Writing Golden Shovel Poetry Across the Curriculum

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Abstract

This article describes lessons learned from the implementation of an instructional strategy that was conducted with preservice teachers enrolled in an undergraduate literacy course highlighting reading and writing as instructional tools to teach content area material across the curriculum. One requirement in the course was a Poetry Project. This project invited students to explore and use different poetic formats to write and illustrate two different poems across two different content areas. This article focuses specifically on one poetic format, namely, Golden Shovel Poetry (GSP). It describes the origin and purpose of GSP and shares student samples of Golden Shovel poems across four different content areas: English/Language Arts, Social Studies, Mathematics, and Science. It ends with lessons learned from the whole experience and suggested considerations for K-12 teachers who wish to develop their own poetry project in their respective classrooms.

Keywords: content literacy; instructional strategies; writing; methods and materials; literature; teacher education; professional development

"Whenever you have a reluctant reader, poetry is the way to go. The white space opens the door ... and then they are hooked" (Nikki Grimes, in Jensen, 2018).

The purpose of this article is to describe the poetry project, share samples of student poems that resulted from this project, and discuss lessons learned from the whole experience. I share only golden shovel poems because, while all students used a variety of poetic formats, all students selected the golden shovel poetic format to write one of their poems.

Background

As a former elementary, middle grades, and high school English Language Arts (ELA) teacher, I taught many reluctant readers and wish I had known of this advice by Nikki Grimes. Today, I am a teacher educator who teaches an undergraduate and graduate literacy course for preservice and inservice teachers entitled *Reading in the Content Areas*. At the undergraduate level, students in the course are mostly preservice students enrolled in one of three teacher education programs: Early Childhood Education (ECE), Middle Grades Education (MGE), and Adolescent and Young Adult Education (YAE). At the graduate level, the course is a required course in the Masters of Reading Specialization (MRS) program, as well as an elective in the Curriculum and Instruction (C&I) doctoral program. In general, the course is designed to highlight reading as an instructional tool to teach content material across the curriculum. One major goal of the course is for students to learn different genres, as well as and a variety of instructional strategies to use with these genres, to effectively teach reading across the curriculum.

Recently, I spent time exploring some additional genres. I considered adding fables, fairy tales, fantasy, folklore, dramatic plays, horror, humor, legend, mystery, mythology, science fiction, tall tale, biographies, and autobiographies. In the end I decided to add poetry for several reasons. One reason was personal, and the others were professional. Personally, I have always enjoyed reading and writing poetry for enjoyment, what Rosenblatt (1994) calls taking an aesthetic stance. I have not, however, read poetry to gain knowledge or seek information, what Rosenblatt (1994) calls taking an efferent stance. I suspected that I was not alone on reading poetry from an aesthetic rather than an efferent stance. Based on past experiences, I also suspected that students in this class perceive poetry more from an aesthetic than an efferent stance.

Professionally, I selected poetry because much professional literature suggests that it has power and potential for learning across the curriculum (Blintz & Monobe, 2018). Among other things, poetry supports abstract thought, provides a means for students to represent and communicate in a limited amount of space "complex ideas in symbolic ways" (Graves, 1992, p. 163). Moreover, poetry invites students to explore "poetic devices like metaphor, simile, imagery, alliteration, and rhyme and, in the process, promotes vocabulary development" (Kane & Rule, 2004, p. 665).

Historically, poetry has been a favorite, if not privileged, literary tool to teachers of English/Language Arts. Today, however, much research has been conducted and much professional literature has been published on teachers using poetry across the curriculum (Chatton, 2010; Gui & Polley, 2021; Jacob, 2018) increasing amounts of teachers see poetry as a genre to teach content area material across the curriculum (Kane & Rule, 2004). This is due in large part to the continuous proliferation of high-quality and award-winning literature that uses poetry.

In sum, I decided to include poetry as a genre in the course for four reasons. One, poetry is a new genre for this course. Two, this course has focused primarily on reading, as per the title, but a major goal of the course is also to focus on the interrelationship between reading and writing. Inviting students to read and write poetry is one way to highlight this interrelationship. Three, poetry allows students to take both an aesthetic and efferent stance on reading and writing. An aesthetic stance on reading and writing is to experience pleasure, and an efferent stance is to gather information. Four, poetry provides students with a new curricular resource and instructional strategy that they can use now or later in their own classrooms.

