1

The Color Poem

Often, teaching poetry in the classroom is achieved successfully through imagery. This introductory lesson provides students with an insight into their own creative depths, helping to establish their "eye for resemblances."[1] Furthermore, it helps create the sense of language as a visual medium. Defining a relationship between the *image* and the *art* is the key to explaining how everyday words can be patterned to create memorable language experiences (e.g., poetry). Poems do not begin with ideas so much as they begin with words that are developed into language patterns that *create* imagery.

from A Word or Two Against Rhyme

Give the word the fresh scent of ripe corn
swaying in the wind of a hopeful field,
tasty as the rare bread of my hungry childhood.
Oh let the word ride endlessly, fantastic
speak face to face, heart to heart
with your neighbor of the farthest century.

—Menke Katz

In poetry, each word has monumental importance. The goal is to create the most potent sensory image possible. Out of imagery is born the poem and a new understanding of and delight in language. This experience leads to a new insight into one's own possibilities. Like fingerprints, the unique images each individual is capable of creating encapsulate personality, psyche, memory, and experience: *self.* This first lesson introduces imagery using color and the five senses.

SAMPLE LESSON: POETRY

Teacher: Today we are going to be talking about poetry. Who knows something about poetry?

[1]Aristotle's *Poetics*: "The greatest thing by far is to have command of metaphor. This alone cannot be imparted to another; it is the mark of genius, for to make good metaphors implies an eye for resemblances."

Student: Poetry uses rhyming words.

T: Always? Does a poem always have to rhyme?

S: No, not always. But most of the time it does.

T: It's true that most of the poetry, limericks, and nursery rhymes that we study and read in class do rhyme. However, most poetry that is being written today, and much that has been written in the recent past by those we call *contemporary poets,* does not rhyme.[2] It may have a rhyme inside the poem, and we call that *internal rhyme,* or it may have a line or two that rhymes, but the poem overall is written in what we call *free verse.* Free verse allows us, among other things, not to rhyme. We'll be getting quite familiar with free verse once we begin to write our poems. Does anybody else want to tell us what poetry is?

S: Poetry tells a story.

T: Sometimes. But again, not always true and, in fact, the type of poetry that tells a story has a very specific name. It's called a *narrative poem.* Has anybody ever heard the word *narrator?*

S: Yes.

T: What does a narrator in a movie or on television do?

S: Tells the story of what's happening.

In this particular form of questioning, the intent was to give the students

T: Right. So a poem that is a narrative is the kind of poem we would want to write if we wanted our poem to tell a story. The kind of poetry we are

[2]For example, Theodore Roethke's poem "Orchids," from *The Collected Poems of Theodore Roethke* (1975), doesn't rhyme:

They lean over the path
Adder-mouthed,
Swaying close to the face,
Coming out, soft and deceptive,
Limp and damp, delicate as a young bird's tongue;
Their fluttery fledgling lips
Move slowly,
Drawing in the warm air.

And at night,
The faint moon falling through whitewashed glass,
The heat going down
So their musky smell comes even stronger,
Drifting down from their mossy cradles:
So many luminescent fingers,
Lips neither dead nor alive,
Loose ghostly mouths
Breathing.

something familiar with which to name the less familiar subject, poetry. The technique of linking familiar to unfamiliar is extremely helpful when introducing new ideas or new subjects.

going to be writing today is not going to be narrative. Today we are going to be most concerned with the words themselves. In poetry, words are often *more* important than the idea. Let's explore poetry a bit by trying to define what makes a poem a poem. If we were going to bake a cake, for example, what ingredients would we need?

S: Flour, sugar, milk, eggs.

The teacher is attempting to build a foundation of ideas that will clarify the terminology to be used and, in this case, illuminate in understandable language the essence of poetry. As in all of the scripting, the emphasis is on repetitive reinforcement of newly presented ideas and increasing vocabulary.

T: Right. And we might also want to add a bit of salt, some butter, and maybe top it all off with some chocolate icing. Now, if we want to make a poem, we need to know what ingredients go into the poem. The first and most important ingredient, like the flour in our cake recipe, is a small word. It comes from the larger word *imagination.* The small word we are looking for is the word *image*. An image in poetry is what we call a *word picture.* We will explore how word pictures work in a few moments. The second ingredient is almost as important. Without it, there is no poetry. I'll give you a clue: We laugh or we cry, we yell or pout or kiss and hug, depending on how we—

By encouraging students to draw on their own views of the world, the teacher provides them with a means of personalizing their feelings through poetry.

S: Feel.

T: Yes, feel. *Feelings* are the second ingredient in our poetry recipe—how we feel about what we are writing. We need to put ourselves into our poems. We need to try to make the reader understand our emotions and feelings so that when they read our poems they will be able to feel and understand what we felt when we wrote them. Our goal, in poetry, is to capture our own personal energy and to project our very own personal feelings. How do we know how we feel about something? From where do feelings come?

