Teaching Traditional Math Poetry

Teaching traditional math poems can open up mathematics for children. It takes math out of its “box” and makes it whimsical and creative. When teaching traditional math poetry, it is helpful to follow certain steps:

★ Introduce the math topic.
★ Introduce the Poetry Frame through the Sample Poem(s). These can be shown on the overhead or chart paper and/or distributed to children.
★ Show additional sample poems from the Classroom Journal. (optional)
★ Brainstorm ideas for the poems.
★ Write a collaborative poem together, or demonstrate by writing a poem yourself in front of the class. (optional)
★ Pass out the Poetry Frames if you haven’t already done so.
★ Encourage each child to pick a topic to help him or her get started.
★ Circulate and give help and encouragement during writing time.
★ Have children revise poems and write final drafts.
★ Invite children to draw pictures to accompany their poems. (optional)
★ Allow children to share their poems, formally or informally.
CHAPTER 1

Number Sense
Poems

Sample Poems

100 bees
fuzzy, busy, buzzing
50 are working, 50 are resting
I wish bees didn’t sting
100 buzzers

100 fish
wiggly, shiny, smooth
10 red, 50 green, 30 blue, 10 yellow
my favorite is the parrotfish
shiny suns swimming
across the seas

Elizabeth, grade 3

1,000 ants
marching, black, small
each ant has six legs, 6,000 legs in all
streaming like missiles
puny marchers

David, grade 3
POETRY FRAME

Poems about 100 and Beyond

objects
three describing words
something about the objects that has numbers
how you feel about the objects
new or same name for the objects

Your Drawing

Name ___________________________
Classroom Journal: Number Sense Poems

My first experience with math poetry was in a third-grade classroom. I introduced a lesson on writing Number Sense Poems, which included the math concepts of number sense, place value, and the operations.

We started by compiling an extensive list of things that are often found in groups of 100 or 1,000. The children were immediately engaged. Their list included spider babies, ants, fish, snowflakes, pennies, and dust mites, which one of the boys was allergic to.

Next, I introduced the Poetry Frame below and told them that they could use it as a springboard. Many children had seen this form, called a diamante. I adjusted it to include numbers in the third line, and I gave the children many examples of how that line could be written. In your classroom, you can use the Sample Poems on page 18 and the children’s poems in this Classroom Journal to help your children with line 3.

______
| objects |
|_______|
| three describing words |
| something about the objects that has numbers |
| how you feel about the objects |
| new or same name for the objects |

Elizabeth had a concerned look on her face when she started, as if there were a certain way to write the poem, which I assured her there wasn’t. She was smiling when she finished her elegant poem:

100 fish
wiggly, shiny, smooth
10 red, 50 green, 30 blue, 10 yellow
my favorite is the parrotfish
shiny suns swimming across the seas

Elizabeth, grade 3
David’s sharpness came through in his poem:

1,000 ants  
marching, black, small  
each ant has six legs, 6,000 legs in all  
streaming like missiles  
puny marchers

David, grade 3

Ben told me he has trouble with handwriting but his creativity, his vast knowledge, and his rich vocabulary were evident:

100 jellyfish  
upside down, lighting, drifting  
50 are electric, 50 are flower-hatted  
calm, happy, mysterious  
100 stingers

Ben, grade 3

Taylor, who finds spelling and writing a challenge, was very proud of his poem:

Stars  
Distant, shiny, floating  
1,000 stars coming out 1 by 1  
If the stars weren’t there, it would be dark.  
Sparklers

Taylor, grade 3

After the success of my first math poetry workshop, I was off and running.
Teacher Notes: Number Sense Poems

1. Introduce the concept of 100 and 1,000 by brainstorming things that come in quantities of 100 and 1,000. Possibilities include:

   ants  fish  dust mites
   frogs  jellyfish  pennies
   spider babies  penguins  teeth on a shark
   gnats  leaves  snowflakes
   moles  bees  raindrops

2. Explain the form of the poem—a diamanté, or diamond-shaped poem.

   _______ objects
   _______ three describing words
   _______ something about the objects that has numbers
   _______ how you feel about the objects
   _______ new or same name for the objects

3. Display and/or distribute the Sample Poems.
4. Write a diamanté poem together as a class if you think it will help.
5. Have children choose a topic.
6. Circulate as children write and/or illustrate their own poems.

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Easier and Harder

To adjust this Poetry Frame for younger children, make it simpler by including the number 100 on the third line. This would be fun for the hundredth day of school.

   bees
   fuzzy, busy, buzzing
   100 bees making honey at the hive
   I wish bees didn’t sting
   buzzers

To make this poetry prompt more challenging for older children, they can include multiplication or fractions in the mathematical line in the middle of the poem.
CHAPTER 2

Shape Riddles

Sample Poems

Short Riddle
I am red.
I am an octagon.
I make cars stop.
What am I?

Interesting Riddle
I am as red as a ripe berry
that the birds pick in winter
against a gloomy winter sky.

I am an octagon with 8 metal sides
all the same length,
and a metal front you can tap
if you leap up high.

I make drivers slow down
and put on the brakes.
Sometimes I hear the brakes
squeak and squeal!
What am I?
POETRY FRAME

Shape Riddles

My riddle is about __________________________________________

I am ___________________________ (color)
I am ___________________________ (shape)
I ___________________________________ (what it does, used for)
What am I?

I ___________________________________ (color)
I ___________________________________ (shape—how many sides and corners)
I ___________________________________ (what it is used for or what it does)
What am I?

Name ___________________________