With this background in mind, I developed and implemented a poetry project as one of five major assignments in the course. The project invited students to first explore a variety of poetic formats and then select two different formats to write two poems across two different content areas. This article describes the results of this project.

I begin by describing how I introduced the poetry project to students, followed by a discussion of the origin and purpose of golden shovel poetry. Next, I describe the poetry project and share student samples of golden shovel poems across the curriculum. Then, I share descriptions of student thinking and reflections about their poems and end with lessons learned. My goal is that this article will introduce or expand the awareness of K-12 teachers and teacher educators about golden shovel poetry as an instructional tool to teach and learn across the curriculum.

Introducing Students to the Poetry Project

At the beginning of the project, I shared the quote by Nikki Grimes and many students expressed skepticism. One student stated: "I'm not sure reluctant readers would be excited about reading, much less writing poetry." Another stated: "It's hard to imagine that poetry motivates reluctant readers." I urged students to temporarily suspend their skepticism as they experience the poetry project.

I also shared different poetic formats with students. These included:

- Haiku
- Ballad
- Diamante
- Free Verse
- Doublet
- Limerick
- Golden Shovel Poem
- Sonnet
- Tanka
- Occasional Poem
- Shape or Concrete Poetry
- Ode
- Acrostic
- Color Poem
- I Wish…Poem
- Five-senses Poem
- If I Were…Poem
- Contrast Poem
- Pantoum
- Definition Poem
- Preposition Poem
- Multiple Voice Poems
- Clerihew
- Cinquain Poem
- Contrast Poem
- Villanell

Many students acknowledged that they were unfamiliar with most of these formats. One stated, "I never learned much poetry in school except Haiku." Another stated, "I don't know if I should already recognize these formats. What I do know is that I don't, and I have never heard of some of them, like a pantoum or a clerihew."

I explained that the project was an opportunity for them to become familiar with different poetic formats and use two formats to write and illustrate two poems in two different content areas. Not surprisingly, at the end of the project, students used a variety of different poetic

formats. What was surprising was that all students used the golden shovel poetic format for one of their poems. One student reflected,

I'm not surprised that we all chose the golden shovel format. None of us had ever heard of it, never read a golden shovel poem, and certainly never wrote a golden shovel poem. That's why I selected it and, in the end, found writing a golden shovel poem to be really enjoyable, informative, and even playful.

Origin of Golden Shovel Poetry

A good starting point to understand the origin of golden shovel poetry is the poem *We Real Cool* by Gwendolyn Brooks (1963).

We Real Cool

The pool players.
Seven at the Golden Shovel

We real cool. We Left school. We Lurk late. We
Strike straight. We Sing sin. We
Thin gin. We Jazz June. We Die soon.

This poem captures her observation one day of seven boys shooting pool at a pool hall, named The Golden Shovel, doing what they believed were cool things (Dorsch, 2019). It ends with an uncool prediction of the boys' early death. This poem has an important connection to another influential poet, Terrance Hayes, and to one of his poems.

Hayes wrote *Lighthead* (Hayes, 2010), an anthology of poems that won the National Book Award in 2010. One poem in the anthology is entitled *The Golden Shovel*.

I. 1981

When I am so small Da's sock covers my arm, we
cruise at twilight until we find the place the real

men lean, bloodshot and translucent with cool.
His smile is a gold-plated incantation as we

drift by women on bar stools, with nothing left
In them but approachlessness. This is a school

I do not know yet. But the cue sticks mean we
are rubbed by light, smooth as wood, the lurk

of smoke thinned to song. We won't be out late.
Standing in the middle of the street last night we

watched the moonlit lawns and a neighbor strike
his son in the face. A shadow knocked straight

Da promised to leave me everything: the shovel we
used to bury the dog, the words he loved to sing
his rusted pistol, his squeaky Bible, his sin.
The boy's sneakers were light on the road. We

watched him run to us looking wounded and thin.
He'd been caught lying or drinking his father's gin.

He'd been defending his ma, trying to be a man. We
stood in the road, and my father talked about jazz,

how sometimes a tune is born of outrage. By June
the boy would be locked upstate. That night we

got down on our knees in my room. *If I should die
before I wake*. Da said to me, *it will be too soon*.

