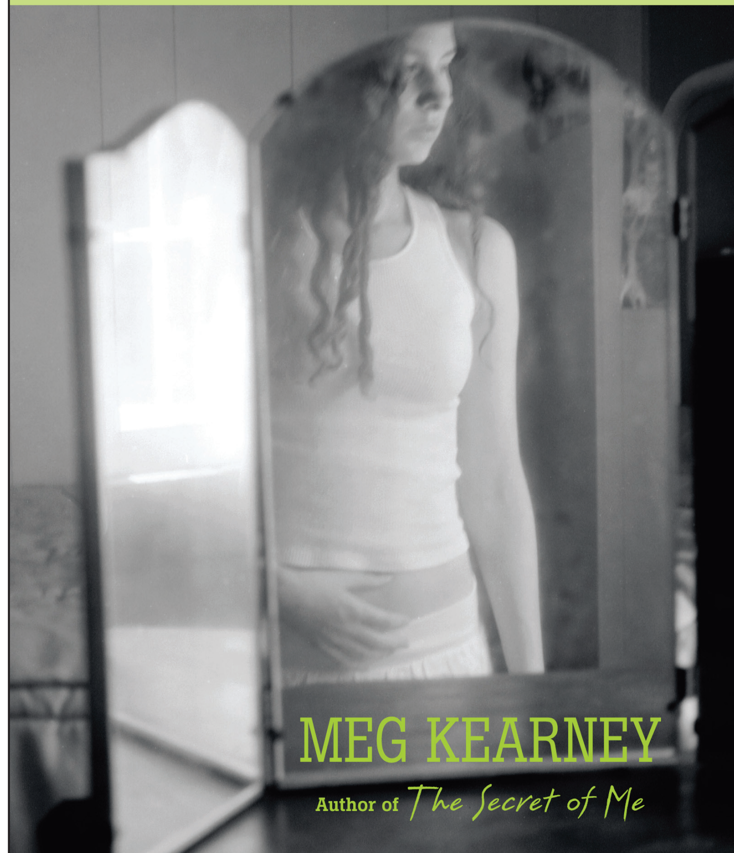
A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO

The Girl in the Mirror
by Meg Kearney



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This Guide focuses on poetic and narrative elements of *The Girl in the Mirror* and supplements the “Guide to This Book’s Poetics” (pp. 156–165) in the novel’s back matter. It also offers reading and writing exercises that can be used in classrooms at any level. As author of both the novel and this Guide, Meg Kearney welcomes feedback and questions from teachers and students; feel free to contact her through her web site, www.megkearney.com.

INTRODUCTION

Why write poems? This is a question I have been asked by teens and adults alike. And now that I've written two novels in verse, sometimes I am asked a second question: why write a long story composed of them?

To the first question, I always answer, "If I could express what's expressed in a poem in any other way, I wouldn't have written the poem in the first place." Poems often attempt to express the otherwise inexpressible; experience and feelings can be ambiguous, and so we reach for metaphors and images to say what we otherwise can't. But poems also draw power from their compactness. My mentor William Mathews used to compare a poem with a metal spring; the more you push down on the spring, the more energy it has.

Regarding the second question (why a novel in verse), read on.

ASK NOT WHAT A POEM IS, BUT WHAT A POEM CAN DO

What is a poem? Ask your students, ask a poet, look up quotes on the Internet, and you'll wind up with as many different definitions of a poem as you have responders. It makes more sense to ask what a poem can do instead of what it is. A poem can:

- Tell a story (e.g.: about a funeral or about a birthday party).
- Say "this is how I've solved being alive thus far" and/or "this is what it's like to be inside my skin, my head." The poet Stanley Kunitz said poetry is "the telling of the stories of the soul." It's important for students to know that such stories can be made up! Often we have to make up a fiction in order to tell an emotional truth.
- Express an emotion or describe an experience that's otherwise inexpressible (often using image, metaphor, and simile).
- Find the universal in the personal: for the reader, a poem can provide a way to enter someone else's life and perhaps to understand that the poet shares the same fears, problems, joys, ideas, traditions—or the reader may be able to see differences in a new way, and maybe understand them better.
- Make a statement (funny, political, vengeful, loving).
- Help us remember things: The first poets lived before man had invented the printing press; these traveling bards used rhythm and rhyme as ways to remember and retell stories that people could pass on from one generation to the next.
- Entertain.
- Celebrate or pay tribute (the job of odes and elegies).
- *Battle silence*—finding expression for the thing left unsaid, the thing no one wants to talk about, or fears talking about, or doesn't know how to talk about.

