

Writing Powerful Poetry

Using Imagery to Unlock Creativity

Grades 4 - 8

Created by Laura Candler

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Teacher Information and Directions

Writing Powerful Poetry includes teaching strategies and printables to implement a “poetry workshop” in your classroom. Throughout the unit, your students will learn to express themselves through imagery and free-verse poetry. Depending on the amount of time you allow for mini-lessons and writing, your poetry workshop may last for a few days or a few weeks. You’ll find specific poetry lesson ideas that cover everything from appreciating imagery to writing complete free-verse poems. Also included are printables and poetry examples to make the experience easy for you, as well as powerful for your students. If you’ve never taught free-verse poetry before, get ready for an exciting adventure!

Why Teach Poetry?

What do your students think when you mention the word “poetry?” If they’re like many young people, they think of rhyming words and messages inside greeting cards. Or they may imagine long, incomprehensible poems that make no sense at all! However, unless they’ve been taught to write free-verse poetry, they may not be aware that some of the most powerful poems ever written don’t rhyme and may be only a few lines long. Poetry is often nothing more than an outpouring of emotions from the heart onto paper, and its power is expressed through strong images conveyed in a simple way.

Teaching children to write poetry is a delight because it’s so easy to help them unlock their own creativity. In a matter of days, they are tapping into their own feelings and putting raw words onto paper. Show them a few examples, let them explore that various types of imagery, and off they go! Kids also love the fact poets are allowed to break all the rules. Your student poets are free to express themselves without worrying about complete sentences and the usual conventions. Furthermore, poetry has a visual appeal that’s missing in other forms of writing. As soon as they begin to open their eyes and see the word in a new way, it’s as if the poetry just pours from them. I’ve found this to be true of both boys and girls, and I’m always amazed at their insights.



Creating a Poetry Workshop

After teaching poetry for many years, I've discovered some strategies to help my students write powerful poetry. During the weeks that I'm teaching poetry, our writing lessons take the form of a "poetry workshop." A poetry workshop begins with time for sharing and appreciating poetry, followed by a short mini-lesson. It includes plenty of time for students to write, and often concludes with students sharing their poems. If the weather is nice, we take our writing outside because there's something about fresh air and sunshine that seems to help them get into the flow of writing.



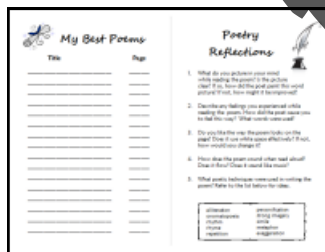
Your Role in the Poetry Workshop

You have an important role in your students' development as budding poets. You'll be guiding and facilitating their early attempts at writing, so it's important to provide class time for students to write. This mini pack includes a variety of strategies for unlocking creativity; always begin by modeling the strategy in a whole class setting. Provide time immediately after the mini-lesson for students to move away from their desks, get comfortable, and write on their own. Make yourself available for writing conferences while they work, but resist the temptation to correct errors or even to praise indiscriminately at this point. Believe it or not, heaping praise upon your students can have a detrimental effect; instead of writing to satisfy themselves, they will begin to write what they think you want to read. Of course you can and should give them genuine feedback about powerful images or your appreciation of a particular word choice. It's just that praise can actually stifle creativity when given too freely.

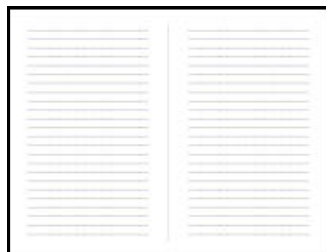
Personal Poetry Journals

One of the most important tools of the poetry workshop is the Poetry Journal. You can have students bring journals from home, but it's also fun to create simple journals from folded sheets of 8 1/2 by 11 inch paper. You can use the patterns on pages 12 and 13 to have each student create a personal poetry journal. Use construction paper or cardstock for the cover. You can make copies of the top pattern shown at left on the cardstock, or copy the pattern on white paper and have students glue each half into the insides of the booklet's cover. Then prepare about 4 or 5 sheets of paper per person with the lined paper copied on the front and back of each sheet. Fold all of the inside pages and the cover in half, and tuck the pages inside the cover. Staple along the middle to create personal Poetry Journals. Have students write their names on the front covers and decorate them as they wish. As they begin writing poetry, they can create a personal Table of Contents by listing their poems and page numbers on the lines on the inside of the front cover.

Inside of Cover



Lined Inside Pages



My
Poetry
Journal

Sharon Lee

Assigning Poetry Homework

Given the time-constraints on today's classrooms, you may be tempted to skip the classroom writing time and assign the poetry for homework. Please don't. Students need quiet time to write immediately after the mini-lesson. Many students don't have the time or a place at home to write freely, and your mini-lesson will no longer be fresh in their minds. You won't be there to help when they get stuck, and they may not be comfortable writing poetry around their family members at first. Providing a safe time and place in your classroom for kids to write poetry is nothing short of a gift to them, a gift that will be returned to you many times over. Of course it's fine to encourage them to write poetry at home if they would like to do so, and to allow them to take their Poetry Journal home as long as they will bring it back to school each day. Just be sure to provide time at school for them to get started and let it be their choice to take their journal home to continue working on their poetry in their free time. Often students will become so excited that they want to take their poems home to finish and share with their family.



