

Social Emotional Poetry

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Contents

Acknowledgements	5
Introduction	7
What Is SEL?	9
Choosing Poems For Your Lessons	11
UNIT 1: WHAT DOES POETRY LOOK LIKE?	13
Lesson 1. Fewer Words	14
Lesson 2. Line Breaks.....	17
Lesson 3. Stanzas.....	19
Lesson 4. Poetic Structures	22
UNIT 2: WHAT DOES POETRY SOUND LIKE?	25
Lesson 5. The Power of Words	26
Lesson 6. Rhymes	29
Lesson 7. Repetition.....	31
UNIT 3: POETRY TOOLS	35
Lesson 8. Metaphors.....	36
Lesson 9. Similes	39
Lesson 10. Imagery	42
UNIT 4: SEL AND POETIC EXPRESSION	45
Lesson 11. Evoking Feelings	46
Lesson 12. Expressing Life with Poetry.....	49
Lesson 13. Expressing SEL Skills	52
Lesson 14. SEL Games and Poetry.....	54
Lesson 15. Perspective-Taking	57

UNIT 5: POETRY ANALYSIS	61
Lesson 16. Reading Poetry with Curiosity.....	62
Lesson 17. Collaborative Analysis	65
UNIT 6: EDITING AND PRESENTATION	67
Lesson 18. Editing with Agency.....	68
Lesson 19. Presentation	71
UNIT 7: SHOWCASE	73
Lesson 20. Celebration and Praise	74
What Now?	77
About the Author	79

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Introduction

For 20 years, poetry transformed my classroom. Reading poetry validated students' individual relationships to meaning. Writing poetry invited students to be vulnerable and expressive. Self-confidence increased, trust was built, and a palpable sense of community was established.

Teaching poetry achieved every social and emotional learning standard. Self-awareness was met by having students connect to what was individually meaningful to them. Self-management was met by discovering and regulating one's emotional experience in reading and writing poetry. The standards for social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making were met by creating poetry collectively, peer editing, and respectful listening.

Although teaching poetry achieves social-emotional learning standards intrinsically, the lessons in this book help students reflect upon and articulate their social-emotional experiences. This crucial step allows teachers to track and nurture social-emotional skills side by side with academic instruction. By engaging in SEL-specific dialogue at the end of a lesson, the opportunity for SEL flourishes by naming it and giving it space to grow.

You do not need to be an SEL expert to implement the lessons in this book. Social Emotional Poetry was written for teachers who are unfamiliar with SEL curricula, but want social-emotional results. By just teaching the student-centered lessons, which are all constructed around reflection, exploration, and collaboration, you will be teaching social-emotional skills. You only need to facilitate a discussion about the social-emotional experience at the end of each lesson.

The book is divided into eight units. Every unit provides a lesson structure that can be repeated and expanded upon by using different poems or by introducing a new poetry element.

UNIT 1 introduces the form and structure of poetry.

UNIT 2 explores what poetry sounds like.

UNIT 3 considers poetic topics.

UNIT 4 investigates poetic tools.

UNIT 5 is a blueprint for analyzing poetry.

UNIT 6 is a blueprint for teaching a specific social-emotional skill.

UNIT 7 is a blueprint for a social-emotional approach to editing and presenting.

UNIT 8 showcases students' poetry in a final celebration.

Enjoy the beautiful boundless experience of social-emotional poetry. Your class will be forever transformed.

What Is SEL?

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) describes SEL as “the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.”

They divide SEL into five standards with corresponding learning objectives:

Self-Awareness:

- Identifying emotions
- Self-perception
- Identifying personal, cultural, and linguistic assets
- Body-mind awareness

Social Awareness:

- Empathy
- Perspective-taking
- Respect for others
- Understanding one’s role and contribution within a community

Self-Management:

- Regulation of emotions, thoughts, and behaviors
- Self-motivation
- Goal setting
- Growth mindset

Relationships Skills:

- Communication
- Negotiating conflict constructively
- Teamwork
- Relationship building

Responsible Decision-Making:

- Ethical responsibility
- The ability to use values to guide actions
- Consideration of self and others
- Analyzing problems and brainstorming solutions

If you are new to SEL, the standards and learning objectives can be overwhelming. How do you address these crucial concepts and skills in addition to everything else you do? No worries! That is why I wrote the book. You do not need a master's degree in SEL to meet SEL standards. Simply implement the SEL-based poetry lessons in this book and these standards will be met organically.

