

An Easy Way to Write a Poem

By Sally Murphy

Want to write a poem but don't know where to start? Simple - with a piece of paper and a pen (or pencil!) Instead of sitting chewing that pen and worrying what you should write about, use it to write down a list.

Your list could be on any subject you like. Why not write a list of what is happening in the room around you? Look, listen, even smell, what is going on around you. If you're in a classroom, your list might look something like this:

Kids chewing pens

Kids writing

Someone screwing up a piece of paper

Teacher walking around the room

Clock ticking

Someone passing a note

Someone giggling

Someone sighing

Fly buzzing at the window

The smell of a banana in someone's desk

Use your five senses and keep writing your list until you can't hear, see, smell, taste or feel anything else.

By now your page will be pretty full – and, believe it or not, you are well on your way to writing a poem. Reread your list, underlining or highlighting what you think might be the most interesting things you've written down. Are there other ways of describing those things? Is the clock just ticking or is it tick tock ticking? What sound does the paper make as it is being screwed up? Does it crumple? Write your new ideas down. Now, do some of your ideas maybe belong together? There are two things on the list above that start with 'kids' and four with 'someone'. Draw arrows or use brackets to connect them up. When you're doing this, you might also think of some things you didn't put in your list – or some you might like to make up. What if there was someone crying at the thought of writing a poem? Or kids hiding under their desks? Remember this is your poem, so you can make up whatever fits.

By now your piece of paper might be looking pretty messy with ideas and underlines and arrows, so grab a fresh piece of paper. The hard work is done. Now, use your list to create a poem. How? Simple? Just rearrange the items from your list in the new order you have just created. Again, you might find that as you start to rewrite it, new ideas or words come to you. Use them. Your poem might now look like this:

Kids are crying

Kids are sighing

Kids are chewing pens

Kids are writing.

Someone's giggling

Someone's passing a note

Someone's scrumpling and crumpling a piece of paper

The clock is tick tock ticking

The teacher is walking around the room.

So, by simply rearranging your list, and leaving out the bits you didn't like (such as the smelly old banana) you've got the first draft of a poem. But, when you reread it, you might see there's something missing. In the poem above, we're not sure WHY all these things matter. Why is everyone sighing and chewing and so forth? It's because everyone is trying to write a poem. So, you might choose to tell the reader this in a title, or somewhere in the poem. Next, are there some words that aren't necessary? Do we need the word 'the' for example? And the word 'are'? Is there anything else we could add? When I reread it, I thought of the word 'wriggling', because it rhymes with giggling. I also wondered if the teacher was just walking, or if she was being a bit impatient. I also thought it might be more interesting if we used her name. So I jotted these things down. Because this is a first draft you can add bits in, cross them out, draw arrows and so on until you're happy with what you've got.

Then, using another sheet of paper, you can write another draft. So, your poem might look like this:

Writing a Poem

Kids crying

kids sighing

kids chewing pens

or writing.

Giggling

and wriggling

and impatiently jiggling.

Passing notes

scrumpling and crumpling pieces of paper

as the clock tick tock ticks

and Miss Imms paces the room

waiting for our poems to appear.

So there you have it. From a simple list, you have shaped and reshaped until a poem **has** appeared.

Your list doesn't have to be about what's going on around you. You could write a list about an animal, a holiday, a person – you could even use a shopping list! Then use your imagination and as many drafts as it takes to create a poem that you're happy with. So what are you waiting for? Start a list and see what poem appears.

If you liked Sally's suggestions you might like to visit her website at:

<http://www.sallymurphy.net/>