



Wishes, Lies, and Dreams: Teaching Children to Write Poetry

Kenneth Koch , Ron Padgett

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The classic, inspiring account of a poet's experience teaching school children to write poetry

When Kenneth Koch entered the Manhattan classrooms of P.S. 61, the children, excited by the opportunity to work with an instructor able to inspire their talent and energy, would clap and shout with pleasure. In this vivid account, Koch describes his inventive methods for teaching these children how to create poems and gives numerous examples of their work. *Wishes, Lies, and Dreams* is a valuable text for all those who care about freeing the creative imagination and educating the young.

Wishes, Lies, and Dreams: Teaching Children to Write Poetry Details

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From Reader Review Wishes, Lies, and Dreams: Teaching Children to Write Poetry for online ebook

Michelle says

my favorite parts of this book are the student poems; I often think about them. "I have a bone city inside me."

Tracey Duncan says

the best part of this book is the anthology of children's poems at the end. three thumbs up.

Jimmy says

Kenneth Koch is like the grandfather of teaching poetry writing. No writing teacher should be unfamiliar with him.

Megan says

I will soon be teaching a writing workshop to 13-15 year-olds. Any helpful book recs would be much appreciated!

Isabel says

Hmm. Well, I've never been much for poetry. I just don't "get it." It's like any kind of art, I suppose. It's in the eye of the beholder and all that. However, this book actually gave me a little bit of a thrill. For a moment I had the urge to try some of the exercises. I felt as if I just might be close to getting the point behind poetry. (I'm still not sure why it has to be poetry and not prose, though--aside from random line divisions, they're awfully similar.)

This book is written by a poet who becomes a guest teacher in several classrooms. I love how he discovers the stages of development through his teaching and reading his students' writing. The growing self consciousness of his older students made the assignments they completed distinctly different by those of first graders writing to the same concept.

There are several great ideas for introducing poetry to classrooms. I liked the idea that poetry should be alive and children should feel competent to write it. I also liked how he explained cliché word choice by making inventive language seem so new and exciting. I also thought his ideas about how to experience children's writing was great. Basically, don't be judgmental, but when something amazing appears in a student's writing, praise it and explore what works in that turn of phrase with the rest of the class.

Koch's explanation and use of collaborative poetry is interesting. I'd always thought that it seemed like idea infringement when one kid would take another's idea and minimally tweak it and call it their own. K indicates that this is almost like riffing in jazz and encourages this kind of shared work. I see his point.

There are lots of great ideas for encouraging creative thinking in this book. It's kind of a "how to" guide with lots of examples.

On that topic, though, I must say, the hands off approach to kids expressing their inner feelings is no longer possible in today's world. Plenty of these poems mention death, killing and hate. There's no way a kid could write that now without a teacher having to flag a guidance counselor. Not sure that that's necessarily a bad thing, either... Funny to see these elementary school kids expressing their early indoctrination into sexism so casually, too. "I wish each man had ten beautiful girls" then there would be world peace (or something to that effect). Huh? Other poems were written by girls who long to be beautiful so they can have power over the men/boys in their lives. Wowza. The amazing thing is, at the oldest, these kids are 13 years old! Copywrite 1970. We've come a long way, Baby?

I like the ideas for encouraging writing and I thought the student examples were interesting, but perhaps could have been edited down to about half as many. But maybe the point is that with children's poetry writing there should be no editing... hmm.

Nahid Soltanzadeh says

The collection of poems by elementary students is delightful and awesome. The poems are silly and pure and imaginative and crazy and sometimes mean. Some of them gave me ideas for my own writing.

The themes and ideas have been picked really effectively. I think what ---- does in those poetry classes is so valuable. The freedom and honesty in those poems show the safe and open classroom they've had. (Safe enough for a 5th grader to write about his teacher: " [she] is a pretzel and is worth 2cents") I've been designing a curriculum in my head as I read his introduction.