This encouragement is also a way of subtly reassuring them that their responses are neither right nor wrong but rather a projection of their creative use of words, flavored by their experiences. The teacher is therefore constantly creating this accepting environment, which will allow for the greatest freedom of ideas. Note also that the teacher presents image examples (modeling).

S: The heart.

S: The brain.

T: Yes, but how do we know, for example, that we like chocolate cake but dislike spinach (or like spinach and dislike chocolate cake)?

S: Because we've tasted them, and chocolate cake tastes better than spinach.

T: True for most, and this tasting is what we call *experience.* Drawing on this experience is what we call *memory.* So, feelings can be said to come from ex-

periences and memories. When you are writing a poem and are looking for an image or word picture to describe the beach, let's say, and you, Barbara, went to the beach once and found a shell with a pearl inside—and you, Neal, fell asleep in the sun and got a terrible sunburn, do you think you would use the same images or word pictures or put in the same feelings when writing your beach poem?

S: No.

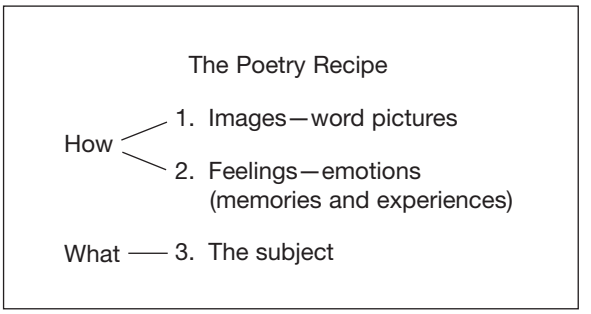
T: No, of course not. One image might be: A day at the beach is as shiny and pink as the inside of a shell and white and brilliant as a newly formed pearl. The other image (or word picture) might be: A day at the beach is red and hot and painful as a blister. Both images convey the visual impact of a word picture, and both draw on memory and experience. Each image is a very personal statement, and each image tells us something about the poet who wrote it. Are you beginning to see how images and feelings work in poetry?

S: Yes, but how do you really know what a day at the beach is like?

Inventing the poetry recipe through class discussion.

T: A day at the beach is like the poet who writes about it. If we chose today to write about the beach, there would be as many different views of the beach as there are students writing, and that's what makes writing poetry so exciting. It gives us each a chance to be who and what we are through our poems and to explore our own very personal feelings about things.

Let's move on now to the final major ingredient. This ingredient, like the eggs and the salt in our cake, completes the main part of our poetry recipe, and it is the subject: what we are writing about. Most people think that the subject is the most important ingredient, and if we were writing a book report or term paper, it would be. But in poetry we are concerned with language, words, what we can do with them, and what we can make them do for us. So far, then, this is what our poetry recipe looks like:



T: The image and the feelings are what we call the *how* of poetry. How do we put words together to form pictures? How do we shape those pictures by using feelings and emotions? And the subject is the *what* of poetry. What are we writing about? Now we have a basic understanding of what goes into making a poem. There is still one more thing we need to include if our poem is going to come to life. It's something you have five of, and it isn't your fingers and it isn't your toes. What else do you have five of?

S: The five senses?

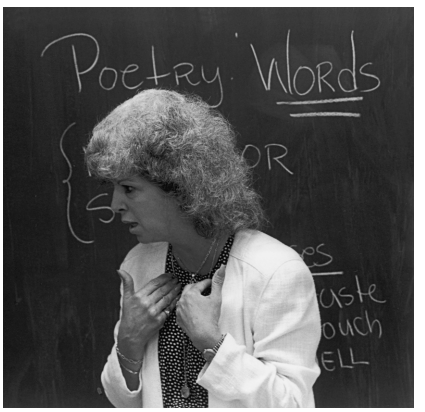
T: You're right. The five senses. Let's list them on the board.

> See—how things *look*
> Hear—how things *sound*
> Taste—how things *taste*
> Touch—how things *feel*
> Smell—how things *smell*
>
> ---
>
> Emotions—how things make us *feel* inside

You'll notice that I added an additional sense—emotions. It's not a physical sense, but it is important in writing the poem. Now that we have all of these ingredients, let me give you an example of how they work. Suppose I wanted to describe the color of my blouse without ever using the color word in my poem. I might write something like this:

My blouse is the color
of midnight, of bats that flap
their wings on Halloween, of the
sleek limousine that cruises
down the street. My blouse is
a color that smells like smoke
drifting up from a campfire in
the woods and the rich, dark
smell of chocolate melting

Learning about
the sense of touch.



Poet/teacher
collects sensory words.

