Youth-Write for Radio:
Poems and Stories for the Ear
A Teacher Handbook for Grades 7 to 12
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**Celebrating Student Writing**
Introduction

Since 1999, the Youth Radio Drama Competition, open to secondary level students in Saskatchewan, has focused on writing radio drama plays. CBC Saskatchewan has decided to expand the contest to include new categories for poetry and short story writing. This handbook for the teaching of poetry and prose has been prepared as a companion to the drama handbook.

The categories for the 2007 Youth-Write for Radio, open to Saskatchewan students age 12-18 not yet in post-secondary school, will include:

- Poetry (no limit on number of poems, up to five minutes read)
- Short story (up to ten minutes)
- Radio Drama (up to ten minutes)

Both handbooks can be ordered by writing or e-mailing the CBC Gallery producer, or they can be downloaded from the Gallery website. The addresses are as follows:

Kelley Jo Burke  
Producer, Gallery  
CBC Saskatchewan English Radio Performance  
(306) 347 9426 , cell (306) 596 6741  
kellyjo_burke@cbc.ca

http://www.cbc.ca/gallery/youth.html

Two CDs are also available on request, which will provide sample radio plays, short stories and poetry for students to listen to.
Section 1: Curriculum Connections

This handbook is based on the premise that all classroom teaching should be planned, sequential and aimed at achieving learning objectives selected by the teacher. Teachers using this handbook should refer to their curriculum guides to determine how the activities provided here fit into their learning program and their unit plans.

English Language Arts is the most likely subject area for the lessons in this handbook to be integrated into. This will not be a difficult task. To begin with, listening is a major area in all language programs, and what is a radio program if not a listening experience? The writer of material for radio is creating work for the ear and imagining a listener rather than a reader.

In addition to listening objectives, all contemporary language arts curricula include objectives related to the students’ use of expressive language. Writing poetry and stories for the ear rather than the page is a further exploration of the creative writing students already do in the classroom.

Themes and writing ideas for this unit of lessons can come from anywhere. Suggestions will be provided in the lessons here, but teachers can choose comparable themes from their language arts curriculum guides, or any other areas of study in their learning programs. This holds for listening selections as well. Refer to your curriculum bibliographies to supplement the listening selections made available by CBC.

It is not necessary for teachers to teach all ten lessons in this handbook. They can choose, expand and adapt according to their own unit plans.

Common Curriculum Framework

Several years ago, the Education ministries of the western provinces and territories collaborated on a common curriculum framework for English Language Arts. The intention was that the broad learning outcomes developed in the Framework would be used in provincial/territorial curricula, thus creating commonalities across jurisdictions. One of the purposes for this was to facilitate optimum use of resource materials such as this handbook.

In addition to developing learning outcomes, the Framework reinforces the idea that facility with language includes possessing the skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing, viewing and representing. These are to be developed and reinforced throughout the teaching of language arts, kindergarten though grade 12. While the latter two (viewing and representing) refer to visual language skills, the first four can all be developed through radio writing and producing experiences.
This handbook has been developed to support two broad outcomes from the Framework, both of which focus on exploring and organizing ideas:

**General Outcome: Explore thoughts, ideas, feelings and experiences**
- Express ideas
- Consider others’ ideas
- Experiment with language and forms
- Express preferences
- Set goals

**General Outcome: Enhance the clarity and artistry of language**
- Generate ideas
- Choose forms
- Organize ideas

Teachers will find that, by focusing on these learning outcomes and by developing the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, they will be meeting the goals and objectives of their Language Arts program. For more detail, teachers should study the curriculum guide for their grade and jurisdiction.

**How to Use This Handbook in Saskatchewan**

**English Language Arts**

Study your curriculum guide and select appropriate learning objectives related to the outcomes described above. Saskatchewan’s language arts curricula provide guidance on the writing process and this applies to any kind of expressive writing. The guides also describe themes that can provide a focus for this unit and help teachers integrate the unit into what is already happening in the classroom. In grade 11, teachers of Creative Writing 20 will find a natural fit.

The Saskatchewan English Language Arts curriculum provides what are referred to as “model units”. These models are designed to show teachers how to develop sequential units of study to suit their own classroom needs while meeting the objectives of the curriculum. Saskatchewan teachers can easily take the suggested lessons in this handbook and adapt them to fit the formats of the model units in the guide.

Note also that the Saskatchewan English Language Arts curriculum guide emphasizes activities for before, during and after reading, listening, speaking and writing. Although the activities in this handbook are not identified as such, they can easily be organized to fit this method of guiding students through their learning experiences.
Arts Education

Although Arts Education does not include creative writing as a strand of the curriculum, there are many opportunities for including writing in integrated units. For example, students in dance might create a spoken word sound track as a component of an original dance. Music students might create sound poetry as an exploration of rhythm or improvisation. Teachers interested in this application of the unit should study the Arts Education objectives to find a fit that works for them.

Communication Production Technology (CPT)

CPT is a practical and applied course that focuses on industry-related practices, including audio production. If the course is offered in your school, there are some interesting possibilities for team teaching. For example, the Language Arts students could work with the CPT students to produce a radio program of the students’ poems and stories for the ear.

Special Project Credit

Individual high school students in Saskatchewan may receive credit for a special project, which must be approved by their principal. They may do this only once and receive the credit at any level from grade 10 to 12. Approval must be received by the student before the beginning of the school year. Students with a special interest in writing for radio production should discuss this with their principal.

A Note about Revision

Because we are trying to provide as many ideas as possible for student writing, this handbook does not include a lot of direction for revising writing. The assumption is that teachers have their own methods of guiding the writing process, based on direction in their curriculum guides. Revising is a part of every writer’s work. Most students in grades 7 to 12 will have experienced revision as part of the writing process.

A Note About Workshopping

Some lessons in this handbook suggest that students to work together to discuss drafts of their poems and stories. Teachers should be familiar with workshopping processes before asking students to do this. Review information about workshopping in your English Language Arts curriculum guides, or other texts on the writing process. Give students a clear idea of the criteria for discussion, and make sure they understand the kind of negative or personal comments they are not allowed to make. It’s a good idea to agree as a class on some workshopping rules and post them. Make sure students know that the author of the work is the
final authority on that work and that all comments are to be helpful rather than simply critical.

Remember that some students will not to want to show their work to other students and, although you can encourage them to be more confident, they should always be given the opportunity to work with one other compatible student rather than a group and, in some cases, opt out of the workshop process and work on revisions independently. Writing is not a group activity. Workshopping is only helpful if it expands a student’s thinking about his or her own work in a positive way.

A Note About Assessment

Teachers often have questions about how to assess students’ creative projects. The following are a few tips for assessing the students’ poetry and stories for the ear:

- Consider where each student is starting from and assess his/her progress accordingly.
- Base assessment of the learning objectives that are selected for the lessons/unit from the appropriate subject area (e.g., Language Arts).
- Consider both the process and the product. A student may have learned a great deal even if his/her product is not completely successful. Some students will choose very difficult, ambitious projects, while others will choose simpler, more focused projects. The complexity of the project should be taken into account when looking at the result.
- Keep anecdotal records about the students’ progress over the course of the unit, rather than assessing at the end only.
- Include writing from this unit in the students’ subject area portfolios (e.g., their writing portfolios in Language Arts), and assess it as part of the overall writing program.
- Don’t forget to ask the students to assess their own learning in this unit. They may have some insights about their writing process that teachers have not considered.
- Refer to any writing rubrics that are in your curriculum guides. It may be possible to adapt an existing rubric for writing for the ear.
The Listening Selections

Titles

The listening selections referred to in this handbook are available on disk, for loan from CBC upon request. The disk was compiled from material produced by CBC Saskatchewan for its program Gallery. Every attempt has been made to find material that will appeal to students and be suitable in terms of subject matter. However, as with all resource material for students, teachers should screen the selections before presenting them in the classroom. Teachers may know of other recorded selections that will appeal to their students.

The selections:
- *Petroleum, Canola Oil, and Liquid Compost* by Joel Richter (student drama)
- “The Missouri Coteau” by Ken Mitchell (cowboy poem, contains a mild expletive)
- “Opening the Cottage” by Paul Wilson (lyric poem)
- “At Craigallachie” by Nicholas Kinar (student lyric poem)
- “The Saskatchewan Time Theme” and “There are Two Kinds of Talk” by Steven Ross Smith (sound poems)
- “little green men” and “identity” by Tallisman (hip hop poems, a mild expletive in “identity”)
- “W’sekac’hk and the Flood” (traditional Cree story, as told by Mike Pinay)
- “Foil Butterflies” by Bev Brenna (short story)
- “Nose to the Ground, Eyes Down” by Alice Kuiper (short story)

Author Biographies

**Joel Richter** was a Grade 10 student at Luther College High School in Regina when he won the 2005 Youth Radio Drama Competition run by CBC Saskatchewan.

