

Paint Pots of Poetry: **Deeping Comprehension Through Cooperative Poetry Discussion**

Poetry is a genre which requires a variety of consciously applied comprehension strategies. A reader of poetic language must be prepared to visualize, to search for main ideas and to understand that there is often more than one interpretation of the meaning.

Poetry can extend our imagination, confirm our understandings of ourselves and our world. It can help us find unity with one another and to help us see the metaphors in daily living.

To maximize language learning and comprehension, I like to engage students in cooperative teams as they work with poetry. This increases student-to-student conversation, teaches teamwork, and tends to expand comprehension as diverse ideas are shared. When learners think about the meaning of a poem in cooperative groups, they are exposed to multiple views and understand with greater depth.

Poetry is a wonderful context in which to explore word meanings. Because of the creative uses of language and metaphor often found in poetry, words are often used in new and unique ways which, when consciously addressed, expands student vocabulary.

Paint Pots of Poetry: The Process

Students will work in teams of four to six students to collaboratively read poems using the questions provided on paint sticks to guide their reflections on the poem. The purpose is to give students an opportunity to enjoy a variety of poems and be able to think about the “big idea” in cooperative groups. The “paint pots” are a metaphor to help students make the connection to the visual imagery that poetry creates. You might want to consider setting up stations with a different poem at each station. Groups could then rotate from station to station and experience a variety of poems.



Learners work in cooperative teams to explore the deeper meanings of poems. Vocabulary can be enriched when learners think about the variety of ways in which words and phrases support meaning in a poem.

Materials:

- Each station will need a Paint Pot (empty paint can or bucket) and paint sticks with questions written on them
- Poetry selections (chart size or a photocopy for each reader)

Procedures: Each cooperative group is given a different poem poster or set of photocopies for a poem and a “Paint Pot” with questions

Steps:

1. Each student reads the poem silently at least twice
2. The group then reads the poem chorally
3. Each student in the group selects a paint stick from the paint can
4. Each student rereads the poem silently for the answer to their question
5. Each student reads their question out loud and shares their thinking about the answer
6. The group discusses the question and thinks about possible answers. They are encouraged to come up with more than one answer for each question.
7. The process continues until each group member has shared a question and guided the discussion around possible answers.

Possible Questions for paint sticks:

- What is the “big idea” of this poem?
- What is the theme of the poem?
- How does the speaker feel about the subject of the poem?
- What is the tone or mood of the poem?
- Select an interesting word or phrase. In this poem, it probably means _____.
- If you could ask the author one question, what would it be?
- What do you visualize as you read this poem?
- Does the author have a message for the reader?

Paint sticks (free from a paint store) carry questions that students can use to guide them in thinking more deeply about poetry.



Variations:

Each cooperative group becomes an expert group on one question. (Example: Group 1 might have, “What is the theme of the poem?” Group 2 might have, “What do you visualize?”) As each group rotates to the variety of poems in the room, they search for the answer to that single question. As a result, the theme group would have explored the

theme for several poems and might then discuss what they noticed about the way authors express theme in poetry. The visualizing group could share out about how different authors supported visualization for the reader.

Expert groups could leave their thinking on sticky notes at each poem station. This would allow other students to read and see what other groups are noticing about each poem.

At the end the poems and sticky notes could be posted for a “gallery walk” so learners could view the variety of responses.

Key Questions:

1. How might Paint Pots of Poetry support the learners you serve? Would you make any modifications of the process?
2. Poems appear frequently on standardized tests. What questions might you place on stir sticks that would help prepare students for the standardized tests they will encounter?
3. How might you extend this deeper kind of reading to passages you lift from favorite picture books or novels?
4. Could you extend this kind of experience to reading passages from a unit of study in science, social studies, health and so on? What kind of questions would best support this approach to content area reading?