

Poetry and Science Lessons/Ideas - Middle School

This series of lessons and ideas is designed to take about one week. Science and English Language teachers could work together, or separately. Or this series could be run as a workshop in a library, or elsewhere. Information to help with instruction are in blue.

Poems are suggested. Other high quality poems may be found at, for instance, the [Poetry Foundation](#) or at sites such as [Interesting Literature](#).

DAY ONE: Icebreaker

I'm sure you've all heard the poem

*What a wonderful bird the frog are
When he sit he stand (almost)
When he walk he fly (almost)
When he talk he cry (almost)
He ain't got no sense, hardly
He ain't got no tail, neither, hardly
He sit on what he ain't got hardly*

What is appealing about this poem (what do you like)? Let the ideas from students all hang out, write them down, then suggest they classify them as science, poetry, both. Starter ideas:

funny
rhymes, repetition
relates frog to bird
relates croak to cry
Where is the science in the poem?

Whole Class Look at a "Real" Science Poem

(Two different students read this, so there is time to absorb it. Make sure everyone has a copy.)

a) [Mosquitoes](#) by Alison Hawthorne Deming

<https://www.americanscientist.org/article/mosquitoes>

First came the scouts who felt our sweat in the air
and understood our need to make a sacrifice.

We were so large and burdened with all we had carried,
our blood too rich for our own good. They understood

that we could give what they needed and never miss it.
Then came the throng encircling our heads like acoustic haloes

droning with the me-me-me of appetite. We understood
their pleasure to find such hairless beasts so easy to open and drink.
We understood their female ardor to breed and how little
they had to go on considering the protein required to make

their million-fold eggs. Vibrant, available, and hot,
we gave our flesh in selfless service to their future.

*[Alison Hawthorne Deming](#) (1946 –) is a poet with a long interest in natural sciences. Two of her earlier poetry books were *Science and Other Poems*, and *The Monarchs*, which reference the New England of her earlier life. Check out her [Field Studies Writing](#) website.*

b) Discussion

What appeals to you about this poem? Are there particular lines that you like?
If you hadn't seen the title, how far into the poem would you have figured out the "they"
in the poem?

Let's look at the science in the poem:

List "facts" of science are in this poem?

Did you learn any new science from this poem? Did the poem help you learn
more about mosquitoes?

List "facts" of any other subject are in this poem (if any)?

Let's look at the poetry:

Look at the "line break" from line 3 to 4. What do you notice about it?
pause? surprise?

Repeat this exercise for lines 7 to 8

Notice how the mosquito and human information are woven back and forth.

Would you prefer this poem to be rhymed?

In the lines:

We understood

their pleasure to find such hairless beasts so easy to open and drink.

We understood their female ardor to breed and how little

they had to go on considering the protein required to make

their million-fold eggs.

Notice the "eeee" sounds. How many can you find? (Guess what? – the
repetition of sounds can be almost as soothing as rhyme.)

Notice that some beginning letters are repeated, and often they are relatively
close together. An examples is "never" and "needed."