**Ken Mitchell** is a cowboy poet and storyteller from Moose Jaw. He has performed extensively with The Writers of the Purple Sage, a group consisting of his brother Slim and 100-year-old cowboy Bill Gomersall. (Bill recently passed away.) He has also written novels, dramas and stories. His most recent publication is *The Jazz Province, The History of Jazz in Saskatchewan*.

**Nicholas Kinar** was the third place winner in the 2002 Youth Radio Drama Competition. His play was not produced, but his poetry was. “At Craigallachie” is one of the poems.

**Paul Wilson** was born and raised in central Alberta. He moved to Regina in the late 1970’s, where he lives with his wife and two daughters. He is the author of
several books of poetry and is a member of the poetry group Poets’ Combine. He
is also a co-publisher with Hagios Press.

**Steven Ross Smith** (also published as Steven Smith) is the author of several
books of poetry and fiction, and presents sound and performance poetry. Smith
has performed and/or been published in England, Holland, USA and in Canada.
Since 1992 Smith has performed with DUCT, an improvisatory vocal art and
music ensemble he founded. He is the Director of the Sage Hill Writing
Experience.

**Mike Pinay** is a consultant and cultural liaison with the File Hills Qu'Appelle
Tribal Council.

**Beverley Brenna** is a writer and storyteller/puppeteer who lives with her
husband and three sons on a small acreage near Saskatoon. She is a winner of
two Saskatchewan Writers’ Guild Awards for short fiction and children's literature.
Her two previous books are *Spider Summer* (Nelson, 1998) and the Smithsonian
picture book *Daddy Longlegs at Birch Lane* (Soundprints Press, 1997).

**Alice Kuiper** is a citizen of the world currently stopping in Saskatoon, among
other places. “Nose to the Ground, Eyes Down” is her second produced story.

**Tallisman**'s journey to Regina has taken a long and winding road. He was once
part of the Toronto cult band The Plains of Fascination… Then in 1996, with
fellow Fascinator Nelly Furtado, he formed a duo called Nelstar. Nelly Furtado
went on to superstardom. Tallisman went to Saskatchewan. But he wouldn't
have it any other way. In Regina, he’s produced his first solo CD called *80
million Isms*…which was completely recorded in his home studio.

**Acknowledgement**

Thank you to the writers who have given us permission to put their work on the
listening selections disk.
Section 2: Unit Plan

The following plan includes ten lessons of approximately one hour in length, but can be adapted to suit any length of class. The lessons do not have to be taught on ten consecutive days. The teacher might want to leave time in between lessons for students to work on their writing projects. Teachers should select their own learning objectives for the lessons and teach the lessons according to the processes and methods of their curriculum guides. The lessons are suggestions only. Experienced teachers may have other activities to guide students in an exploration of “writing for the ear”. Teachers may also wish to follow one of the thematic suggestions in their curriculum guide and adapt the lessons accordingly.

These lessons can be used for whole classes, small groups of students or individual students working on special projects. The lessons are presented in three developmental levels: grades 7 and 8, grades 9 and 10, and grades 11 and 12. Teachers should assess their students’ needs and make adjustments according to prior writing and listening knowledge and experience.

Lesson 1: Pictures in the Mind

Purpose:
➢ To get students thinking about the aspects of language and sound that hold a listener’s attention without the support of visual elements
➢ To get the students thinking about radio as an artistic medium

Grades 7-8

This lesson will serve as a basic introduction to radio drama and other writing for radio.

Activities

Ask the students to think about sounds that give them some kind of message without any accompanying language. For example:
➢ a fire siren
➢ screeching car tires
➢ the microwave beeping
➢ a dog barking in a farmyard.

Are these complete messages? Do they tell the whole story? If you walked into a room and heard a microwave beeping out of the blue, do you know the whole story? Have the students work in small groups to create a three or four sentence story to explain sounds such as the above. Then have the group write a very
short scene that includes the sound (e.g., the microwave) along with some lines of dialogue to add further information to the scene. Their scene should include only sound and dialogue, and no visual stage directions.

For example:

**SOUND:** Microwave beeping.
**POLLY:** Anna, can you get that? It's driving me crazy.
**ANNA:** You get it.
**POLLY:** Why me?
**ANNA:** Because whatever is in there is yours.
**POLLY:** I thought it was yours.
**ANNA:** Not mine.
**POLLY:** Well, whose then?
**SOUND:** A KNOCK ON THE DOOR.
**NEIGHBOUR:** Hello?
**POLLY AND ANNA:** Oh no, not Mr. McGillicutty again.
**NEIGHBOUR:** Hope you don't mind. My microwave is on the fritz. I just helped myself... won't be a minute here. Ah good. Seems to be thawed.

So now we have more information about the beeping microwave, created with sound and dialogue.

After the students have written their short scenes, have the groups read them to the rest of the class, creating the sounds effects they need as well.

Introduce the concept of radio drama: plays written for the ear, with only sound effects, music and dialogue to create characters and stories.

Listen to *Petroleum, Canola Oil, and Liquid Compost* by Joel Richter, provided on the listening selection disk. It won first prize in the CBC's special Centennial Youth Radio Drama competition in 2005.

After the drama, discuss the following questions:

- What is the basic story of the drama?
- What pictures or scenes in your mind stand out from the drama?
- How were you able to form these pictures in your mind without any visuals to help?
- How were you able to separate one scene from the next?
- How were you able to tell the characters apart?
- What different elements or devices did the writer and producers use to help the listeners follow the drama (e.g., dialogue, sound effects, music)?
- How was the story told that is unique to a radio story (rather than a television story or a movie)?
As a whole class, create a definition of radio drama.

Ask the students the questions:
- Do you think there are poems and stories that are written to be listened to rather than read?
- What might some of the characteristics of these poems and stories be?

**Grades 9-10**

If the students have no experience with radio drama, the teacher can use the lesson above as an introduction.

If the students have done some work with radio drama, this lesson can serve as a review and an introduction to other kinds of writing especially for radio.

**Activities**

Begin with the following review questions:
- What is a radio drama?
- What is different about radio drama from stage or television drama?
- What devices are used in radio drama so the listener can follow the story and form pictures in the mind?

Listen to *Petroleum, Canola Goil, and Liquid Compost* by Joel Richter, provided on the listening selection disk. It won first prize in the CBC’s special Centennial Youth Radio Drama competition in 2005.

After listening to the drama, hand each students an index card or piece of paper roughly the size of a postcard. Have the students describe a scene from the drama, as though they actually witnessed the scene. They can use the sentence “You won’t believe what I saw,” if it helps. Give them 5 or so minutes to write. Ask for student volunteers to read their descriptions aloud. Keep track of the various scenes on the board or chart paper. Perhaps tape the “postcards” on the board or chart paper under headings categorizing the various scenes.

As a class, look at the scenes that were described and discuss why it is that the pictures are vivid in the students’ minds when they were only listening. How did they know what was going on? How were they able to form pictures in their minds? Discuss each scene and try to draw the “tools” of radio drama out of the discussion: sound effects, dialogue, music. The students might also suggest characterization and plot since *Petroleum, Canola Goil, and Liquid Compost* is a story.
Discuss in more detail the role of each of the following:

- Dialogue (Possible answers: provide information, create characters, move the plot along, create humour, introduce conflict, have fun with language, show the difference between characters, etc.).
- Sound effects (Possible answers: make scenes more real, catch the listener’s attention, add information that is needed by the listener, provide transition to a scene change, etc.).
- Music (Possible answers: set a tone, mood or atmosphere, give a clue about the age of the characters, provide transition to a scene change, establish a certain era or time, provide a cue that the mood or time is about to change, etc.)

Choose one scene from *Petroleum, Canola Oil, and Liquid Compost* and listen to it again. Talk about each of dialogue, sound effects and music, and what they contribute to the particular scene. Ask the question: “If you were producing this scene, what would you do differently?” Discuss.

Ask the students the questions:

- Do you think there are poems and stories that are written to be listened to rather than read?
- What might some of the characteristics of these poems and stories be?

**Grades 11-12**

If the students have no background in studying radio drama, the teacher can draw activities from the grades 7-8 and 9-10 sections as an introduction.