Learning about the sense of feeling.

in a pot. My blouse is a color
that tastes like licorice
and burned marshmallows and steak
cooked on a grill. My blouse
is a color that feels bumpy
and rough like coal or sticky
and bubbly like tar on a summer
day. My blouse is a color
that is frightening like stairs
that creak in the middle of the
night. It is a lonely color
like a sky without stars or a
room without lights.

Learning about the sense of smell.

T: What color was I describing?

S: Black.

T: Did you see the word pictures? Could you have drawn pictures of the images I used? Bats on Halloween? Smoke drifting up from a campfire? A sky without stars?

S: Yes.

T: Did you hear the five senses in the poem? Can you give me an example of one of the five senses?

S: You can smell smoke.

S: You can see a limousine on the street.

S: You can feel sticky tar.

S: You can taste chocolate.

T: Good. What about an emotion? Did I use an emotion to describe the color black?

S: Yes, you said it was frightening.

S: And lonely.

T: I can tell you were thinking and listening very well. So now we begin to see how images—word pictures—work, and also how we use our five senses to create images. It's important to remember that this was *my* black poem. Your black poem would have been different because you would have had entirely different memories and experiences to draw on. Let's work on a poem together before we try individual poems. Let's use the color red and try to describe it, through poetry, using all we now know about poetry: images, word pictures, feelings, the subject (red), and emotions; and let's try to bring our own personal memories and experiences into our images. Now. What does the color red look like?

S: An apple.

This illustrates the process of creating an image, and extending it through the use of adjectives. The teacher extracts ideas by using a technique of quick, insistent questioning. This type of lesson needs to move quickly, and the teacher should be

T: I can see that. An apple. Let's take that a bit further to find the word picture. Where is the apple? Is it in a bowl or on a tree?

S: On a tree.

T: On a tree. What time of year is it?

S: It's fall.

T: I see. Is the apple ripe?

S: Yes.

constantly aware of pacing. Note also how the teacher adds weight to the student response by thoughtfully and reflectively repeating it, indicating to the class that he or she is a truly attentive and involved listener. In doing this, the teacher is modeling the listener role, so important to any class dynamic.

T: Tell me more about it. Describe this apple, this particular apple on this particular tree on this particular fall day. Describe it.

S: It's shiny.

S: It's round.

S: It's juicy.

T: Those are fine descriptive words that tell us something about the apple. Let's put them all together and see what we have:

Red is a ripe, juicy, shiny,
round apple on a tree
in fall.

What else does red look like?

S: A fire engine.

T: Ah ha! A fire engine. Describe it.

S: It's long.

S: It's fast.

S: It's sleek.

T: Where is the fire engine? What is it doing?

S: Racing to a fire.

T: *Racing* is a good word choice. All right, let's put it together:

Red is a long, fast,
sleek fire engine racing
down the street to a fire.

What does red sound like? Is it loud or soft? Does it scream or whisper?

S: Red sounds like the siren on a fire engine.

T: I can almost hear it. What does the siren on a fire engine sound like? Find a word or combination of words that describes that very particular sound.

S: It's very loud.

S: It's also a very long sound. It goes on and on.

T: Good. What time of day do you think the siren sounds the loudest? Day or night?

S: It sounds loudest at night when everything else is quiet.

T: That's good, and that tells me you've listened to the sound of fire engines. Then our image or word picture for the sound of the color red might be:

Red is the loud, long sound
of a fire engine siren
at night.

A good device you can use to help yourself come up with images is to list words that go along with the five senses and emotions. List *see* words or *sound* words or *touch* words. How about the feel of the color red? Let's start out by listing *feel* words.

S: *Hot* is a feel word.

S: Cold.

S: Sharp.

S: Sticky.

S: Bumpy.

T: Good words. Which ones, or perhaps others we haven't mentioned yet, might best describe the feel of the color red?

S: Hot. Red is definitely a hot color.

T: Hot as what?

S: Hot as a fire.

S: Hot as an oven.

S: Hot as a fire in the woods on a cold winter's night.

T: Now we're beginning to see how to extend the image. Make it more visual, a better word picture. So then we might say that

Red feels hot as a fire
in the woods
on a cold
winter night.

How about some more feel images?

S: Red is hard as a rock.

T: What kind of a rock?

S: A volcanic rock.

T: Interesting! What else might red feel like?

S: It might be dry.

T: Dry as what?

S: Dry as a desert sun.

T: Yes! Good image! What does red smell like? What is the scent, the fragrance, the aroma of the color red?

S: Red smells like a rose.

T: Where is this particular rose? Your particular rose? In a vase by the window? In the garden? Where?

S: In the garden.

T: What time of year is it?

S: Springtime.

T: What time of day is it?

S: Morning.

T: Now put it all together and tell me what we have.

S: Red smells like a rose in the garden in the morning in the springtime.

T: It works! What else might red smell like?