To Rhyme or Not to Rhyme? That is the question!

The only way I have ever been able to teach kids to write poetry from the heart was to ban the use of rhyme, at least for the first week or so. I have nothing against rhyme when it is used artfully, but when kids try to use rhyme, their words end up sounding contrived and lifeless. As soon as I break them of the rhyming habit, their words begin to flow more naturally, and they begin to write amazing heart-felt poetry.

Free Verse Poetry for Kids

As a facilitator in the poetry workshop, you can provide lots of examples of free-verse poetry, poetry from kids and as well as non-rhyming poetry published by adults. Shel Silverstein and Jack Prelutsky are wonderful poets, but I tuck these types of books away during our poetry-writing unit. Instead, I search my school library for poetry books that have short poems about real experiences, or that use imagery to touch the emotions. I have discovered two authors in particular, whose work seems to motivate and inspire my students. Both Ralph Fletcher and Kristine O'Connell George write poetry that seems to reach right across the page and capture my students' complete attention. I have created a bibliography on page 25 with a list of several of my favorite books from these authors.



Additional Poetry Resources

Before you begin your poetry-writing unit, you may want to teach your students about specific types of imagery and poetic devices, such as similes, metaphors, personification, and so on. Having a more complete understanding of how poets use words can be very helpful. You can find additional resources on the Poetry page of Teaching Resources at <http://www.lauracandler.com/filecabinet/literacy/poetry.php>.



Teaching Kids to Write Powerful Poetry

Poetry-Writing Lesson Sequence

Below you'll find an overview of the suggested lesson sequence to be followed during your poetry-writing workshop. Remember that on most days you'll want to start with a mini-lesson and follow it with some time for students to write on their own.

1. Introduce imagery
2. Create poetry journals
3. Create similes and metaphors
4. Introduce poetry
5. Share examples of free-verse poetry
6. Write simple imagery poems
7. Introduce reflection and revision
8. Brainstorm images related to a single topic
9. Write topic-based, free-verse poems
10. Revise and edit topic-based poems
11. Write poetry based on life-experiences
12. Publish and share



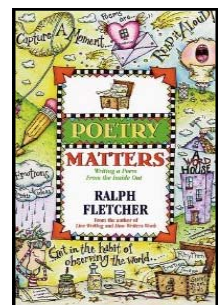
Advanced Preparation

- **Prepare Poetry Journal materials** - Prepare materials as described on page 3 or ask students in advance to bring spiral notebooks to use as journals. If they bring their own journals from home, have them glue the table of contents and reflection questions into the front and back covers of their journals.
- **Gather a collection of free-verse poetry books** - Check to see what your school and public library have to offer in the way of poetry books for children. For this lesson, select books with thought-provoking free verse poetry rather than those with silly, rhyming poems.

Teaching Tip! Teach poetry with Poetry Matters.

My favorite book for teaching poetry is Poetry Matters, by Ralph Fletcher. In this small chapter book, the author speaks directly to students about how to write meaningful, heart-felt poetry. I have used it for years, and it's one of the easiest ways to teach poetry. During my poetry unit, I read it aloud, one chapter a day, placing it under my document camera so students can see the words and arrangement of lines in each poem. This provides the core of my daily mini-lessons. Then I give my students time to write on their own. I'm always amazed at what they write after seeing Mr. Fletcher's examples.

Note: This book is available in digital format. Check the bibliography for details.

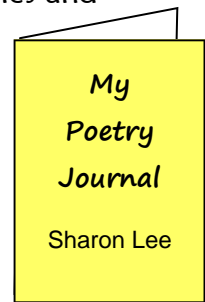


Teaching Kids to Write Powerful Poetry

Poetry Writing Lesson Details

1. **Introducing Imagery** - Before you begin your poetry unit, start looking for examples of imagery in everything you read. From the morning newspaper to books you read aloud, you'll start to see clever uses of language. Share those examples with students and ask them to begin looking for examples of imagery on their own. Don't worry about trying to identify and label the different types imagery, such as similes and metaphors. Just focus on how the words are used to create a specific feeling or visual image.

2. **Create Poetry Journals / Imagery Hunt** - Provide class time for students to create their poetry journals, and ask them to write "Imagery" as the title of the first page. Have them look for examples of imagery in the books they read and in everyday life and jot them down on that page, along with the title of the source. Provide class time for students to share their findings with a cooperative learning team or with the class.

