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Inventing Metaphors to Understand the Genre of Poetry

Cover Page Footnote

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Inventing Metaphors to Understand the Genre of Poetry

Phyllis Whitin

*Poetry should be like fireworks, packed carefully and artfully,
ready to explode with unpredictable effects.*

- Lilian Moore

*Have you ever stared at the sky, and seen a bright,
shimmering jet fly through the air?*

*Heard its roar, seen its bright, shiny hull?
I believe poetry shares the same attributes.*

*Poetry is a beautiful thing that shines, and can be heard for miles
in someone's heart.*

- Robert, Grade 7

A perennial tension that teachers face when exploring poetry with children is how to balance explication and appreciation. As Louise Rosenblatt cautions, "Do not hurry the young reader away from the lived-through aesthetic experience by too quickly demanding summaries, paraphrases, character analyses, explanations of broad themes" ("What" 392). On the other hand, analyzing poetry can further enhance appreciation. Dorothy Strickland and Michael Strickland state, "The talk and learning *about* poetry comes not as a totally impromptu by-product of the sharing, but as one of the many aspects of a well-conceived literature program" (203). As a seventh-grade teacher, I wanted to form a design for poetry analysis that would encourage children to examine the unique features of poetry without losing "something vital and alive" (McClure 35).

I had previously used an immersion model of teaching poetry at the elementary and middle school levels, in average, advanced, and remedial classes (D. Whitin 456-58). By making oral poetry sharing a daily routine, I found that children of all ages and abilities developed a love of this genre. Children voluntarily learned poetry by heart, shared it with family and friends, spontaneously

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dramatized pieces for their classmates, and chose to write original poetry during writers' workshop. I was comfortable with the appreciation part of teaching poetry, but I was searching for an entree into a more analytical stance. During the year described in this article, I taught seventh grade in a suburban school in the southeast. My two literature classes were identified as academically gifted, with about 90% Caucasian, 9% African American, and 1% Asian American. I decided to explore ways to analyze poetry more deeply with these children, as well as to draw upon my experience with other populations of children so that the tools we developed would be useful in a variety of settings.

Having taught in the district for several years, I knew that during elementary school these adolescents' reading experiences had centered around reading stories and poems in basal texts and answering corresponding comprehension questions. Despite their academic abilities, I found that the students were hesitant to describe their personal interpretations of literature of any genre. I felt that the children needed two kinds of experiences before turning to the analysis of poetry. First, I believed that these students, like others in different settings, needed a lengthy immersion period into poetry. Secondly, they needed experience with personally interpreting literature. To address this second goal, I introduced the children to sketching as a response to reading (P. Whitin 1-4). In this strategy, called "sketch-to-stretch," children make symbolic sketches for ideas, themes, and characters (Short and Harste 528-36) rather than summarizing or paraphrasing text.

I postponed formal analysis of poetry until the spring. During this time I developed tentative plans. However, when enacting these plans, I found that my own vision had been limited, and I revised my thinking about the teaching process. In the remaining sections of this article I describe my reasoning in choosing a tool for analysis, the implementation of the project, and the changes that I recommend to others as they use the approach.

Deciding Upon a Tool to Analyze Poetry

First, I decided upon questions that I wanted the students to consider while analyzing poetry: What makes poetry poetry? What is its power? What does it do? Next, I considered how we might examine closely the essence of poetry without destroying its aesthetic dimension. I did not want to revert back to a traditional approach of picking apart individual poems. We needed a vehicle to talk *about* poetry without dissecting the poems themselves. I decided that creating metaphors about poetry could serve this purpose. These metaphors would be once removed from the poetry itself. Analyzing the metaphors would enable the students to examine the nature of poetry without destroying the wholeness of the poetic experience. I based my decision upon commentaries that poets have made about poetry and the children's experience with sketching.

