

12-3-2009

Examples: What Teachers Are Doing With Poetry


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Recommended Citation

Miller, Penny, et al. "Examples: What Teachers Are Doing With Poetry." Indiana Partnership for Young Writers, 2009. Available from: http://digitalcommons.butler.edu/iypw_articles/19

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In This Issue

[TEACHERS WRITE, TOO](#)

[MUNDANE OBJECTS MAKE POETRY](#)

[STUDENTS CAPABLE OF MORE](#)

[COACH SUPPORTS, INSPIRES](#)

December 3, 2009

Dear educator,

In November, 112 teachers from across Indiana attended a full-day professional development workshop with renowned poet Georgia Heard. Here is a sampling of the things these teachers are now doing in their schools and classrooms as a result of that workshop.

TEACHERS WRITE, TOO

Tim Jagger, curriculum leader at **Greene Intermediate Center** in South Bend, used Georgia's ideas to feed his own inner poet. Building on Georgia's invitation to "crack open" the dull phrase *it was a nice day*, Tim wrote this poem (one he can no doubt use as a demonstration in a mini-lesson!)

A Nice Day

It was a nice day-
a **wonderful** day.
Grey clouds blocked the Sun.
A chill rain fell upon the
sodden earth.

Dark.

Dreary.

Damp.

Dismal.

The perfect excuse for a dancing
fire,
a good book.

- T. P. Jagger

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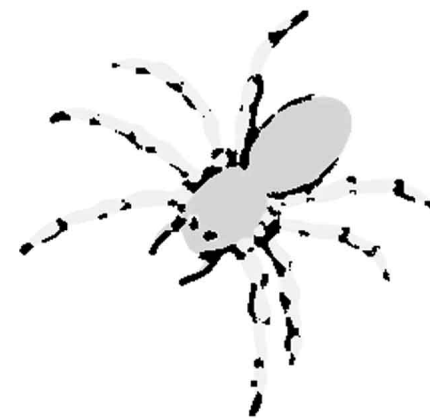
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MUNDANE OBJECTS MAKE POETRY FUN, ACCESSIBLE

Penny Miller, a K/1 teacher at **IPS Center for Inquiry #84 (CFI 84)**,

attended the Georgia Heard poetry workshop with her student intern, **Sarah Duffer**. Penny and Sarah loved Georgia's idea of surrounding students with poems about everyday objects to help immerse students in the genre. So Sarah posted a clock poem by the clock, a flag poem by the flag,...and even a spider poem by the huge spider that



has taken up residence in the window! The spider is a bit of an inside joke -- it built a web between the glass and screen, and even though the custodian has tried to kill the spider several times, it keeps reappearing -- so of course this poem is now a class favorite. Penny said the students began noticing the poems on walls (even one on the ceiling) right away, and now they are excited to read and discuss poems.

STUDENTS CAPABLE OF MORE

Carole Damin, also a K/1 teacher at **CFI 84**, said Georgia's workshop shed light on more than just that spider poem, though. Her grade level team expanded their expectations for their students' final publication in the poetry unit. In the past, they've required each student to contribute one poem to a class anthology. They'll still do that, but now they will also ask each child to assemble an anthology of his or her own poems by the end of the unit. "Our poetry unit follows our nonfiction unit, so the students are already capable of composing a book with a table of contents," said Carole. "A personal anthology featuring multiple poems they've written is a realistic next step."

COACH SUPPORTS, INSPIRES PEERS

Libby Duggan, instructional coach at the **Christel House Academy (CHA)**, took what she learned from Georgia Heard and re-envisioned it in a way that can support all the teachers in her school. Borrowing Georgia's ideas for "climbing inside a poem" -- that is, reading, re-reading and "living with" the same poem over the course of one week to really delve into the poet's craft -- Libby is compiling collections of poems for the CHA faculty and spotlighting one poem per week in an all-staff email. She provides the poem and some ideas about how teachers and students might use and study the poem throughout the week. These are often quick activities, ideal for morning meetings or transition periods. The poems and curriculum ideas aren't mandates, but they do fuel Libby's peers with reading and writing strategies they can adapt to fit their classrooms.

Are you using curriculum ideas inspired by an Indiana Partnership for Young Writers workshop or program? If so, [tell us](#) about it.