

# The Pen and Paper



Developed by:

## Indiana WRITING PROJECT

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Dear friends,

We know that you are in midst of or finishing-up ISTEP+ Part 1, and Spring Break is following quickly with ISTEP+ Part 2 looming. It is a stressful time for you and your students. Why not have some fun with language and do a little poetry writing? Janet Wong in [Seeing the Blue Between: Advice and Inspiration for Young Poets by Paul B. Janeczko](#) tells us "I love to write poems because I am lazy. A poem is short. I can write a first draft in five minutes and then go eat a bag of potato chips. Later, when I get another idea, I can come back and write a second draft in another five minutes" (114). We found once our students understood the freedom of poetry, students loved to write poetry; they loved to break language rules, they loved to make up words, and they loved to play with form. Surprisingly, the boys in our classes seemed to love writing poetry the most! We took poetry walks through the school to find authentic subjects on which to write, sometimes dropping in the hall to do a five minute free write. As Ralph Fletcher suggests in *Seeing the Blue Between*, we found mystery in everyday objects: gym class, artwork hanging in the hall, the sounds a working school makes (22). We wrote poems about March Madness, dreams of Spring Break, and yes, our students even wrote about ISTEP!

Our younger students loved form poems to guide their writing, but older students experimented with free verse and narrative poems. Through poetry, we were able to reinforce figurative language instruction and examine language to make it precise. We also found that conferencing on poetry looked a bit different. Students were talking about language and imagery! As teachers, we were thrilled! During conferences, we heard students say, "I can't quite see what you are trying to say" and "Can you think of a stronger word?" As Georgia Heard points out in *Seeing the Blue Between*, "To revise is a poet's life. To see and then to see again is what a poet's life is all about. I revise my poems not for the sake of revising, but to clarify what I see with my eyes and what's in my heart" (40). We witnessed our students purposefully revising for clarity. Our students were poets!

We also found that as our students wrote poetry, they developed a deeper understanding of the poetry we asked them to read. Students came to understand the imagery and figurative nature of poetry because the students were using the same craft in their own writing! Our closing suggestion to you is from Steven Herrick in *Seeing the Blue Between*.

1. For a start, don't rhyme. We don't talk in rhyme--why should we write that way?
2. Write the way you talk. Think of the tone of the voice in your poem. Is it the way you speak?
3. Write about what you know. Sports, Friends. Parents. Teachers. Pets. Teachers' pets!
4. When you've written your poem, stand up and say it aloud. Work on how it sounds as well as how it reads. After all, poetry is about words--both spoken and written.
5. Good Luck! (46).

Don't wait until National Poetry Month to do some poetry writing. Have some language fun now! Until next month, Write on!

Shirley and Susan

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