My inspiration from poets came from several sources. I read that Eve Merriam had once compared poetry to condensed orange juice (Sloan 962). Her metaphor helped me to think about the importance of word choice in poetry. Poetry is not "watered down" with excess words. Another of her metaphors helped me consider the way poetry invites multiple interpretations and multiple perspectives:

“As a crystal can be turned in the sunlight to reveal all the colors of the rainbow, so a poem can be turned over and over in your mind and new meanings will radiate” (Merriam 3). Mary Oliver, elaborating on a metaphor by Walt Whitman, emphasized the emotional response to poetry. She compared it to a field or a temple, where the primary experience is feeling, and where intellect is secondary (Heard 46). Poets use metaphors to express what poetry can do.

Metaphor, then, could be a useful vehicle for the students to use to express their thinking. Poetry is grounded in metaphor, and poets themselves use metaphor to explain what poetry means to them. Elliot Eisner’s description of metaphor helped me to see it as a tool that would keep the students from merely listing qualities:

[Metaphor] capitalizes on surprise by putting meaning into new combinations and through such combinations awakens our senses. Metaphor is the arch enemy of the stock response [. . .] for making public the ineffable, nothing is more precise than the artistic use of metaphor. (226-27)

I also felt that inventing metaphors for the essence of poetry would build upon the children’s experience with literary sketching. Throughout the year, the children had created visual metaphors as they sketched responses to stories. For example, one student symbolized a character as a sun because of her positive role in a story, while other children used lines of blue or red to show pain in conflict. Creating visual symbols forced the children to interpret literary features in personal ways, rather than summarizing or paraphrasing a text. I felt that these experiences with metaphorical sketching paved the way for talking about poetry without dissecting it. Earlier experiences had also shown me that students of all ages and abilities could talk about literary devices in quite sophisticated ways through sketched responses. I therefore thought that my current plan for inventing metaphors to explore “what is poetry?” could apply to a wide range of audiences.

In deciding how to enact this plan, I also considered the children’s experience with literature circles. They were quite experienced in extending one another’s ideas through exploratory talk (Barnes 108-15). I wanted the children to invent metaphors individually, but I also believed that through conversation, they would be able to extend their metaphors and enrich their understanding of poetry. I therefore decided that we would follow the authoring/inquiry cycle model (Short and Harste 257-62) as a framework for the experience. The inquiry cycle model capitalizes on the interchange of ideas. It was this decision that brought me the most surprises as a teacher and forced me to revise my future plans about the project. At the outset of the experience, however, I planned the following steps:

- Introduce the idea of describing poetry through metaphor by relating to the students’ experience with metaphorical sketching.
- Conduct a group brainstorming session to generate ideas.
- Allow time for students to develop rough-draft ideas for individual metaphors.
- Meet in authors’ circles to extend and develop one another’s metaphors.
- Present metaphors in final draft form to the whole class.

What actually occurred exceeded my preconceived notions. I had simply expected that the metaphors would highlight various literary devices. As I describe in the following section, the students surprised me with their aesthetic connections to poetry as readers and writers. Through conversation, they extended each other's metaphors and found patterns and themes among them. I believe that it was the decision to follow the inquiry cycle that led to my changed thinking and revised plans. However, choosing metaphor as the vehicle of analysis proved to be a key decision. By examining poetry through the essence of poetry itself, we kept the mystery, beauty, and personal qualities of poetry alive.

Setting the Challenge

In order to introduce the idea of creating metaphors for "Poetry is. . .", I asked the students to brainstorm "What poetry does" and "What poetry is" as a class. Some ideas included: poetry is happy or sad, it expresses feelings in depth, there is a certain "ring" to it that includes rhythm and rhyme, it's your thoughts running wild on paper, it is music or song, poetry lets you get away from the world, you know what it means to *you*, it makes you observe closely, and poetry is a way to show secrets without saying them. Next, I reminded them of sketched metaphors they had created throughout the year: "Remember Heather's sketch that showed Mary Call as the sun? And the collaborative sketch that compared Long John Silver to an ocean? What metaphor could you create that might capture some of these ideas about poetry? What is something that makes you happy or sad, or causes you to feel deeply, or is secretive?" I suggested that they think over ideas for a few days. I planned to explore some sample metaphors together after they had developed some ideas.