II. 1991

Into the tented city we go, we-
akened by the fire's ethereal

afterglow. Born lost and cool-
er than heartache. What we

know is what we know. The left
hand severed and school-

ed by cleverness. A plate of we-
ekdays cooking. The hour lurk-

ing in the afterglow. A late-
night chant. Into the city we

go. Close your eyes and strike
a blow. Light can be straight-

ened by its shadow. What we
break is what we hold. A sing-

ular blue note. An outcry sin-
ged exiting the throat. We

push until we thin, thin-
king we won't creep back again.

While God licks his kin, we
sing until our blood is jazz,
we swing from June to June.
We sweat to keep from we-

eping. Groomed on a diet
of hunger, we end too soon.

The poem is a tribute to Gwendolyn Brooks. Hayes used two lines from her original poem, *We Real Cool* (Brooks, 2022), to create a new poem entitled *The Golden Shovel* (Hayes, 2010). In addition to the tribute, he introduced a new and innovative poetic format. The name of his poem *The Golden Shovel* (Hayes, 2010) is also the name of the poetic format.

Purpose of Golden Shovel Poetry

The purpose of golden shovel poetry is to inspire the writing of other poems. It is a poetic format that uses words from an existing poem to create a new poem. This format invites authors to borrow a line, or lines, from an original poem and use each of the words as the end-words to create a new poem. In effect, reading only the last word of each line of the new poem is the same as reading the original poem (O'Dell, 2016).

Golden shovel poems can be different from original poems, especially in terms of wordplay (Share, 2017). It invites authors to bend, break, and mend words by inserting line breaks into longer words, as well as experiment with enjambment, known as the continuation of sentences without pauses beyond the end of a line, couplet, or stanza (Literary Hub, 2017). It also offers authors an innovative poetic format to find, develop, and express a personal voice.

Poetry Project

As mentioned earlier, I developed and implanted a poetry project in my undergraduate literacy course, *Reading in the Content Areas*. The course consisted of 21 students, and, at the time, all students were pre-service teachers enrolled in middle childhood education. The course lasted one semester and consisted of a total of 16 class sessions. Each class session met weekly for 2 ½ hours. In addition to the poetry project, the course included 4 other major course requirements. Each requirement covered 3 course sessions, including the poetry project. The final class was dedicated to students sharing, celebrating, and reflecting on their own and each other's best work.

Conceptually, the project was based on several common core reading and writing anchor standards (CCSS, 2010) since all students were preservice teachers. In reading, the project was based on 3 standards: students were required to attend to 1) *key ideas and detail* and the 2) *integration of knowledge and ideas* as they considered and included discipline specific content information, and 3) *craft and structure* as they considered and analyzed the structure of poetic

formats. In writing, the project was based on two standards: students were required to write different 1) *text types and purposes* as they considered and selected different poetic formats, as well as 2) *production and distribution of writing* as they authored and illustrated two different poems with two different poetic formats in two different content areas.

Instructionally, I used a theoretical framework first introduced by Smith (1981) to organize and implement the poetry project. I used this framework for several reasons. One, it is a highly recognized framework that is based on much research not only in literacy, but also in content areas across the curriculum. Two, it is based on and driven by the notion that "nobody learns anything without active engagement in the process" (Harste, 2000). In this project, I wanted students to be actively engaged in the process of reading and writing poetry. This framework posits that teachers are mentors and that teaching involves demonstrating. As mentors, teachers need to demonstrate the kinds of thinking they want students, as novices, to use in a lesson, unit, or project. In this project, I used reading aloud as an instructional strategy to demonstrate different ways of thinking about reading and writing poetry.

This framework consisted of four interrelated sections: *Introducing, Engaging, Demonstrating,* and *Sharing & Reflecting*.

Section 1: Introducing (class session #1)

I introduced the poetry project by asking students to share their initial thoughts about the opportunity to write and illustrate poetry across the curriculum. I asked for several reasons. One, I wanted to gain some preliminary impressions about students' personal experience with and general interest in reading and writing poetry. These impressions helped me to keep or change important components of the poetry project. These components included total time for the project, number of read-aloud demonstrations, development of text sets of picturebooks with different poetic formats across content areas, and selection of instructional strategies for student engagement. In this article I use the spelling of the word *picturebook* as one word to "emphasize the inextricable connection of words and pictures" (Wolfenbarger & Sipe, 2007, p. 273).

