

LANGUAGE ARTS

POEMS BY YOU ABOUT YOU

GRADES 5-12

This is an excellent activity the first week of school. It helps to get students involved immediately in the curricula, get to know each other, and it gives the teacher some examples of student work to post for Back to School Night.

- Hand out the two poems entitled ***I AM***, (see below—feel free to print them out and reproduce them for your class).
- Hand out the ***I AM MODEL***, (see below); put a copy on an overhead projector, if available, for the entire class.
- Using the model, create an original poem as a class, incorporating ideas from the students.
- Assign ***I AM*** to the class.
- Optional: Each student does an art project (collage, diorama, anything that shows WHO they are) to accompany the poem.
- Students orally present their personal ***I AM*** poem to the class. ***I AM***

I am a carefree girl who loves horses.

I wonder if there ever was a horse that could fly.

I hear the stomping of a hundred mustangs on the desert in Arabia.

I see a horse with golden wings soaring into the sunset.

I want to ride swiftly over a green meadow.

I am a carefree girl who loves horses.

I pretend to be an Olympic jumper.

I feel the sky pressing down on me as I ride along a sandy shore.

*I touch the clouds on a winged horse.
I worry that I'll fall off and become paralyzed.
I cry when a colt dies.
I am a carefree girl who loves horses.
I understand that I will not be able to ride every day of my
life.
I say, let all horses roam free.
I dream about the day when I have a horse of my own.
I try to be the best rider in the world.
I hope to ride all my life.
I am a carefree girl who loves horses.*
-ELLY TATUM

I AM

*I am a nutty guy who likes dolphins.
I wonder what I, and the world, will be like in the year
2000.
I hear silence pulsing in the middle of the night.
I see a dolphin flying up to the sky.
I want the adventure of life before it passes me by.
I am a nutty guy who likes dolphins.
I pretend that I'm the ruler of the world.
I feel the weight of the world on my shoulders.
I touch the sky, the stars, the moon, and all the planets as
representatives of mankind.
I worry about the devastation of a nuclear holocaust.
I cry for all the death and poverty in the world
I am a nutty guy who likes dolphins.
I understand the frustration of not being able to do
something easily.
I say that we are all equal.
I dream of traveling to other points on the earth.
I try to reach out to poor and starving children.
I hope that mankind will be at peace and not die out.
I am a nutty guy who likes dolphins.*

-SANDY MAAS

I AM-MODEL

FIRST STANZA

I am (two special characteristics you have)
I wonder (something you are actually curious about)
I hear (an imaginary sound)
I see (an imaginary sight)
I want (an actual desire)
I am (the first line of the poem repeated)

SECOND STANZA

I pretend (something you actually pretend to do)
I feel (a feeling about something imaginary)
I touch (an imaginary touch)
I worry (something that really bothers you)
I cry (something that makes you very sad)
I am (the first line of the poem repeated)

THIRD STANZA

I understand (something you know is true)
I say (something you believe in)
I dream (something you actually dream about)
I try (something you really make an effort about)
I hope (something you actually hope for)
I am (the first line of the poem repeated)

submitted by

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BEGINNING OF THE YEAR AUTOBIOGRAPHY

GRADES: 2-8

Many teachers use the first few weeks of school for community-building and getting-to-know-you activities. To integrate language arts into this community-building theme, I begin my writing program by having the children write and publish their own autobiographies. The first year that I did this, however, a problem arose when I tried to find a suitable model of an autobiography to read to the class before they began their own writing. My solution—I wrote my own autobiography!

MATERIALS:

- the implements with which your class generally writes and illustrates
- your imagination and facts about yourself—your family, interests, hobbies, childhood, early schooling, etc.

METHOD:

1. Follow the same writing procedures you ask of your children—writing, editing, having a peer conference with a colleague, revising, illustrating, and designing the cover.
2. On the first day of school, talk to your class about autobiographies—the stories that people write about their own lives and that others read to find out about the author's life.
3. Read your autobiography to the class as a way of introducing yourself.
4. Kick-off your writing program by having the children begin to write their own autobiographies.

This book becomes a popular one to sign out and take home to

read. By the time Open House arrives a few weeks into the school year, many children have read it at home and their parents already “know” me—and the interests that we share! There are personal benefits as well. Creating a book this way makes you aware of the feelings involved in the actual publishing experience and the risks involved in putting your work out for public scrutiny. In all my years of teaching writing to small children, I think this is the most valuable lesson I have learned about the writing process.

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THE EVILS OF BOOK REPORTS

GRADES 4-12

This is one of the most controversial lessons I’ll ever write...but also one of the most important.

I never give book reports to my students. Never.

There are some basic premises to my position:

- A MAJOR GOAL OF MOST TEACHERS IS TO GET STUDENTS TO ENJOY READING.
- ALMOST EVERY TIME A BOOK IS ASSIGNED, THE STUDENTS ARE REQUIRED TO WRITE A REPORT
- STUDENTS HATE BOOK REPORTS
- STUDENTS ASSOCIATE BOOK REPORTS WITH READING
- STUDENTS DO NOT VOLUNTARILY READ

This may sound simplistic...and it is. But it's also basic psychology—the students associate a negative experience (reports) with an action (reading books), and therefore, hate the action!

Think about it...how often, when you assign a book, do the students immediately inquire whether or not they have to do a report! And when they find out that a report IS required, how excited are they to now read?

So how do we get the students to read? Or, as many teachers may ask, how do we check up on whether or not they are reading? Here are a number of random ideas:

- Require the students to keep a reading book with them at all times, as part of their supplies. They read the book during their free time. When a book is easily accessible, they will naturally read.
- Assign genres of books as usual. However, instead of a report to check up on them, sit down and talk to the student, one-on-one. It's easy—you'll get all of the information you need, and you'll also develop a closer relationship with the student. This one-on-one only has to take a few minutes and can occur over a couple of weeks, during students' work time.
- Participate in book clubs (i.e. Scholastic, Troll). The students are picking their own books, and paying for them, and therefore, are more apt to read them.
- Start a classroom "card catalogue". After each student reads a book, he/she makes a card with a short summary for other students in the class to read. This is an easy way to check on the students reading!
- If you MUST give a project, use a type of book "project"—anything but a "written report". This can be a diorama, book poster, book cover, etc.

I have found that my students continuously read. They are always purchasing book club books, and their parents often

relate back to me that the students get upset because they don't have enough time to read (when I give them too much homework). Reading has become a pleasurable experience—not one associated with a dreaded “book report”!

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