Megan, however, gave me a better opportunity for exploration. She loved writing poetry, and our discussion inspired her to write a brief essay at home that evening. In it she described how she composed poetry, and she concluded the piece with several metaphors: "Poetry is the tree of life, blown gently by the wind of love," "Poetry is a child that never grows old," and "Poetry is a brook that never stops bubbling." I asked her if the class could interpret one of her metaphors in order to develop ideas for their projects. She agreed, and I copied the brook metaphor on an overhead transparency. I asked, "How is poetry like a brook that never stops bubbling?" They contributed:

they both have movement
 they both have rhythm
 the rhythm can go slow or fast, but it's steady underneath
 new ideas surface, just as the water bubbles up
 a stream can be spring-fed; poetry has new meaning over time
 poetry is fresh and refreshing
 poetry is life-giving
 poetry nourishes by sight, sound, taste, feel and smell
 poetry leads to other ideas when a reader connects a poem to
 personal experiences; a brook feeds into tributaries

As a group we were able to make a number of interesting associations. Each

of the brook's attributes inspired a connection to poetic devices or a reader's response. Its flowing movement suggested rhythm; its bubbling hinted at new ideas "rising"; its sustenance implied satisfaction of needs; and its part in a larger watershed conveyed a sense of making connections. After we generated a few other possibilities for metaphors, I asked them to each bring a rough-draft idea for a metaphor to an authors' circle in a few days.

Already Megan had caused me to revise my plans. I wondered, "But another year I won't have a Megan. What else could I do to encourage a group discussion?" I decided that I could have invited small groups of children to write descriptions of poetry for initial exploration. I also could have provided children with copies of poems that published poets have written about the nature of poetry, and asked them to use the poems as springboards for discussion. Megan's spontaneous response helped me to see possibilities for future planning.

Next, I designed another group experience before the children's rough-draft metaphors were due. I wrote Merriam's comparison of poetry to condensed orange juice on the overhead. Some students were not familiar with condensed orange juice, so I explained that it is compact, with all the water taken out. To make juice, a person needs to add water. The metaphor and the description sparked an interesting conversation. Stephanie commented that poetry is smaller than a story, but it still has as much meaning. I added that orange juice is really strong tasting, and Keesa remarked, "Poetry pops out at you like an explosion," (interestingly, an idea quite parallel to Lilian Moore's at the beginning of this article). The idea of strength interested Kim, who said that emotions are strong, and poetry was emotional. Meg then described that reconstituted orange juice has everything, including the water, and that "having everything in it has taken away the wonder." Perhaps she had connected the idea of adding water to the expression "watering down." At first I felt uncomfortable with Meg's idea because I felt as though part of poetry's wonder is in its intensity, but I held my tongue and listened to the children. Interestingly enough, her comment inspired several students to ponder where "wonder" comes from in a poem. Several students decided that a reader has to add the wonder to a poem just as a person adds water to the juice. After several student-student interchanges, I found myself becoming more and more intrigued with their ideas. To me they were explaining a transactional view of reading (Rosenblatt, *The Reader* 16-19) through their metaphors. The students' observations emphasized the active construction of meaning on the part of a reader. The issue that these students were describing reminded me of a professional article that I had been reading the night before. I decided to share a portion of this article with them, so I read aloud, "Interpreters do not decode poems; they make them" (Fish 12). We talked about the similarities between their idea of a reader "adding the wonder" and this professional theory. I used their metaphor to explain further that a reader can create a "new poem," or new meaning, upon rereading, and I was glad that I had initially held my tongue! Once again I learned the lesson that I must be patient and leave room for children to explore ideas without my interruptions. I was amazed that the metaphorical image of orange juice supported these seventh graders as they expressed quite abstract, theoretical ideas. With this in mind, I looked forward to the sharing planned for the next day.