Based on student responses, my overall impression was that students were experienced at reading poetry but less experienced writing poetry. One student stated:

I've always liked reading poetry and have written a few poems, but I don't think of myself of having much experience at writing poetry. And yet, I'm really excited about the opportunity to learn about different poetic formats and using one to write poetry. Most sound unfamiliar to me. Some sound challenging, others sound like a whole lot of fun.

My other impression was that students, while inexperienced, were genuinely interested in and even excited about this poetry project. One student stated,

I have read lots of poetry, but I haven't written much poetry. When I did, it was in English class. I never wrote poetry in math or science or social studies. So, I am really looking forward to learning about different poetic formats, and even more so using different formats to write my own poems across content areas.

Another stated,

I have read poetry, but I don't have much experience writing it. I may have written a few poems in middle and high school, but I don't remember them, which probably means they weren't very good. However, now that I studying to be a teacher, I'm curious and a little bit excited about learning how to write poetry to teach content area material. I am ready to go.

Section 2: Demonstrating (class session #1)

I read aloud a picturebook at the beginning of each class session for several reasons. One reason is that it is a valued and enjoyable way to begin each class. Students often write on course evaluations at the end of the semester that they valued and enjoyed the read alouds throughout the semester. One student stated,

> I learned many things in this class. However, one thing I didn't expect to learn was how to do a read aloud to students. I really enjoyed starting each class with a read aloud. I always thought read alouds were for children not middle school students and certainly not college students. Now, I feel like I know how to read aloud to a whole class of students. Even better, I am excited about reading aloud to my own students.

Another reason for reading aloud is to demonstrate before reading, during reading, and after reading components of the reading process. Before reading, I display the front cover and invite students to make and share predictions about the text. Typically, I use questions like *Based only on the front cover, what do you think this story will be about?* This question, and others like it, is designed to engage students in inferential and predictive thinking and to share their thinking with others.

During reading, I pause at strategic places in the picturebook and invite students to share *What's New?* This strategy, and others like it, provide students with an opportunity to monitor their ongoing comprehension of the picturebook. Finally, after reading, I invite students to spend 3-5 minutes reflecting and writing responses to the picturebook in a reader response journal and sharing responses with the whole class. This culminating experience allows students to share their personal understandings as well as hearing different perspectives on the same picturebook.

For this project, I read aloud *R is for Rhyme* (Young, 2010), a colorful, enjoyable, and informational alphabet picturebook that presents different poetic formats through a variety of illustrated poems. I read aloud for two reasons: 1) read an informational text to introduce students to different poetic formats, and 2) encourage students to start considering two different formats to write their own poems.

I began by displaying the front cover of the picturebook. Then, I invited students to take a minute to pause and ponder the cover, asking themselves two questions: What do you notice? What do you wonder? Keeping the cover page displayed, I invited students to share responses to these two questions: One student stated,

> I noticed that there is actually very little information about poetry on the front cover. It just has the title, *R is for Rhyme*, and a subtitle that suggests it is an alphabet book about different poems. I wonder if all the poetry in this book will rhyme.

Another stated,

> I had to look twice but I noticed that on the right side of the page the butterfly is standing on a leaf and holding an opened, red book. On the left side the red rose is using its leaves to hold an opened, yellow book. They both seem to be looking at each other. I wonder if each book is a book of poems, and they are reading them to each other.

Then, I read aloud one-half of the picturebook. At that point, I paused and invited students to consider the question: What are you learning that's new? One student stated,

> I had no idea that there are so many kinds of poetic formats. This is all new to me. I have heard of some of these kinds of poems, but I have never heard of most of them. It's kind of exciting.

Another stated,

> I've always thought of alphabet books as books to teach children the letters and sounds of the alphabet. This book is more sophisticated than teaching the letters of the alphabet. It creatively uses the letters of the alphabet to introduce different poetic formats. I've learned that this picturebook isn't just for kids; it's for teachers, too.