The first activity below requires a radio drama script. Check the school library for *Studio One: Stories Made for Radio*, published by Coteau Books. It contains ten radio scripts by Saskatchewan authors. Not all of them are appropriate for high school students so teachers should screen the scripts before choosing. Other scripts can be found in compilation texts for high school English Language Arts courses. Check English Language Arts bibliographies. For example, *On Cue 2* edited by Diane F. Eaton, is one recommended resource in the Saskatchewan bibliography for grade 11.
Activities

Begin with a written script for radio drama. Assign the students to groups and give them 20-30 minutes to work up a “live” production of a short scene from the script (one page). They should select actors, music if possible, and sound effects. Set up an imaginary microphone behind a screen and have the students perform their scenes. The rest of the students will listen as though they are listening to the radio.

After each scene, discuss the role of dialogue, music and sound effects in the scene.

Have a brief discussion on the questions:

- What is radio drama?
- How is the listener able to follow the drama without the help of visuals?
- How is the listener able to form pictures in his/her mind?

Listen to *Petroleum, Canola Oil, and Liquid Compost* by Joel Richter, provided on the listening selection disk. It won first prize in the CBC’s special Centennial Youth Radio Drama competition in 2005.

After the drama, discuss the following questions:

- What is the basic story of the drama?
- What pictures or scenes in your mind stand out from the drama?
- How were you able to separate one scene from the next?
- What different elements or devices did the writer and producers use to help the listeners follow the drama (e.g., dialogue, sound effects, music)?
- How was the story told that is unique to a radio story (rather than a television story or a movie)?

As a whole class, discuss the unique characteristics of radio drama. (Possible answers: sound allows you to form your own pictures in your mind, the story can take place anywhere in any time period, the story doesn’t have to happen in order, you can reproduce any event using sound, etc.)

Ask the students the questions:

- Do you think there are poems and stories that are written to be listened to rather than read?
- What might some of the characteristics of these poems and stories be?
Lesson 2: Rhyming Story Poems

Purpose:
- to explore rhyming poetry that is written to be recited
- to listen to and write poems with a narrative intention

There is a long tradition of people reciting poetry for the entertainment of others. Sometimes, this poetry is humorous and focuses on narratives that poke fun within situations that are familiar to the listeners, kind of like “in jokes” or tall tales. Cowboy poetry is an example. Or, these poems can be lamentations about sorrows or losses that, again, are familiar to the listeners. Some sea shanties are examples. In this lesson, students will listen to rhyming story poems and then begin writing one.

Introduction: All Grades

The well-known rhyming story poems of Robert Service are accessible in most school libraries.

Begin with a poem such as “The Cremation of Sam McGee” or “The Shooting of Dan McGrew”. Play a recording if you can, or read one of the poems aloud to the students. These two poems are excellent examples of story poems that are highly entertaining for the listener.

Ask the students what they think the characteristics of these poems are that make them so entertaining. (Possible answers: they contain humour, the rhyming is clever, the exaggerated details in the stories grab your attention, the author was obviously having fun with the words and sounds he chose, etc.)

Provide some background about Robert Service. He was born in England in 1874 and dreamed of coming to Canada to be a cowboy. When he was growing up, he loved the stage and reciting poetry. When he was 21, he left for Canada and got a job in B.C. working on a farm. Eventually, he was employed by a bank and was transferred to Whitehorse, and then Dawson City, where he loved to hear stories about the old-timers and the lives of the prospectors. He began to write the stories that he heard into poems, embellishing the stories with his vivid imagination.

Look on a map and see where Whitehorse and Dawson City are. Look at pictures if you can of the prospecting days, or of these northern towns at the time Robert Service lived there.
Discuss:
- Imagine the first audience for the poem you listened to. Imagine the recitation. Where was it? Who was there?
- How do you think the location Service lived in influenced his writing? Where did he get his stories?
- What do you think the people back home in England thought when they read his poems? What would their impressions have been of the place he was living?
- Do you think the story Service based the poem on happened exactly like in the poem? Why do you think he exaggerated the story? What effect does exaggeration have in a story like this?

In the next lesson, students will work on a poem. These activities that follow are preparation for Lesson 3.

**Grades 7-8**

In grades 7-8, focus on the idea of exaggeration to create a good story, which can then be turned into a poem.

Discuss exaggeration in the poem(s) listened to above. Do the students think every detail in the story is true? Are there details that might have been true?

Ask the students what exaggeration means. What is exaggerated in the poem? How does exaggeration make the story more entertaining for the listener?

Discuss exaggeration in the radio drama listened to Lesson 1 (*Petroleum, Canola Oil, and Liquid Compost*). What happened in the drama that could have been true? What was exaggerated?

**Activities**

Ask the students to make up a story about a person who comes up with an invention that backfires. For example:
- a hair tonic that is supposed to grow long hair quickly, but has a bizarre side effect
- a car that drives itself from voice commands
- shoes that give the wearer the ability to fly
- a robot that does homework for you
- etc.

Brainstorm other ideas with the students. Make a list.

Give the students 10 minutes or so to make up a story or anecdote based on one of the ideas.
Ask for volunteers to tell their stories to the rest of the class. Or, have the students meet in groups of 3 or 4 to tell each other their stories.

As a class, discuss three of four of the stories. Brainstorm elements of the stories that could be exaggerated to make the stories even funnier or more entertaining.

Have individual students rewrite their stories, exaggerating elements to make the story funnier or more entertaining.

**Grades 9-10**

When people try to create rhyming poems for the entertainment of others, they often have trouble grasping metre in their rhyming. Awkward metre makes a rhyming poem difficult to read aloud and interferes with the listener’s enjoyment. In grades 9-10, focus on metre in story poems. Look at both number of syllables and the stresses on the syllables.

**Activities**

Have the students read a poem such as “The Cremation of Sam McGee” aloud, taking turns reading the verses. Discuss why it is that the poem is easy to read aloud.

Take one of the verses and count the syllables. What do the students notice?

Example:
There are strange things done neath the midnight sun (10 syllables)
By the men who moil for gold (7 syllables)
The northern lights have seen strange sights (8 syllables)
That would make your blood run cold (7 syllables)

Note that the number of syllables is the same in lines 2 and 4, and slightly different in lines 1 and 3. However, the reader adjusts the rhythm to make the syllables fit the pattern.

Look at the word *neath*. Ask the students what happens if you use the word *beneath* instead.

In the third line, add the word *very*: The northern lights have seen very strange sights... Ask someone to read the whole verse with that one word added. What happens? Is it as easy to read? What do the listeners think? Use the word *terribly* rather than *very*. Now try to read it. Can they adjust the way they read the line to make the rhythm work with the other lines? (It’s harder with the word *terribly.*)
Assign different verses to small groups. Have them add two words and subtract two words anywhere they want in the verse.

Now read the whole poem again, with the “revised” verses.

What do the students think?

Have students examine the patterns of emphasis on the syllables? Do they see a fixed pattern? What happens if they try to read the poem with emphasis on the wrong syllables?

Review the concept of exaggeration. What effect does exaggeration have on the poem?

Ask the questions:
- Do you think that everything in this poem really happened?
- What seems too outrageous to have really happened?
- What in the poem might really have happened?
- Where might the idea for the poem have come from?

The newspaper can be a good source of ideas for “you’ll never believe what happened” stories. Have a supply of newspapers and tabloids on hand. Ask students to find a story that they can turn into an anecdote to tell to friends or family. Have them write the story down in paragraph form. Then, have students meet in small groups to tell (not read) each other their stories and then (as a group) brainstorm elements of each story that could be exaggerated.

If there is time, have the students rewrite their stories exaggerating certain details for effect.

**Grades 11-12**

Good writers of rhyming story poems often have fun with language and imagery. In grades 11 and 12, focus on using language and imagery to add complexity to a story poem and increase the listener’s enjoyment.

**Activities**

Ask the students what they think the differences are between reading a poem in a book and listening to someone read one aloud. What might a writer have to do to make a story heard rather than read easy for a listener to follow? Make a list of the students’ suggestions.

Read aloud or listen to the Robert Service poem again.
Review metre. Take one of the verses and count the syllables. What do the students notice?

Example:
There are strange things done neath the midnight sun (10 syllables)
By the men who moil for gold (7 syllables)
The northern lights have seen strange sights (8 syllables)
That would make your blood run cold (7 syllables)

Note that the number of syllables is the same in lines 2 and 4, and slightly different in lines 1 and 3. However, the reader adjusts the rhythm to make the syllables fit the pattern.

Look at the word neath. Ask the students what happens if you use the word beneath instead.