Extending Metaphors through Collaboration

To be prepared for our authors' circle day, each student needed to have invented a metaphor and written a reflection to defend how the metaphor described poetry. I found during this time that some students' comparisons were more figurative than others, some were more developed, and some were not technically metaphors at all. However, each of their ideas generated interesting conversations about poetry. We used the strategy, "Save the Last Word for Me" (Short and Harste 506-11) to share the metaphors. One author stated a metaphor, such as "Poetry is a cloud," and the other members of the group responded with their interpretations for the metaphor. The author's perspective was "saved for last." In this way I hoped that the students would extend and enrich their metaphors through the multiple perspectives their classmates would give.

I visited the groups as they shared, and I tape recorded two of them. Four girls met in one authors' circle. Keesa announced, "Poetry is like Mariah Carey's, 'Without You.'" Both Ashley and Shannon thought that "you can't live without poetry." Kelly compared the singer to a poet telling a story. Shannon commented that Mariah Carey has a unique voice and "every poet is different, and everyone has their own style." Keesa then contributed her idea last, affirming the girls' ideas and adding, "It is so amazing that she can make an old song new. And that's like poetry. It can change the way you think about things, just like her remake. It changed." Just as Mariah Carey revived an old song and developed a new meaning for it through her personal interpretation, so too can readers change their thinking through personal interpretation of poetry. I was reminded of Merriam's words, "But in a poem, there is only one central character, and it is always the same person. It is the 'I' of the poet who is really you the reader" (2).

Rusty, a student in another group, later told me that his authors' circle had helped him extend the meaning of his metaphor. Originally, Rusty had decided that poetry was a perpetual motion machine because the motion of the machine was like the rhythm of a poem. After thinking some more, he decided that this perpetually moving machine could also symbolize that poetry can be preserved forever. During his authors' circle conversation, he made another connection. He realized that "no one really knows what a perpetual motion machine looks like because one hasn't been discovered. That's almost exactly like poetry. No one knows exactly what a metaphor for [poetry] is because they haven't found a perfect one." Rusty's last observation highlighted the notion that there is no one-to-one correspondence between a metaphor and its referent. We were dealing with the ineffable, so we could not find the "perfect" solution to capture the essence of poetry, just as people have not created a "perfect" perpetual motion machine. Neither experience is finished or closed.

Julie reported that her authors' circle participants related their ideas to each other as they talked. I found this interesting, since their metaphors were quite different. Dahlia said that poetry was a treasure chest with a missing key (the reader finds the key), Heather thought that poetry was a jewelry box with ornaments for varied occasions, and Julie decided that poetry was all the extra emotions in the world. Despite the differences among their metaphors, the three girls found that they shared an appreciation for the generative power of poetry. Julie

wrote, “Me, Dahlia, and Heather discussed how every time a poem is read, a new idea is generated and a new idea from that, etc. Sort of like poetry is just images or thoughts passed down from other poems.”

While listening to discussions, I was impressed with the wide variety of metaphors that the students had created. Many of the metaphors reflected personal interests of various students. Jackie compared poetry to piano playing; he played piano. Shannon, who loved tennis, said poetry is a tennis match. Candice’s father was an artist, so she chose one of his paintings to help her describe poetry as art. Rusty, who was fascinated with scientific discoveries, called poetry a perpetual motion machine. Despite their differences, however, most of the students extended their metaphors by “saving the last word for me,” or connected them to one another by discovering underlying patterns. Shannon deepened Keesa’s metaphor of personal expression in poetry, and Rusty’s authors’ circle gave him new perspectives to consider about his perpetual motion machine. Julie, Heather, and Dahlia discovered new ways to express the ongoing process of meaning-making. This spirit of connecting and extending metaphors that we developed during authors’ circles paved the way for a fruitful whole group celebration of metaphorical writing. However, my expectations for the final sharing were short-sighted. I expected that the culminating celebration would serve as a summary of our exploration; instead, it became an additional opportunity for extending and connecting ideas. I later realized that I could extract from this final experience teaching practices that could facilitate these connections in future lessons.

