

Your Turn Lesson

USING A SCAFFOLD TO WRITE A LIST POEM

Scaffolds provide a framework for writers to organize their thinking. The structure that an author uses can be a repetitive word, phrase, or line that sometimes introduces a new idea and sometimes restates an important idea for emphasis. In poetry, scaffolds appeal to our sense of sound as we read the words silently or aloud. Just as we look for patterns in nature, we search for them in our writing.

Hook: Return to “Signs” by John Frank and discuss the scaffold the author uses. Help your students discover that the poem consists of noun-verb phrases followed by a main idea. (You may need to explain the difference between a noun and a verb if your writers are very young.) Companion pieces that use the same scaffold include *Snowsong Whistling* by Karen Lotz and *Moon Glowing* by Elizabeth Partridge. You can also find examples of the two-word scaffold in *Pumpkin Eye* by Denise Fleming, but the order is changed to adjective-noun (“swooping bats,” “hissing cats”). Notice that these “-ing” words denote action but answer the question “What kind?” This book can offer an alternative scaffold to some students.

Purpose: *Writers, today I am going to show you how to create a list poem using two-word phrases. We'll also be thinking about the main idea we want our readers to understand about our topic so that we can choose the best words to support that idea.*

Brainstorm: Together with your students brainstorm a list of topics they could easily use. Seasons and holidays work well with this lesson, but your list might also include animals, sports, or any other topic your students have some knowledge of. Choose one and brainstorm nouns and verbs that come to mind to describe your topic. You may have more than one verb for each noun. Brainstorming as many words as possible will give you and your students lots of choices. Be sure to record your verbs with the “-ing” ending. Create two columns (nouns, verbs) on chart paper or the whiteboard to use as a resource. Here's an example:

Nouns	Verbs
flowers	nesting
birds	building
tulips	growing
buds	chirping
robins	returning
butterflies	spreading
bluebirds	hopping
daisies	flitting

As you collect words from your students, tease out more specific nouns and verbs from the general categories they may give you. For example, if a student gives you “flowers,” put it on the list to honor his suggestion, but your next question might be, “What kinds of flowers do you know?” This charting provides a chance for you to also work on synonyms. If a student offers “sings” you might ask for other words that describe the sounds birds make. Another possibility is to look for word combinations that provide alliteration. Students can use thesauruses and dictionaries to find interesting words.

Model: Talk with your students about how you first want to think about your main idea, or what you want your readers to understand about the topic. Following the scaffold, this will be the last line. Explain to them that deciding on your ending thought will help you choose the words and ideas that go best with your poem. For example: *I think spring is such a beautiful season so I’m going to make my last line: “Spring is beautiful!”* Continue to think aloud as you choose the words to create your poem. A finished example might look like this:

Spring

Tulips blooming,
Dogwoods budding,
Daffodils glowing,
Spring is beautiful!

You can stay with the scaffold of four lines or add additional noun-verb lines to offer more choice to your students.

Here’s another example from Rose’s notebook that uses the adjective-noun scaffold:

My Busy Garden

Nesting bluebirds,
Chirping chickadees,
Hovering hummingbirds,
My busy garden!

Shared/Guided Writing: Together with your students create an additional poem using their ideas. You can keep the same main idea or change it. Be sure to engage in lots of thinking aloud about word choice. Before students write individually you can return to other topics and continue to brainstorm additional words. For example, if you are writing about seasons you might want to brainstorm words for all the seasons so students have more choices. One way to do this is to post charts and have students work in small groups to record the words on the charts. They can rotate among the charts in carousel fashion to continue to add ideas.

Independent Writing: Invite students to create their own list poems using the words charted or on a topic of their choice. As an option for young students, this activity can be part of a reading and/or writing center. Write the words on oak tag strips and place them in two columns (nouns/verbs) on a pocket chart. Students can rearrange the words to create list poems then practice reading them for fluency, or they can record them in their writer's notebooks.

Reflection: Ask students to reflect on how creating the list poems worked for them:

How did the use of the scaffold help you with your writing?

How did choosing your main idea first guide your word choice? Why is this important?

What other topics could you use in creating this type of poem?

When might you use this scaffold again?