In the third line, add the word very: The northern lights have seen very strange sights... Ask someone to read the whole verse with that one word added. What happens? Is it as easy to read? What do the listeners think? Use the word terribly rather than very. Now try to read it. Can they adjust the way they read the line to make the rhythm work? (It's harder with the word terribly.)

Pay attention to the emphasis on certain syllables. Can they see a pattern there? What is the pattern? Consistency in metre helps the listener follow a rhyming poem.

Review literary devices such as alliteration and repetition. Do the students notice Robert Service using any of these devices in his poems?

Examples:
- men who moil for gold (alliteration)
- the lady that's known as Lou (alliteration and repetition)

Ask the students to look for examples in the verses. List them. Discuss the effects that these literary devices have on the listener. Possible answers include:
- alliteration appeals to the ear and grabs the listener's attention
- alliteration can be funny or make something seem tongue-in-cheek
- repetition can be like a place marker for the listener, or something familiar to return to every so often
- repetition can create tension because whatever is repeated comes to be expected and the listener anticipates it.

Examine the rhyming patterns in a poem such as "The Cremation of Sam McGee". Which lines rhyme? Discuss the internal rhyme (e.g., there are strange things done neath the midnight sun). What do the students think of Service's
ability to rhyme? Do they think he had fun figuring out the rhymes? Are the rhymes fun for the listener?

Review the concept of exaggeration. What effect does exaggeration have on the poem?

The newspaper can be a good source of ideas for “you'll never believe what happened” stories. Have a supply of newspapers and tabloids on hand. Ask students to find a story that they can turn into an anecdote to tell to friends or family.

Have them try writing any part of the story down in one rhyming verse, focusing on metre. Have the students work in pairs to read their verses aloud to each other. Are they easy to read aloud? Is the metre consistent? If not, how can they fix it? The students can work in pairs to fix the metre their verses.

In the next lesson, the students will work further on their rhyming story poem.

Lesson 3: Rhyming Story Poems Cont.

Purpose:
➢ to explore rhyming poetry that is written to be recited
➢ to listen to and write poems with a narrative intention

All Grades

Find an example of a cowboy poem. Many examples are available on the Internet, or there may even be a local cowboy poet who would come to the class and perform. The listening selection disk contains “The Missouri Coteau” by Saskatchewan writer Ken Mitchell. Ask: how are cowboy poems like Robert Service’s poems? (Possible answers: they rhyme, they’re written for entertainment and to be recited, they’re based on stories and details that are familiar to the audience, the stories are exaggerated to make a better tale, etc.).
Grades 7-8

Activities

Look at the rhyming pattern in the cowboy poem that was selected. Discuss. Which lines rhyme? Look at other poems (such as the Robert Service poems) and identify the rhyming patterns.

Have students get out their “exaggerated” stories about an invention that goes haywire. Have the students look at their own stories again and divide the story into parts. What happens first? Next? Next? How does the story end?

As a class, look at the first lines of the Robert Service poems and the cowboy poem(s). For example:
- A bunch of the boys were whooping it up in the Malamute saloon
- There are strange things done neath the midnight sun

Why are these good first lines? List some characteristics of a good first line for a poem meant to entertain an audience? List the students’ ideas.

Have the students try writing a first line for their invention poem. Ask for volunteers to read their lines aloud. Discuss.

Give the students some time to work on writing the first verse for their poem. (The students who finish quickly can keep writing the next verses.) When most students have written the first verse, stop and have some students read them aloud. Stay positive and encouraging, pointing out:
- how the verse grabs your attention
- how it promises more of the story to come
- the rhyming pattern.

Give the students time to keep writing the rest of their poem. Help the students who are having trouble. If some students finish the whole poem quickly, they can begin writing another.

Save time at the end of the class to have the students who are willing read (or recite) their poems. You could set up the “reading” as an event at a convention of inventors. The inventors entertain each other with story poems about their work, the way cowboys entertained each other around a campfire.
Grades 9-10

Activities

Examine the metre in the cowboy poem that was selected. Review and discuss.

Have students get out their newspaper stories from the last lesson. Now have the students look at their own stories again and divide the story into parts. What happens first? Next? Next? How does the story end?

As a class, look at the first lines of the Robert Service poems and the cowboy poem(s). For example:
- A bunch of the boys were whooping it up in the Malamute saloon
- There are strange things done neath the midnight sun

Why are these good first lines? List some characteristics of a good first line for a poem meant to entertain an audience? List the students’ ideas.

Give the students some time to work on writing the first verse for their poem, from their newspaper story. (The students who finish quickly can keep writing the next verses.) When most students have written the first verse, stop and have some students read them aloud. Stay positive and encouraging:
- the first line
- how the verse grabs your attention
- how it promises more of the story to come
- the rhyming pattern
- the metre.

Have the students work in pairs, reading aloud each other’s verses. If the metre is awkward, it will be difficult for another person to find the rhythm. If the metre seems awkward, have them count syllables and note the syllables that should have emphasis. Have them work together to try to make the patterns consistent.

Have the students try writing a first line for their newspaper story. Ask for volunteers to read their lines aloud. Discuss.

Give the students time to keep writing the rest of their poem. Help the students who are having trouble. If some students finish the whole poem quickly, they should work on revising. Ask them to pay particular attention to their rhyming pattern and the metre. They will likely need to read their poem aloud to know if the metre is working.

Save time at the end of the class to have the students who are willing read (or recite) their poems. You could set up the “reading” as an event at a convention of tabloid newspaper reporters. The reporters entertain each other with story
poems about their work the way cowboys entertained each other around a campfire.

**Grades 11-12**

**Activities**

Review literary devices such as alliteration and repetition. Look for examples of alliteration, repetition, exaggeration and unusual imagery in the cowboy poem(s). What about the rhyming pattern? Can the students see anything else the writer has done to make the poem more enjoyable for the listeners?

How does the poem start? How does the first line set the poem up? How does the poem end? Is there a kind of “punch line” at the end? A different way of bringing the poem to a close?

As a class, look at the first lines of the Robert Service poems and the cowboy poem(s). For example:

- A bunch of the boys were whooping it up in the Malamute saloon
- There are strange things done neath the midnight sun

Why are these good first lines? List some characteristics of a good first line for a poem meant to entertain an audience? List the students’ ideas.

Have students get out their first verse from the last lesson. Ask for a few volunteers to read their verses aloud. Examine the first lines. Do they set the story up in an interesting way?

Give the students some time to write their poem from the newspaper story. Encourage them to think about the beginning, middle and end of their story poem. Think about ways to exaggerate details for effect, or use other literary devices.

As they finish a draft, have them work with another student to read their first drafts aloud to one another. If they were to do another draft, how could they improve:

- the poem’s opening verse (to grab the listener’s attention and promise more of the story to come)
- the rhyming pattern
- the metre (look for lines that are difficult to read with the correct rhythm)
- the use of literary devices such as alliteration and repetition.

Save time at the end of the class to have the students who are willing read (or recite) their poems. You could set up the “reading” as an event at a convention of tabloid newspaper reporters. The reporters entertain each other with story
poems about their work the way cowboys entertained each other around a campfire.

**Lesson 4: Hip Hop and Rap Poems**

Hip hop and rap poems sometimes get a bad name because of the language and violent content we know from some popular music videos. However, hip hop and rap poetry are serious and legitimate forms of poetry and don't have to be “x-rated”. They are forms that are popular with young people with their contemporary themes. A study of hip hop/rap follows logically from rhyming story poems. Because the themes are personal, these poems also provide a link to other forms of personal expression in poetry. The musical rhythms of hip hop and rap poetry make them perfect forms for live performance and radio.

**Purpose:**
- to expand students' knowledge of contemporary performance poetry
- to explore a contemporary form of rhyming poetry

**Grades 7-8**

**Activities**

Have a discussion about the rap and hip hop the students are familiar with. What are some characteristics? Although students will likely list the language and violence as characteristics, try to bring the discussion to:
- Rap and hip hop often have important social themes such as racism and poverty.
- The songs are usually personal stories or express the personal viewpoint of the artist.
- The artist addresses an audience and sometimes even uses the pronoun “you” to speak to the audience.

Explain to the students that there is a form of performance poetry that is like hip hop music. This poetry often rhymes like hip hop and rap music, and is meant to be performed live for an audience.

Listen to the Tallisman poem “little green men”, on the listening selection disk. Tallisman is a hip hop poet who now lives in Saskatchewan.
Discuss:
- What is the story in this poem?
- How is the poem like rap or hip hop music?
- Do the students think the poem would be as effective if it were written down to be read rather than performed? Why or why not?
- What is “musical” about hip hop poetry?
- What is the poet saying about the human race in this poem?
- What does the poem mean?
- Why do the students think Talisman uses rap style for his poems rather than another form of poetry?