WHY A NOVEL IN VERSE?

If poems can do all of the things listed above, it makes sense that one would use them as

building blocks to tell a novel-length story. One of the strengths of a novel in verse is that—just as in a singular poem—there is no extra "fat content" weighing down the story. The reader "leaps" from one poem to the next; the imagination fills in what might happen in between. In a traditional novel, for example, the reader might have to follow a protagonist from his kitchen table to his coat rack, then to his foyer and troublesome door knob to the front stoop (where the morning's paper still lies), then down the walk to the driveway, where he stands searching his pockets for his keys. In a verse novel, the protagonist moves from the kitchen table to the moving car within just a few short lines. Each poem represents a scene and/or emotional state and moves the story forward.

More thoughts on the verse novel are found on page 7.

POEMS VS. PROSE (JOURNAL ENTRIES)

Unlike its prequel *The Secret of Me,* which is comprised only of poems, *The Girl in the Mirror* includes poems and journal entries. The journal entries supplement the poems' storytelling. They allow Lizzie to contrast traditional prose with poems (such as in "The Graduation Party" sequence, p. 42), to "think" on the page (when pondering the details in the letter from her adoption agency, or the multiple meanings of the word "charm" on p. 91), and to provide short pieces of exposition. It can be fascinating to see the two genres—poetry and prose—standing next to each other, each helping the other tell Lizzie's tale and setting up multiple examples of the adaptable powers of form and content.

While prose gives Lizzie the chance to provide background information and relay certain stories in the gushing way a teenage girl might tell them to another teen, poetry—where every word, every syllable counts—enables her to cut straight to the emotion and heart of a story or scene. (See also, "On Journaling," below, for more on this subject.)

Poetry also provides the tool of the line break. *The line break is the only tool the poet has in her toolbox that the prose writer does not have; it is the "anti-prose" mechanism that doesn't allow the line to reach the edge of the page.* Instead, again and again the line break sends the reader back into the poem itself—layering meanings, creating tension and rhythm, and undercutting expectations—instead of allowing a continuous flow of prose narrative. The poem then features a second form of music unknown to prose—not just the music of the sentence, but also the music of the line.

POETIC AND NARRATIVE ELEMENTS, WITH EXERCISES

THE CONTRAST POEM (“But Now,” p. 104)
Students are asked to contrast (and compare) when they start writing their first essays, but this is a rhetorical device that works well in poems, too. The poem “But Now” is in a simple form that works well with the youngest of students and grade levels right up on up through adult students. The format is in couplets, and uses repetition to advance its meanings:

“I used to be ________________
but now I am ________________ .”

“But Now” is a serious poem that uses contrast to show how Lizzie’s emotional state has changed since her father died. It continues to build toward the final couplet, which echoes a major theme of the book—a girl who has plummeted so far into her grief and self-destructive acts that she no longer recognizes herself.

Poems that use this format can easily be light-hearted, silly, or strange. For example, a lighter take on this format could result in a couplet like:

“I used to be a dachshund,
but now I am a hot dog.”

Exercise:
Have a student read “But Now” aloud for the class. If time allows, ask another student to read it aloud again. Poems bear repeating and should be read aloud whenever possible. This enables everyone to hear the sounds each word makes, and how sounds between words play off one another.

Then, ask students to write contrast poems using the format above. This can be an in-class or homework exercise.

After students have had a chance to work on their poems, have them take turns reading them aloud. Ensure that fellow students are listening carefully. After a poem is read, ask the class members what words and/or phrases they remember.

Contrast poems tend to be grounded in *concrete words*—words that refer to things you can see, touch, taste, hear, or smell—which makes their images memorable. It’s a good sign that a poem is working well if listeners remember large portions of it after having only heard it, without having seen the poem on the page. Take this opportunity to talk with students about concrete vs. abstract words, and why the former tend to help in retention of the poem (usually the sign of a poem’s strength).

METAPHOR, IMAGE, AND PORTRAIT POEMS (“vs.,” p. 68; and “Self Portrait,” p. 150)
In his book *Best Words, Best Order,* poet Stephen Dobyns states that “every metaphor is based on withheld information that the comparison given by the metaphor tries to uncover.” Most metaphors are made out of images, moving us from the abstract to the concrete: “She was so skinny, she nearly slipped between the floorboards.” “My attraction to him died quicker than a bug hitting a windshield.”

