

SAMPLE LESSON FROM WORDSMITH

1. EXPLORING SENSORY EXPERIENCE

You receive information the same way everyone else does – through the senses. What you *sense* (see, hear, smell, feel and taste) affects what you *think*. Can you ever hear sleigh bells without thinking of Christmas? The senses are like windows that open directly to experience, and people who live in the same culture share many of the same sensory impressions. Sparkling tinsel, the sharp scent of pine, warm gingerbread cookies, and smooth red ribbon are all images that say "Christmas" to many of us.

Try an experiment. On the lines below, write something about Christmas that relates to each of the five senses. Try to think of at least one descriptive adjective to go with each, like *smooth* red ribbon, or *sparkling* tinsel.

Christmas:

_____ (sight)
_____ (sound)
_____ (touch)
_____ (taste)
_____ (smell)

Merry Christmas!

Do you know what you've just done? You've written a poem!

Your poem doesn't rhyme, but poetry and rhyme aren't necessarily the same thing. In fact, the poetry you'll be writing in this section will almost certainly be better if it *doesn't* rhyme. The reason is that while you're busy thinking of words that rhyme ("Ummmm, 'plink,' 'pink,' 'sink,' 'stink'..."), you may overlook the very words that would best express your feelings. I have only one rule for poetry:

Poetry is the result
of choosing the words to say
just what you want to say
in just enough space.

More than any other kind of writing, poetry deals with feelings and impressions. This is where your senses come in.

EXERCISE 1-A. Think of your favorite season of the year: winter, spring, summer or fall. Each season has its own character, its own holidays, smells, sounds, activities. On a blank piece of notebook paper, write a poem about the season you like best. Don't let the assignment scare you – just use the model of your Christmas poem. That is, write the name of the season on the first line, write an impression from this season for each of the five senses, and end with the name again, modified by a descriptive adjective that sums up the whole season for you.

Do you like what you've done? Ask two people – a parent and a friend, for example – to read your poem and tell you if the words you chose suggest the season to them. You may want to change a line or two, or think harder about a particular taste or smell. When your poem is perfect (or as perfect as you can make it), copy or print it.

EXERCISE 1-B. Write similar poems about the other three seasons. Think about them, write your impressions, correct the lines, and copy them on good-quality paper, Bound together in a booklet, with illustrations, your original poetry would make a priceless, one-of-a-kind gift for somebody close to you (and it wouldn't cost much!).

EXERCISE 1-C. Now for a challenge. Try writing a poem about a color, describing how that color would taste, smell, sound and feel. Here's an example:

Purple looks rich, like a king's robe.
Purple feels soft and smooth as velvet.
Purple smells dark and sweet as violate.
Purple sounds like the mellow notes of a French horn.
Purple tastes dark and wild as blackberries.

If purple doesn't appeal to you, think of robin's-egg blue, or vermilion, or ochre. Think about two or three colors, and write poems comparing how they would taste or smell. Follow the pattern given above, or use your own pattern.

A collection of color poems would make an attractive little booklet, too. Maybe Emily Dickinson got started this way.

Poetry is such a huge subject I would have to write another book to do justice to it. I'll just say here that a poem can be about anything and take any form. The best way to become familiar with poetry is to read it.

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