Have the students write their own hip poem. They should begin by choosing a theme or story they want to develop into a hip hop poem. Some students might want to do this by writing the poem on paper. Others might want to develop the poem by rapping out loud. In both cases, they should remember that the poem will eventually be performed out loud either by themselves or by someone else. They might want to think about the kind of story or theme that would be appropriate for hip hop.

When they have a draft, they can work in pairs or in small groups to examine the following in their first draft poems:
- the rhyming (Are they happy with their rhymes?)
- the rhythm (Are the lines easy to say out loud or are there too many or too few syllables?)
- what they’re saying (Does the poem express the meaning that they intend?)

Encourage them to spend time revising after their discussions.

Have the students who are willing perform their poems, or get someone else to perform their poem for the class.

Discuss:
- how the poems express similar characteristics to hip hop and rap music
- how the poems are different from hip hop and rap music.

Grades 9-10 and 11-12

Activities

Have a discussion about the rap and hip hop the students are familiar with. What are some characteristics? Although students will likely list the language and violence as characteristics, try to bring the discussion to:
- Rap and hip hop often have important social themes such as racism and poverty.
The songs are usually personal stories or express the personal viewpoint of the artist.
The artist addresses an audience and sometimes even uses the pronoun “you” to speak to the audience.
Rap and hip hop music often express themes of personal identity (i.e., How do I fit into this complicated world?).

Explain to the students that there is a form of performance poetry that is like hip hop music. This poetry rhymes like hip hop and rap music, and is meant to be performed live for an audience.

Listen to the Tallisman poem “identity”. Tallisman is a hip hop poet who now lives in Saskatchewan.

Discuss:
- What is the poet saying about identity in this poem?
- What question is he asking the audience in this poem?
- How is the poem like rap or hip hop music?
- Why do the students think Tallisman uses rap style for his poems rather than another form of poetry?

Have the students write their own hip poem. They should begin by choosing a theme that they think is appropriate for a hip hop poem. (They might want to explore their own ideas about identity.)
- What do they want to say about this theme?
- What setting or context do they want to build? (Tallisman used a ride on public transit.)

Some students might want to develop their poem by writing it down on paper. Others might want to develop the poem by rapping out loud. In both cases, they should remember that the poem will eventually be performed out loud either by themselves or by someone else.

When they have a draft, they can work in pairs or in small groups to examine the following in their first draft poems:
- the rhyming (Are they happy with their rhymes?)
- the rhythm (Are the lines easy to say out loud or are there too many or too few syllables?)
- the theme (Does the poem express the thoughts and feelings they intend?)

Encourage them to spend time revising after their discussions.

Have the students who are willing perform their poems, or get someone else to perform their poem for the class.
Discuss:
- how the poems express similar characteristics to hip hop and rap music
- how the poems are different from hip hop and rap music
- what makes a successful hip hop poem.

Lesson 5: Lyric Poems that Appeal to the Ear

In the last few lessons, students explored rhyming poetry. The next few lessons will focus on other types of non-rhyming poetry that express personal thoughts and feelings using imagery and sound.

Purpose:
- to review contemporary poetry that speaks directly to a reader/listener about the poet’s thoughts, impressions, feelings, etc. rather than telling a narrative
- to encourage students to think about how their poetry can be written to appeal to the ear

Grades 7-8

Non-rhyming poetry can hard for students to grasp. Keep it simple with grade 7 and 8 students. Begin by asking what the difference is between a thought expressed in a paragraph and the same thought expressed as a poem. (Possible answers: less words, phrases rather than sentences, different kind of rhythm, pauses are important, reader/listener has to figure out the meaning, etc.)

Activity

Have the students listen to Paul Wilson’s poem “Opening the Cottage” on the listening selections disk (or any other contemporary lyric poem).

Discuss:
- what the poem is about
- how the poem expresses the author’s personal ideas
- how the words and lines are rhythmic even though the poem doesn’t rhyme
- how a poem like this causes the listener to form pictures in the mind
- how the production for radio built on the poem’s appeal to the ear.

Discuss how poetry is very personal and there is no end of topics that could be subject matter for poetry. Poetry is an intimate form that is like a conversation between the poet and one other person, so the topic can be anything that matters to the poet.
What was the thought Paul Wilson had when he wrote the poem “Opening the Cottage”? List the students’ suggestions. How did he turn his thought into a poem? What is different about the poem and that same thought expressed in paragraph form? Listen to the poem again. Discuss.

Go back to the idea that a poem can be a thought expressed in words and images, in a different form from a paragraph. Remind them of the characteristics of a poem that they noted at the beginning of the lesson (e.g., less words, phrases rather than sentences).

To have students practice writing in a non-rhyming poetic form, ask them to find a short paragraph in a newspaper or magazine, on a topic that interests them. Or, you can have a number of these available and hand them out randomly. Have them turn their paragraph into a poem by reducing the words and breaking the lines so that they create a pleasing rhythm. The words that are left should express the gist of the paragraph.

Have them work in small groups to discuss the poems. They should examine:
- the kinds of words that they left in (are they strong words?)
- where they chose to break the lines (does this create a rhythm that they like?)
- places where they could add new words to create better pictures or images
- words that can be deleted because they don’t add to the poem.

Give them some time to go back and revise their poems. If they want, they can add things that weren’t in the original paragraph.

Have them give their poem a title.

**Grades 9-10 and 11-12**

**Activities**

Have students do some research on the history of lyric poetry using the Internet or library. Ask individual students or small groups to find four facts that they can share with the rest of the class, such as:
- lyric poetry was originally written to be accompanied by a musical instrument (lyre)
- early themes were love, spirituality and nature
- the sonnet was an early modern form of lyric poetry
- the sonnet had a very specific rhyming pattern
- lyric poetry is personal and expresses the thoughts and feelings of the poet
- contemporary lyric poetry expresses the thoughts and feelings of the poet but doesn’t have to rhyme
• although contemporary lyric poetry doesn’t usually rhyme, rhythm and metre are important considerations
• lyric poetry speaks directly to a reader or listener.

Have the students listen to Paul Wilson’s poem “Opening the Cottage” on the listening selections disk (or any other contemporary lyric poem).

Discuss:
• what the poem is about
• how the poem expresses the author’s personal ideas
• how the words and lines are rhythmic even though the poem doesn’t rhyme
• how a poem like this causes the listener to form pictures in the mind
• how the production for radio built on the poem’s appeal to the ear.

Do the students think this poem is a lyric poem? Why or why not?

Listen to the poem again and make a list of interesting images in the poem. Examples include:
• deep breath of winter
• clean chop of the woodsman
• hard white fist
• slow hand of daylight
• drink warm air

Do the students think there is a difference between hearing these words and seeing them as words on a page? What is the effect of hearing them? What impressions do they get from hearing the words?

Discuss how poetry is very personal and there is no end of topics that could be subject matter for poetry. Poetry is an intimate form that is like a conversation between the poet and one other person, so the topic can be anything that matters to the poet.

Have a discussion about some of the topics that might appeal to youth writing poetry – young people like themselves. List.

Listen to Nicholas Kinar’s poem “At Craigallachie”. (The author was a 17-year-old student from Saskatoon when the poem was aired on CBC’s Gallery.)
• What do the students think the poem is about?
• What are the poet’s thoughts about the way the railroad was built?
• What images in the poem express those thoughts?
• What do the students think of the way the poem was produced for radio (the music and sounds)?
Nicholas Kinar wrote his poem about an historical event: the driving of the last spike on the cross-Canada railroad. In the poem, he expressed his thoughts and feelings about that era in Canadian history.

Have students write down a “thought” of their own about any subject in a short, expressive paragraph. Then have them make a first attempt at expressing that thought as a non-rhyming poem by deleting words and breaking the lines to create a pleasing rhythm.

Have all the students ask the following questions of themselves, about their own first drafts of their poems:

- Look at the words they’ve left in. Are they strong words?
- Look at their line breaks. Do the lines end with strong sounds?
- Do the line breaks create a rhythm that they like?
- Are there places where they should delete words?
- Are there places where they could add stronger words or images?
- Do the images and impressions in the poem reflect the thoughts or feelings intended?

Give them some time to go back and revise their poems.

To end the lesson, ask them what they would add for sound and music if they were producing their poem for the radio.