Through their use of metaphors, portraits—poems in which a character (or real person) is described both physically and emotionally—challenge students to recognize details, facts, and ideas concerning those characters, including their inner feelings and their relationships with others in a story. Portrait poems force language away from the abstract ("She is pretty") to the concrete ("She is snow sparkling on a moon-lit night") and enliven description through the use of the senses. "She is snow sparkling on a moon-lit night" gives us a sense of beauty, but also presents the color white and leaves us feeling a bit cold, too.

Portrait poems can help students relate real people and situations (or literary characters/situations) to people and situations in their own lives. Students may also come to understand cultures (within families and in the larger world) both different and similar to their own. They can challenge students to write from a different perspective, and/or to write about others in ways that might shed light on their lives and emotions.

Reading & Writing Exercise:
Ask students to read "vs", and "Self Portrait". It's best if these (and all) poems can be read aloud in the class.

Take a closer look at "vs." Ask students what *senses* the poem employs to paint its pictures; for example, **sight** (lumberjack, red and black flannel, trees, straw, barn, brown boots, basketball high-fives, collar shirt, cat, map, are all visual, concrete words); **hearing/sound** (wind; a sweet, low voice; the slap of those high-fives; a voice like a map that leads you home . . . what does that sound like?); **touch** (flannel, cold air, warm house, sunshine); **smell** (leaves, fresh air, soap, a warm, spicy tortilla); and **taste** (picnics imply different foods for everyone, which probably come to mind; we also taste that spicy tortilla). Using the senses give poems texture and grounds them in the concrete, making them interesting and memorable.

Synesthesia—the mixing of the senses, or "cross-sensory metaphors"—also lends to the kind of meaning that is understood in the gut or the heart more than the head. "He smells like . . . sunshine" and "his voice is a map" are examples.

Ask students to describe Peter and Tim based on the *physical* clues provided in the poem. Next, ask them to describe what the boys are like *emotionally, as people.* Have students point to words and/or lines in the poem to underscore their conclusions.

Next, read "Self-Portrait" aloud, or have a student read the poem. Tell the students that after the poem is read, they will have time to write their own self-portraits or a portraits of loved ones. Urge them to describe themselves or the person being portrayed both emotionally and physically through the use of metaphor; they must also use at least three of the fives senses.

Usually when I give this assignment, I write at least four or five body parts they must describe through metaphor on the board (e.g. ears, nose, arms, hips, knees) and a set up a couple of emotion-packed metaphors ("When I'm happy about __________ I feel like __________"; when I'm worried about __________ it's like __________") and invite students to use these as jumping-off points for their poems.

THE FUN OF TRADITIONAL FORMS ("The Day My Father Died," a pantoum, p. 14)
Traditional verse forms should not be viewed as restrictive—just the opposite. Following the dictates of a form can make the writer say the unexpected *because* she's reaching for a rhyme or syllable or a word with multiple meanings (like words than can act as both verbs and nouns, handy when writing a sestina with its repeating end words). The poet Billy Collins has said that "one of the great functions of rhyme and meter is to establish trust. When you hear the

regularity of the beat and the dependable recurrence of end rhyme, there's an immediate contract issued between the poet and the reader." The reader who knows she's experiencing a villanelle will expect a pattern of repeating lines throughout the poem and will know those lines will come together at the end in (one hopes) a powerful way; she'll likely finish reading the poem just to see how the writer pulls it off.

Writing within the constraints of a form can also provide a "safe" structure to explore highly emotional feelings or events. (For an example, you might look up one of the best poems I've read about September 11, 2001 is Donald Hall's pantoum titled "The Number," found in his book *The Back Chamber.*) The structure of form controls the pace and order in which information is released in a poem; formal elements of language, pacing, and sound take over the presentation of action and emotion and ideas. The writer places the content of the poem "in the hands" of the form—she can even "blame" for form for difficult subject matter, thinking, "The form made me say those things! I needed the rhyme!" This is why I chose sonnets and a pantoum for the poems about the death and funeral of Lizzie's father.