S: Smoke.

S: Perfume.

T: Fine. Let's take these one at a time and make them into word pictures. Let's do the perfume first. Tell me about it. Whose perfume is it? What does it smell like? What does the fragrance remind you of?

S: It's my mother's perfume, and it smells like flowers.

T: Red is the flowery smell of my mother's perfume. Good. Now, what about the smoke?

S: Red is the smell of smoke from a campfire in the woods on a snowy night.

T: Very effective string of words. That's putting it together! What does red taste like?

S: It tastes hot.

T: Hot as in temperature or spicy hot?

S: Spicy hot.

T: Like what?

S: Pizza.

S: Hot peppers.

S: Spaghetti sauce.

T: Put it together.

S: Red tastes spicy hot like pizza and hot peppers and spaghetti sauce.

T: What emotion does red make us feel? Happy? Sad? Lonely? Excited?

S: Red is brave.

T: Brave as what?

S: Brave as a soldier in war.

T: What else?

S: Happy. Red is happy as a birthday party or a clown.

T: That's really good imagery, and it's a good place to end our red poem. Let's go over it and see what we have:

RED

TO SEE

Red is a ripe, juicy
shiny, round apple
on a tree
in fall.

Red is a long, fast
sleek fire engine racing
down the street
to a fire.

TO HEAR

Red is the loud,
long sound
of a fire engine siren
at night.

TO FEEL

Red feels hot
as a fire
in the wood
on a cold
winter night.

TO SMELL

Red smells like a rose
in the garden
in the morning
in the springtime.

Red is the flowery smell
of my mother's perfume and the smell
of smoke from a campfire in the woods
on a snowy night.

TO TASTE

Red tastes spicy hot
like pizza and hot
peppers and spaghetti sauce.

EMOTION

Red is brave
as a soldier
in war and happy
as a birthday party
or a clown.

T: Good poem. Let's see if we can put together everything we know and everything we've experimented with today and write our own color poems. I want each one of you to choose a color (the subject) and using images and feelings and the five senses (plus emotion), describe that color for me through free verse poetry.

STUDENT POEMS

WHITE

White feels like two people
getting married.
White smells like peppermint
candy getting ready
to be eaten.

White looks like fluffy
clouds in the blue sky,
feels like roses growing
in a garden, white tastes like vanilla ice cream cones.

White feels comfortable.

—THIRD GRADE

PINK

I sound like
a meek voice in the distance,
a little baby crying at night.
I sound like
anything young or a cat's meow.

I smell fresh but not crisp
calm, like
talcum powder
and a clear river
seen at the harbor.

I look small,
pale, and from a distance
I look light but not bouncy.
I'm calm.

I feel smooth like
a baby's skin
soft as a new pillow made
from light colored fabric.

I taste almost like
nothing, an old piece of paper,
dried meat
seltzer with the fizz all gone.

I taste calm.

—SIXTH GRADE

Peach

Peach reminds me of cool summer
mornings,
It's shaped long, bold and curvy.
It is like a sculpture of an Oriental
woman
warming peach juice for her baby.
It smells natural,
sounds like fur brushing a new leaf,
relaxing,
peach cobbler,
a child
with a freckle on her nose
sleeping under a mother's smile.

—Fifth grade

Green

I smell like lemons and limes and juicy
leaves
and grass and ripe peaches.
I taste like bananas when they're not
ripe
and grapes and grass and papaya, salad
and peas.
I am soft as cotton and comfortable as
playing
in the leaves, cold as ice, squishy as
peas.
I am the color of the Hulk
and leaves in the spring and grass in
the summer,
dinosaurs, apples, caterpillars.
My voice is the sound of grass swishing
in the air,
wind blowing very hard through the
trees.

—Class poem, third grade

SUMMARY: POETRY

In this introductory poetry lesson, we provide some simple writing tools for our students. These tools enable them to explore new language possibilities. By asking them to enter an arena that had no definitive borders, no hard-and-fast rules for right and wrong, we asked them to take risks. Praise, encouragement, and emphasis on the positive were essential.

Each group of students (on any given day) generates its own unique energy. It is this energy, this spontaneity and sense of sharing, that cannot be captured in print. What is lacking is the giggles, the laughter, the delight in students' eyes when confronted with the wonder of words (their own and others'). The exhilaration, exuberance, and sense of accomplishment that comes from the metamorphosis of *red* into *an apple, an apple* into *a bloody moon,* and the *moon* into an *angel's pillow* are memorable. Each creative strand becomes part of a fabric that is woven of words, conceived joyously one at a time. But the real moment of truth is the time of sharing. The poem, personal and personified, is given as a gift and more often than not, accepted in the same spirit. The enthusiasm with which the poems are read and greeted readies the group for further word/music/movement exploration.