**Lesson 6: Sound Poems**

Sound poems can be thought of like scat singing in jazz, or like the voice creating sound effects and abstract rhythms. Some sound poems are sounds only (purely abstract), while others are words mixed with sounds and/or music. As the name “sound poem” implies, these poems are definitely meant to appeal to the ear and to be performed live. If you have a choral music teacher in the school, he/she could help you with getting the students to express sounds with their voices. This is something they can really have fun with once you get them to open up to the idea.

**Purpose:**

- to introduce students to sound poems
- to encourage students to have fun exploring sound patterns with their voices and sound-producing objects

**All Grades**

**Activities**
Introduce the idea of an abstract sound poem by showing the students slides or other reproductions of abstract expressionist paintings and sculptures with no recognizable subject matter. Ask the following questions:

- What are these paintings about?
- Is it possible they are not supposed to represent anything you would recognize?
- Are some of them about colours, lines, textures and shapes?
- Do the colours, lines, textures and shapes make you feel any particular way?
- Is it possible some of these works are about feelings?
- Might some of them be about an idea or concept such as “movement” or “time” or “war” without having recognizable images in them?
- Might it be possible to approach poetry in this way?
- How?

Find some examples of jazz scat singing (Ella Fitzgerald was famous for her scat singing). Listen. What is the singer doing with his/her voice? (Possible answers: using it like a musical instrument, improvising, making up sounds to go with the music, having fun with the other musicians, etc.)

### Grades 7-8

#### Activities

Listen to “The Saskatchewan Time Theme” by Steven Ross Smith on the listening selection disk. Ask the students questions such as the following:

- What is the poet doing with his voice?
- What’s your first impression of this poem?
- What sounds do you hear?
- Do any of the sounds remind you of real sounds or objects?
- How would you describe the rhythms in the poem?
- How would you describe the mood?
- Do you think you could write a score for this poem (like a musical score or sheet music)?
- If so, what symbols would you use to represent certain sounds?
- Do you think the poet likes to perform poems like this in public? Why or why not?
- What do you think is the point of this poem?

Have some superhero comic books in the classroom – the kind with sound balloons such as blam, splat, ker-ploosh.

Have small groups of students work together to create a poem that represents one of the stories in a comic book with the following guidelines:

- the poem is to be performed live
- no actual words allowed, but they can use onomatopoeia
- the students can use “found sounds” such as two blocks of wood hitting together, but the poem must also include sounds made with their voices
- the voice sounds can be “solo” voice sounds, or the group can create sounds together
- the piece should be no more than one or two minutes in length
- they should use their knowledge of music elements to think of ways to create variety in pitch (high/low), tempo (fast/slow), and dynamics (loud/soft)
- they should think about how they can create a shape for the poem
- the students can create a script or a “storyboard” if they like, to decide on the scenes they want to express with sound
- certain sounds can represent certain characters if this helps them (as in the movie Peter Pan, where Tinker Bell never talks.

Give the groups time to create their piece.

Have each of the groups perform their superhero sound poem.

Discuss:
- the challenges in creating a poem using only sound
- their favourite sounds
- sounds they would replace with better sounds if they were to do this again
- ways to create variety in the sounds
- ways to create shape in the whole poem.

If there’s time, have the groups create a score for their piece, imagining that someone else will be performing it from the score. They can be as creative as they want in finding ways to represent the sounds and shape using written symbols.
Grades 9-10

Activities

Listen to “The Saskatchewan Time Theme” by Steven Ross Smith, on the listening selection disk. Ask the students questions such as the following:

- What is the poet doing with his voice?
- What’s your first impression of this poem?
- What sounds do you hear?
- Do any of the sounds remind you of real sounds or objects?
- How would you describe the rhythm in the poem? Is there a pattern?
- How would you describe the mood?
- Do you think you could write a score for this poem (like a musical score or sheet music)?
- If so, what symbols would you use to represent certain sounds?
- Do you think the poet likes to perform these poems in public? Why or why not?
- What do you think is the point of this poem?

Play the poem again and this time have students create a “score” as they listen. Compare the scores. Look for similarities and differences in the way students represented the sounds.

Many of the elements poets work with in sound poetry are similar to the elements of music:

- pitch (high/low)
- dynamics (loud/soft)
- tempo (fast/slow)
- timbre (tone quality of sound)
- pattern and repetition.

Have the students choose any sound they can create with their voice or with found objects and practice varying the above elements.

Listen to “There are Two Kinds of Talk” by Steven Ross Smith. In this poem the words in the phrase There are two kinds of talk break down into sounds only. Ask the students why they think the poet started with a phrase and then used only sounds. Discuss the effects and the meaning of the poem.

Have the students work individually, in pairs or in small groups to create a sound poem using the following method:

- Ask students to choose a phrase from a song they like (8 words maximum). Or, you can have phrases ready for students who can’t think of one.
Have the students explore voice sounds that they think follow logically from the phrase.
Have them experiment with the sounds, varying the pitch, tempo, dynamics and timbre.
Have them put the original phrase and their choice of sounds together into a sound poem. The phrase can come anywhere in the poem (not necessarily at the beginning). They can use the phrase more than once but no more than six times.
The students should practice their poem and have it ready to perform. If they’re shy about performing the poem, they can record it and play the recording.

Have the students perform their poems or play their recordings. Discuss:
- the pattern created in each one by the repetition of sounds and the placement of the original phrase
- the variety in tempo, pitch, dynamics and timbre (or the lack of variety)
- the meaning the sounds add to the original phrase.

Ask each group, “If you were to do this poem again, what would you do differently? Why?”

**Grades 11-12**

**Activities**

Listen to the two Steven Ross Smith sound poems on the listening selection disk. Ask the students questions such as the following:
- What is the poet doing with his voice?
- What’s your first impression of these poems?
- What sounds do you hear?
- Do any of the sounds remind you of real sounds or objects?
- How would you describe the rhythms in the poems?
- How would you describe the mood?
- Do you think you could write a score for these poems (like a musical score or sheet music)?
- If so, what symbols would you use to represent certain sounds?
- Do you think the poet likes to perform these poems in public? Why or why not?
- What do you think is the point of these poems?

Find a listening disk for a sound poetry ensemble such as The Four Horsemen. In Saskatchewan, there is a music disk called *A Love of the Music* produced by Saskatchewan Learning to support the Arts Education music curriculum. The disk was distributed to all schools in Saskatchewan. On it, you will find two compositions/performances by a Saskatoon group called DUCT. Steven Ross
Smith is a member of DUCT, along with a percussionist, a violinist and a clarinetist. (If you can't find this selection, do the activities for grades 9-10.)

Ask the student to guess what instrument Steven Ross Smith plays. (Answer: his voice.)

Play the selection “Slate 26” on A Love of the Music (or any other sound poetry ensemble selection). What are the students’ first impressions?

Discuss the following elements and listen for examples:
- pitch (high/low)
- dynamics (loud/soft)
- tempo (fast/slow)
- timbre (tone quality of sound).

The use of repetition in sounds and in these elements creates pattern. Listen again for repetition. Can the students pick out any patterns in the form of the selection?

Have simple musical instruments for the students to use. (Orff musical instruments or any percussion instruments such as triangles, wood blocks, etc. would work nicely. Talk to the music teacher.) Any students who play band or orchestral musical instruments can bring them, if they want.

Have students work in small groups or ensembles to create a sound poem that mixes vocal sounds with music, on a one-word theme. They can come up with their own theme but have some suggestions ready (e.g., time, war, winter, justice, love, wind, fire, etc.).

They should think about:
- vocal sounds that reflect their theme
- how the sounds and music will fit together
- use of the above elements
- patterns that will give their piece form
- meaning they create through the development of their poem

Have the ensembles perform their poems. Discuss:
- the pattern created in each one by the repetition of sounds and music
- the variety in tempo, pitch, dynamics and timbre (or the lack of variety)
- how the sounds and music work together
- how the sounds and music reflect the theme.

Ask each group, “If you were to do this poem again, what would you do differently? Why?”
Lesson 7: Oral Stories

Storytelling is perhaps the most obvious form of story intended for listening rather than reading.

Purpose:
- to introduce students to storytelling as a literary form
- to encourage students to think about the characteristics of a good oral story

Grades 7-8 and 9-10

The best introduction to storytelling would be to have a storyteller visit the classroom and tell a story to the students. As that will not be possible in most cases, the traditional Cree story “W’sekac’hk and the Flood”, as told by Mike Pinay, is provided on the listening selections disk.

Activities

Before listening, ask the students if they know any good storytellers. Why do people enjoy listening to someone tell a story?

Listen to “W’sekac’hk and the Flood”. This is a traditional Cree story.

Discuss:
- Who are the characters?
- What takes place in the story?
- What do the characters in the story learn?
- What makes this a story that is better to listen to than to read in a book?
- What did the radio producer do to produce the story for radio? How did the sounds affect the story?