Villanelles and pantoums are circular, great for obsessive thoughts. Sestinas and sonnets are good forms for telling stories. Sonnets can also create wonderful lyrics, moments captured in time. The ballad tells a memorable tale that can often be sung.

The main thing a student of poetry should come away with when learning about formal verse is that it is fun. Really. It's about playing with words. When I took a course in prosody in graduate school, the best thing my professor did was give students the freedom to try writing in forms without worries about how "good" our poems were. He simply wanted us to explore the form and how it worked by writing in it. Instead of a grade, he gave each poem a check mark to indicate it was done correctly. Or, he handed it back with some pointers and invited us to try again. He didn't expect us to write brilliant villanelles; he wanted us play, to learn the rules for writing a villanelle (or sonnet etc.) by following those rules with no other expectations attached. How freeing that was!

Each of the forms is a tool in the poet's toolbox. In order to use that tool to its best advantage, the apprentice poet needs to know how it works and in what situations it might come in handy. I once spent three years trying to write a poem titled "Tattoo." It started as a three-page narrative poem in which I told the whole story of getting an image inked into my arm, right down to the name of the tattoo artist (his name was Rusty Savage, which seemed too amazing to leave out). The poem wasn't working, so I challenged myself to cut it to two pages. Then to one page. (After all, a poem's power lies in its compression, right?) Still, it seemed forced. I had come to the poem already knowing what I wanted it to say, which is a very good way to set yourself up for failure. I put the poem away and let it simmer. Then it dawned on me: my tattoo is in the shape of a circle (three interconnected ravens). Why not try a circular form, like a pantoum? I pulled out the poem, rescued a line or two that seemed to be working, and let the form lead the way. Not only did I end up with a poem that was a keeper, I learned that the tattoo was a symbol of the connection between myself and my two mothers. (I also learned that the name of the tattoo artist, as ironic as it was, didn't belong in the poem.) My subconscious knew that already, but it took the pantoum to teach it to my conscious mind. If I hadn't taken that course in graduate school and learned how a pantoum worked, I never would have thought to pull that form out of my toolbox and try it out.

Reading & Writing Exercise:

Ask a student or two to read the pantoum "The Day My Father Died" aloud. Discuss the poem's form. First, the poem is made of quatrains (four-line stanzas). The first and last lines of the entire

poem are the same: "I thought it was a joke." Next, notice that the second and fourth lines of each quatrain repeat as the first and third in the next quatrain. For example, "They called me out of class," which is the second line in the first stanza, becomes the first line of the second stanza while "I dropped my phone. They sent me home," which is the last line in the first stanza, becomes the third line of that second stanza. This pattern is repeated form one stanza to the next.

Here's perhaps the most tricky part about a pantoum: it can be any length, but the second and fourth lines of the *final* stanza must repeat the first and third lines of the *first* stanza ("I thought it was a joke." and "Mom said Dad was dead."). And ideally, the second and fourth lines of the last stanza should appear in reverse order (meaning line one of the first stanza becomes line four of the final stanza; line three of the first stanza becomes line two of the final stanza). That is why "I thought it was a joke" is the last line as well as the first line of the poem.

Ask students, why does this form seem to work so well with the content of the poem—with what's going on at that moment in the life of Lizzie and her family? Does the repetition of the lines echo Lizzie's confused emotional state, her inability to believe what's happening? How does that first line change in its emotion, meaning, and impact when it becomes the last line?

One of my favorite pantoums by a contemporary poet is Laure-Anne Bosselaar's "Stillbirth." Students can read this poem and hear the poet read it on the Web site of the Academy of American poets: http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/960.

Ask students to try their hand writing a pantoum. The subject doesn't have to be tragic, but it should be compelling—perhaps a basketball game that was won (or lost) in its final seconds, or a music recital or first-ever attempt at cooking a meal that went terribly wrong or miraculously right.

Students should be given this exercise as a homework assignment, allowing them time to learn the form and come up with a poem that follows this challenging structure. Remind them that the poem can be long or short (Bosselaar's is quite short)—the number of possible quatrains is indefinite—but again: the second and fourth lines of the *final* stanza must repeat the first and third lines of the first stanza—and ideally, the second and fourth lines of the last stanza should appear in reverse order.

If time allows, ask students to read some of the other poems written in form in *The Girl in the Mirror,* such as "Birthmother Ghazal" (p. 71), "The Ballad of One Saturday Night" (p. 72), "My Father's Wake" (Shakespearean sonnet, p. 16), "Intruder at the Cemetery" (Spenserian sonnet, p. 121), or "Mother's Day Poem I Decide Not to Give Mom" (villanelle, p. 34).

