

One-Sentence Question Poem Comparing Two Images

This poem is a single sentence written in the form of a question, asking us to compare two images in terms of a particular abstract attribute, such as sadness, beauty, silence, etc. Both images should embody the attribute so fully in their own particular ways, that the question turns out to be unanswerable. Also, both images might be visual, or one image might be a visual one, while the other is connected to one of the other senses. Another choice would involve mixing the senses in the same image. There is no particular rule in this regard.

1) Read the following question poem aloud, giving students a few silent moments to absorb its impact. Ask students not to voice a response they might have:

What is quieter—
sunlight seeping through a dragonfly’s wings,
or a snowflake melting in the dog’s soft fur?

2) Write the poem on the board, read it another time, and ask for their responses, reminding them that there is no “right answer” to the question, only their own personal response.

3) Tell students that a response to a poem differs from a response to a question in math, when they are required to give a definite answer to a question like “Is seven a greater number than three?” The poem turns out to be a question that simply invites them to experience how both images embody the attribute, even though they might be attracted to one over the other.

4) Ask students to write “What is quieter” on their paper and follow it with two quiet images. Remind them that the sentence is a question, and they do not give an “answer” to their question.

5) Pass out the adjective list appropriate to your students’ grade level, so they can write another question poem using a different adjective. If time runs out, and it might with younger students, the exercise can be repeated for another class.

For older students, you might use one of the two high school student poems for the initial example on the board.

Sample Poems:

What is more wonderful,
an iceberg floating in the sunset,
or a raindrop spreading its music across an umbrella?

Avery, 1st grade

What is emptier,
a cookie jar pleading for cookies
or a broken doorbell wiped of sound?

Zachery, 4th grade

What is quieter,
a river frozen in winter,
or a classroom during a test?

Dolores, 6th grade

What is more bruised,
a running back's body after a game
or feelings from a broken alliance?

Alan, 9th

What is more intense—
salmon fighting upriver to spawn
or trying to live up to your father's expectations?

Bruce, 11th