MOVEMENT

Although imagery seems to lead naturally to a richer vocabulary and lends itself to the creation of the poem, movement also provides a natural starting place, both for

the teacher and the students. Because movement does not have to be learned, it is a good way to extend the poem beyond the page. Student poems often undergo additional editing, with the poets' permission, as they are recreated through the extension process of movement and music.

Analyzing some of the preceding poems with the kind of vision mentioned previously, we first find the common denominator, color. The names of colors, in and of themselves, provide a possible impetus for group movement exploration and a necessary flexing of movement imagination, giving students confidence and skills with which to apply their ideas. The word *pink* creates a light, quick sound in the mouth that might be equated in movement with the flick of the hand or the toss of the head. In its brevity, it requires quickness and lightness. Two of the three possible elements of movement are already evident:

Time—how long a movement takes

Weight—the light or heavy quality of that movement

Space—where in space the movement happens: high, low, behind, under, through, around, in opposition

As another example, *red* might be perceived as a word in transit—powerful, bright, possibly increasing in speed as it goes, ending with an explosion. *Brown* suggests a dark quality and thus might call for a heavy, ponderous accompanying movement. *White* has air in it and glides in the mouth as it would in space, except for the little catch at the word's end, which brings it to a delicate stop. All these sounds and thousands of others can become the source for first explorations in movement.

Although the sounds of the color words determine the time and weight of the movement, the teacher should suggest to beginning explorers which body parts to use and where to place the movements in space. One approach that works well is to start the group exploring any movement from seated positions (floor or chairs), moving gradually to an upright position, and finally involving forward movement (locomotion). This sequence gives the student a greater sense of security in what may feel like a new experience and also gives the teacher time to isolate the task, making refinement possible. When choreographed, these simple movements can lead to surprising artistic results.

SAMPLE LESSON: MOVEMENT

Introducing new concepts in ways that demand involvement and thought by students is always desirable. Here, it becomes a guessing game of how to link the abstract movement with the sound of a color. The teacher had the particular color red in mind but accepted the related colors offered as possibilities.

T: You've recently created some wonderful color poems. Let's explore these colors in yet another way. In a moment I'm going to communicate to you in the language I would like us to use. I'll say the name of a color in this new language. See if you can guess the color *and* the new language. [The teacher makes strong, upward motions, first with one fist, then the other.] First, can anyone guess the language?

S: Movement.

T: Right—a language we use to communicate with much of the time, right along with words and facial expressions. Anyone know the color I was moving?

Modeling first, asking the class to try the demonstrated movement, then moving to students' own ideas provides a sure and comfortable framework. Asking students to model other student ideas is another technique for showcasing originality and giving weight and credence to student input.

Starting a movement from a stationary spot provides students with a comfortably restricted area. The inexperienced or overly exuberant student is more likely to stay on task and not take the lesson in an unwanted direction. More difficult to control and to accomplish with merit is movement that moves into the room (i.e., locomotion), and thus it should follow those movement tasks that are static.

The insistence for concentration comes first when working with all levels of children. If the task does not involve vocal sound, the movements should be done in concentrated silence. Recognition of those children who can accomplish a task with a kind of single-mindedness and unawareness of the group is one way of reinforcing these goals and ensuring a more interesting resulting movement.

S: Probably yellow.

S: I think orange.

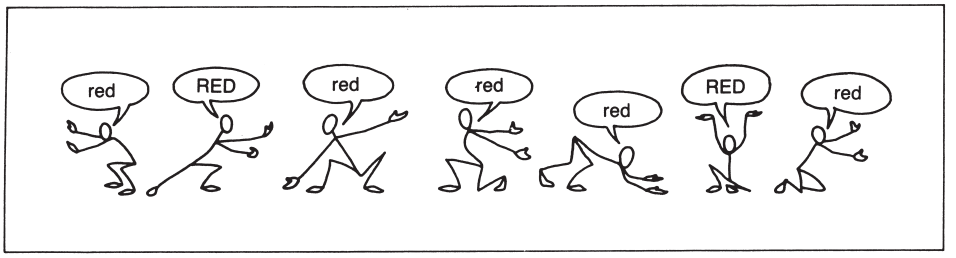
T: You were both on the right track with your bright colors. I was thinking of red. From your seats, would you all make my motions as you say the word *red?* Say the *r* very strongly. Right. Thrust up and outward. Do it as often as you wish but say the word with each motion. Stop when you feel your red piece is ended. Is there any other way we could move the word *red?*

S: You could sort of twist your body and bring your arms around.

T: Would you stand and show us what you mean? Could everyone stand and copy Neal's motion when I say *begin?* Each time you say the word *red,* you are going to accompany it with a strong twisting motion. Begin. Now we have two ways to move *red.* Could anyone think of a way to move *red* that would take us into the room, moving forward?