Then, after reading the description of the poem's form in the back of *The Girl in the Mirror* (and perhaps after doing some further reading in a text recommended at the end of this Guide), invite students to write a poem in at least one of these forms. Let them know that their poems won't be judged by how "good" they are—that they should feel free to play with language, and simply learn how such a poem is made by writing one.

THE "DRAMATIC LYRIC," SEQUENCES, AND THE VERSE NOVEL ("Gone," p. 57)

Poetry is historically divided into three types, depending upon who is speaking: lyric (first person), dramatic (the characters do all the talking), and narrative (a narrator speaks in first person while characters speak for themselves). The lyric is generally defined as a relatively short, descriptive poem that emotes intense, intimate, personal feelings. In old times it was a poem composed for singing, and today it can be fairly musical. Usually the lyric poet is speaking in his or her own voice, though the poet might take on the voice of another.

Some writers also define the lyric as a poem that captures a moment in time. Most of those moments tend to be dramatic, and thus worth capturing. Which leads back to the definitions above: they seem clear, but in reality, these three types of poems tend to cross over and into one

another. As poet Edward Hirsh puts it in his wonderful book *How to Read a Poem and Fall in Love with Poetry:* "Readers experience how the narrative or story-like element drives lyric poems; how the musical element, the rhythm of emotions, charges narrative poems; how the element of dramatic projection empowers many narratives, many lyrics."

Dramatic poetry has been around since the classical Greeks, when it was a form of celebration during festivals for the god Dionysus. According to *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics,* one way Western critics have defined "dramatic poetry" is "lyrics or short poems that imply a scene." So here again we have two types of poetry overlapping.

The dramatic lyric can "imply" a scene, as quoted above, or depict a scene that has a beginning, middle, and end. While all scenes have a beginning, middle, and end, one or two of these parts might be implied (for example a poem might begin in the middle of action, with the beginning of the action left to the reader's imagination). The speaker of the poem can use her own voice and at the same time serve as narrator and actor—in other words, the three modes of poetry blend together.

Much dramatic poetry comes in the form of plays (think Shakespeare), though a lyric sequence or even single poem can fall into this genre. To quote *The New Princeton Encyclopedia* again, "the modern poetic (or lyric) sequence is a grouping of mainly lyric poems and passages (or fragments) . . . that tend to interact as an organic whole . . . it is generally distinguished from the modern "long poem" by its free deployment of different prosodic forms and shifting focal points." Examples run from Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* to Eliot's *The Wasteland* to Lowell's *Life Studies,* but such a definition could also describe the verse novel, the aim of which is (*New Princeton Encyclopedia* again) "to give that attention to everyday life which the novel manages to easily, without relinquishing the manner, power, and concentration of poetry." The verse novel groups all sorts of poems together to create a whole story. Within it there might be mini-sequences that work synergistically as units, but also serve to feed the overall story.

Poems in *The Girl in the Mirror* that might be described as dramatic lyrics include "Dad's Wake" (p. 16) and "Dad's Funeral" (p. 17), both sonnets that tell the stories of these events. The poems emote intense, personal feelings spoken in Lizzie's voice. Both poems feature dramatic dialogue (in "Dad's Wake": both the "thanks" the family members say to people paying their respects, and the musings in Lizzie's mind; in "Dad's Funeral": the beginning prayer of Father Dan and the people singing "Amazing Grace"). Each poem describes a scene that has a beginning, middle, and end, though some of these elements are implied. The "Wake" poem starts in the middle of the scene, implying the family has already arrived at the funeral home, and leaves us still there, though we know Lizzie and her family must go home. "Funeral" takes us from the beginning of the scene with the family entering the church right to the dark end, the lowering of the father's body into the ground. The poems stand alone but go together; linked with "Journal Entry #2103: Irish Funeral Party" (p. 18), the three act as a sequence that together make more of a whole.

The string of sonnets in "Kate Says, Come Visit Me in NYC, and One Thing Leads to Another" (p. 123) is a second example of dramatic lyrics that work as a sequence. Other individual poems that could be called dramatic lyrics include "Gone" (p. 57), "Making Up at Mack's Auto" (p. 62), "Skipping Stones at the River Walk, Talking About College" (p. 82), and "Forced Confession, Hello Shop" (p. 105).

