

Making a Poem Hum: Combining Alliteration with Onomatopoeia For Grades Three Through Six

by Terri Glass

I love reading poems aloud that use alliteration and onomatopoeia imaginatively. They are fun for the mouth to say and for the ear to hear. I often teach this as the third lesson in a series of five, after students have learned metaphor and simile. They'll be able to make a compact poem combining sound and image.

1. Begin by explaining that alliteration, one of our poetry tools for the day, is like a tongue twister: beginning sounds are repeated over and over. Ask if any student knows a tongue twister. Examples: *Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers. Sally sold seashells by the seashore.* What sounds are repeated?
2. Alliteration is usually a little subtler in a poem. In poetry, repeating the beginning sounds of words close together may happen only in two words in a line, and may be scattered in different places in a poem. Alliteration makes sound roll off the tongue and is very pleasant for the ear to hear.
3. Ask the students to create an alliteration in front of their name. Examples: Terrific Terri, Awesome Amanda, Wacky Will.
4. Next, introduce *onomatopoeia*: naming a thing or action by vocal imitation.
5. Ask the students to be totally quiet for two minutes. What sounds did they hear? Can the students name them? Breathing, tapping, humming, coughing, and so on. List them on the board. Many of these words sound a lot like what they mean. Tap your pencil and compare the sound to the word *tap*.
6. You may also ask what different sounds a dog makes and list those on the board for examples: *whine, yelp, woof, bark, pant, growl*. Tell students the English language is full of onomatopoeic words that make sound come alive instantly to the reader or listener.
7. Read three to four poems from Douglas Florian's books *insectlopedia* and *on the wing*, which have excellent examples of using both alliteration and onomatopoeia inside a poem. His books are also cleverly illustrated. You can also share the student poems on the worksheet.
8. Have students find the onomatopoeic words first. Ask: What sounds do the creatures make? Where is there alliteration? Are the words back to back or within a line? Are any metaphors or similes being used?
9. Next, replicate the following chart on the board, on chart paper, or with a projector. It gives examples of these devices to aid students in creating a compact poem about a creature that makes sound. You can use this chart to create some examples.

| Alliteration | Creature | Metaphor/Simile | Onomatopoeia | Action |
|--------------|-------------|-----------------|--------------|--------|
| hungry | hummingbird | helicopter | hum | hovers |
| daring | dragonfly | blue as topaz | whooshes | flying |
| angry | alligator | mean machine | chomps | swims |

10. Ask the children to think about an animal that makes sound and what it may do in the course of a day. Then the students will compose a short poem with three to four alliterations scattered throughout the poem, and one to two onomatopoeic sounds: one the animal makes or what it might hear. Add one simile about what the animal looks like, or what action it may have. Note: A student may include more than one animal in a poem that focuses on place.

Time and Materials: Fifty to sixty minutes. You will need a white board, a document reader, chart paper, or an overhead projector to create the lists and chart. Optional: Douglas Florian's books *insectlopedia* and *on the wing* add a lot.

Worksheet

poem by Douglas Florian

Follow this link for the text of the poem:

<http://fcbooknotes.blogspot.com/2012/04/hummingbird.html>

In the Land of Snow

by Isaiah McGrue, Marin County

In the land of snow,
icicles dance
and rest upon the polar bear's nose.
The narwhal circles icebergs
splish-splash-spray
SLAM!
There goes a polar bear.
The winded white rabbit
with coat smooth as silk,
feet pit pat
against the icy ground.
Mountaintops hover all dusted in white,
patches of green
peek from their ivory blanket.
Icicles dance
in the land of snow.



The hummingbird illustration was created by student Diana Valle of Sonoma County

The Monkeys

by Mariella Todebush, Marin County

Through green and screeching noise
swing the furry monkeys.
They pick ticks out of their tangled wirehair
munch chew eating bananas and bugs
launch through trees like little fleas
climb tall in the world of leaves.
How I wish to swing and sway
like those little monkeys.

Advice to Writers

This poem does not have to be long. It can be compact and still be full of interesting sounds. Think about the action of the animal first and what it looks like. The animal may make a sound with its mouth or its body to create the onomatopoeia. Make up an onomatopoeic word, if you wish! The alliterations can go in front of any noun as an adjective, or after a noun as a verb, and can be added later. Sprinkle them throughout the poem.