

Practical Poetry: Bending the Rules for a Better Understanding

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ABSTRACT

Across the globe, the word ‘poetry’ seems to be both exclusive and infamous in its particular ability to quash the vibrant optimism of, and strike fear in to the heart of, even the most enthusiastic group of students. And in correlation to the current onslaught of tech-happy, electro-friendly mediums available to the modern student, the world of poetry waits in line as an archaic standby, often only deemed approachable when all else fails. While other types of input, such as basic grammar, idioms, and common vernacular are readily recognised as being of fundamental importance to the imbibition of the English language, poetry is regularly abandoned due to its perceived difficulties and redundancy. However, this research has shown that, through correct deduction and direction of class membership, poetry is not only an enjoyable but rewarding adventure in the vast discipline of English language education.

Keywords: Diversify, interact, create

I. Introduction

This research was conducted at various levels, with different age groups, backgrounds and settings. The study was set to question and gauge student reaction to poetry, before and after experimenting with the subject, during class time.

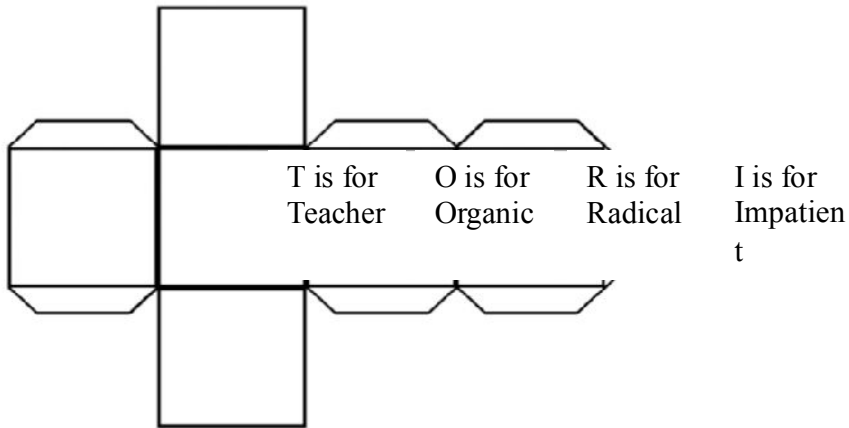
Following the recommendations of Frederick Schroeder in his online study ‘For Better Or Verse’, and an intensive writing class syllabus designed by Professor In Lee (Jeonju National University of Education), this study was able to isolate three types of poem which are readily accepted by, and easily teachable to, groups of ESL students.

II.

1. The Poetry Cube

The name acrostic helps students to express their thoughts and ideas on a subject which they already know – themselves. In writing a name acrostic students are forced to focus on their own name, written in English, and to come up with a series of character traits which belong to them and correspond to each alphabetic figure. Through this research, it was possible to develop an interactive method in which to teach this particular form of poetry.

Rather than simply write the acrostic on a plain white sheet of paper, students were given the net shape of a box. This forced students to concentrate on the layout of the words, and the aesthetic value of the poem. The result of this particular quirk was that students challenged themselves to find words of the same length, often uncovering adjectives which they had never previously heard of.



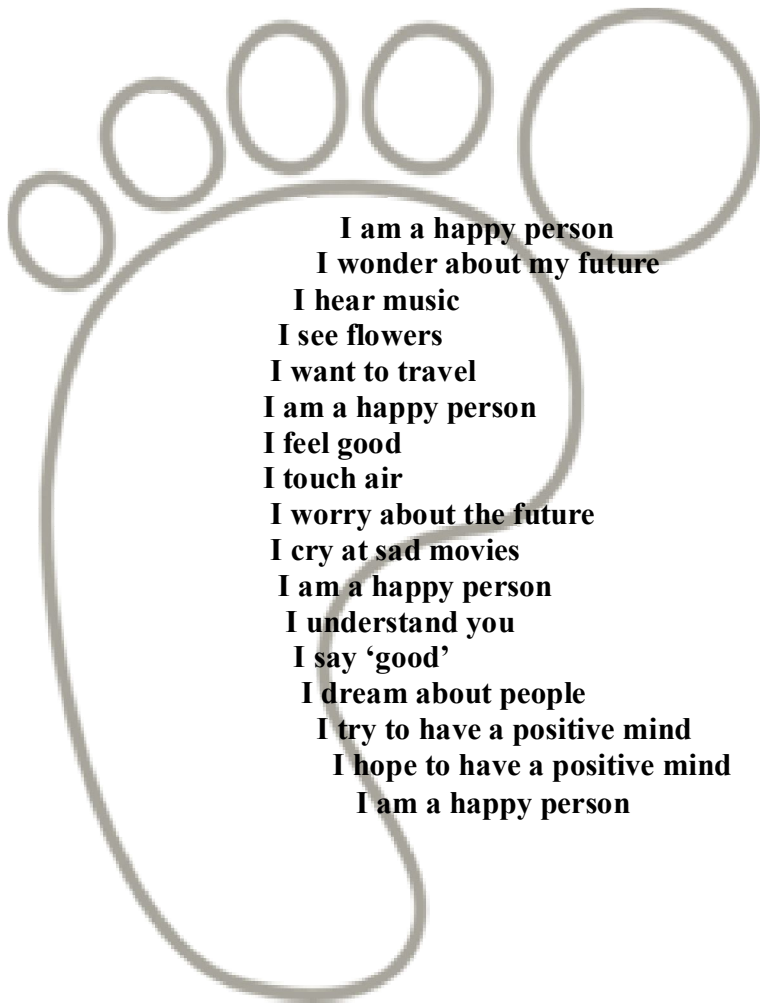
2. The 'I Am' Foot

The 'I Am' foot challenges students to write about their daily experience of life, using a very simple sentence pattern. The poem begins and ends with the words 'I Am'. What the student chooses to write down in the body of the poem should follow the pattern below:

<u>I am</u>	(Two special characteristics the person or thing has)
<u>I wonder</u>	(something the person or thing could actually be curious about)
<u>I hear</u>	(an imaginary or actual sound)
<u>I see</u>	(an imaginary or actual sight)
<u>I want</u>	(a desire)
<u>I am</u>	(the first line of the poem is repeated)
<u>I pretend</u>	(something the person or thing could actually pretend to do)
<u>I feel</u>	(a feeling about the imaginary)
<u>I touch</u>	(an imaginary touch)
<u>I worry</u>	(something that could really bother the person or thing)
<u>I cry</u>	(something that could make the person or thing sad)
<u>I am</u>	(the first line of the poem is repeated)
<u>I understand</u>	(something the person or thing knows to be true)
<u>I say</u>	(something the person or thing believes in)
<u>I dream</u>	(something the person or thing could actually dream about)
<u>I try</u>	(something the person or thing could make an effort to do)
<u>I hope</u>	(something the person or thing could hope for)
<u>I am</u>	(the first line of the poem is repeated)

To make these more interactive, students were asked to remove their own shoe and to draw around the outline of their own foot. Students were then asked to transform the foot in to a different image. These 'feet' were transformed in to a variety of items such as an ice cream cone, a cloud and a bowling ball. By doing this, students were given the opportunity to make a significant personal investment in the poem, as well as having to follow a set pattern which is both helpful and malleable.

As can be seen from the example below, written by a 2nd year student of the Korean department, the results can be quite moving.



3. The Cinquain

How it works...

**Title of
Poem:**
**Author of
Poem:**

Parts of Speech:

- Line 1:** = 1 noun. This is the topic or theme of the poem.
Line 2: = 2 adjectives. They describe the noun in line 1.
Line 3: = 3 gerunds (verb + ing). They describe the noun in line 1.
Line 4: = 1 short, complete sentence about the noun in line 1.
Line 5: = 1 noun. This is a synonym for the noun in line 1.

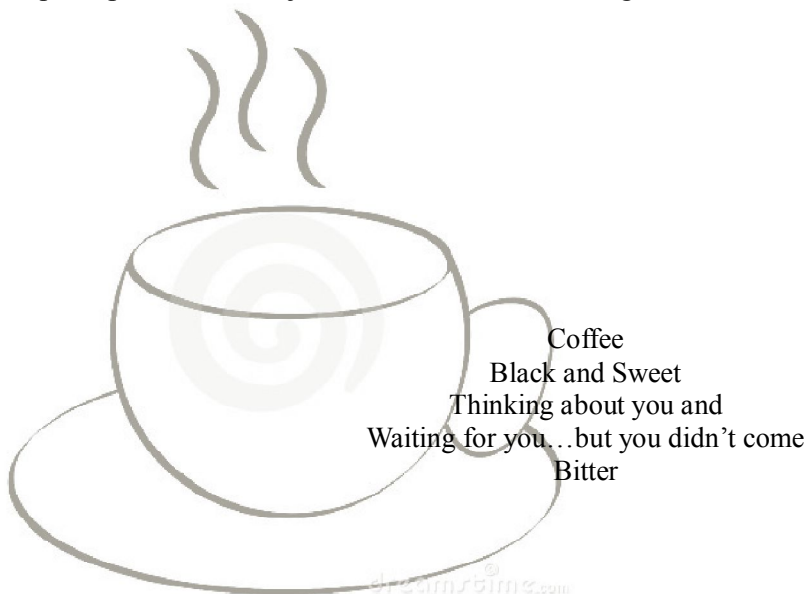
The cinquain poem formed the bulk of the research that was carried out. Owing to time restrictions, this style was the most easily adaptable to a fifty minute class slot.

When the study in to poetry initially began, this poem was distributed to freshman students. They were given the freedom to choose whichever topic they liked. However, this proved rather fruitless as many of the students were simply choosing what they saw in front of them i.e. their cell phone or a pencil case. The choice of topic had to be restricted further, especially with large groups of relatively inexperienced, and often sleepy, university students.

Instead, the students were given a variety of laminated cards, each one with a simple caricature of a different animal. Students were asked to select the animal which most reflected themselves, and then to base their poem on that animal. The written results of this restriction showed a dramatic shift in results – the students themselves were also much keener to write about something more abstract, such as a lion or penguin.

Other classes, who had been together for several years and who had, thus, developed a stronger bond, were not given an animal. They were given the name of a classmate and asked to write the poem without explicitly revealing the classmate's identity. Upon completing the writing challenge, students were asked to read out their work and the class had to guess the identity of the mystery muse. This resulted in a great amount of hilarity and a visible appreciation for a new aspect of poetry.

The same senior students were then asked to submit, via email and as a homework piece, one more cinquain poem on a subject of their own choice. Again, some of the results were quite startling:



III. Results

Many of the senior students, who worked on two cinquain poems, added comments to their homework submission, expressing how much they had enjoyed and appreciated this opportunity, and how they intended to use this again in the future.

Sophomore groups, who completed a full 2-hour class on poetry, and who used all three of the techniques listed above, were asked to vote on their favourite. They identified the cinquain as being the most enjoyable format.

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About the Presenter

Tori received an MA in Philosophy from the University of Glasgow, and is currently working on an MA from Nottingham University, England, specializing in English Literature and Linguistics. She has taught, for almost a decade, at various levels. Her professional interests include developing methods in which to bring classic literature in to the contemporary classroom, and language, gender and the divide. She is the immediate past president of Jeonju North Jeolla KOTESOL and regularly volunteers her time and translation skills with a Seoul-based NGO. Her goal is to wade further, still, in to the field of Translation Studies.