Reading & Writing Exercise:

Ask two students to each read "Gone" (p. 57) aloud in class, and then discuss the poem as a story and as a made thing. Where does the story of the poem start? (At the party held the night before, implied in the first line?) What happens in the middle (does Tim's arrival add another

layer of interest to the story)? How does the story end? What are some of the poetic devices used in the poem—can students point to use of internal rhyme? What is the average number of syllables per line? How is enjambment used in the poem—does it keep the reader moving down through the poem? Does it serve to underscore or undercut any meanings from line to line? (For example, in line four "This calms me only" carries its own sense, as if Lizzie is the only one calmed by Cathy's assurances; then "a little while" on the next line quickly gives a different meaning to the sentence.)

Almost everyone has a story about somehow losing a favorite or beloved object. Ask students to write a short poem (25 lines or fewer) on this subject. They should ensure the story in their poem has a beginning, middle, and end; they should also try to keep their lines at about 10 syllables each (such challenges make for careful word choices; also, lines of 10 syllables tend to be written in iambic pentameter); and they should employ internal rhyme at least four times. The poems should attempt to emote intense feelings (funny, sad, horrified, etc) either in the voice of the poet or a character the poet has created. The poems may feature other people/characters and make use of dialogue.

Have students read their poems aloud in class. Have their fellow students remark about what they liked about each poem and what words/phrases they specifically remember. Students should also mention any point where they were confused or lost while listening to the poem. Have each poet write down the comments of their peers, and then use these points of praise and constructive criticism to revise the poem.

To take this exercise a step further, invite students to write two more poems that are connected thematically to the scene depicted in their first dramatic lyric. Each of these poems should be able to stand on its own, but together with its "sister" poems create a synergistic whole. These sequences can also be partly made of prose pieces, like Lizzie's journal entries.

ON JOURNALING

A few thoughts on the contrast between prose and poetry are covered in the introduction to this Guide. It's clear that Lizzie fancies herself to be not only a poet, but a girl who keeps a journal because she hopes someday to be a novelist or memoirist (she even says so in "Journal Entry 2115: The Truth Comes Out," p. 110). Like writing poems, journaling enables Lizzie to describe events and try to make sense of them, disentangle thoughts and ideas, and release pent-up emotions.

But telling about events through journal entries is different from writing poems about them, as the goal of poems is to *recreate* the feeling of the actual experience as opposed to describing it. Lizzie's world is so emotion-packed during the time the novel is set, journaling actually gives her a little distance from what's happening, yet provides a vehicle to help make sense of things at the same time. As teacher David Capella put it, the journal entries "balance [the] poems and . . . modulate the emotional tenor of Liz as a character within the novel's plot."

Lizzie's journal entries are often short stories, with beginnings, middles, and ends. Some of her journal entries are brief notes that allow her to jot down immediate thoughts, observations, and feelings—such as those she is having right after having read the letter from the New York Foundling about her birth mother (Entries #2105 to #2106.1, pp. 27–29). Some of these observations and feelings later provide inspiration for poems like "Birthmother Ghazal" (p. 71) and "Deciding to Register My Name: A Pantoum" (p. 139).

Writing Exercise:

If your students are already keeping a journal, invite them to choose an entry or two and use it as a leaping-off point for a poem.

Students who are not already keeping journals can be invited to start one, even if it's only for a week. Ask them to jot down conversations they overhear, things they see on their way to school and home again, what the cafeteria smells and sounds like from day to day. Each journal entry should be at least 250-words long. At the end of the week, challenge them to choose one journal entry to inspire a poem.

THOUGHTS AND SUGGESTIONS REGARDING REVISION

Early in the process of writing poems, students should be encouraged to find a secluded place to read their poems aloud to themselves. Often this is a great way to pick up on problems like awkward syntax, overused words, and missing phrases.

Next, students should simply read drafts of their poems aloud to the class. The students listening should be asked to pay very close attention while the poet is reading. After great applause, students should indicate what specific words or phrases they remember most from the poem they just heard. Do they remember the first line? What images stick in their minds? What is the last word in the poem? Most likely, the memorable parts of the poem will be the most concrete—the words or phrases that listeners could see, smell, touch, or taste in their imaginations. The poet should make note of what her fellow students found memorable, knowing these probably represent the strongest sections of the poem.