S: You could take a slow step and raise your knee on the *r,* then on the end of the word, stamp your leg down.

T: Demonstrate it, please. We'll watch. Class, was this a strong or a weak motion? Yes. It almost had a pressing quality and had great weight behind its slowness. Try pressing the word *red* with your arms outward this time. Upward. [The teacher says the word each time.] A harder one—press your back into space and stop. I liked your concentration. You've all moved red in three ways—thrusting, twisting, and pressing it in all directions. Could you now combine these three versions into one movement piece called "Red," accompanying your own movements with your voice throughout? Let's let half the room demonstrate while the other half observes. Observers be ready to tell us who had good concentration, who had motions with the greatest variety, who used their space in an interesting way (high, low, or middle), who connected the movements into a convincing whole. Performing group, begin, and freeze when you are finished.



T: Who saw someone whose movement they liked?

S: Neal looked good. I liked his concentration.

T: That's very important in being convincing in movement. What else?

S: I liked the way Betty went from one version to the next and sort of connected it into one idea. I liked when she kneeled down.

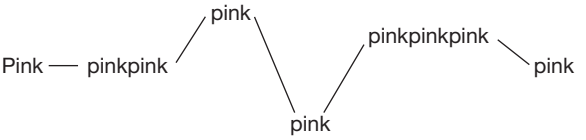
T: Good. A movement can start from any position: standing, sitting, kneeling.

S: I liked the way Bob said the word as he moved. He really looked in "movement" like his color "sounded."

T: Your comments will help the next group! Switch roles, please. [Other half of the group explores and is critiqued in a positive way by peers.]

The teacher sums up what has been observed in the student movements and labels them using movement vocabulary. These words now become a handle for both student and teacher, for future movement use and analysis.

T: Before we try another color, let's see what we've learned so far: Movement can begin with any part of the body, from any position, and happen in any part of space possible. The word *red* called for a heavy, pressing kind of movement quality and was slow. All movement has three qualities: time, weight, and length (or duration). With that information, let's explore another color: pink. Sit down, please. As I say the color randomly, think how the word makes you feel like moving, only move mentally. Now from your seats, will you show me what you imagined, as I say the word? If I'm silent, don't move. If my voice is high, show me in space where that would be.



In the situation of peer evaluation, the teacher defines the parameters wherein the discussion will take place (exhibiting a strong teacher presence). These margins delineate the goals of the exercise and suggest what qualities the observing group should be looking for. This tactic can suc-

cessfully sidestep any negative comment tendencies of the group or individuals and again make the experimental zone a safe haven for trying.

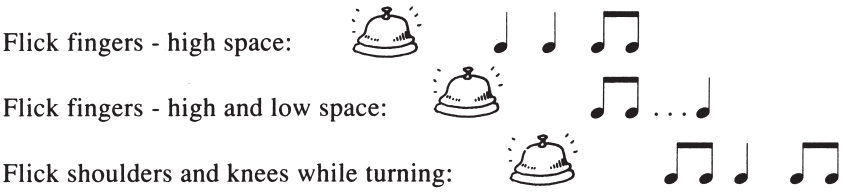
The summation of any task in effect headlines for students the salient bits that the students should remember and hopefully reapply.

I enjoyed watching your responses! I saw quite different movements this time: flicks, quick light motions. Antoinette, you moved your shoulders quickly. Rob, you moved disjointedly, like a robot. All of your movements reflected the weight and time of the word *pink*. Good. Everyone, please stand and let's practice this quick flicking with all parts of the body. Let's see you flick with your nose. Flick with your hips, one knee, one foot, your hands, a shoulder. [The teacher pauses for student movement after saying each body part.] Flick with your hands *and* your head! That's interesting! Instead of saying the word *pink* this time, I wonder if we could find a sound in this classroom which sounds light and pink. [The teacher taps metal cabinet with her ruler.] Pink sound?

S: How about this? [The student runs a pencil up the spiral of a notebook.]

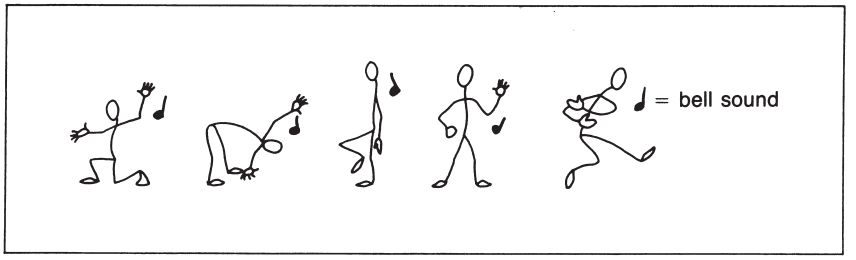
S: I have a better one—the bell on your desk!