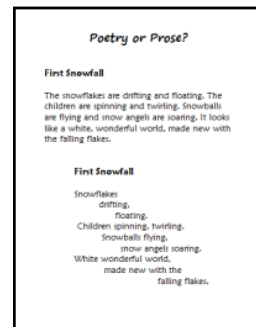


3. **Create similes and metaphors** - Now that your students understand how to find examples of imagery in everyday life, it's time for them to start creating their own images. This step comes easily to some students, but others will struggle with this concept. I've found that they all benefit from a brainstorming exercise in which they have to look for connections between objects and ideas that don't appear to be related at first glance. For this lesson, each student will need a copy of page 13, Creating Similes and Metaphors. Here's what to do:

A worksheet titled "Creating Similes and Metaphors" with a name line. It features a table with two columns: "Topic" and "Comparison Object". Below the table, there are instructions and a section for "My simile is like" followed by a blank line. At the bottom, there are two numbered instructions: "1. Use the ideas on the list to create a simile or a metaphor." and "2. Now use the ideas to create a simile or a metaphor comparing the subject to the object. Think use the word 'like' or 'as'." followed by a blank line.

- **Whole Class Brainstorm** - Display the chart on page 14 to use for the class brainstorming session. On left side, have students list different topics for poetry, and on the right side have them brainstorm objects that could be used for comparison. (See examples on page 15.) Let students take turns adding ideas to the class chart while they all record them on their papers.
- **Whole Class Write** - Select one topic and one object to use for this guided lesson in creating a simile or metaphor. Follow the example given on page 15 in which hope is compared to a star. If needed, remind students of the difference between a simile and a metaphor. Similes use "like" or "as" in a comparison, while metaphors state that one thing is another thing.
- **Individuals or Pairs Write** - After the class has created an example of imagery, allow students to work together with a partner or alone as they create their own examples.
- **Record Images in Journals** - Have students record their favorite examples on a page in their Journals titled "My Similes and Metaphors."
- **Sharing Imagery** - Be sure to allow class time for sharing your students' favorite examples with the class or within their teams. If you have a document camera, it's easy to project their best work for others to enjoy.

4. **Introduce poetry** - Ask your students what they think of when they hear the word “poetry” or “poem.” Discuss their ideas and clarify the points below using the “Poetry or Prose?” example on page 16. Then show additional examples for each point using poems from a basal reading book or poetry book. You may also want to display the visual “What is Poetry?” (page 17) at some point during the discussion. This visual summarizes the points below.



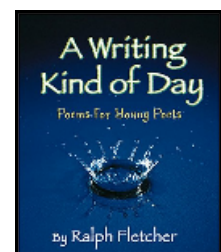
- Poetry is a special form of writing in which the writer, or poet, uses vivid language and imagery to communicate ideas. This is in contrast to “prose” which is the ordinary form of written language, such as stories. Show the “Poetry or Prose?” page and ask students which example is poetry and which is prose. Discuss reasons for their choices.
- Poems may be short or long, and they often contain short lines and stanzas. Explain that a “stanza” in a poem is like a paragraph in prose. Show examples of poems that include several stanzas.
- Poetry doesn’t have to rhyme. Be sure to read and show some examples of free-verse poems that don’t rhyme.
- Poetry often breaks the normal rules of writing. Poets frequently write in fragments and phrases, although they generally use conventional spellings. Ask students to examine “First Snowfall,” and they’ll notice that the prose example includes complete sentences, while the poem leaves out words and arranges them differently on the page.
- Poetry looks different from prose. It has a visual appeal, so poets carefully consider the shape of the poem and where to break each line as they are writing. Sometimes the difference between poetry and prose is simply the way the words are displayed on the page.



5. **Share examples of free-verse poetry**

Display the poetry books you gathered, and make them available to students to take to their seats and read during the day.

Tip: You may want to create a checklist of all titles and make sure that you have them back in the collection at the end of the lesson.

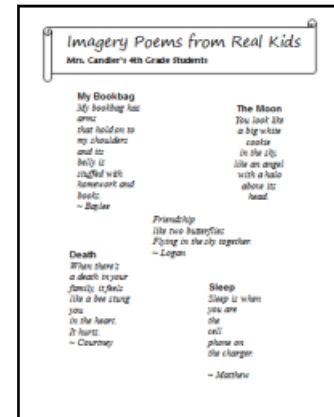


Start each day by reading aloud at least one free-verse poem. You’ll find lots of great examples in Ralph Fletcher’s book, *A Writing Kind of Day*, and Kristin O’Connell George’s poetry books for children. One simple yet powerful example of Ralph Fletcher’s writing is “Defrosting the Freezer,” and it can be found online at the Poetry Foundation: <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/archive/poem.html?id=241080> Notice how Mr. Fletcher describes the items found in the freezer using plain language, as well as the way he infuses the experience with emotion in the last sentence.

Eventually, as your students are exposed to this type of writing, their words will begin to flow as they look deeper into their own everyday experiences.

6. Write simple imagery poems

By now, many of your students may have begun to write poetry spontaneously, but this exercise will make the process easy if they haven't started on their own. Make sure your students know that they may write in their Poetry Journals whenever they feel inspired, not just when you assign a topic. Review the difference between poetry and prose, and remind students that it's okay for poems to be short. In fact, some poems are just snapshots of feelings - images scribbled down and captured in a few phrases.