After reading aloud, I invited students to reflect on the different poetic formats presented in the picturebook, as well as consider which formats are most appealing to them as they continue to decide which formats they wish to select for their poems. In terms of selecting content areas, I urged students to take a curricular and instructional perspective. By curricular, I urged them to see writing and illustrating two original poems, not merely to complete a course requirement, but as an opportunity to create curricular resources that, ideally, they would share with their own students one day as examples of using poetry to teach content area information. By instructional, I urged students to write and illustrate original poems in two content areas they hope to teach in the future.

Section 3: Engaging (class session two)

As noted earlier, one important goal of this undergraduate literacy course was for students to actively engage with instructional strategies and different genres to teach content area material across the curriculum. Engagement is a critical component of learning because literacy learning is not a spectator sport; that is, no student becomes literate without active engagement in the process (Harste, 2014, p. 93). In that spirit, I developed and shared a text set of picturebooks that illustrate different poetic formats across different content areas. The purpose was for students to read and discuss a variety of these texts, explore different poetic formats, identify some personally appealing formats, and select content areas for their poems (see Table 1).

Table 1

Different Poetic Formats

Text	Author
English/Language Arts	
Troy Thompson's Excellent Poetry Book	Gary Crew
Doodle Dandies: Poems that Take Shape	J. Patrick Lewis
My First Book of Haiku Poems	Esperanza Ramirez-Christensen
Poems to Learn by Heart	Caroline Kennedy
The Watcher	Nikki Grimes
Social Studies	
In Flanders Fields	Linda Granfield
A Wreath for Emmett Till	Marilyn Nelson
Individual: Poems for Social Justice	Gail Bush
I Remember: Poems and Pictures of Heritage	Lee Bennett Hopkins
One Last Word: Wisdom from the Harlem Renaissance	Nikki Grimes
Mathematics	
Edgar Allan Poe's Pie: Math Puzzlers in Classic Poems	J. Patrick Lewis
Math Talk: Mathematical Ideas in Poems for Two Voices	Theoni Pappas
Marvelous Math: A Book of Poems	Lee Bennett Hopkins
Cold = Puddle: Spring Equations	Laura Purdie Salas *Math Potatoes:*
Math for All Seasons	Greg Tang
Science	
Science Verse	Jon Scieszka & Lane Smith
Summer: An alphabet Acrostic	Steven Schnur
Before Morning	Joyce Sidman
Sciencepalooza: A Collection of Science Poetry for Primary and Intermediate Students	Franny Vergo
Joyful Noise: Poems for Two Voices	Paul Fleischman

In small groups, students spent time reading, discussing, and rotating these texts from group to group. While reading and discussing, students recorded responses to texts in a reader response journal to the prompt: What's new? The purpose of the prompt was to focus student attention on poetry and poetry formats that are new to them. One student wrote,

> What is new to me are all these different formats. I knew a couple of them, but I didn't know most of them in this book. I find some formats really appealing, like multiple voice poems and golden shovel poetry. I'm thinking about using these two formats to write and illustrate my two poems.

Another student wrote,

> I'm inexperienced at poetry, not reading poems, but writing them, and especially not illustrating my writing. I just never seen myself as an avid reader and certainly not a poet. And yet, I felt motivated by some of these books. They made poetry understandable and doable, rather than something only real poets can do. I'm leaning towards writing and illustrating a golden shovel poem, and either a shape poem because that would be fun to draw or villanelle because none of us in our group has ever heard of it.

Session 4: Sharing and Reflecting (class session three)

Sharing and reflecting are important to learning. By sharing, students can hear, respond to, and appreciate the work of others. In the process students hear their own voices better by hearing the voices of others. Reflecting is also central to learning. Brabson (in Mills & O'Keefe, 2017) stated,

> You go off and work, then you come back together to reflect. You get feedback and fine-tune your ideas with the knowledge of your colleagues. You have an extended mind when you have the benefits of everyone's wisdom (p. 5).

In this spirit, after writing and illustrating two poems, students shared by reading aloud one of their poems to the class. Afterwards, students wrote and shared personal reflections on the whole experience.

Samples of Golden Shovel Poems

In this section, I share samples of students' golden shovel poems across different content areas: English/Language Arts, Social Studies, Mathematics, and Science. As mentioned earlier, the golden shovel format was not a required poetic format for the project. There were many formats available for students to use; however, all students chose to write a poem using this poetic format.