Celebrating and Extending: Examining a Writer’s Perspective

After our discussion of Megan’s “bubbling brook” metaphor, I noticed that certain themes, such as the never-ending possibilities for personal meaning, crossed several metaphors. That night I wrote in my journal, “Maybe patterns and themes would help us tie together ideas and develop a sense of the uniqueness of poetry.” I was beginning to see the potential of metaphor that Pugh, Hicks, Davis, and Venstra describe: “Through metaphorical thinking, divergent meanings become unified into the underlying patterns that constitute our conceptual understanding of reality” (3). When the children gathered to celebrate their finished projects, several key patterns did emerge.

We sat in a circle, and one by one students read aloud their favorite poem and their metaphor essays. Two or three students responded to the ideas of each presenter. These comments helped to connect ideas across metaphors. No one metaphor could capture completely the nature of poetry, but clusters of metaphors offered perspectives on poetry for us to consider. Some students had created metaphors that emphasized the writing of poetry; others had concentrated on the reading of poetry, and still others had considered both poet and reader.

Julie, for example, identified with the poet’s process of writing. First, she shared Merriam’s “I, Says the Poem,” and then commented:

Poetry is everything in the imagination, and poetry is all the extra thoughts and emotions in the world. A poem can be anything like a little girl or an old man. And the way poetry is started, one poem is written, and that con-

tinues a cycle. Someone reads that, and they get a thought, and they write it down, and they get a thought from someone else, and those two thoughts together can inspire a poem. And like they lead to other things, and later on they might affect your writing. So it's sort of like how everything that you read adds up bit by bit, like little things make up the ocean [. . .] anything you read comes out in your poems.

Julie's explanation reflected her own extensive experience of writing both poetry and prose. She realized that anything can become a topic for writing through an author's imagination and that all experiences and reading create a fund of writing material from which to draw.

Next, Andrew described poetry as a plane in flight because planes can take people to new places. Most of his explanation centered on the role of the poet. He called the pilot the poet, the controls pencil and paper, and the wings the lines "because they keep the plane steady." The passengers were the readers. During the time for comments Andrew added a new idea, "If the plane crashes, that would make it a bad poem."

Julie objected, still taking the perspective of a writer that she had developed in her own metaphor: "If a poem doesn't work, then you can go back to it and get one line from it or something. You could go back and get an old part of the plane. Like you could take the plane apart and take out the pieces that could be used with another poem." Reacting to Andrew's metaphor gave Julie an opportunity to elaborate upon her understanding of the process of writing, for she herself often found seeds for a promising piece of writing from a discarded draft. Julie showed me that a personal metaphor can become a lens through which a learner can interpret another point of view as well as develop one's own.

A Second View: Taking the Reader's Perspective

A few minutes later Sarah read her paper, in which she called poetry a "dandelion in a meadow of light":

As I walked through the tall, green grass, I saw a dandelion and not so many other flowers. I took the dandelion in my hand, and just looked at it awhile, pondering my wish. When I finally decided the wish I wanted, I blew the fluffy, white flower into the wind. Then I went along my way, still holding on to my wish. I chose poetry is like a dandelion because when you come to a poem, you have to read it, and you have to read it over and over again. And just pondering the poem, just like you ponder a wish [. . .] if you do poetry quickly without pondering it, you won't understand it, and it won't be as meaningful to you.