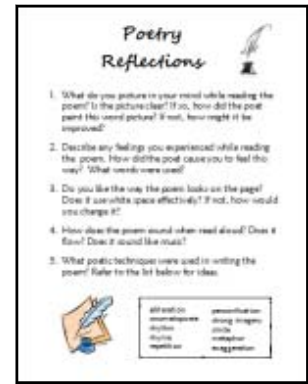


I've found the following sequence of steps to be very effective in teaching students how to write simple imagery poems:

- **Share student examples** - Show the examples on page 18 which were written by some of my 4th grade students. If possible, cut the poems apart and show just one poem at a time. If you have an interactive whiteboard, use the "spotlight" feature to reveal a single poem at a time. Read each poem aloud slowly, and give your students time to think about each image.
- **Pairs Discuss** - Ask students to turn and talk with a partner about which poem is their favorite and to discuss why they like it.
- **Time for Writing** - Provide at least 20 minutes for students to try writing their own poems. It's best to let them move away from their desks and find a quiet spot on their own. If the weather is nice, take them outside to write.
- **Look for Inspiration** - If students seem "stuck" and can't think of anything to write, allow them to use their Simile and Metaphor brainstorming chart for ideas. Or allow them to borrow some of the poetry books and read a variety of poems. They might also simply list some ideas in their journal or write a paragraph about a topic that's important to them.
- **Offer encouragement** - As your students begin to write, they will want to share their first attempts with you. Remember to be encouraging without overdoing the use of praise. Focus on their specific word choices that impacted you or the way the poem makes you feel. Don't worry about whether it looks like a poem at this point. Many students start out writing paragraphs of imagery that can easily be shaped into a poem later. Just encourage them to let the words flow and don't worry about spelling or writing conventions.
- **Class Sharing** - Conclude the lesson by letting students share their work with a partner, their team, or the entire class. If you have a document camera, students may want to put their journals under the camera while reading them aloud to their classmates. Remind students that spelling doesn't count during this process, so classmates are not to point out spelling errors in others' work.

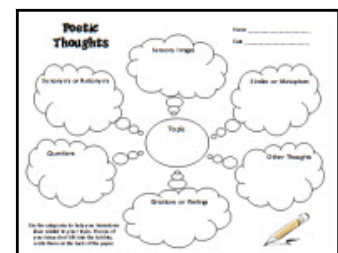


7. **Introduce reflection and revision** - After students have written a few simple poems, it's time to introduce reflection and revision. This part of the lesson is tricky because many children feel that as soon as their words hit their paper, they are perfect in every way. I have found that the best way to introduce the concept of revision is to allow students to reflect on someone else's work first. Try this 4-step process:



- **Reflect on Imagery Poems from Real Kids** - Have students turn to the back inside cover of their journals which should contain a copy of the Poetry Reflection questions on page 19. Then post the student samples you showed them earlier (page 18). Choose one of the poems, and discuss a few of the reflection questions as a class. Ask your students how they might have written the poem differently. There's no need to discuss every question, and many of them don't apply to the student work samples. Unless you've taught the poetic devices at the bottom of the page, I wouldn't even mention them at this point in time.
- **Students Reflect on Own Work** - Now have your students find a poem in their own journal and mentally ask themselves the reflection questions as if they were someone else reading their poem. Tell your students to cross out words, add words, make corrections on the page, etc. A journal is a place to capture words and ideas, and everything doesn't have to be perfect. As a part of the revision process, they may need to consult a thesaurus to find more vivid vocabulary, but they shouldn't use words that are unfamiliar to them.
- **Editing vs. Revision** - Explain to your students that after they revise their work for word choice, they may still need to edit their poem for spelling errors. Even though poems may break many of the rules of writing, most poets do follow correct spelling conventions. If they didn't, the meaning of the poem might be unclear. After they have corrected all errors and made all changes, they should copy the final poem neatly onto another page.
- **Share revisions** - Finally, have students pair with a partner and show their partner both the original poem that they wrote and the revised final version. I would not suggest that they ask their partner for advice because poetry is very personal and should be written to please the writer. However, I would encourage students to say what they like about the other person's poem. They might tell the writer why they liked a particular image or word choice, or how the poem made them feel.

8. **Brainstorm images related to a single topic** - After students feel comfortable writing short imagery poems, it's time to challenge them to write longer poems. To help students make this transition, it's helpful to have them brainstorm images and ideas related to a single topic. The "Poetic Thoughts" graphic organizer can help with this task. It's not necessary to have them complete



plenty of class time to write poetry and share their poems with others. At this point in my poetry unit, I find that almost all of my students are eager to break away from the graphic organizers and write poetry from their hearts. Our writing class becomes a true “workshop” in which a mini-lesson is followed by an open writing time. During this time, different students are engaged in a variety of tasks including, writing, revising, sharing, and conferring as needed. Rather than everyone writing on a certain day and revising on the next day, all of your students will write and revise their work throughout the poetry workshop time. You and your students will find this to be a special time during your school day.

