



7GP Contest Best Practices

Announce the contest and start the poetry unit at the beginning of the school year.

Plant the seed for this competition as soon as possible to give students more writing days to be inspired and to begin writing and sharing their poems outside the classroom. Getting the spark to fire up every student's pen is more challenging in a short time period. Two-thirds of last year's participating educators stated they would move the timing of their poetry unit from the second half of the school year to the first half, well before our mid-January contest deadline because of the influence this contest program can have on students and educators' lives.

Engage all 7th graders by giving each a printed copy of our Student Handout. Having a tactile contest handout facilitates some students to share the news of the competition with peers and household members. Posting the handout in 7th grade homerooms and classrooms also provides a stimulating reminder.

Every 7th grader should be strongly encouraged to write a poem of their choice.

Encouraging all students to write a poem can help reluctant writers overcome hindering personality traits or real-life situations as well as improve personal and communication skills through the power of their own pen.

Let students write as many poems as they wish and away from the tension of the classroom environment. Students appreciate opportunities to write and not have the poem be part of a "red-pen" exercise. Also, students at this grade level experience pride when they discover their authentic written voice; they celebrate the chance to create their own work as our book title states, "poetry on our terms."

Let students know that every poem they write should be treated as a trophy.

This idea helps engage more students to believe in the value of their own writing. The metaphor also helps them understand that while some poems may need more polishing than others, all should be celebrated.

Suggest that students value the title of their poem. Titles present an opportunity for students to express creativity and entice and inform the poem's reader. One-word titles and titles incorporating writing prompts should be discouraged (e.g., Hope, Love, Just Because, Who I Am).

Display poems written by all students in the school's most public spaces (e.g., main hallways, cafeteria) throughout the school year. This will create a cultural shift in the school that promotes freedom of expression through writing, that every student's poetic voice matters, and these voices should be heard and celebrated beyond this writing competition. This ever-changing display of "trophies" also builds progressive excitement as new poems are posted, generating more ideas for themes and styles for more students to write and more poems to see and appreciate. By May's national Reading Month, all students in the school can feel empowered and more confident in expressing themselves through writing.



Invest in monthly 30-second contest reminders. These help students remember that there is still time to write the winning poem of their choice for submission by the school contest deadline of January 19, 2016.

Do not let the students decide the school's winning poem. While some schools have had success letting students reduce the competition to the Top 5 or 10 poems, the final selection process is best left to adults who would select the poem based strictly on the words on paper and include more than a popular theme as a focus of the selection. We know that students perceive that the selection of the poem will be fairer if the poem is reviewed on an anonymous "blind" basis involving more than one teacher as a judge.

Be expected to be surprised who will be your best poet and how many students will become interest in poetry. Our rule to judge the poem based solely on written content has resulted in 70% of the educators stating the poem they selected was written by a student they did not expect to win the contest. Equally surprising, 70% of the student winners said this is the first contest of any type that they had won. Communicating the possibility that "anyone can write a great poem" will create enthusiasm for the genre and the contest among both students and their educators.

Some schools offer a contest for each grade. Some schools offer a small cash prize and some publish a book of poems from all grades of students. The reason for doing this is because The 7GP Contest becomes a contagious motivator for all students to share their written words.

Multi-disciplined learning opens up more inspiration for poetry writing. Students have said that classes in history, current events, science, art, music and other subjects have inspired them to write. Mentioning this helps some students to find a theme for their poem.