

Riverside Goes with the Flow of Its Poetry

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April 27, 2005

Riverside School students are transforming life into art this week, turning even the most banal details into poetry.

"We are stuck in traffic/My dog is barking at Mom/And my mom is tired," wrote James DeFazio, 8, during an in-class poetry workshop led by Ted Scheu, one of four professional poets working with the kindergarten through fifth-grade students as part of the school's first Poetry Week. The week was developed and funded by the PTA's Arts in Education Committee.

DeFazio and other second-graders were learning to write senryus -- three-line, un-rhymed poems of 17 syllables that Scheu described as "a haiku with attitude."

While haiku focuses on nature, senryu focuses on human nature. Several other students in Audrey Barrette's class focused on the unpleasant nature of their siblings.

"These forms (of poetry) help students in their regular writing because they learn to be careful about their word choices," said Scheu, a former teacher who has been the school's poet-in-residence for the past several years.

Meanwhile, fifth graders received instruction from poet and writing professor Corie Feiner on more advanced poetic terms, such as alliteration, plosives and fricatives.

"Poetry is music, story and song," the students chanted together in a lilting rhythm with accompanying hand gestures. Feiner, who teaches at Manhattanville College, reminded them that "you are going to use your words as instruments."

Elsewhere, Dave Johnson, a poet, playwright, editor and writing teacher, worked with kindergartners and first graders, while performance artist and poet David Zucker performed his "Poetry in Motion."

Poetry Week grew out of the school's annual Poem In Your Pocket Day, in which participants either write their own poem or copy another poet's work to carry with them and read to others throughout the day. Poetry Week will culminate with a Poem In Your Pocket Day celebration at 2 p.m. Friday.

"What we like about Poetry Week is that it is an in-class, artist-in-residence model, as opposed to pulling the kids out for an assembly," Principal John Grasso said. "They are actually working on poetry during their reading and writing time. It is part of their curriculum."

But the poetry is not limited to the classroom. Several students called out "I've got a new poem!" or "I've got 10 poems!" to Scheu as they passed him in the halls after the workshop. Grasso said a kindergartner stopped him in the hall yesterday morning to recite his latest poem.

Students can drop their compositions into a submissions box in the hallway. A committee of teachers will select the best for publication in the school's biannual literary journal, *Riverside Writes*.

"The poets have been just totally blown away by what the kids have brought to the table," Grasso said. "It is just everyone thinking about poetry for the week."