

Writing With Writers: Karla Kuskin Poetry

Step 1: My Poem

ME

By Karla Kuskin

My nose is blue,
my teeth are green,
my face is like a soup tureen.
I look just like a lima bean.
I'm very, very lovely.
My feet are far too short
and LONG. My hands are left and right
and wrong.
My voice is like the hippo's song.
I'm very, very,
very, very,
very, very
lovely?

"Me" from *Dogs & Dragons, Trees & Dreams*, ©1980.

 SCHOLASTIC

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Step 2: Brainstorming

Here are a few ideas that may help you get ready to write. I hope you find them useful.

1. Don't think about writing a poem. When I am writing, I don't usually think about writing a poem. I just think about some special thing that is on my mind, and I figure out what I have to say about it. For instance, let's say I want to introduce you to my cat. Here are a few descriptions of her.

Examining the breeze
a package neatly wrapped with tail
flicks a whisker
pleased.

Napping everywhere
stretched in the sun
as if the sun were hers.
Awash in warmth
and furs.

The flow of a cat walking
over the lawn

to place herself like a soft stone
in the middle of the paper
I am working on.

Each of these simple descriptions is a quick picture in words — sort of a snapshot. The lines are short and you can hear rhythm in them, like the rhythm in a song. And I did not always write whole sentences. When you write this way, your writing looks like a poem, and it is.

2. Don't worry about grammar. A poem doesn't have to have complete sentences or paragraphs. Just get your main idea or feeling, or both, down on paper. Later, as you reread, you can fix what you think needs fixing.

3. Read poetry by different poets. Read it aloud and to yourself. As you read, see if you can feel the rhythm a poet has used. Can you tap your foot to the rhythm or drum your fingers to it? Song lyrics are simple poetry set to music. Try making up a tune to the words you have written. Does the tune make it sound like a song?

“Examining the Breeze” from *Near the Window Tree*, © 1975.

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Step 3: Write Your Poem

Now you try it. Here are some challenges that should help you begin writing.

1. Write a description of something that interests you, something you know very well — your cat, dog, or bird. If you don't have a pet, how about a stuffed animal? Or your running shoes, or the picture in your room that has been there so long you don't look at it anymore.

2. Now take a long look at the subject you have chosen. Think about it. What makes it special? Does your dog have long ears that look like old socks? Write that. Do your running shoes light up when you run at night? Write that. What color are the lights? Where are they on your shoes? Pay attention to little things, the details that make your shoes or the dog or that picture on the wall different from something else. Don't write that your dog is "nice" or that a picture is "pretty." Instead, write about those things that make something nice or pretty. When you write this way, you are making a picture out of words. This is a word picture of my cat's nose:

There is no nose I know
no nose I think
no point as pale and pink.
A rose among fur snows.

If I could choose
to be a snoot as suitable
as it that sits on Toots
I would have chose
to be that very nose.

“There is no Nose” from *To Ride a Butterfly*, © 1991.

There is a lot of rhyming in those lines. And there are lots of words that almost rhyme and sound funny together, like nose and know, and snoot and suitable. Rhyming is fun to read, but a poem does not have to rhyme. Many wonderful poems do not rhyme at all.

3. Now, you have written a description of something you know well. Try describing something new to you. Take a walk outside and find something you have never looked at closely like the street light or the sky at 4:30 in the afternoon. As you write this description, listen carefully to the sounds of the words you use, and to their rhymes — but *try not to*

rhyme. Just concentrate on making a picture of what you see.

When you've finished your description, put your work down for a little while. Walk the dog or make yourself a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. Now go back and read your words again. Do you still like them? Is there something you think could be better? Try changing it. Here are a few things to look for:

1. One way to see how your words sound is to read them aloud to yourself or someone else. Do they make you see the light fading in the sky? How do you like the way your words sound together?

2. Do the words you have written express a feeling? If a friend reads your words, will he or she feel what you have felt?

3. Don't be afraid to change your words. Reread what you've written several times. The better you know it, the better you will know if it needs to be changed, or if it says what you want to say as it is.

4. If you like to draw, try illustrating one of the descriptions you have written. Writing and drawing

make a good combination, and each one helps you to see things more sharply.

When your poem is complete publish it online to share with other kids.