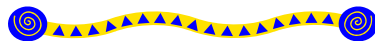
Tips for Helping Young Poets:

- Make copies of the Poetic Thoughts graphic organizer available for those students who need it for brainstorming.
- If your students say they don't have anything to write about, ask them to make a list in their journals of experiences or activities they love or even ones that they hate. Then ask them to write a paragraph about that experience. Next, show them how to shape the paragraph into a poem by removing words or adding and changing the line lengths. Many students only need this kind of help once before eagerly writing on their own.
- Encourage your students to open their eyes and see things from different perspectives. One fun way to do this is to give each student a magnifying glass and take a “field trip” out to the playground or school yard. Give everyone 10 minutes or more to record their observations from a ladybug's perspective and to write freely about that experience.



12. **Publish and share** - The best part of all is helping students to publish and share their work! In this day and time, the possibilities are almost endless. Here are a few ideas:

- Host a Poet's Tea. Invite parents to enjoy refreshments while listening to students present their favorite poems.
- Publish student poetry on your class web page or blog.
- Display the poems on a bulletin board outside your classroom. Title it “Poetic Thoughts” and have students write their poems using one of the thought bubble patterns on page 24 or 25.
- Create a class poetry book in which each student designs one page and the entire booklet is bound with pieces of fancy ribbon.
- Take snapshots of your students while they are writing, and use them to create a multi-media presentation of poetry and photos as shown at right.



For more poetry ideas and printables, visit Teaching Resources at www.lauracandler.com. Be sure to check out the Color Poem lesson in the April Seasonal Mini Pack.

preview

Creating Similes and Metaphors

Name _____

Topics	Comparison Objects

Directions:

1. In the boxes above, brainstorm topics and comparison objects that could be used to create strong similes and metaphors.
2. Choose one topic and one comparison object. Choose objects that normally wouldn't go together and describe their similarities. Try to find more than one way they are alike. Use your imagination!

Topic _____ Comparison Object _____

Ways they are alike: _____

3. Now use these ideas to write a simile or a metaphor comparing the concept to the object. (Simile use the word "like" or "as," which metaphors just state or imply that one object or concept is something else entirely.)

Creating Similes and Metaphors

Class Brainstorming Chart

<i>Topics</i>	<i>Comparison Objects</i>

Preview

Simile and Metaphor Examples

Name _____

Topics	Comparison Objects
love growing up friendship anger loneliness winter red fear hope hatred death	rainbow bee roller coaster stars fireworks waterfall ocean turtle fire diamond

Directions:

1. In the boxes above, brainstorm topics and comparison objects that could be used to create strong similes and metaphors.
2. Choose one topic and one comparison object. Choose objects that normally wouldn't go together and describe their similarities. Try to find more than one way they are alike. Use your imagination!

Topic Hope Comparison Object A star

Ways they are alike: Hope is a feeling that you don't have what you want, but you can almost reach it. Sometimes stars seem like you could almost touch them but you can't right now.

3. Now use these ideas to write a simile or a metaphor comparing the concept to the object.

Simile: Hope is like a star, just out of reach, hanging there as if I could almost touch it.

Poetry or Prose?

First Snowfall

The snowflakes are drifting and floating. The children are spinning and twirling. Snowballs are flying and snow angels are soaring. It looks like a white, wonderful world, made new with the falling flakes.

First Snowfall

Snowflakes

drifting,

floating.

Children spinning, twirling.

Snowballs flying,

snow angels soaring.

White wonderful world,

made new with the

falling flakes.

What is Poetry?

Poetry is a special form of writing that uses vivid language and imagery to communicate ideas and emotions.

- Poems may be very short or very long.
- Poems often contain fragments and short lines of text.
- Long poems may be divided into sections, or stanzas.
- Poetry doesn't have to rhyme.
- Poets often break the normal rules of writing.
- Poetry looks different from prose.



Imagery Poems from Real Kids

Mrs. Candler's 4th Grade Students

My Bookbag

*My bookbag has
arms
that hold on to
my shoulders
and its
belly is
stuffed with
homework and
books.
~ Baylee*

The Moon

*You look like
a big white
cookie
in the sky,
like an angel
with a halo
above its
head.
~Aaron*

Death

*When there's
a death in your
family, it feels
like a bee stung
you
in the heart.
It hurts.
~ Courtney*

Friendship

*like two butterflies
Flying in the sky together.
~ Logan*

Sleep

*Sleep is when
you are
the
cell
phone on
the charger.*

~ Matthew

Poetry Reflections



1. What do you picture in your mind while reading the poem? Is the picture clear? If so, how did the poet paint this word picture? If not, how might it be improved?
2. Describe any feelings you experienced while reading the poem. How did the poet cause you to feel this way? What words were used?
3. Do you like the way the poem looks on the page? Does it use white space effectively? If not, how would you change it?
4. How does the poem sound when read aloud? Does it flow? Does it sound like music?
5. What poetic techniques were used in writing the poem? Refer to the list below for ideas.