Sarah's metaphor developed her perspective of the reader's stance in poetry. Julie, however, still influenced by her writer's perspective, concentrated on a different attribute of dandelions. She commented, "When you talked about how when you blow it and it scatters, it's sort of like when you read a poem and it scatters different ideas. And like each one of those little seeds is going to be a new flower,

and each is going to turn into a new poem.” Julie’s remark strengthened both Sarah’s metaphor and her own. Julie extended Sarah’s idea by taking a different perspective on the seeds blowing in the wind, emphasizing that they bear new flowers. On the other hand, having the opportunity to consider Sarah’s metaphor supported Julie to add a new dimension to her own thinking about writing.

Next, Raymond remarked that he, too, could connect his idea to Sarah’s, but from a different angle. Raymond’s metaphor was “Poetry is a spark.” He explained, “If the spark hits wood or leaves or whatever, at exactly the right time, that would be the reader’s thoughts. Then it becomes a fire. And the more thoughts the reader can come up with, the bigger the fire is, and the more important it would be to that particular reader [. . .]. You have to have wood from the reader—an open mind.”

Raymond’s metaphor, like Sarah’s, shows the reader’s active stance. Amy McClure describes the same idea in this way: “Although [a poem] owes its creation to the poet, it owes continued life to its readers and listeners ” (35). Raymond’s perspective of the reader affected the way he interpreted Sarah’s dandelion metaphor. He extended her metaphor to show how he saw the connection: “I think that a dandelion is a good way to describe it because, if you’re out in a field full of flowers, there’s flowers out there. And a dandelion is really just a weed. It’s real simple, and you don’t really want to look at it, but some people are going to bend over and pick it up anyway. And that’s the people who are going to understand the poetry.” By developing Sarah’s idea of taking time to ponder a weed, Raymond, too, enriched Sarah’s metaphor. His comment also balanced the reader-writer relationship that Julie initiated. Only would potential writers benefit from reading poetry if they took time to “bend over and pick it up anyway.”

I found my own thinking changing during the conversation as well. For instance, Heather compared poetry to a jewelry box with a dancing ballerina. She explained that jewelry boxes contain a variety of jewelry for all tastes and occasions, just as a wide variety of poems appeal to different people for different reasons. The ballerina represented the way poems “sing to you.” However, several of the students’ comments focused on the music box. As they talked, I found myself thinking about the simple structure of a music box song. It reminded me of the economy of words in poetry. I commented, “The song in a music box is always really simple, and poetry is kind of pared down to the bare essentials of meaning. You know, you can’t have a lot of extra words in poetry. You pare it down so that each word is really concentrated.” Rusty added that my explanation was similar to Merriam’s poem, “How to Eat a Poem” because there’s nothing left over. Then Julie realized that our comments were similar to Merriam’s metaphor of condensed orange juice. The power of metaphor and of exploratory talk were affecting me, too. I connected my personal interest in music with my own appreciation for poetry, but without the students’ comments, I would not have done so. I, too, was a learner during the discussion.

This part of the discussion evolved in unexpected ways. In reflection, I now see that other teachers could encourage students to make connections among metaphors with questions such as, “Who else can relate a metaphor to Sarah’s dandelion idea?” “What do these metaphors suggest about writing poetry?” Of course,

listening for additional insights to highlight is equally important to including these questions. The experience of these children only shows one possibility. One lesson from this experience, however, is probably applicable in all cases: the role of the teacher as a learner. During this discussion I found myself sharing my own process of thinking, and I believe taking this stance encouraged the students to think more flexibly as well.

Finding a Theme Among Metaphors

This sharing of metaphors led to one other overall generalization. During the discussion the group discovered an underlying theme of cycles among many of the metaphors, and several students attempted to relate more and more metaphors to this idea. Julie began by describing how one poem leads to the creation of another. When Sarah shared her dandelion seed idea, Heather said, "It's like Julie's poem; it was a cycle." Dahlia connected Julie's image of the ocean as a cycle of the tide going in and out. When Candice showed her art slide as a metaphor, Julie noticed a sun in the painting: "I thought of the sun; the sun has always been here, just as poetry's always been here. It keeps going, and the sun keeps going around [. . .] back to the cycle again." Steven's metaphor compared poetry to a caterpillar that became a butterfly "if you gave it time." His classmates then connected metamorphosis to the theme of cycles. I marveled aloud that one idea led to another. Suddenly Dahlia exclaimed, "Cycle is a big theme! Think about it, everybody!"