A more traditional way of workshopping and revising poems is helpful if students have had a chance to work on their poems beyond a first draft. In this case, divide the students into groups. It's best if photocopies can be made so that students have copies of each other's poems; if this is not possible, they will have to listen extra hard during this "workshop" exercise (not necessarily a bad thing!). If copies *are* available, have the students in the groups exchange poems with each other (so that, for example, each member of a group of six has five poems plus her own). Decide which poem will be workshopped first, and then ask a student who is *not* the poet to read the poem aloud. The way a poem is written on the page—how punctuation, white space, line breaks, and stanza breaks are used—guide the reader in how the poem should sound, much like musical notation enables a musician to play a song he's never heard before. It's important for the poet to hear someone else "interpret" how the poem should be read, thus enabling her or him to find out if the "notation" is working. Then, ask the writer to read the poem aloud. The members of the group should be listening for (a) language/images/phrases that "leap out" because they are memorable or especially strong for some stated reason; (b) language/images/phrases that seem tired, worn-out, over-used; (c) abstract words like "ugly," "pretty," and "happy." Students should not necessarily take the clichéd or abstract words and phrases out immediately, but instead discuss why these words/phrases strengthen or weaken the poem (and why). In revising their poems, students should try to link abstract words ("love," "happy," "success," "mad") with concrete ones ("chocolate ice cream," "summer vacation," "freshwater pearls," "a dentist's drill"), turning them into fresh metaphors that will make the poem stronger.

Students who have been listening should next give feedback to the poet, starting with what they liked most about the piece. They must be specific: "I liked it" or "it's good" is not acceptable; instead, they must point to words/phrases/lines/stanzas in the poem that seem strong, fresh, startling, or otherwise memorable and then say why this is so. Then the person providing the feedback should offer some kind of constructive criticism: "I got lost in the second stanza, where the speaker describes what might be a mushroom," or "It seems that 'white as snow' is a phrase I've heard before. Maybe you could think of something else that seems fresher."

After all students have had a turn at both giving and receiving feedback, they should be given time (in class or at home) to revise their poems again. Poets often write many, many drafts before considering a particular piece to be finished. I have had the privilege to read some of

Donald Hall's poems in draft form. I noticed that in the upper-right hand corner of these poems, there was a number ("51," "96," "127"). Often the numbers were over 100. When I asked Don what these numbers indicated, he wrote back to say, "That's the number of drafts the poem has gone through." Writing good poems is hard, but joyful work.

RECOMMENDED BOOKS ABOUT POETRY AND PROSE FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

BOOKS ABOUT POETRY

Kim Addonizio and Dorianne Laux, *The Poet's Companion: A Poet's Guide to the Pleasures of Writing Poetry* (W. W. Norton & Co., 1997).

Babette Deutsch, *Poetry Handbook: A Dictionary of Terms* (HarperResource, 1982). There are several editions of this book. It is easy to find a used copy to purchase online.

Kenneth Koch and Kate Farrell, eds., *Sleeping on the Wing: An Anthology of Modern Poetry with Essays on Reading and Writing* (Vintage Books, 1982).

Donald Hall, *To Read a Poem* (Heinle Publishers, 1992).

Edward Hirsch, *How to Read a Poem and Fall in Love with Poetry* (Harcourt Brace, 1999).

BOOKS ABOUT POETRY FOR MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS

David Cappell and Baron Wormser, *Teaching the Art of Poetry: The Moves* (Lawrence Erlbaum Publishers, 2000).

Also, visit www.frostplace.org for information about a terrific summer program, the Conference on Poetry and Teaching, held annually at the Frost Place in Franconia, New Hampshire.

BOOKS ABOUT PROSE AND JOURNALING FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL, HIGH SCHOOL, AND BEYOND

Lucia Capacchione, *The Creative Journal for Teens: Making Friends with Yourself* (Career Press, 2008).

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Ann Longknife and K. D. Sullivan, *The Art of Styling Sentences* (Barron's Educational Series, 2012).

Anne Mazer and Ellen Potter, *Spilling Ink: A Young Writer's Handbook* (Flash Point, 2010). Grades 5 to 9

Stephen Wilburs, *Keys to Great Writing* (Writer's Digest Books, 2007).

William Zinsser, *On Writing Well* (Harper Perennial, 2006).