English/Language Arts. This golden shovel poem in English/Language Arts was based on "A Girl" by Ezra Pound. This student stated,

> I selected this poem because Pound is a favorite poet. I like the natural rhythm and flow of this poem, and the descriptive words he uses such as sap, moss, and folly. The line I selected from the poem implies a relationship between a person and violets and that relationship made me think of metaphors.

Figures 1 and 1a illustrate the golden shovel poem titled "Cinnamon Rolls." She plans to be an ELA teacher and use it to teach metaphors.

Figure 1 and **Figure 1a** *Cinnamon Rolls*

"A Girl"	**Cinnamon Rolls**
The tree has entered my hands, The sap has ascended my arms, The tree has grown in my breast, Downwards, The branches grow out of me, like arms. Tree you are, Moss you are, You are violets with wind above them. A child-so-high-you are, And all this is folly to the world.	A metaphor is something that can describe **you** to the world. Two things **are** not the same but have something in common. **Violets** are cinnamon rolls, sweet to smell. Combine the words **with** a sensory description. The **wind** is a whisper **above** the powerful sky as it passes a secret to **them**.
	

She stated,

> Metaphors can be tricky to learn. I had difficulty distinguishing between a metaphor and a simile. I wrote my poem to introduce aspects and examples of metaphors. I extended metaphor into my illustration. I used orange, yellow, brown, and white watercolor paint to illustrate cinnamon rolls. I chose cinnamon rolls to relate them to violets. Both are sweet to the smell.

Social Studies. This golden shovel poem was based on "Still I Rise" by Maya Angelou. The student stated,

> I struggled at writing a golden shovel poem. My fiancé shared a poem by Maya Angelou named "Still I Rise." I was absorbed by its message of empowerment and courage. I wanted to write a social studies poem and decided on the Civil Rights movement and slavery.

Figures 2 and 2a illustrate this student's untitled golden shovel poem.

Figure 2 and **Figure 2a** *Untitled*

"Still I Rise"	
You may write me down in history With your bitter, twisted lies, You may trod me in the very dirt, But still, like dust, I'll rise. Does my sassiness upset you? Why are you beset with gloom? 'Cause I walk like I got oil wells Pumping in my living room. Just like moons and like suns, With the certainty of tides. Just like hopes springing high Still I'll rise. Did you want to see me broken? Bowed head and lowered eyes? Shoulders falling down like teardrops, Weakened by my soulful cries? Does my haughtiness offend you? Don't you take it awful hard 'Cause I laugh like I got gold mines Diggin in my own backyard. You may shoot me with your words, You may cut me with your eyes, You may kill me with your hatefulness, But still, like air, I rise. Does my sexiness upset you? Does it come as a surprise That I dance like I have diamonds At the meeting of my thighs? At of the huts of history's shame I rise Up from a past that's rooted in pain I rise I am a black ocean, leaping and wide, Welling and swelling I bear in the tide. Leaving behind nights of terror and fear I rise	Moonlight welcomes **you** with open arms, the odds **may** be in your favor. As you **trod** through the quiet brush, **me** -eting death here is your wager. **In** a solemn breath you take your chance. **The** coast seems almost clear. What **very** little there is to lose when you live a life of fear. From the **dirt** you crawl with trembling hands. One light shall guide your path., **But** from the hill, hell's hounds stand **still,** you scent they've found at last. **Like** fevered beast, they bound your way, kicking **dust** from where they lie, Struck with **ill (I'll)** you stand there still, hoping courage might yet **rise.**

Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear I rise Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,' I am the dream and the hope of the slave I rise I rise I rise.	
	