T: [The teacher plays the bell.] Do the rest of you like that sound for pink? Then that's the way it will be. As I play the bell, I'll suggest body parts and places in space in which to move.



This lesson is geared toward building experiences in actual movement and in labeling what is being done for later, more sophisticated application within the color poetry itself. It is, if you will, a playing with the elements of an idea before putting it into a more complex structure. To have started with the color poem might have invited shallow and tentative results because that task could

This time, can you make up—*improvise*—a flick piece with any body parts of your choice—but always look in the direction of your movement. (Your eyes are like a flashlight that illuminates your movement.) Excellent. That little trick of looking in the direction you are moving makes your improvisation look very convincing. It made me want to look at you. Shall we divide up the class again and watch each other? Which student would like to play the bell? Remember, this time the bell is the leader of your movement, so you will have to listen carefully to know when to move. Be ready to say what you liked!



have been overwhelming. It is helpful for students first to isolate elements, regardless of what they are, before fixing them into a more involved form.

Pink got us into movement qualities that are light and fast. These are named *flick* and *dab.* Let's try the word *brown,* and this time I would like you to choose movement qualities from this list that you think best express brown:[3] slash, press, punch, glide, wring, float, flick, or dab.

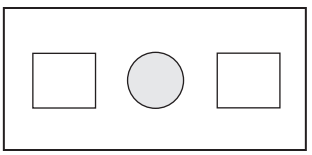
S: I think *brown* has to have a slower movement, so I choose *glide.*

S: I think *glide* is too light for brown. I pick a slow, heavy one: *press.*

T: Other ideas?

S: Well, it's definitely not flick. What about *wring?* Is that like *twist?*

T: Exactly—imagine your whole body is a large, wet towel that you are wringing out—takes a heavy, weighted movement and lots of time to get the water out. Then, most of you agree with press, wring, and possibly glide? Fine. Will you divide into two groups, five people each of pink and five brown—pinks over by the windows, browns near the door. I have a picture I would like you to move. Can you tell what will happen as you study this drawing?



Which shape do you feel represents pink best? Then this means the pink group will begin, followed by the brown group, resuming (and concluding) with the pinks. Will the groups ever be moving at the same time?

[3]For more information about movement qualities, see Rudolph Laban's book *Modern Educational Dance* (MacDonald & Evans, 1963).

Who would like to play the bell sound for the pink group? Browns, yours will be a vocal sound—let me hear you say BROWWWNNNNN, and make it sound like the color it is. Fine. Harry, you are the leader of the brown group—when Harry starts, pinks stop. Ready to do a color movement piece in ABA form? Begin. [The teacher gives critiques about having concentration, interacting in groups, letting eyes move in the direction of the gesture, using space in a varied and interesting way, and using parts of the body in a varied way.]

This next color will take us to the poem called "White" (p. 17). Say the word *white* and feel it in your mouth. It has air at the front end, and a *t* stop sign at the end, and in the middle? Show me the middle. Yes, a long glide motion does nicely. We may then need to combine some movement qualities to meet the needs of *white.* Try dab, glide, and flick. Repeat this and on the glide, move forward in the room. Nicely done. Find a new starting position for the word *white.* Yes, it could certainly be twisted with arms extended, and I see you want to start the word from low space. All of these ideas are equally good. You've shown me a good beginning vocabulary of movement, so I think we are ready to try the poem. Read it to yourself from the board. May I hear some ideas about how we might move the first two lines, "White feels like two people getting married"?

S: We could have a few people move the word *white* and let others say the part about getting married.

T: Yes, and you're controlling your giggles very well. How many people do you think should be in each group?

S: Let everybody except two people do *white* and freeze their last movement, while the two getting married say and move their part.

T: Volunteers for the couple? Volunteer for the *white* leader who will breathe just before beginning? The class will watch and listen for that breath and thus know when to start. Will you lead, Joe? Breathe a beginning for us and see if the group can come in wordlessly with you. Nice leading—your group came in beautifully! Can the two people getting married invent a movement that suggests they like each other? No? Anyone suggest something for them?

S: They only have a short line and not much time, so maybe they could just raise their arms into an arch.

T: Good point. Please try it so far. Look to your breathing leader to know when to start, speak as you move, ready? [The group tries first line.] That was the idea. Let's go on further. There's another *white* at the next line: "White smells like peppermint candy getting ready to be eaten." Should the larger group do this? Divide off? Have a solo? What do you suggest?

S: I think the whole group should do *white* again and have a solo on the candy.

T: Right. Volunteer for the solo? Perhaps you can think of the shape of a peppermint candy in a state of readiness, and use that as your movement when you say your line. Let's all try it from the beginning. Married couple ready? Candy? Listen for the breath from your leader. Well done. Going on "White feels like clouds in the sky." Any movement ideas for that line?

S: We could have some separate clouds like we had the candy and the couple.

