Thoughts for Teachers

Please find some time to enjoy poems with your students from early stages of learning and onward. Poems help expand our learning and our skill at exploring ambiguity and clarity with curious confidence. I have been inspired by students’ lives, life and world events, and the joy of learning in community to write poems that bring metaphor and fun in accessible language to international students.

As our American poet June Jordan wrote, *We are the ones we have been waiting for*. So, don’t hesitate, don’t wait. Bring the magic of metaphor to your class. We can help connect hearts and minds and build Social Emotional Learning with international flair and respect for all.

My poems follow a rhyming strategy, helpful with our English suprasegmentals, as well as spelling and its mysterious connection to pronunciation in English. The twelve poems on this website move from short and sweet verses to longer language explorations with more complex themes and metaphor.

First, my poems offer a lighter theme for beginning students, such as *Who Is That?* or Sitting Here. Your students can enjoy these poems easily with some simple support from you.

Then, I offer other poems to build community and support in your classrooms, which are perhaps full of diverse cultures and life experiences. For example, *Your Name, Please,* helps students laugh and discuss pronouncing, spelling, and remembering international names. The poem, *MyEnglish is Beautiful,* affirms the work our students have made learning a new language. *The Trouble with English* offers a dialogpoem of encouragement between two learners. English is a challenge!

Also, I have been moved to write about our human challenges in the manner of Paolo Friere’s problem-posing. Let’s look and learn about the matters before us. When we teach about world challenges our students surely encounter, we help empower them to grow and voice their many inner resources with this new language they communicate in. We can also help them find and nurture new strengths.

My poem For Malala came to me as we studied her life after her tragic shooting, and yet the poem is also about girls and gender equity all over the world and across time. It’s my story, too. School and my education saved my life in so many ways and I yearn to give educational opportunities to every girl alive on our planet.

As for language and power, what is more harmful to our souls than losing our maternal/home language? *No (More) Forbidden Languages*expresses sad longing and anger over language loss and your students from everywhere connect with this emotion. Throughout time, corrupt, powerful leaders have forbidden slaves, indigenous people, speakers of “Nonstandard” language forms (Cockney English, Black English, Spanglish, Chinglish, Creole French, etc.) to know, to speak, to remember, to sing, to love their native languages. The denial of this basic human dignity: self-expression and connection to family roots is a hate crime. I believe there is not one justifiable reason to deny a language to exist. In addition, we humans continually invent and remember our languages.

*Rap It!* celebrates the ancient “ain’t” of English which appears in Nobel prize-winning songs and literature, and yet still incites rancor in some grammarian circles and faculty rooms. Ain’t you tired of that old song yet? I surely am. Students enjoy learning varieties of English which they will hear in song, in movies and on the street, so let’s teach varieties that help open doors to communication and understanding.

Finally, *Which English?*  brings up our linguistic tug of war about the role of English in the world. Perhaps you are Canadian, British, Australian, American, or Singaporean. Within these groups,we have many kinds of English, by region, by gender, by class, by formality. Maybe you are a fluent speaker of English as your second or third language. Worldwide today, there are more speakers of English as a Second Language than there are Native Speakers. Which English indeed will our students need most often? With less worry about correctness and more attention to content and clarity, we can let go and help us all savor our amazing and creative varieties of English around the world today.