

Summary

Entering and Opening the World of a Poem

I chose a poem which is short and accessible and which uses the resources of ambiguity and leaving gaps. These resources draw readers into imagining a “possible world” (Bruner, 1986) of the poem and challenge them to connect the words of the poem to the worlds they live in. The poem I chose was “Keepsake,” from *Honey I Love and Other Love Poems* by Eloise Greenfield (1978)

Keepsake

Before Mrs. Williams died
She told Mr. Williams
When he gets home
To get a nickel out of her
Navy blue pocketbook
And give it to her
Sweet little gingerbread girl
That’s me
I ain’t never going to spend it
(unpaged)

I would like to focus on those strategies and aspects of meaning that reflected the engagement of readers with the gaps in the poem, their entering into the world of the poem and opening the poem out into their own worlds.

Entering the World of the Poem

There are several gaps that need to be filled if we are to make sense of this poem. One gap is the relationship between the speaker, the “sweet little gingerbread girl” and the giver of the keepsake, Mrs. Williams. Another gap is the information about the significance of the nickel: Why does Mrs. Williams choose to give a nickel? Why does the girl decide not to spend it? A third gap is the setting of the poem: When and where does it take place?

Opening to the Outside World

Besides entering the world “inside” the poem, we open the poem out into the larger world by reasoning things through personal experiences and beliefs. Has anyone called you a special nickname or said your name in a way that made you feel especially good? Who do Mr. and Mrs. Williams remind you of in your own life? Do you have a keepsake that reminds you of the person who gave it to you and the things you did together?

Another strategy used was to enact scenes either drawn from the poem or related to the poem. They quoted from the poem and adopted the voices of the characters.

Teachers of poetry need to be readers of poetry. They need to be knowledgeable about the range of poetic forms and impulses – about poems that are lyric, narrative, contemplative, descriptive, and combinations of these genres. In choosing poems to share with children, teachers need to respond honestly to the poems, and to reflect on what resources each poem employs to draw the reader in.