

## POSTCARD POEM

This is an exercise designed to give students practice with concrete, sensory images, figurative language, and to begin thinking about audience.

1. Begin by asking the students to think of someone they know who doesn't live within a hundred mile radius of where they live.
2. Have them think about a favorite place they go to with a 30-mile radius of school. Have them be very specific. Have them write the name of the place (Mt. Erie, Campbell Lake, Clear Lake, Deception Pass, Pass Lake, Padilla Bay, etc.).
3. Tell them they will be writing a "postcard" to the person above, from this place they just chose. They need to write this down as a title: Postcard from \_\_\_\_\_. Talk about what a postcard usually is. Generally we think about sending someone a picture of a place, with just a few jottings on the other side. But what if a "word picture" of the place had to be substituted for a visual image? What would you have to put in? Leave out? The normal postcard doesn't have "judgment" in the image, but presents the image itself. How do you refrain from "judgment" in writing? Talk about leaving out such adjectives as "beautiful, magnificent, lovely, amazing, peaceful, etc.
4. Give them the handout, and go over it with them. They must write their own postcard in exactly the same manner, following the numbered requirements. Ask them to think about the person to whom they are writing, to perceive them as the audience. But ask them also to understand that there will be another audience (the rest of us!) who are kind of "looking in" on the poem. Having a particular audience in mind focuses our language, and dictates what we leave in or out.

## POSTCARD FROM FIR ISLAND

1. Begin with a simile:  
    **Snowgeese** fall onto a stubbled field like chips  
    of plaster from a ceiling of white clouds.
2. Use an example of personification:  
    A row of **cedar** fence posts keeps silent
3. Use a weather image:  
    vigil. A north **wind** snaps
4. Use two sensory observations in a row:  
    a row of bed sheets hung on a line  
    behind a gray house. The air is thick  
    with the smell of freshly opened  
    **clams**. That shape by the field's edge
5. Use a second simile:  
    is a coyote, quiet as snow, its head tilted
6. Circle back to the opening image:  
    toward the sky from which white things keep falling.

Use the name of at least one tree or bush (e.g., "cedar" above):  
alder, willow, maple, cedar, fir, Nootka rose, Scotch broom,  
blackberry, salmonberry, Oregon grape

Use the name of one bird (e.g., "snowgeese" above):  
hawk, eagle, heron, cormorant, mallard, robin, gull, sandpiper,  
snow goose, trumpeter swan, winter wren,

Use the name of one kind of marine life (e.g., "clams" above):  
barnacles, mussels, salmon, crab ling cod, bullheads, kelp, eel grass,  
salmon, oysters, sea urchins, clams,

Use at least one weather image (e.g., "wind" above):  
clouds, rain, snow, thunder, calm, windy, frosty, sleet, hail,