

Writing An Acrostic

All poems need the “right words” and the acrostic poem is a good way to introduce this concept. Students gain experience with word choice as they look for the right word to fit the letters of the subject of their poems.

Thinking About Yourself

Before you tell students that they will be writing an acrostic poem about themselves, ask them to fill out their “Personal Inventory” (REPRODUCIBLE #1, page 10) as honestly as possible. They won’t need a lot of time, maybe 10–15 minutes. Knowing that time is limited should help them focus on the task at hand. It is important that students know that what they write on this page is completely private. No one in the class will read what they write, unless they decide to make it public.

Ask students to write words and phrases, thoughts and feelings, in the boxes provided on this worksheet. Let them know that you do not expect them to write a poem about these ideas, but that you hope they’ll include some of the

Paul

Who am I?

<p style="text-align: center;">Likes/Dislikes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good food • Baseball! • Jazz • a good walk • Summer in Maine • bad ^{casual} diners • injustice • long lines • water in the cellar • bad ^{bad} sports 	<p style="text-align: center;">Personality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • funny / wisecracker • thoughtful • self-critic • hard for me to relax
<p style="text-align: center;">Treasures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • family photos • computer disks • special books • mementos from friends 	<p style="text-align: center;">Dreams & Plans</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep writing • watch Emma grow • watch as much baseball as I can • Keep growing as a person
<p style="text-align: center;">Physical Characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • full, bushy beard • lots of silver in my hair • green eyes • glasses • about 5'10" • left ear pierced • loud voice 	<p style="text-align: center;">Family</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 brother + 1 sister • still in touch w/ them all • Emma, 10-year-old daughter • Nadine, my wife • Rose, our white standard poodle • a handful of tropical fish

rich personal material in their poem—whatever they wish to share. They don't even have to write sentences. The point of the exercise is to get them to write information quickly before they have time to weigh their words and fuss over spelling.

Finding the Right Details

After students have filled out the “Personal Inventory” on REPRODUCIBLE #1, give them a few minutes to read through what they've written. They may want to make some last minute additions. Hand out REPRODUCIBLE #2, (“Finding the Right Details” page 11) on which students underline the most important information, then write some details in the space provided.

The worksheet will also help them discover if their selections have anything in common. They might notice that many of them are connected to some passion in their lives, such as music, baseball, ballet. They may choose to write an acrostic poem about themselves using that interest as a unifying theme for the poem.

Starting Your First Draft

Even though an acrostic poem can be written about anything—that's part of their appeal to young writers—I've found it's best if students write their first acrostic poems about themselves. The final reproducible (#3, page 12) asks students to begin drafting their poems. Although I suggest they begin their draft by writing the letters of their name down the left hand edge of the worksheet, please make sure they don't simply look at those letters and try to think of words to fit them. This is too limiting; poetry is about possibilities, not limitations. Rather, your students should concentrate on finding a way to work some of their key, favorite details into poetic lines beginning with those letters.

Since an acrostic poem can be written as a list as well as a statement or question, the second part of the reproducible asks students to write an acrostic poem that is not the form they used in their first try. After students have had a chance to write both types of acrostics, take some time to discuss how they felt about each type. Was one easier than the other? Why? Did they like writing one type more than the other? Why?

RESOURCES

Autumn: An Alphabet Acrostic (Houghton Mifflin, 1997) and *Spring: An Alphabet Acrostic* (Houghton Mifflin, 1999), both by Stephen Schnur, abound with well-crafted acrostic poems and rich illustrations.

1

Acrostic

Name _____ Date _____

Personal Inventory

In the spaces below, write down information about yourself.

Likes/Dislikes

Dreams/Plans

Personality

Physical Characteristics

Material Treasures

Family and Family Life

2

Acrostic

Name _____ Date _____

Finding the Right Details

1 Look at the words and phrases you used to describe yourself and your interests on worksheet 1. Underline those you feel are most important. Are there any that reveal a side of you that other people might not know? List them in the space below. Such details are called “telling details,” meaning they tell or reveal something about someone or thing, and all good writing needs them.

© _____

© _____

© _____

© _____

© _____

© _____

2 As you look at your personal inventory sheet and the items you listed above, do you notice anything these things have in common? For example, some of the things you feel are important about you might be related to friends or family, your pet, sports, or school. You might want to use a theme to unify your poem. If you had to choose one word to describe yourself, what would it be? Write it here.

You don't have to use this word in your poem, but it may give you an idea for it.

Name _____ Date _____

Starting Your First Draft

1 Once you've selected your details, you are ready to start a first draft of your acrostic. Write the letters of your name down the dotted line at right. Then begin your acrostic, looking for a way to work the things you've listed in "Finding the Right Details" into the poem.

2 When you have finished your draft, write another draft on the same subject (in the space at right), but this time make it a different kind of acrostic. If the poem above is a list, make this one a statement or question about you. Take another look at the sample poems so you can see how these two kinds of acrostic poems work.

3 After you have drafted two versions of the acrostic poem, decide which one you prefer. Underline the parts in that poem you especially like. Try to rework your drafts into poems you like enough to read to your friends.