

# Poetry in public spaces



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Duration: 2x2 classes

Age of students: 7-13-year olds

Aim of program: learning language through literature, interdisciplinary approach, and promotion of art in public spaces

To help students to understand hard text or subject that does not spark a joy for them, teachers can try to adapt teaching and learning methods to meet their expectations. This is a program for promotion of poetry reading and understanding poetry. It is combining literature and visual art, and challenging teachers and students to think about their surroundings and how can they influence it.

Keep in mind that this method is suitable for all language learning programs, native, second and heritage. Focus is on learning language through literature and interaction.

## First class (2x45 min)

1. Present class plan to the students, be clear of your intentions, about challenges of poem, language, or subject it is presenting, explain why is important to learn it and present method of street art poetry to them.
2. Read poem to the class, go over unknown words, ask students about it, and try to let them discuss about the poem. You can ask: What does it tell them, what they like about it, why they think this poem is valuable, how is written, what language it's using, how different it is from everyday talk? Support talk in group, pair, etc.
3. Let each student select the most meaningful sentence or line from the text and explore why they chose that.
4. Talk about public spaces. Where can poetry be presented? Show some example of public art, and where is it present. Talk about your surroundings wonder with students where poetry or art can be introduced? You also must be precise about places that are not suitable for art interventions. With younger students you can go together to the places around and inside school where they can present, they work.
5. Students rewrite the chosen part of the poem and prepare it for public placement. You can ask students also to paint something they see in



selected text. Street art is visual, it's having specific written style, but also drawing, painting and sticker art style. You should explore media that is suiting to you and your group.

Depending on the place you aim to present your poetry, choose the quality of paper and writing material. You can choose stickers in color, page from notebook, any color pencils, or you can make big panels. Be careful and plan your time for this activity in relationship to the outcome you wish to achieve.

This activity is giving time for students to spend time with text to deeply understand it to play with it and to acquire knowledge about it.

6. Talk with students about homework: placing paper with poem in a public space and taking picture of it. Be clear about safety instructions, also tell students that they are not obligated to leave paper in a public space, but to collect it after a photo is taken. Notice that there are places that are not supposed to be taken as a public art and general safety. In our project this homework was done with the help of parents. This task can also be done during class in school surrounding or during school trip.



Instruction for photos: take one photo of paper you prepared so that we can see poem and second photo of the poem in public space. It is important to show the surrounding student chose. Speculate and reason for selecting it will be subject of next class.

## **Second class (2x45 min)**

1. Talk with students about the homework: what was interesting, what was challenging, did they have help of someone, did someone show interest in their poem.
2. Talk about street art: what texts we can see in public places, what do they think about poetry in public spaces.



3. Give time for every student to present their photos.

4. Talk about why they chose that specific place.

5. Return to talk about the poem or the original text: what do they think about it now, what did change in the relationship towards text from first class to now?

6. Closeup. Sum up everything all students told and give finale word. Also remind them what is the purpose of poetry and street art.

## Examples of these projects

### 1. Old poems and unknown words

Aleksa Santic's poem *Emina* was published in 1902 and the language used in this poem is not in everyday use, which makes it hard to understand for students with limited language skills. After explaining that we will study this poem and we'll do it as a street art, students' attention and interest rose.

Every unknown word was shown to students from Google Image so they could build the connection between word and image. Once we learned all words, students selected their favourite part and rewrite it on the paper. Later they took this paper outside and placed it in their favorite place. Students commented how they learned the part of the poem they worked on. They and their parents commented how text was hard, but now they know a lot of new words and it was not hard for them to learn. As a final part of this task, photos of this poems in Finland will be send to the museum in Bosnia that is placed in city where Aleksa Santic, the poet, lived and where he created this poem.

### 2. Historic poems and the poem's message

We selected a poem about our Independence Day and rewrote it to make it understandable to the kids. Then we discuss the themes of the poem and kids portrayed them by drawing and role-playing. We also placed the pictures in chronological order to describe how our independence war started, what happened during the war and how we achieved our independence. We described the themes of the poem by pictures and some important words and expressions. After that, we displayed the pictures in the common space of the school. The purpose of the display was that kids would see and discuss the poem in their break time

with their friends (who could be from their home country or different countries and cultures).

It was a successful project as kids understood the main message of the poem in an artistic way. It made me emotional when I saw their love and respect to the people who sacrificed their own lives and lost their nearest and dearest ones for our independence. It was also quite surprising for me to see how they portrayed the themes by drawing and acting.

## **Questions for the teacher**

### **1. How to prepare?**

Prepare students for uncertainty of street art. One day it's there and tomorrow not. Street art is powerful and provocative. Aim of street art is to make influence and cause reaction. It is having limited time expectation.

### **2. What text do you want to present?**

Is it a traditional poem, or poet whose flag day we are celebrating, is it Nobel prize winner, or is it text your students enjoy, or have challenge understanding?

### **3. To whom do you want to present it?**

Is it just for your students or for next door classroom, or students who are graduating and leaving school this year? Is it to someone out of your school? Neighborhood, or maybe city officials, hospital etc.

### **4. Where is the right place for our text to be presented?**

Ideally texts are put on places where people can see them and places where the text meets the audience. You can place the texts in classrooms or schools, bus stops or parks or for example local hospitals, keeping in mind the audience of the poems. Is it for everyone in waiting hole, or specific department or to doctors in they offices as a thank you gift?

Your task as a teacher is to organize and facilitate this place. You can involve students in communication with authorities as a communication skill development.

### **5. How to present?**

Would it be on sticker papers or in big letters on parking place or printed on notebook that will be given to someone? There is plenty of options you can choose from.

### **6. How to evaluate?**

Always come back to asking what we did? Why we did it and what we achieved with this? And most important how did it personally affected us? How do we feel about this action and what do we think about original text now?