He stated,

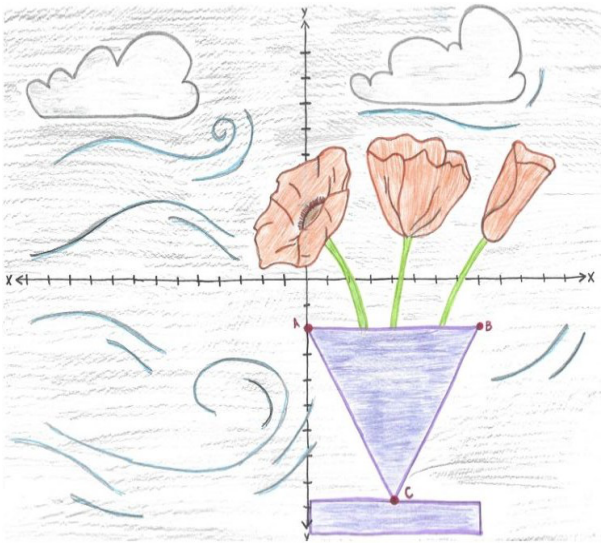
> I enjoyed writing this poem. I like history, so that helped. In this poem, I wanted to put the reader in the place of an escaped slave. I also wanted to instill fear and anxiety that might come from being in that situation. I want to teach history and use this poem to teach lessons on slavery and the Civil War.

Mathematics. This golden shovel poem was based on "Nature Knows Its Math" by Joan Graham. This student stated, "I selected this poem because it is about nature and the beauty of the four seasons, but also incorporates mathematical vocabulary."

Figures 3 and 3a illustrate the golden shovel poem titled "If a Triangle Met Nature." She plans to be a middle grades mathematics teacher.

Figure 3 and **Figure 3a** *If a Triangle Met Nature*

"Nature Knows Its Math"	**"If a Triangle Met Nature"**
Divide the year into seasons four *subtract* the snow then *add* some more green a bud, a breeze, a whispering behind the trees, and here beneath the rain-scrubbed sky orange poppies, *multiply.*	Oh, look! I see the equilateral triangle ABC. I'll start **here** Point A is two **beneath** the origin, with B and C in quadrant IV. I could move the triangle to the left or to **the** right. Bewaretriangle! The **rain scrubbed** sky is infested with wind. What could the **sky** have done now? The **orange** triangle could be a unique vase full of **poppies** I wonder what would happen if it were to **multiply**?



She stated,

> I plan to use my poem to introduce a mathematics lesson on transformations. I can also use it as a post assessment where students can show they understand the difference between transformations such as translations, dilations, reflections, and rotations. Students can explain which type of transformation is represented in each line of my poem. For example, students can use line 3 and state something like, 'I could move the

> triangle to the left and that would represent a translation.' Or, line 5, 'The sky infested with wind represents a reflection of the image or reflection.' Or, line 8, 'I wonder what would happen if it were to *multiply?'* represents a dilation.

Science. This golden shovel poem was based on "My Brother Ate My Smartphone" by Kenn Nesbitt (2018). This student stated,

> I chose this poem because it is funny. I thought students could relate to a poem about smartphones. I selected one line as the basis for my golden shovel poem. I thought this line could paint a picture in the reader's mind of just how smart his brother is now that he ate the smart phone.

Figures 4 and 4a illustrate the golden shovel poem titled "Isaac Newton." She plans to teach science and use this poem to introduce Isaac Newton as a famous scientist.

Figure **4** and **4a** *Isaac Newton*

"My Brother Ate My Smartphone"	**"Isaac Newton"**
My brother ate my smartphone. Although it might sound strange, he swallowed it and, bit by bit, his brains began to change. He started getting smarter. He grew so shrewd and wise. And I could see that, suddenly, a light was in his eyes. He knew as much as Google. His IQ was off the charts. I'd never seen someone so keen, With such astounding smarts. He solved the toughest problems With simplicity and ease, And calculated answers With unrivaled expertise. It seems he's now a genius, A perfect brainiac. But don't care of think it's fair. I want my smartphone back.	Isaac Newton, who was **he**? He told us everything he **knew**. An apple fell down on his head **as** he sat below. But that was not too **much** for him. He discovered three laws **as** he couldn't use **Google** to help him. Gravity was **his** discovery in 1687. His **IQ** was 190 and we wouldn't know physics if it **was** not for him. Some days he was **off** but we can thank Sir Isaac Newton for all **the** work he did that was off the **charts**.

She stated,

> I wrote a golden shovel poem about Newton because he is an important person in the history of science. I used the word Google because he didn't have the Internet when he made his scientific discoveries. My illustration includes an apple tree because it influenced Newton's work with gravity, and different colors in the sky to represent the important work Newton did with light and color.