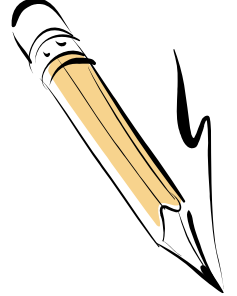
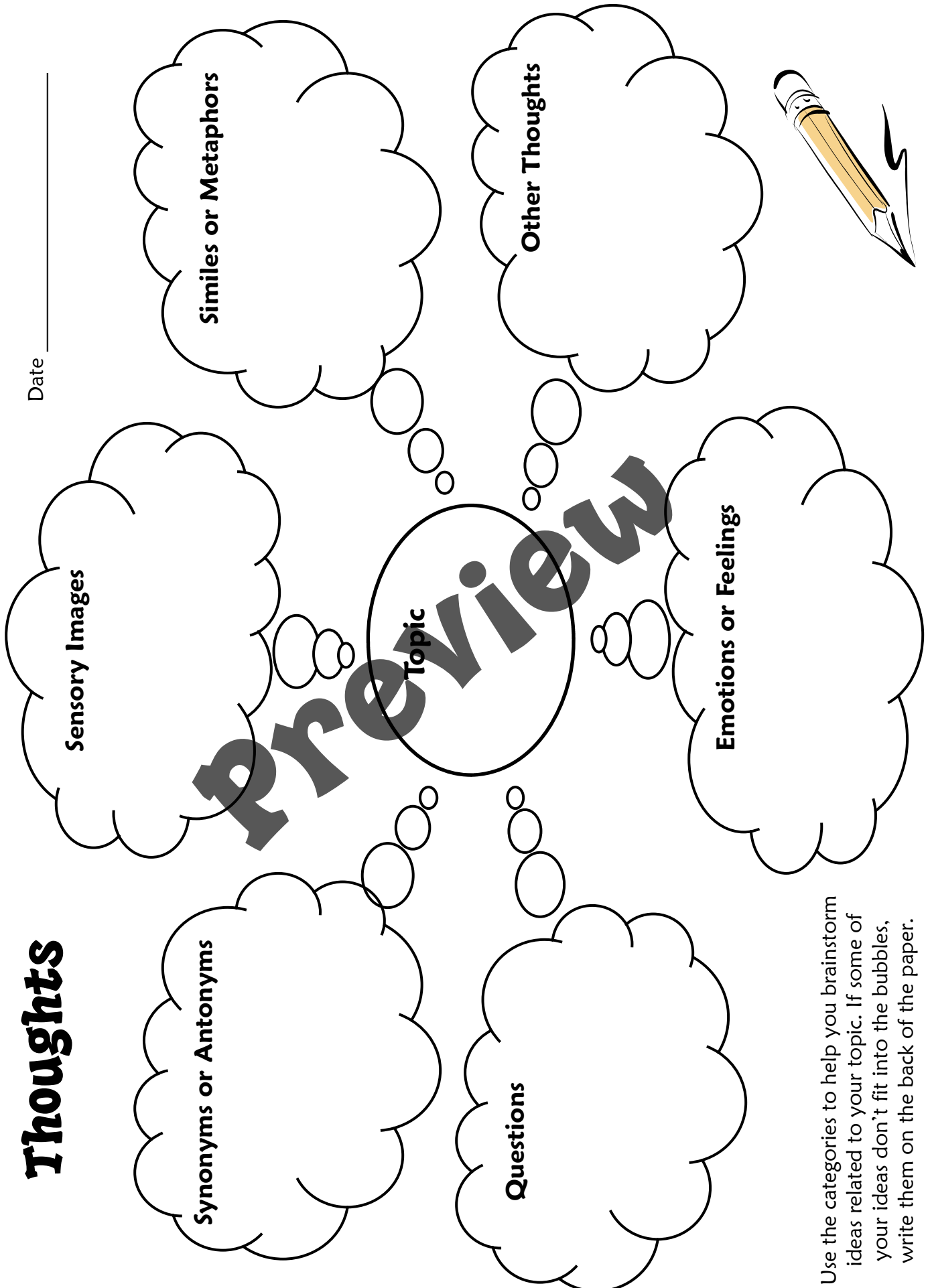


alliteration	personification
onomatopoeia	strong imagery
rhythm	simile
rhyme	metaphor
repetition	exaggeration

