

Writing With Writers: Jean Marzollo Poetry

Step 2: Riddle Writing Tips

Riddle writing is a good group or class activity, as well as a good individual activity, especially for older children. To make your pictures, you can draw, use collage, and/or stickers. To write the riddles, follow the *I Spy* pattern. Here's how:

1. Write your riddles to the *I Spy* beat.

Read the riddles in an *I Spy* book aloud. Can you hear the pattern of the rhythm? It's a 3/4 waltz rhythm. If you can't hear it, get your music teacher to help you clap it out. 1-2-3, 1-2-3, 1-2-3, 1-2-3. There are four main beats to a line. (Technically, the rhythmic pattern is called dactylic tetrameter.) You can sing all the *I Spy* riddles to an old-fashioned song called *Sweet Betsy from Pike*. Ask your music teacher to help you learn the song and perhaps make a tape to play in the classroom. Interestingly, rap also has four main beats to a line. Many children today find it helpful to rap the *I Spy* riddles in order to understand the rhythmic pattern. They love to rap and tape the *I Spy* riddles they write!

2. Make sure your riddles follow the *I Spy* rhyme scheme.

There are four lines to an *I Spy* riddle. Look for the



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words that rhyme. Where are they? They are at the end of the lines. What is the pattern of the rhyme? The first two lines rhyme, and then the last two lines rhyme. (Technically, this is called an **aabb pattern**.)

3. Make sure your riddles have the *I Spy* punctuation style.

Where are the commas? Where is the one and only semicolon? Where are the uppercase letters?

More Tips:

1. Write your riddles before or while you make your pictures. If you wait until you are done with your picture, you may find you don't have enough in your picture to write a good riddle.
2. Look for interesting words, such as thumbtack and hatchet. Put them in your riddle.
3. Listen to the beginning sounds of your words. Put words like shovel and shark together because they have the same initial sound; that's a trick of poetry called *alliteration*.
4. Listen to the inner sounds of words. Put words like crab, bats, and map together because they have the same inside sounds. That's another trick of poetry called *assonance*.

Take your time. Creating *I Spy* pictures may be more challenging than you think!



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