T: If we do that, what movement quality do you recommend? Is it the same glide for *white* or is it a press or float or dab? What does the key word *cloud* suggest to you, and where should the movement take place?

S: I think the movement should be a light one. A float maybe. And since it's sky, we should use high space.

T: Would you all try this idea of the larger group again saying *white,* then completing the line with a float on "looks like clouds in the sky?" Begin. It's looking nice. Let's continue. What are the key words in the next line, "And white feels like white roses growing in a garden"?

S: Roses.

T: Another?

S: Growing.

T: Would you all try to move a "growing rose" please. Where will you begin in space? Right, low, so you have somewhere to grow. Be aware of how you are moving, sensing in your muscles the feeling of this movement. Begin. Most of you floated slowly, up-

ward. Some of you also pressed your flower open, which was effective. Will the whole *white* group perform this?

S: I think three people should be roses.

T: Three volunteers please? Let's now get the couple, the candy, and the rose people placed in a way that makes the visual arrangement of our movement piece look interesting. Any suggestions?

S: The solo people should be off to the side.

T: Agreed? Let's then try to go from the beginning. Give me a piece of quiet, and when the sound paper is blank, your leader will breathe the lead breath. It's beginning to look convincing, and we're almost through. Ready? [The students perform the movements.] That was good so far. Our movements have been mostly slow and light, but here comes "vanilla ice cream cones" and those words speak something different. Can the whole group find a way to move "white ice cream cone" as a floor pattern, making the shape of the object on the floor as you move it in space? I saw some people moved forward, a few to the side, one person moved very lightly side to side, hopscotching the cone shape. I especially liked that because it changed the speed of our movements and added contrast. Variety is good. Consider now the last line of the poem: "White feels comfortable." Ideas please?

S: I think only a few people should do the ice cream part so we can all do the last line.

S: I do, too.

T: Okay. Let's try it. Three volunteers for the side-to-side ice cream cone movers. What, then, will the whole group do to look comfortable?

S: Lie down.

T: I know you were being funny—but that's really not such a bad idea. What if we didn't go clear to the floor, but got into comfortable low shapes? Everyone, show me a comfortable shape. I see people with their elbows up on each other's shoulders, leaning, slouching. Okay, we'll try these, but can you get to these positions in a slow-motion float? As you say "white feels" from this point on, move as slowly as you can until you come to the word *comfortable* and be ready to hold your final pose. You

should relate to each other as if a photographer placed you for this final picture.

S: Can I end up kneeling?

T: Certainly. In fact, why don't we have about three of you end up in a kneeling position—levels are always more interesting than everyone being the same height. Can you end with your elbow on your knee and fist on your chin? And would one of you end up in a delicious stretch, using your high space? This variety should look good. Hold the final picture for three slow counts. Let's just practice the ending. Remember—everyone is doing the last line. Ready?

Speak the words of the last line very slowly and relax. Bravo. Shall we take it from the top? Erin, we are honored to be celebrating your choice poem in movement, and we will try to do it as beautifully as you wrote it!

S: If it's good, can we do it for the class across the hall?

SUMMARY: MOVEMENT

Successful movement lessons have some givens:

- A room or space big enough for movement exploration
- Clearly defined movement tasks for exploration with time for trial and mutual reflection
- Clear signals on how to begin and end movement efforts
- Reinforcement of the need for concentration on the task at hand
- A trusting, accepting class atmosphere consciously nurtured by the teacher in which risk is comfortable and criticism is always positive by both students and teacher
- A teacher willing to model movements occasionally and explore along with students
- A nonthreatening lesson progression for the inexperienced that moves from small movements at the lesson's beginning and later spirals to more complex tasks that use the whole body, space, and locomotion
- A process that is accomplished by a combination of the students' improvised ideas and suggestions, joined with light additions and gentle shaping by the teacher
- Movement lessons accomplished either with provided sound, self-sound, or in silence *but always without conversation.*

Any introductory movement lesson serves as an invaluable tool for subsequent movement involvement with poetry. Whatever time is taken isolating qualities and playing with the ideas of time, weight, and space will pay enormous dividends in helping children adapt movement to their own poetry. This kind of specific movement focus is not limited to older children—in shorter spurts, young children benefit just as much from analyzing movement qualities, along with the less abstract kinds of movement more commonly associated with the young.

Movement can be an important keystone to all your creative word works. Its sources are many: vocal sounds, the sounds of words, word meanings, musical instruments or "found sounds" (see Chapter 4), along with the whole area of visual motivation that is not covered in this book: graphics, paintings, children's art works, or combinations of aural and visual stimuli. Movement helps bring "shape to joy . . . and release to tension."[4]

[4]Ginott, H.G. (1972). *Teacher and child: A book for parents and teachers.* New York: Macmillan.