Poetic Thoughts

Name _____

Date _____



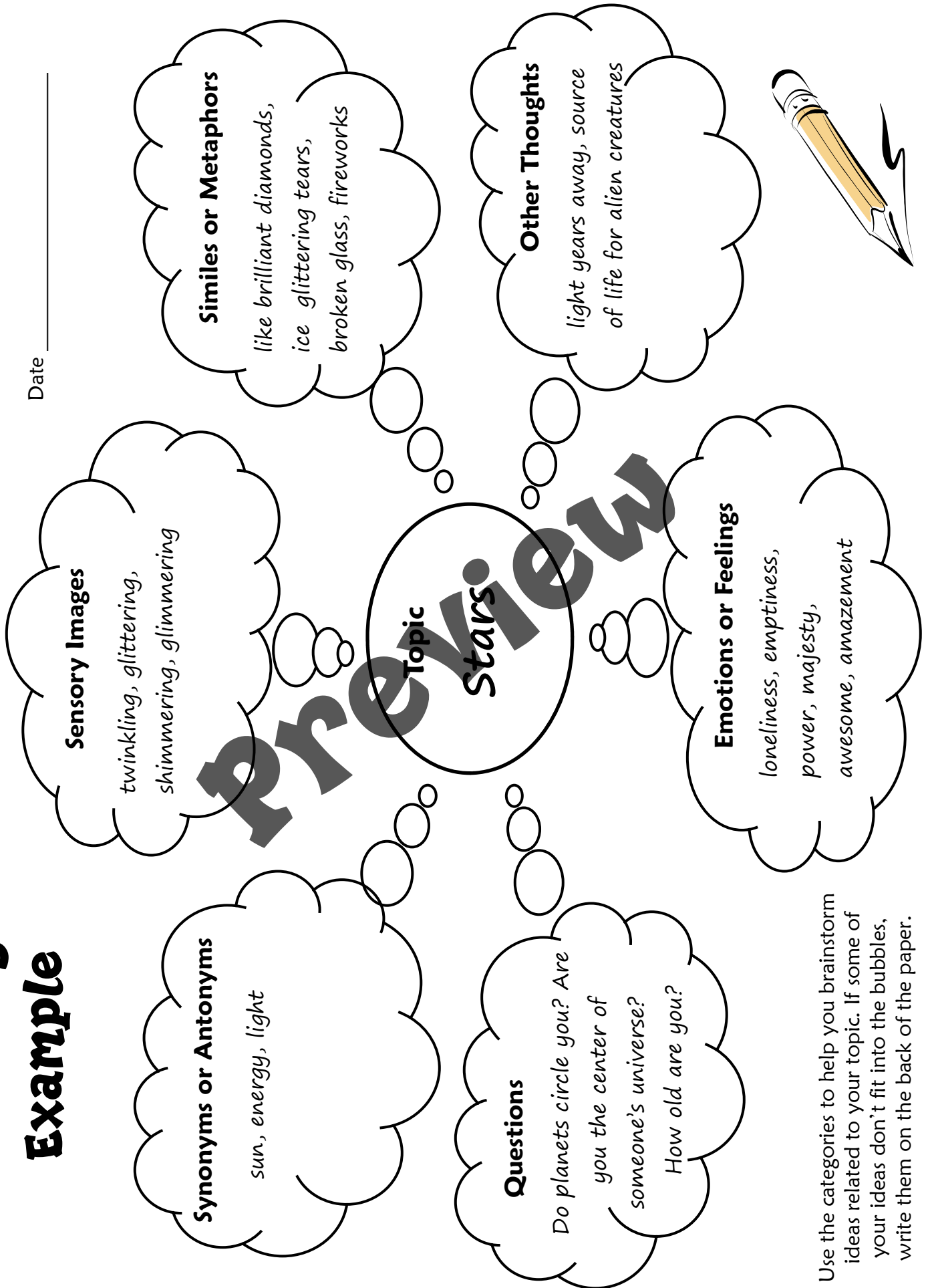
Use the categories to help you brainstorm ideas related to your topic. If some of your ideas don't fit into the bubbles, write them on the back of the paper.

Poetic Thoughts

Example

Name _____

Date _____



Use the categories to help you brainstorm ideas related to your topic. If some of your ideas don't fit into the bubbles, write them on the back of the paper.

Stars are spread above me
like glittering diamonds on a velvet cloth
or fireworks bursting in glory.
Their energy reaches out to me
from light years away.

They are faraway suns, just like my own.
Does their energy give life to the aliens
that inhabit their planets?

