

Finding Home in Words: A Free Verse Poetry Workshop

Materials Needed:

- A comfortable notebook or several loose sheets of paper
- A favorite pen or pencil
- (Optional) Colored pencils or markers for the brainstorming activity
- (Optional) Access to a printer for the provided example poems

Lesson Plan Details

- **Subject:** Creative Writing / English Language Arts
- **Grade Level:** 4th-5th Grade (Age 10)
- **Time Allotment:** 60-75 minutes

1. Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

- Understand the basic characteristics of free verse poetry (no strict rules, rhythm, or rhyme).
- Brainstorm personal connections to the themes of loss, hope, and home using a creative mapping technique.
- Use sensory details (sight, sound, smell, taste, touch) and emotional language to express ideas.
- Draft an original free verse poem that explores one or more of the core themes.

2. Introduction & Warm-Up: Word Connections (10 minutes)

Let's get our creative minds warmed up! We're going to play a quick word association game. I'll say a word, and you say the first few words, feelings, or images that pop into your head. There are no wrong answers!

- **Step 1:** Start with the word "**Home**." (What do you see, smell, or feel? *Possible answers: warm bed, smell of cookies, Mom's hug, my dog, the green front door.*)
- **Step 2:** Next, try the word "**Loss**." (This can be a tricky feeling. What does it feel like? What color is it? *Possible answers: empty, gray, a missing puzzle piece, quiet, a locked door.*)
- **Step 3:** Finally, let's do the word "**Hope**." (What does hope look like or feel like? *Possible answers: a tiny green sprout, sunshine after rain, a key, a window opening.*)

Teacher's Note: This quick activity gently introduces the themes and shows the student that abstract feelings can be described with concrete images, which is the foundation of great poetry.

3. What is Free Verse Poetry? (10 minutes)

Today we are writing **free verse** poetry. It's my favorite kind of poetry because it's all about freedom!

- **Explain:** Free verse poetry doesn't have to follow rules. It doesn't need to rhyme (like "cat" and "hat") and it doesn't need a specific rhythm or beat. It sounds more like a natural conversation.

- **The Poet's Job:** The poet gets to decide where to break the lines and how to arrange the words to create a certain feeling or emphasize an idea. A short line can feel quiet or sudden. A long line can feel like a rush of thought.
- **Read an Example Aloud:** Let's look at a very short, famous free verse poem. Read it aloud twice.

The Red Wheelbarrow by William Carlos Williams

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens

- **Discuss:** Why do you think he broke the lines like that? What does it make you focus on? (Guide the student to see how breaking "wheelbarrow" and "rainwater" makes you look at the words and the images more closely.)

4. Guided Exploration: Finding Feeling in a Poem (15 minutes)

Let's read a poem I wrote just for this lesson that touches on our themes. We'll be detectives and look for clues about how the writer shows feelings without just saying "I was sad" or "I was hopeful."

The Old Key

The front door doesn't fit the old key anymore.
That house, a photograph behind glass.
I remember the scratch on the kitchen floor,
the ghost of a dog's tail wagging.

Today, a cardinal landed on the new fence.
A flash of impossible red.
It sang a song I didn't know the words to,
and I felt the sun on my hands,
a warmth that promised
it would stay for a little while.

Discussion Questions:

- Where do you see the idea of "loss" or a past "home" in this poem? (Clues: the key not fitting, a photograph, the ghost of a dog's tail.)
- Where does "hope" appear? What image gives you that feeling? (Clues: the red cardinal, the sun, the promise of warmth.)
- Which words help you see, hear, or feel something? ("scratch," "flash of red," "warmth.") This is using your senses!

5. Creative Brainstorming: Your Heart Map (15 minutes)

Now it's your turn to gather ideas. We're going to create a "Heart Map."

- **Step 1:** Draw a large heart that fills most of a page in your notebook.
- **Step 2:** Inside the heart, write down words, memories, quick sketches, and feelings related to **home, loss, and hope**. Don't worry about full sentences. This is a treasure chest for your poem.
- **Prompts to help you fill your map:**
 - **For Home:** A specific smell from your kitchen? The color of your bedroom walls? A secret hiding place? A favorite chair?
 - **For Loss:** A friend who moved away? A pet you miss? A favorite toy that broke? What does an empty space sound like?
 - **For Hope:** The feeling of swinging high on a swing? The look of the sky right after a storm? A promise someone made to you? A seed you planted?

Teacher's Note: Give the student quiet time for this. Play some soft, instrumental music if it helps them focus. This is the most important step for creating a personal and powerful poem.

6. Drafting Your Poem (20 minutes)

Look at your Heart Map. Pick one or two ideas that feel the strongest to you right now. Your poem doesn't have to be about everything on the map—just one small piece is enough.

- **Instructions:** Start writing. Don't worry about it being perfect. Let the words flow. Try to use your senses. What did you see? Hear? Smell? Feel?
- **Think about your line breaks.** End a line where you want the reader to take a small pause.
- **If you get stuck, try one of these starters:**
 - "I remember..."
 - "The house smelled like..."
 - "Hope is the color of..."
 - "Sometimes, I close my eyes and see..."

7. Closure & Sharing (5 minutes)

Creative work is brave work! Thank you for exploring these big feelings with words today.

- If you feel comfortable, I would love to hear your poem, or even just your favorite line or image from it.
- **Reflection question:** How did it feel to turn a memory or a feeling into a poem? What was your favorite part of the process?

Teacher's Note: The goal of sharing is celebration, not critique. Praise the student's courage and point out a specific, strong image or feeling they conveyed in their draft.

Differentiation & Assessment

- **For Support:** If the student is hesitant to write, work together to write the first few lines based on their Heart Map. You can also offer a "fill-in-the-blanks" model, such as: "Home is [a color]. / It sounds like [a sound]. / I miss [a person or thing]. / But I see hope in [an image]."
- **For Extension:** Challenge the student to write a second, short poem from a different point of view (e.g., from the perspective of the house, a lost pet, or the cardinal). Or, encourage them to find a metaphor (e.g., "hope is a key") and build a poem around it.
- **Assessment:** This is a formative, process-based assessment. Success is measured by the student's engagement in the discussion, the thoughtfulness of their Heart Map, and the completion of a first draft that reflects their unique ideas and demonstrates an understanding of free verse. The final poem is a creative product, not a test. Focus feedback on effort and

specific strengths ("I love how you described the smell of rain—I could almost smell it myself!").