Dear teachers,

The goal of the Mississippi Poetry Project is to help students experience the joy and accomplishment that can come from writing poetry, and from sharing their own voices, words, and experiences. Last year's Mississippi Poetry Project, where students wrote about their hometowns, was a huge success--we received wonderful poems from young people all across the state. This year, we invite students to write about who they are.

Along with this letter, you'll find the poem prompt and tips for you to share with your students. We know that days are tightly scheduled, and our hope is that this project can be done in whatever way best fits your class: in as little as 30 minutes on one day or, if time allows, spread out over multiple days; as a standalone activity or as part of an existing lesson plan. Most importantly, we hope that this project will provide a joyful and creative outlet for students and teachers alike.

As you work on this project with your students, please feel free to share updates on social media with the hashtag #mspoetryproject, and to look for creative ways to celebrate the work your students are doing! Poetry displays, in-class writing "parties," and readings where everyone shares their work are just a few possible ways to have fun and build community around poetry (we've included some more ideas, too).

Poetry is for everyone. There's no wrong way to write a poem, and words can be a tremendous source of delight, play, and comfort. Thank you so much for your help in making this initiative a success, and for all you do in helping to bring the joy of writing to your students.

With deep thanks,

CATHERINE PIERCE
Poet Laureate of Mississippi

✉ mspoetryproject@gmail.com

Poem Prompt

Poems offer us a chance to go beyond the literal to describe the world and ourselves. For this year's Mississippi Poetry Project, you'll think about how you can describe yourself through metaphor (a comparison that helps us understand something, like saying a messy bedroom is "a dump" or an active person is "a busy bee").

How are you feeling today? If you were a dog, would you be a yapping chihuahua bouncing to see out the front door, or an old hound dog lazily gnawing a bone on the couch? If you were weather, would you be a hurricane or a gentle summer breeze?

Start your poem with "I am" or with "Today I am," and then go from there, choosing some details from the list below and/or making up your own metaphors. Feel free to provide some detail about your answers, or to simply let your list stand on its own.

Don't forget to give your poem a title. You might title your poem after how you're feeling today, or with your own name, or something else entirely--it's up to you!

Today I am:
 –kind of fruit
 –kind of dog
 –kind of instrument
 –kind of weather
 –kind of insect
 –kind of car
 –kind of furniture
 –a color
 –a certain highway or street
 –a certain body of water

Here's a short example:

Happiness
 Today I am a terrier barking at squirrels.
 Today I am a street piano, slightly out of tune but loud as ever.
 I am a bumblebee, bright and buzzing.
 A yellow Lamborghini. A strawberry.
 I am the ocean on a windless summer day, nothing but blue, blue, blue.

Overview:
The Mississippi Poetry Project: Who I Am is **a statewide poetry initiative for students in grades K-12**. All students across Mississippi are invited to participate. Each participating school will select three winning poems per grade, which will be sent on to the statewide competition. All schoolwide winners will have their winning poems published in a contest anthology, and statewide winners will be invited to share their work at a reading and celebration.

Timeline:
1. **During the fall, students will write poems using the attached "Who I Am" prompt**. There is no minimum length; poems should be no more than 30 lines.

2. **By December 8, schools will select three winning poems per each grade.** There is no official contest rubric, but judges (selected by each school) should consider the poem's use of specific detail, attention to the senses, and overall creativity/originality. Each of these schoolwide winners will have their poem published in the contest anthology.

Winning poems should be emailed to mspoetryproject@gmail.com by December 8.

Requirements for submission:
- Each poem should include a title and the author's name below the title.

- Each poem should be submitted as an individual Word doc (feel free to send multiple files in one email).

- Each poem should be saved as [Grade Number]_[School]_[Student's Last Name]. For example: 5_South Elem_Johnson.

3. The winning poems from each school will be entered into the statewide poetry contest. **Statewide winners will be announced by February 5, 2024.**

Celebrating & Sharing Student Work

Some ways to share and celebrate students' creative work:

Poetry Display
A poetry display is a great way to help students feel pride in the work they've done. Choose a section of the classroom or the hallway and hang your class's poems up for all to read and enjoy.

Poetry Readings
Listening to poetry really helps it come alive. Invite students to share their work out loud (and encourage the rest of the class to clap when each poet is done reading).

In-class Poetry Parties
There's something wonderful about writing in a community with others. Turn this project into a community-building exercise by making writing a festive experience--depending on students' ages, anything from snacks to colorful markers to the opportunity to sit in groups or outside can help students experience writing as something exciting.

School-Wide Sharing
Invite students to share their poems during morning announcements--a way to start the day by celebrating student creativity!

Social Media
If your school or class has a social media profile, share the work you and your students are doing with the hashtag #mspoetryproject.

Have other ideas for ways to celebrate your students' poems? Let us know at mspoetryproject@gmail.com!

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