If you are familiar with these standards and learning objectives, name them at the end of every lesson. SEL language allows students to become intentional about implementing SEL into their lives. The discussion of SEL standards and learning objectives communicates their importance, which will translate into students valuing them as well.

Choosing Poems For Your Lessons

Poetry is personal and it's important to choose a poem that resonates with you. Your students will feel the difference. I have made some suggestions, but I highly encourage you to find poems that move you in some way while matching the intention of the lesson. There are some excellent internet resources for finding poems, including Poetry Foundation (www.poetry-foundation.org), the Academy of American Poets (poets.org), and Button Poetry (performance poetry, available at buttonpoetry.com and on YouTube).

UNIT 1:

What Does Poetry Look Like?



ELA Standard:

- Determine the meaning of words and phrases as used in the text, and analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including multiple-meaning words and language that is particularly engaging.

SEL Standards:

- Self-awareness
- Social awareness
- Relationship skills
- Responsible decision-making

SEL Learning Objectives:

- Self-perception
- Perspective-taking
- Teamwork
- Consideration of self and others

Activity 1: Opening Question

Time: 5 mins

Ask, “How do we know a poem when we see it?”

Activity 2: Introduction to Poetry

Time: 5 mins

Instructions:

1. Ask, “What is poetry?”
2. Say, “Poetry is a form of written expression that typically uses fewer words, line breaks, and various other techniques to communicate emotions, ideas, and experiences.”
3. Ask, “What is great about poetry?”
4. Ask, “What is challenging about poetry?”
5. Ask, “What do you want to learn about poetry?”
6. Say, “One quality of poetry is that it typically uses fewer words than prose, putting more emphasis on individual words.”
7. Ask, “When do fewer words have a greater impact?”
8. Ask, “Why can fewer words have a greater impact?”

Activity 3: Group Blackout Poetry

Time: 15 mins

Materials:

- One page of text that can be anything *except* poetry, one copy for each group of 3–4 students

Instructions:

1. Divide class into groups of 3–4 students.
2. Give each group a copy of a text and markers.
3. Say, “We are going to study the effect of using fewer words by blacking out at least half of the words in a paragraph.”
4. Say, “As a group, choose a paragraph and choose which words you would like to keep. Black out the remaining words. Then read the text again aloud and consider how the meaning changed.”
5. Give students ten minutes to achieve this task. If they have extra time, have students repeat the task with a second paragraph.
6. Have each group share the new version of the text with the class.

Activity 4: Individual Blackout Poetry

Time: 15 mins

Instructions:

1. Have students create their own blackout poems using a text you supply for them following the same process as in the group activity.
 - a. Offer the option of students using their own writing.
 - b. Students might point out the structures, stanzas, etc. This is good to recognize, but explain that we will be exploring it further in other lessons.
2. Have students share their poems with the class.

Activity 5: Reflection

Time: 5 mins

ELA Question:

- How does using fewer words affect meaning?

SEL Question:

- How does saying less affect communication?

Homework:

- Social Observations:
 - Notice when people say less and it means more vs. when they say more and it means less.
- Personal Practice:
 - A few times a day, communicate by saying a bit less.



ELA Standard:

- Compare and contrast the structure of two or more texts and analyze how the differing structure of each text contributes to its meaning and style.

SEL Standards:

- Self-awareness
- Social awareness
- Relationship skills
- Responsible decision-making

SEL Learning Objectives:

- Self-perception
- Perspective-taking
- Teamwork
- Consideration of self and others

Activity 1: Opening Question

Time: 5 mins

Ask, “When do you pause during a conversation?”