In addition to being entertaining, stories such as “W’sekac’hk and the Flood” have an important cultural purpose. They are told by Elders who know the significance of the story and the protocols around traditional storytelling.

Some other oral storytellers develop their art form for its entertainment value. Some familiar old stories (such as fables) were told to advise caution or teach a lesson.

Ask for a few volunteers to tell familiar stories such as fables or fairy tales. Discuss the characteristics of these stories (to entertain, to teach a lesson, to advise caution, to poke fun at a common human foible, etc.).

What are the characteristics that make an oral story entertaining? Possible answers include:
Find a book of short fables such as Aesop’s Fables. Have the students prepare a story for telling by taking a familiar fable and setting it in modern times and a modern situation. For example:

- “The Tortoise and the Hare” could become a story about a girl on roller blades and another girl who chooses to walk to school the day of an important final exam.
- “Jack and the Bean Stock” could become a story about a boy who accidentally buys a Space Shuttle on e-Bay.

Have the students work in pairs or small groups to tell their stories. Pose the following questions for discussion and the revising process:

- What are the characteristics of a good story for telling out loud?
- What makes this a good story for telling out loud?
- Did it translate well from the original story to the modern story? Why or why not?
- What are the story’s strengths?
- How could it be made better?

Revise the stories. Ask for a few volunteers to tell their revised stories to the class. Discuss the changes.

**Grades 11-12**

The best introduction to storytelling would be to have a storyteller visit the classroom and tell a story to the students. As that will not be possible in most cases, the traditional Cree story “W’sekac’hk and the Flood”, as told by Mike Pinay, is provided on the listening selections disk.

**Activities**

Before listening, ask the students if they know any good storytellers. Why do people enjoy listening to someone tell a story?

Listen to “W’sekac’hk and the Flood”. This is a traditional Cree story. Discuss:

- Who are the characters?
- What takes place in the story?
What do the characters in the story learn?
What makes this a story that is better to listen to than to read in a book?
What did the radio producer do to produce the story for radio? How did the sounds affect the story?

In addition to being entertaining, stories such as “W’sekac’hk and the Flood” have an important cultural purpose. They are told by Elders who know the significance of the story and the protocols around traditional storytelling.

Some other oral storytellers develop their art form for its entertainment value. Remind students that when people are listening to a story they don’t have the option of going back and reading over a paragraph that they don’t understand. Discuss the characteristics of a good oral story by asking the following questions:

- What makes a story entertaining?
- What makes characters in a story interesting?
- How does some kind of conflict or problem hold a listener’s attention and make a story compelling?
- How do you make connections with an audience as a storyteller?
- How do you make sure that listeners can follow your story?
- How do make sure they can picture the story in their minds?

Have the students create their own story for telling aloud to a group. Give them the following suggestions for stories to help them get started:

- a retelling of a familiar fable or fairy tale set in modern times (as in the Grade 7-10 activities above)
- a story to be told to young children
- a horror story for telling around a campfire
- a story where someone learns a difficult lesson
- a heroic story.

Have the students work in pairs or small groups to tell their first drafts of their stories. Ask the listeners to keep in mind the intended audience for the story. Pose the following questions for discussion and the revising process:

- What makes this a good story for telling out loud?
- What are the story’s strengths?
- Was it vivid in the listener’s mind?
- Could the listeners follow the story?
- How could it be made more vivid or compelling?

Revise the stories. Ask for a few volunteers to tell their revised stories to the class. Discuss the changes.

Lesson 8: First Person Short Stories
English Language Arts curriculum guides contain much information for teachers on writing short stories in the classroom. This handbook will try not to repeat this information, other than as review. Lesson 8 focuses on ideas for stories and first person stories. Lesson 9 focuses on third persons for radio (stories good for listening to).

Purpose:
- to review the elements of a good short story
- to have students explore ideas for stories
- to draft a first person story

Grades 7-8

In grades 7 and 8, focus on story ideas and the first person narrator in this lesson. Don’t worry about tense. Most students will write in the past tense. If some students instinctively choose the present tense, point that out so they understand what they’re doing.

One of the hardest things about teaching writing to young people is convincing them that they have interesting ideas for stories. Some students will already have their own ideas but many will need help getting started. Use stories the students know to encourage discussion on where ideas come from.

Activities

Review with students what a short story is: a narrative that usually focuses on one important incident with one main character. Where novels usually take place over a long time period, stories usually take place in a shorter time span. The “world” of a story is usually smaller.

Talk about some of the short stories the students have studied in language arts. Where do they think the writers got the ideas?

As a class, make a list of the kinds of stories they’ve read. Some examples include:
- stories about a character with a problem or conflict
- stories about a social issue
- retellings of existing stories with a twist (e.g., retelling of a fairy tale such as “Jack and the Bean Stock” in Saskatchewan in modern times)
- fantastical stories
- science fiction stories
- “What if...?” stories
- stories based on a historical character or event
- and so on.

Brainstorm several “what if...” situations.
Discuss the ideas listed and have each student choose one if they don’t already have an idea for a story. It doesn’t matter if more than one student is working on the same idea.

Discuss the elements of short story writing:
- characters (Who is the story about?)
- plot (What happens, that causes something else to happen, that causes someone to act, that causes something else to happen, and so on?)
- conflict (What is the conflict in the story, both external and internal? What is the character confused or conflicted about? What decisions does he/she have to make in the story?)
- dialogue (How do people talk in the story? Whom do they talk to?)

Have students return to the story idea they selected and write the first two paragraphs of a story in the first person. The first person story is a natural for radio because you already have an identifiable character telling a story. Listeners can immediately relate to the “I” character.

There are two kinds of first person stories students can consider:
- The narrator is telling a story about himself or herself (the story is about what happened to me at the zoo).
- The first person character is telling the story about another character (I am telling a story about what I saw when I went to the zoo with Brigit and she accidentally got locked in the monkey house).

When the students have their paragraphs written, have them meet in groups and read their paragraphs aloud to one another. For each story they should identify:
- whether the first person “I” is the character the story is about, or is telling the story about another person
- when the story took place (several years ago, a short while ago, yesterday, etc.)
- the kind of story they think this will be (a story a person who.....).

If the writer wants to ask questions of the group, he/she should do so. Make sure students understand the purpose is NOT to critique the writing. The stories aren’t yet finished.

The students can finish their draft of the story on their own time.

**Grades 9-10**

In grades 9 and 10, focus on story ideas and the concept of point of view with a first person narrator. Don’t worry too much about tense, although you should point out the tense that the students instinctively choose so they understand what they’re doing. Most students will write in the past tense.
Activities

Review with students what a short story is: a narrative that usually focuses on one important incident with one main character. Where novels usually take place over a long time period, stories usually take place in a shorter time span. The “world” of a story is usually smaller.

Show the students, or have them find, some examples of first person stories. Read the first few paragraphs of several different first person stories. Note that the “I” character can be the main character of the story, or the story can be about another character that the “I” character is connected to in some way. The first character is an observer in this case.

Talk about some of the stories the students have studied in language arts. Where do they think the writers got the ideas?

Listen to the short story “Nose to the Ground, Eyes Down” by Alice Kuiper by on the listening disk. Discuss the following questions:

- Where do they think the writer got the idea for the story?
- Who is the main character?
- What happens in the story?
- What is the time span the story takes place in?
- Is the conflict in the story external or internal?
- What makes it a story you can follow by listening rather than reading?

Discuss the first person narrator of the story. Is the story about her, or is she telling a story about someone else? What effect does the first person narrator have on the listener? (Possible answers: You feel as though you’re inside the narrator’s head; you feel as though the reader’s voice is the narrator’s voice.) Is the story present tense or past?

Have the students begin working on a first person story in either present or past tense. The first person narrator must be someone other than themselves, in their imagination. The first person narrator can be:

- a person their age
- a child
- a senior citizen
- a character from outer space
- an historical figure from the past
- an animal
- and so on.

Review the elements of short story writing:

- characters (Who is the story about?)
➢ plot (What happens, that causes something else to happen, that causes someone to act, that causes something else to happen, and so on?)
➢ conflict (What is the conflict in the story, both external and internal? What is the character confused or conflicted about? What decisions does he/she have to make in the story?)
➢ dialogue (How do people talk in the story? Whom do they talk to?)

Give students time to write the first draft of their story. It can be between 3 and 8 pages (typed) in length.

**Grades 11-12**

In grades 11 and 12, focus on story ideas and the concept of point of view with a first person narrator. Add more information about tense to the discussion, and the effects of using either past or present tense. Have students make a conscious choice about tense in their writing.

