as a cruel mouth."

IV. Group Write (30 min.) Putting human thoughts and emotions on something that isn't human

- Discuss personification again
- Return to your original object (or select another)

- Pretend to be your object
- Dig deeper and write from its viewpoint
- Remember five senses we have used before in poems: touch, hear, see, taste, smell

Examples of some things to think about: How does the object feel? What does it see?

Group Write (15 min):

- Handout/Template: I USED TO BE/ BUT NOW _____
- may want to try your similes
- use imagination
- every line must begin: I used to be but now I am _____
- the last line highlights a strength or something you feel positive about and begins with the words: And now I am _____

Wrap-Up - 5 Min. Sprint: Write in journals things that have happened in your life over the last 3 months

Good Closure (15 min.)

1. student work was respected
2. the journey is coming to an end
3. they have the tools to practice resiliency in the face of hard times

Have entire group stand up, make a circle holding hands. Go around the circle and have each person state one thing learned from this experience.

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