Activity 2: Introduction to Line Breaks

Time: 5 mins

Materials:

- Two versions of a poem with line breaks; one original and one rewritten without the line breaks

Instructions:

1. Say, “In poetry, a *line break* signifies a pause.”
2. Write two versions of the same poem on the marker board: one with line breaks and one without.
3. Have a student read each version aloud.
4. Ask, “What effects do the line breaks have on the meaning of the poem?”

Activity 3: Group Line Break Practice

Time: 20 mins

Materials:

- A poem rewritten without line breaks; enough copies for each group of 3–4 students

Instructions:

1. Divide class into groups of 3–4 students.
2. Give each group a copy of a poem with the line breaks eliminated.
3. Instruct students to decide as a group how to rewrite the poem with line breaks. Encourage students to experiment with the placement of line breaks to see how it changes the meaning, rhythm, and overall experience of the poem.
4. After 10 minutes, ask each group to share their reformatted poem with the class.
5. Discuss as a class how the new line breaks changed the poem and what effect this had on the reading experience.

Activity 4: Individual Line Break Practice

Time: 10 mins

Preparation/Materials:

- A poem rewritten without line breaks; enough copies for the class

Instructions:

1. Give students the option to rewrite the new poem with new line breaks, or write their own poem with specific attention to line breaks.

Activity 5: Reflection

ELA Question:

- How do line breaks affect meaning?

SEL Questions:

- How does pausing affect communication?
- What lessons and challenges emerged from working as a group?
- What was your inner experience like when you worked by yourself?

Homework:

- Social Observations:
 - When do people pause in their speech and what effect does it have on communication?
- Personal Practice:
 - Notice when you pause in your communication.

ELA Standard:

- Analyze how a particular stanza fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the theme, setting, plot, or author’s purpose.

SEL Standards:

- Self-awareness
- Social awareness
- Relationship skills
- Responsible decision-making

SEL Learning Objectives:

- Self-perception
- Perspective-taking
- Teamwork
- Consideration of self and others

Activity 1: Opening Question

Time: 5 mins

Ask, “How do you organize your ideas?”

Activity 2: Stanza Introduction

Time: 5 mins

Instructions:

1. Write the same poem on a marker board, once with stanza breaks and once without.
2. Ask, “What difference do you notice between the two poems?”
3. Say, “In poetry, we often separate ideas or sections with a blank space. The lines of poetry that are linked together are called *stanzas*. The space between them is called a *stanza break*.”
4. Ask, “How can grouping ideas in a poem help the reader?”

Activity 3: Stanza Practice

Time: 15 mins

Materials:

- A copy of five different poems with stanzas for each group of five students
- One single teacher’s copy of a sixth poem with stanzas

Instructions:

1. Say, “I am going to read a poem aloud. You are going to guess where the stanza breaks are in the poem. Raise your hand when you notice one idea ending and a new idea beginning. Afterwards, we will look at where the stanza breaks actually are.”
2. Read the poem aloud twice. The first time, read it without indicating where the stanza breaks are. The second time, let the class know where the stanzas are.
3. Divide students into groups of 4–5 and distribute the sets of five different poems to each group.
4. Say, “Each student will read their poem to the group. During the first turn, the reader must hide the poem so only they know where the stanza breaks are. The listeners must raise their hand every time they think a stanza break occurred.”
5. Say, “After the first turn, have the reader read the poem again, this time indicating where the stanza breaks are.”
6. Say, “After the second reading, discuss the significance and the effect of the stanza breaks.”
7. Give 10 minutes to complete the activity.

Activity 4: Individual Stanza Practice

Time: 15 mins

Materials:

- A poem rewritten without stanzas; enough copies for the class

Instructions:

1. Give students a copy of a poem with the stanza breaks removed from it.
2. Tell students to create their own stanza breaks within the poem.
3. Give students the option to write their own poem with specific attention to the use of stanza breaks.
4. After 10 minutes, ask for volunteers to share their poems and the reasons for their stanza break choices.