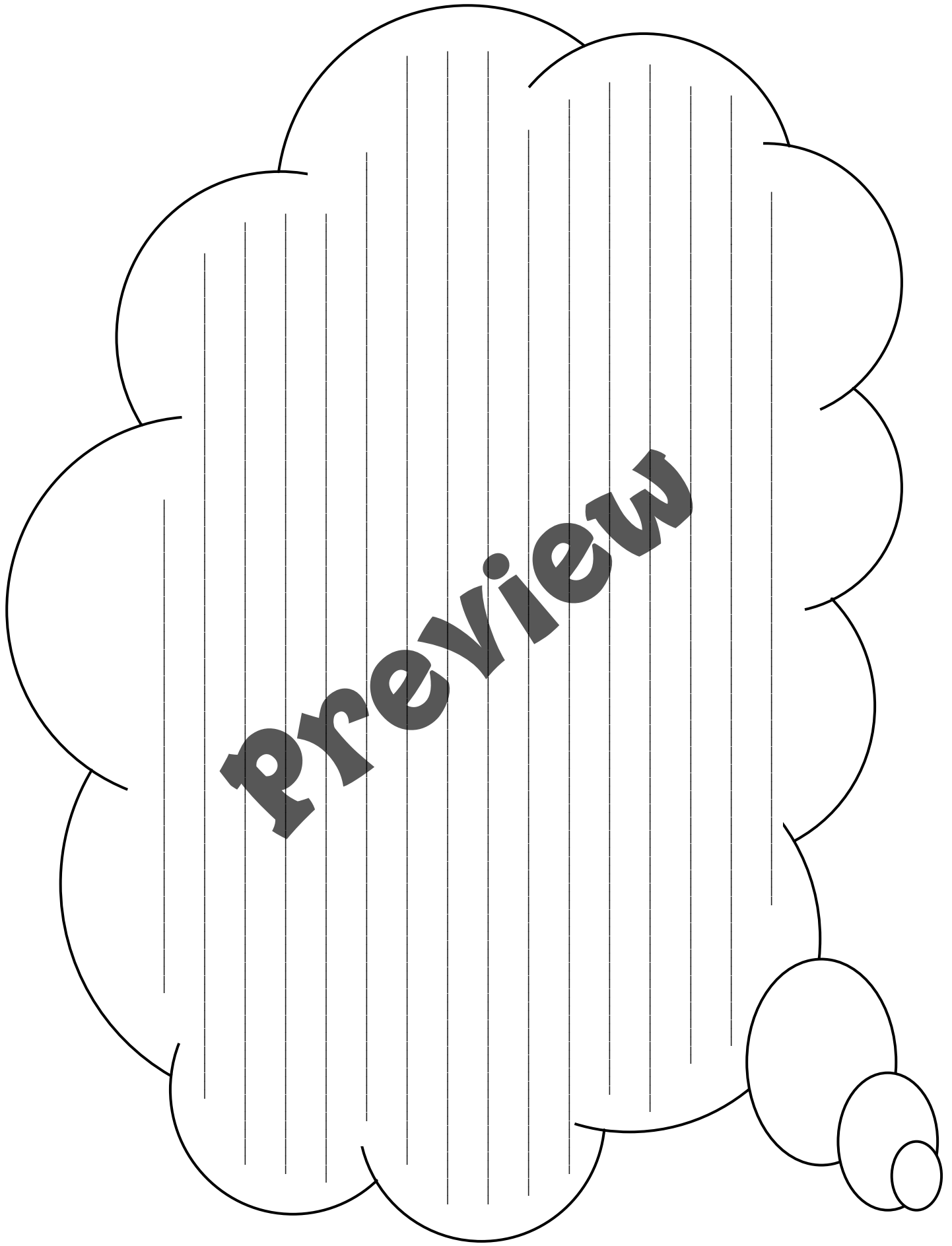
I can only stand and wonder in amazement.

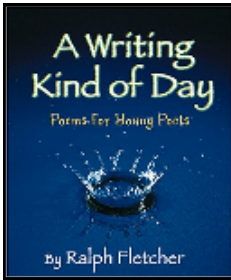
by Laura Candler

March 22, 2011

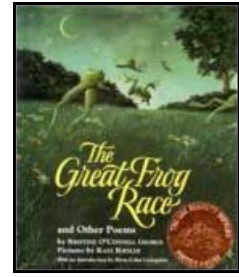


Preview





Free Verse Poetry for Kids



Featured Authors: Ralph Fletcher and Kristine O'Connell George

Fletcher, Ralph. "Defrosting the Freezer." *The Poetry Foundation : Find Poems and Poets. Discover Poetry*. Web. 31 Mar. 2011.

<<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/archive/poem.html?id=241080>>.

Fletcher, Ralph J., and April Ward. *A Writing Kind of Day: Poems for Young Poets*. Honesdale, PA: Wordsong/Boyd's Mills, 2005. Print.

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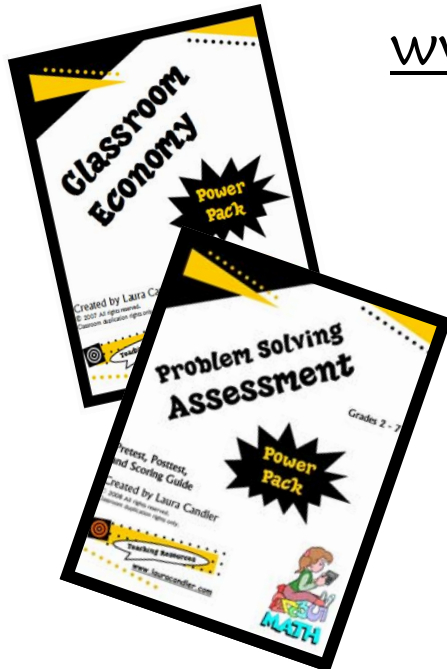
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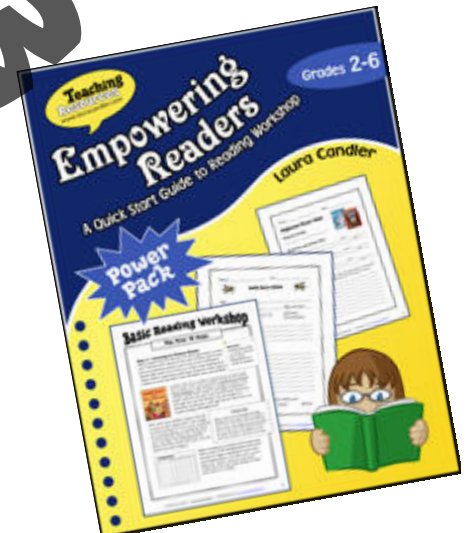
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