Lessons Learned

Based on student written reflections, I learned several lessons from this whole experience. First, I learned about some thinking processes students used to write golden shovel poetry. For example, students connected personal interests, struggles, and passions, related to favorite poets or poems. One stated, "The original poem I selected has always been near and dear to my heart. I recognized the struggle the narrator went through, a struggle that I also personally experienced, so I really identify with the poem and decided to use it as the inspiration to write my golden shovel poem." Another stated, "I am a passionate environmentalist, and I chose my original poem because it involves the environment and has a repeated structure that emphasizes the phrase Mother Earth. The topic of the environment gave me a lead-in to write my golden shovel poem."

I also learned several strategies students used to write their golden shovel poems. For example, once students selected original poems, they identified words and lines in the poems and used them as the structure for writing their golden shovel poems. Students also noted that specific words and lines sparked their thinking about possible content area topics for their poems.

For example, one student selected the word *sidewalk* from the original poem "Where the Sidewalk Ends" by Shel Silverstein (2014). She stated, "The word *sidewalk* sparked my thinking

about segregation, about how there was a time in our history when African Americans had to get off the sidewalk if a white person was walking on that sidewalk." Another student selected a line from the original poem, namely, *and that has made all of the difference* from "The Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost (2019). He stated, "This line sparked my thinking about the notion of difference and that, in turn, started me thinking about subtraction and mathematics."

I also learned that golden shovel poetry offered students a poetic format to explore, develop, and express an authentic voice about a personally meaningful topic. One student stated:

> I selected my original poem because it shows the importance of voice. I used it to write my golden shovel poem to express my own voice, specifically to write about my own struggles growing up with an alcoholic father.

Another stated:

> I chose the poem "The War To End All Wars" by Stanley Cooper (2009) because it hits home with me being in the military. I recently found out I am deploying again so this poem really helped me express myself."

I also learned that this poetry project helped students to think differently about the power and potential of poetry to teach and learn across the curriculum. One student stated,

> I've always liked mathematics. One day, I want to teach math. That's why I wrote a golden shovel poem in the content area of math. Before this experience, I always thought of poetry as something you read and write in English/Language Arts. I never would have thought about poetry to teach math. Now, I am starting to think differently.

Another student, and others like her, stated,

> I was one of the students who expressed doubt about the quote by Grimes that you shared with us at the beginning of the project. I doubted the quote because I am, at best, a reluctant reader, and perhaps more accurately, a non-reader. I just don't like to read. However, this experience of writing golden shovel poems has made me read and write better, but more importantly think differently. Maybe Grimes is right. Poetry is the way to go.

Finally, I learned that Nikki Grimes is probably right, poetry is the way to go, or at least one way to go, not just with reluctant readers but with all readers and writers. Unlike the skepticism expressed by students at the beginning of this poetry project, in the end students indicated that they experienced the power and potential of reading and writing poetry across the curriculum, and it made a positive impact on them. Consequently, they also indicated that they plan to use reading and writing poetry across the curriculum with their own middle grade students in the future.

To that end, I hope these students, as well as other K-12 teachers across the curriculum, will use the text set, or a subset, of texts I used in this poetry project, or expand on this text set by including other genres to develop their own poetry project. For example, teachers can include

anthologies or collections of poems by poets who use different poetic formats. I hope teachers will also consider collaborating with colleagues and librarian/media specialists to develop text sets of literature on poetry and poetic formats that is culturally, socially, and personally relevant for students in their respective classrooms.

I also hope that teachers will use the instructional framework, or a variation of it, to implement their own poetry project. If so, I hope teachers will remember the work of Frank Smith (1981) who taught us a long time ago that effective teaching and learning involves three interrelated processes: introducing, demonstrating, engaging, sharing, and reflecting. These processes are based on the notion of apprenticeship and involves someone (teacher), showing someone else (students), how something is done (*This is how it's done.)*; engaging students by actively and productively participating with them in the demonstration (*I want to try.*); inviting students to share their productive work (*This is what I did)*; and inviting students to reflect on the whole experience (*How did I do? How can I do it better?*).

Ultimately, I hope this article will do for K-12 teachers across the curriculum what it did for me. At one level, this poetry project scratched an intellectual itch, namely, I felt the need to revise my thinking and course to outgrow it. I also hope that this article will introduce or expand awareness of this strategy and that teachers consider using it in their respective content area classrooms.

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