But still, like all other books that talk about a successful teaching experience without mentioning the challenges and pitfalls, it seems too good to be true. I can't imagine myself doing any of this as a teacher. Because apparently he has had no problem and EVERY student loved the class and loved writing poetry. The books that introduce a method/activity/etc. In this way make me think that there is something about that particular teacher that has made it possible. And I'm not that person. So.

P.S: This book is really old. These poetry classes happened in 1970s. It's interesting to see the students' ideas about gender through their poems. Here is one that I fell in love with:

"I wish I was a beautiful chick who could be in any period of life / in the future in the past would be nice / being Cleopatra in Egypt with handsome men at my feet/ or being a pirate enjoying the gold/ even the first woman president in 3002/ also a blood thirsty vampire scaring the men/ or Einstein inventing a potion for invisible guys / Maybe the first to live in an alligator plane in 2006"

Emilia Scifo, 6th grade

Benjamin says

I can't understand why this book vanished. It is one of the most beautiful books about poetry or teaching I can think of.

Kate says

great book to read before you start teaching kids, but just know that kids now-a-days (this was written in the 70's) are totally digitized and need much more prompting and coaxing to actually join the land of the living, even for just a mere 1.5 hours.

unless you are pixellated, you'd better be prepared to really dig around and uproot their attention spans.

it's a good honest book, though, that tells the truth about bombing with a number of lesson plans and deciding upon the 4 or 5 that worked the best for the basis of the book.

Shannan says

Obviously I am reading a lot of poetry this year. This book was an sort of like a manual on hwo to teach kids to write poetry. It had great concepts about rhyme and rhythm and also had a bunch of questions to ask kids to jump start their poem. Like, "If you were a _____ how would you fee?"
Interesting.

Joe Milazzo says

Essential reading for anyone interested in teaching creative writing at the K - 12 level. Also, a great anthology of writing by (and,I guess it is fair to say, for) children.

Sharon says

Very short and anecdotal, but I very much enjoyed this. I applied some of Koch's ideas to write collaborative poems with my preschool class and they loved it. The "I wish . . ." prompt was their favorite.

Crystal says

This is an ok book for teacher who haven't really taught writing before. Otherwise, these are now old methods which are tried and true. I agree with another reviewer that this book needs a desperate update for the electronic age.

Carmussel says

This is SUCH a great book for teachers. I use it in workshops on poetry, and use the concept for retreats. I've bought at least 20 copies of this book to give away. In fact, while I was looking for this book to write this review . . . I just bought 6 more copies! They were 10¢ each (okay, okay, plus \$3.99 for P & H!) Definitely worth it!

Biscuits says

Imagine being one of those kids who got taught poetry by Kenneth Koch? WOW

Karsten says

What a joyful book!

Only the first 20% or so of the book is prose, and this is divided between Koch's story of finding success teaching elementary kids to write poems in 1960's New York classrooms and Koch's observations about what qualities and attitudes in their teacher bring kids and their writing to life. The remaining 80% of the book is an anthology of poems his young students wrote. These are divided according to the assignments Koch used to help the kids get started.

Koch focuses on the kids' accomplishments and creative capacity throughout the book, but it's clear he was as willing and enthusiastic to learn as any of them. The result of his humility and energetic work was a great experience for him and his students and a genuinely encouraging book for any of us who teach.

It's likely that Koch's writing prompts and classroom techniques will seem familiar, maybe even tired, to those of us who grew up even a few years after this was published in 1970. Really, though, that's a sign of Koch's success. The respect with which he treated children's imaginations and the hopeful seriousness that runs through all his advice about teaching informed the attitudes of many, many writing teachers after him. If this story seems well-worn, it's because he did it and told it so well in the first place.

And the kids' poems? They're a sign of Koch's joy in his students' work as well as his evidence that the teaching methods he writes about are successful and that teaching kids to write poems at all is entirely worthwhile. Also, many of them are a lot of fun.

I'll come back to the first 60 pages again whenever get tired teaching and to the 240 pages of poems if I ever start to wonder whether my students actually have imaginations.
