

Using Student Models

Joseph I. Tsujimoto

from *Teaching Poetry Writing to Adolescents*

Student poems often make the best examples; their impact is large. Mention to the class a poet's grade level and name, and you will spark immediate interest, rousing curiosity, attuning (it seems evident now) the listeners' critical ears. Not only do the students share with the poet similar experiences and sensibilities, but more importantly, the young poet shows other students the potential quality of work that *they* themselves can produce. On the other hand, if students know that a work is authored by an adult (because they have been told or because it is evident through sophistication of the language or ideas), the work will appear beyond the students' reach. Often, what makes the adult work inaccessible is not so much its language or ideas (which we can lead them to understand), it is the impossibility of their "duplicating" such work. Skills aside, they have little interest in wanting to. (This is not to say I don't use any adult examples at all. I do. The point is, they are not my primary examples.)

Finally, as we accumulate more and more examples of the students' best work, we help them establish for themselves their own literary tradition, to be used in helping them teach themselves and to become a standard for evaluating new student work.

Options and Limitations

Paradoxically, giving students *many* examples, by both students and adults, can encourage the writing of original poetry. Originality can best be realized through freedom of choice, which becomes meaningful only when one is aware of many options. So I give students as many examples as I can, not just to fire their imaginations with good works, but to increase their awareness of options as well.

First, the sheer number of examples makes students feel like emotional kaleidoscopes. Second, the redundancy illustrates the rules for [the form or assignment] and especially, the exceptions to the rules — creating more options.

In the end, freedom of choice really means freedom to select one's limitations. That is, in the act of choosing for oneself, one simultaneously imposes limitations upon oneself. Though, at first the teacher imposes the larger limitation [in the directions or assignment], the student later imposes the specific ones [in choosing the topic, theme, or tone of the poem and in selecting images and words to express these.]



Stairway to Heaven
by Meagan Bottensek
Champlin Park High School, grade 11

Danielle's Reflection:

Being a writer for an alternative student magazine, I am required to write several pieces of short fiction per school year. Unfortunately, I often have an inability to write while I'm trying to meet a deadline. As a result, I usually cross my fingers and hope for a random burst of creativity. With Moonlight, I got lucky. Around the time I wrote Moonlight I had recently read an article concerning the right of critically ill patients to euthanasia, which influenced the story line. Although this story was not intended to be a direct commentary on that topic, the notion of freeing oneself from unhappy circumstances presented itself as a possible theme for a story. However, I was unable to pin down any specific story line to match the theme until, looking out my window at 3 a.m., I saw the large full moon, ran down to my computer, and wrote Moonlight in about three hours. Many people who read this story complained of how "dark" it was, which rather surprised me because I had not really intended for the focus to be suicide. I deliberately left the conclusion a bit vague, so as to place the focus of the story not on death or life, but on the freedom to choose.

**I Love this Song** by Allison Hodge*Champlin Park High School, grade 9*

Hoops

Darius Holmes

Champlin Park High School, grade 12



A Formal Invitation

In her first edition of *In The Middle*, Nancie Atwell wrote about the periodic "writing invitations" she would post in the classroom: calls for articles for various magazines published by the students, calls that would nudge students to share their experiences and expertise in their writing. There is something more compelling about an invitation, a cachet that a mere assignment doesn't hold.

So, this is a writing invitation for the next edition of *Minnesota English Journal: Student Writing Issue*.

On the next few pages are three kinds of writing we would like to feature in the next issue. With these invitations we hope to continue the multi-layered approach of this issue by publishing creative student models along with context features and reflective responses.

In addition to these three more formal invitations, we still invite your students to come as they are, to continue to submit their surprising, creative, delightful, thoughtful pieces, whatever they are.

Besides inviting your students' writing, we would also like to extend an invitation to anyone who is interested in becoming involved in the publishing of this journal. Please contact us if you would like to write a Teacher Talk piece, if you have an idea for a writing invitation, or if you would like to help with the publishing effort.

A submission form is printed on page 79. Please make a copy for each student's writing you submit.

A few tips for student submissions:

There are space limitations. Shorter pieces are the most publishable. For long class assignments, consider excerpts.

Encourage your poets to think about their spacing, margins, and line breaks. All poems should have titles.

Select the few strongest pieces if you are submitting work from a class assignment.

Word processed submissions are greatly appreciated.

If using writing from this journal as models resulted in some terrific writing, submit it. We would love to publish examples of the power of student models.



Wonders of Writing by Chelsey Mundt

Champlin Park High School, grade 11

Societal Expectations

Buried beneath
a mask cast upon her
by societal expectations.
Lies a little girl,
hidden deep within a body of 18 years.
Her innocence she gave away
to the first who would love her.
Her faith she gave up on,
when the pain was too much to take.
Her beauty she destroyed,
when perfection was something
she knew could never be obtained.
Fending for herself,
the world overwhelming.
Being taken for granted and being hurt
Who stands for those who cannot
believe in themselves?

Used,
as she comes,
Down to her knees.
Believing he'll kiss away the pain.
Forgotten too often,
And she ran to another,
when the pain overtook her body.
Adult,
Child within,
social expectations.
Of a 5'8, 120 lb blonde goddess,
wearing a D cup.
Destroyed the innocence she once held.

Not a child,
yet unable to grow.
Her mask spontaneously disappears.
Used and abused,
is all she's ever known.
Yet her comfort is held
within that knowledge.
Unable to face herself,
She is forgotten within a world,
Of Societal Expectations.

Elizabeth Wagner

Champlin Park High School, grade 11



Strings by Deanna Olson
Champlin Park High School, grade 10