The idea of a cycle implied that poetry lives over time, and that it is enriched by each reader's experience. Equally important to the students was the notion that poetic interpretation is deeply personal. When George compared poetry to a key, he explained, "Some keys can open some locks, and some poems only mean something to certain people, so they can only get into the mind of certain people." Dahlia, whose metaphor was a treasure chest with a missing key, described a similar symbol but from a different angle. She insisted that each person (reader) has a different key, and each has to find that special key to unlock the treasure. Raymond's spark metaphor implied personal meaning, as did Heather's jewelry box. However, personal meaning can change over time, as illustrated by the conversation around Robert's metaphor. He called poetry a cargo ship, and the class discussed what would happen if the ship sank. Raymond thought that the sunken ship, or forgotten poem, would never be as good as it was originally, but I objected: "Sometimes sunken treasure is more valuable." Raymond, following this idea, changed his mind and said, "People might read poems that they don't like, and then they come back and read it again and say, 'Good!' People's attitudes toward something change." The idea of a cycle was modified by this perspective. A cycle is ongoing, but it may be altered, thereby opening new potential. Similarly, poetry lives on, yet it reflects new personal interpretations and new forms of expression over time. Merriam expresses it this way: "[Poetry] becomes like a stone that you skim on a lake; the ripples widen. New meanings unfold, and you have the pleasure of discovering more and more each time" (4).

A Final Reflection

Through individual and collaborative work, these students identified several of poetry's unique features that are consistent with the views of poets themselves: readers make new meanings over time, yet poetry changes readers; poetry evokes emotions; it is deeply personal; it is rhythmic and image-laden; and reading and writing poetry influence one another. However, despite all of our attempts to define a cycle of meaning-making, a reader's perspective, or a writer's perspective, none of our ideas could fully explain the fullness and the mystery of poetry. Using metaphors to frame our thinking preserved poetry's ineffable qualities. Metaphors have no one-to-one correspondence with their referents; they bridge the known and the abstract through interpretation. Maintaining an interpretive stance kept us from reducing poetry to a list of dry attributes. I felt as though the students deeply explored poetry as a genre while enhancing their appreciation of it. As a teacher, I gained a new appreciation for the power of metaphor that is manifested in unexpected ways. I learned to be a better listener to my students.

Although I was extremely excited about the insights that children generated individually and collectively, through reflection I have revised my ideas about using this plan with other groups. I particularly wish that I had planned for the students to reflect upon the meaning of their metaphors as they repeated a cycle of immersion into reading and writing additional poetry. I now would include in my plans for future experiences:

- Introduce an interpretive response to literature through sketch-to-stretch.
- Postpone formal poetry analysis until after a lengthy immersion period.
- Provide opportunities for students to create collaborative poems about what poetry means, and engage in small-group readings of similar poems by published authors.
- Extend metaphors through small and large group brainstorming.
- When sharing rough-draft metaphors in authors' circles, encourage students to look for patterns and connections among metaphors.
- When sharing refined metaphors in a large group, take an active role in asking students to relate their metaphors to each other and to further extend the metaphors rather than regard them as "finished" products.
- After developing metaphors, use them as a frame of reference while reading and writing additional poems; test out and refine the ideas in the metaphors over time.

I conclude, then, with an invitation to others to take these ideas and transform them in new ways with their own students. These strategies serve not as templates, but as suggestions. With plenty of room left for surprise, more students will continue to discover what Stephanie observed: "Understanding poetry is like trying to understand a rainbow; it has no limits, no beginning and no end." ☺

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