

## **Color Poem: A List Poem Of Questions With Connections To A Color**

When invited to write a poem about a chosen color, students' responses are mostly enthusiastic. So many of us have "favorite" colors, or colors we don't particularly like for personal reasons. A color word can evoke images from many sources, and can be connected to various emotional experiences. This exercise enables students of all ages to engage in a multi-layered exploration of physical and emotional connections to a color:

- 1) Ask students to choose a color and write that word as the temporary title.
- 2) The poetry idea is to write a list poem of questions about the color. Asking questions about the color can be a way of drawing the reader into the poem on a personal level. It also opens the reader to new connections, not to mention the writer, who, in the act of needing to make the list poem, may discover new ways of relating to the color.
- 3) Tell students that the color word cannot be mentioned in the body of the poem, only in the title. Also, the word, "color," cannot be written within the poem. This rule prevents unnecessary words, since we already know that the subject is a color and what the color is from the title. (When you pass out the sample poems later, call their attention to the fact that neither poem has the color word or the word "color" in the poem, only in the title.)
- 4) Start a sample of the structure on the board. If the title is "Orange," the first stanza could simply be "Is it the fiery tongues of maples in fall/setting the fields aflame?"
- 5) Remind students about the "categories" approach. Write a few categories on the board, and add the category of "feelings." Tell them to include at least one connection of the color to a feeling. Example: "Is it the loneliness of the hills/as the sun walks down their slopes in the west?"
- 6) Remind students to aim for variety. Encourage them to avoid common connections with their color. For example, if the color is red, tell them to stretch for newer images than blood, valentines, and the stripes on the American flag, unless their detail creates a newer image. Example: "Is it a valentine ripped apart and tossed into the trash?" This detail at least evokes an edge to the common association and creates an image we might not read over so quickly and readily forget.
- 7) Pass out one or all sample poems and ask for responses. These three poems are good samples, but point out that the color black is often connected to something like sadness, just as green is so often connected to envy. During a brief discussion before writing, you might ask about Sarah's reference to "the emptiness of your life you can't fulfill..." Could another color, such as white or blue, connect with emptiness for another person?
- 8) Students sometimes ask, especially when writing a list poem, "How long should this poem be?" Your response might be "as long or as short to make us want to read it more than once." You could note that Sarah's poem is eight stanzas, a good number for variety.

### **Sample Poems:**

#### **Black**

Is it the cape which covers the sky  
or the chimney covered in pitch?  
Is it the string that is sewn on the zebra  
or maybe those swirls put together to make licorice?  
Might it be the dust on a resting book  
or the emptiness of your life you can't fulfill?  
The darkness you can't destroy?  
Or the spider right behind you?

*Sarah, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade*

### **Purple**

Is it the finch building a nest  
in our berry bush  
or the berries eaten by robins?  
Is it the bruise growing on my arm  
from bumping into the car door?  
Could it be the skin of an eggplant,  
petunias in the flower pot,  
and wisteria climbing the arbor?  
Is it my baby brother's face  
when he cries so hard  
he can hardly breathe?  
What about the helpless starfish  
drying up on the hot rocky shore?

*Cassie, 5<sup>th</sup> grade*

### **Black**

Is it the shadow  
of a boulder or  
a convict's past?

Is it a Greek olive,  
a koala's nose,  
the flowing coat  
of a gothic teen?

Could it be the glint  
of obsidian  
caught by the sun,

the cloud forming  
before the storm,  
or the one following you  
just before the test?

A fox's den?

A terrorist's mask?

A cowled monk?

*Derek, 11<sup>th</sup> grade*