**Activities**

Review with students what a short story is: a narrative that usually focuses on one important incident with one main character. Where novels usually take place over a long time period, stories usually take place in a shorter time span. The “world” of a story is usually smaller.

Show the students, or have them find, some examples of first person stories. Read the first few paragraphs of several different first person stories. Note that the “I” character can be the main character of the story, or the story can be about another character that the “I” character is connected to in some way. The first character is an observer in this case.

Talk about some of the stories the students have studied in language arts. Where do they think the writers got the ideas?

Listen to the short story “Nose to the Ground, Eyes Down” by Alice Kuiper by on the listening disk. Discuss the following questions:
➢ Where do they think the writer got the idea for the story?
➢ Who is the main character?
➢ What happens in the story?
➢ What is the time span the story takes place in?
➢ Is the conflict in the story external or internal?
➢ What makes it a story you can follow by listening rather than reading?

Discuss the first person narrator of the story. Is the story about her, or is she telling a story about someone else? What effect does the first person narrator have on the listener? (Possible answers: You feel as though you’re inside the narrator’s head; you feel as though the reader’s voice is the narrator’s voice.)
the story present tense or past? Why did the writer choose this tense? What is the effect?

Discuss why a writer might choose past or present tense.

- A present tense story is very immediate and the reader “sees” what is happening along with the narrator. This is good for a story where you want to build any kind of suspense, or a story where you don’t want the narrator to be a reflective kind of character.
- A past tense story has room for reflection. Whoever is telling the story has presumably had time to think about what happened and reflect on it.
- How much time has passed is important with a past tense story. If the story happened yesterday, the narrator has not had much time to think about and analyze what happened. On the other hand, an old person telling a story about something that happened in childhood has had a lifetime to think about what happened.

Have the students begin working on a first person story in either present or past tense. The first person narrator must be someone other than themselves, in their imagination. The first person narrator can be:

- a person their age
- a child
- a senior citizen
- a character from outer space
- an historical figure from the past
- an animal
- and so on.

Review the elements of short story writing:

- characters (Who is the story about?)
- plot (What happens, that causes something else to happen, that causes someone to act, that causes something else to happen, and so on?)
- conflict (What is the conflict in the story, both external and internal? What is the character confused or conflicted about? What decisions does he/she have to make in the story?)
- dialogue (How do people talk in the story? Whom do they talk to?)

Give students time to write the first draft of their story. It can be between 3 and 8 pages (typed) in length.

Lesson 9: Third Person Short Stories

In this lesson, encourage students to focus on writing third person short stories. Not all third person stories work well on radio, so encourage students to think about what makes a written story good for reading aloud on the radio.
Purpose:
- to have students explore third person stories
- to have students think about the kind of third person story that can work best read aloud on radio

Grades 7-8

Discuss and review:
- When someone is reading a story aloud to you, what makes you pay attention? (Possible answers: interesting characters, action, things happening, interesting images or pictures that form in the mind, good dialogue where it’s clear what character is speaking, etc.)
- What makes you drift off and stop listening? (Possible answers: too much detail, too much description, nothing happening, too much happening, too much jumping from scene to scene, can’t tell who’s talking in the dialogue, etc.)

Review the elements of story writing.

Provide students with appropriate anthologies of short stories. Have several students randomly choose a third person story and read aloud only the first paragraph. Discuss:
- what kind of story they think it will be
- what makes it a third person rather than a first person story
- what makes the first paragraph interesting.

Explain that a postcard story is a story that contains all the elements of a short story but is very short (say, 300 words maximum).

Have students write a third person postcard story. They can use the same story idea they developed in the previous lesson or they can choose a new idea.

Have volunteers read their stories aloud. The listeners should close their eyes as though they are listening to the radio. Discuss:
- the story elements (characters, plot, dialogue, some kind of conflict)
- the use of the third person
- whether this is the kind of story that would be a good radio story (why or why not?).

If there is time, have students revise their stories.

Grades 9-10 and 11-12

Discuss and review:
- When someone is reading a story aloud to you, what makes you pay attention? (Possible answers: interesting characters, action, things
happening, interesting images or pictures that form in the mind, good dialogue where it’s clear what character is speaking, etc.)

- What makes you drift off and stop listening? (Possible answers: too much detail, too much description, nothing happening, too much jumping from scene to scene, can’t tell who’s talking in the dialogue, etc.)

Listen to the short story “Foil Butterflies” by Bev Brenna on the listening disk. Discuss the following questions:

- Where do they think the writer got the idea for the story?
- Who is the main character?
- What happens in the story?
- What is the time span the story takes place in?
- Is the conflict in the story external or internal?
- What makes it a story you can follow by listening rather than reading?

Discuss the main character of the story. In this story it is the main character Bishop’s unusual look at the world that makes the story compelling. Most events in the story are ordinary, but to Bishop they are not. Why is he an interesting character for a story? Where do you think the writer might have gotten her idea for the story?

This story is told in the third person. That is, a narrator is telling the story about Bishop. What if the author had written the story in first person? How would the story have been different?

Have the students take out their first person story from the previous lesson and rewrite it as a third person story. Ask for a few volunteers to read the opening paragraph of the story in first person, and then the opening paragraph in third person.

Discuss:

- The different effects of the first and third person.
- Difficulties encountered changing from one point of view to another.
- Which do they think would be better for listeners? (They might think both first and third are good. Get them to think about why in each case: the interesting character, the action, easy to follow what is going on, etc.

Have them choose the version they like best and revise it.

Lesson 10: Producing Poems and Stories for Radio

This is a fun lesson to end the unit and get students to think a little about what goes on in the studio. Some schools will have recording equipment students can use, or they can perform their pieces live in front of fake microphone, with music and sound effects. If students can visit a recording studio, all the better.
Purpose:
- to have students think about how to enhance a poem or story for radio listeners
- to have students think about the kind of work that might go on in a recording studio

All Grades

Ask the students to think about what a radio producer might consider when he/she is recording a poem or story for radio:
- who will read the poem or story (what kind of voice)
- how the poem or story will be introduced with sound effects or music
- whether sound effects in certain places will help the listener visualize a scene or event in the poem or story
- whether music in certain places will provide a good transition between scenes or sections of the poem or story
- what kind of music
- and so on.

Listen to a few of the poems on the listening selections disk. Discuss:
- How are they introduced with sound or music?
- Did the producer use music or sound effects anywhere else in the piece?
- How do the music and sound effects enhance the poems for the listener?
- Do they think it would be possible to overdo the use of music or sound? What would be the result?

Have students work in pairs or small groups. Each student should choose one of his/her own poems or stories to be “produced” by the pair or group. If they can’t actually record their productions to be played back, they can perform them live for the rest of the class or another class or parents with sound effects and music.

They should treat their written work as a script, indicating where they think music, pauses, sound effects would be best inserted.

Some schools are equipped with recording equipment for practical and applied arts classes. In high schools that offer Communication Production Technology as an applied art, there is an opportunity for the students in both classes to work together to actually produce the students’ poems or stories for recording and airing.

Celebrating Student Writing
Students who choose to do so can submit their stories, poems and dramas to the CBC Youth-Write for Radio competition. (See the Introduction of this handbook for details or visit http://www.cbc.ca/gallery/youth.html.)

As for any competition, students should be reminded that the winning entries are not the only good work in the contest. Contests receive more good work than can be rewarded with a prize, and the final selection always comes down to the judges’ personal preferences. Not winning does not mean the work is not good. Professional writers submit their work to contests and magazines regularly, and more times than not they receive a rejection notice because of the large number of entries. This is part of being a writer.

Saskatchewan students interested in publication should also consider the Saskatchewan Writers Guild student publication Windscript or the Saskatchewan Teachers of English Language Arts publication Golden Taffy. Similar publications exist in other provinces.

There are ways to celebrate student writing in the school as well.

- Have the students edit and publish a school journal of student writing.
- Record and air the students’ work for radio within the school, if this is possible in your school.
- Hold an evening of student readings and invite parents.
- Set up a bulletin board or display case just for student writing.
- Hold a writers festival in the school with workshops and readings for interested students.
- Funding may be available to bring professional writers to your school. In Saskatchewan, see the Saskatchewan Arts Board’s website for information on the ArtsSmarts grant program (www.artsboard.sk.ca) and the Saskatchewan Writers Guild website for information on the Readings and School Visits program (www.skwriter.com).
- ArtsSmarts grant programs exist across the country. Check the national program website for information on your location (www.artssmarts.ca and click “Network”).