



## Writing Fundamentals

## Poetry

# Editing: Poets Create Emphasis

### Rationale:

Poets use capital letters, exclamation points, spacing, and typeface to create emphasis. Students recognize how the poets they read use these devices and attempt to emulate these writing conventions.

### Preparation:

- Use *Little Dog and Duncan* by Kristine O'Connell George (*Place "Crash!" and "Sit!" and one other poem of your choosing on overhead transparencies.*)
- Chart Paper

### Teaching:

#### Inform

One of the things that's so much fun about reading and writing poetry is getting to play with our language and experiment with how our words look on the page. Poets change the size of a word, place it in suspension in the middle of a page, use exclamation points, or spell a word all in capital letters to create emphasis; in other words, to signal a reader to read a particular word more loudly, more enthusiastically, more emphatically.

#### Present

Place the transparency of "Crash!" on the overhead and read it aloud. In this poem, the title is really the very first word of the poem. Do you see how Kristine has used an exclamation point? That tells the reader that the crash makes a really big noise. Then the reader sees Little Dog and his little girl run to see what kind of trouble Duncan might be in. And what kind of trouble is he in? That's right, BIG trouble! Kristine chose to write the word BIG in all capital letters because doing that emphasizes how BIG the BIG trouble is. On a chart write: "Duncan is a big dog" and "Duncan is a BIG dog." Read the two sentences, stressing the emphasis in the second one. Do you hear the difference in the two sentences? That difference is emphasis. Exclamation points and words written in all capital letters create emphasis, so writing "Duncan is a BIG dog" makes it clear that he's a really, really, really big dog! Let's look at another poem of Kristine's called "Sit!" Place the poem on the overhead, read, and point out the title is the first word of the poem. Do you see how Kristine has chosen to use an exclamation point? That makes the reader read it more like the command we might give a dog to "sit!" And Duncan is a good boy and does as he is commanded, but what happens? That's right, he "squashes" the flowers. Do you see how

Kristine makes the word "squashed" all tiny and squashed looking? That really emphasizes how smooshed those petunias are, doesn't it?

#### Engage

I think Kristine had a lot of fun thinking about how she could make her words look on the page to emphasize certain things and help readers read her poem. Can you find other examples where our poets have used these ways of creating emphasis? Place a poem of your choosing on the overhead and walk through it with students, letting them tell you what they notice about how the poet chose to create emphasis.

#### Reiterate

Using exclamation points, capital letters, or different sizes of writing creates emphasis that helps readers see what is important and shows readers how the poem should be read—whether a word should be read more loudly than the others. I want you to look at the poems you've been revising and think about how the finished product should look on the page. Consider how you might emphasize descriptive words by writing them in all capital letters or using exclamation points to let the reader know you want some words read loudly. Oh, and make sure that you don't use all capitals or exclamation points on things you don't really mean to emphasize.

### Conference Questions:

- What words did you highlight or emphasize today? Why?
- Did you read your piece aloud to check how it sounds?

### Extension:

- Use poems from *Splish Splash* to further explore how poets capitalize letters and employ exclamation points to create emphasis.
- Add "editing," "emphasis," "spacing," "exclamation points," and/or "different sized lettering" to the poetry wall display or "Recipe for a Poem" poster begun in *Immersion*.





# Editing: Capitalization



### Rationale:

Poets play with conventions. It is important for students to know the rules and proper use of conventions. Breaking the rules of conventions is a feature of poetry and should be addressed as thoughtful choices poets make.

### Preparation:

- “*coin and aquarium*” from *all the small poems and fourteen more* by Valerie Worth
- “*Rabbit*” from *Fireflies at Midnight* by Marilyn Singer
- “*Ducks on a Winter Night*” from *Creatures of the Earth, Sea, and Sky* by Georgia Heard
- Transparency of “Rules of Capitalization” (see Appendix)

### Teaching:

#### Inform

We already know a lot about the rules for using capital letters. Poets know these rules, too, but as you may have noticed, they sometimes break them. Today, we are going to edit our poems by thinking about capital letters. We are going to make sure we followed the rules, and in places where we decided to break them, we are going to make sure we can explain why.

#### Present

Let’s look at our list of capitalization rules to remind us of what we already know. *Show and read the “Rules of Capitalization” chart (see Appendix).* The last rule may be new to you because it applies particularly to poetry. It is a rule that has been around as long as people have been writing poetry. This is a rule Valerie Worth never breaks. Let’s look at a couple of her poems. *Show “coin and aquarium.”* Although Valerie never breaks it, this is probably the rule most frequently broken by poets. Look at these two poems, one by Marilyn Singer and the other by Georgia Heard. *Show and read “Rabbit” and “Ducks on a Winter Night.”* Why do you think these two poets chose to break the rule? What effect does breaking the rule have on their poems? *Give students time to think and respond.*

The poem “Rabbit” reads like a whisper. The rabbit is hiding and doesn’t want to be found. Using only lowercase letters adds to the effect and tone of the poem.

Like sleeping ducks, Georgia Heard’s poem is calm and gentle. It is possible that Georgia thought about that when she decided to break the capitalization rule. Using a capital letter at the beginning of each line may have broken this flow and “woken those ducks.” Let’s look at rule number 3 on our list.

Read the 3rd rule on the list. Show the poems “Rabbit” and “Ducks On A Winter Night” again. It looks like both of these poets followed this rule. But let’s look closer at Georgia Heard’s choices. Do all the words in her title seem important? *Give students time to respond.* Note the words “on” and “a.” Why do you think she capitalized those words? Are those important words in her title? Although those words are normally not considered important to a title, in this poem they are essential to the action and setting of the poem.

Now, let’s look at Valerie Worth’s poems again. *Show “coin and aquarium.”* Did Valerie Worth follow rule number 3? Why do you think she made the choice she did? *Discuss how none of her titles are capitalized.* It is possible she wanted to add to the “smallness” of her subjects by not capitalizing them.

#### Engage

Before we go off to make some important choices about capitalization in our poems, let’s reread our chart of rules together. *Have students read aloud the “Rules of Capitalization” chart along with you. Stop for clarification when needed.*

#### Reiterate

You all know the rules. As poets, think about how you will apply them. If you do decide to break a rule, be sure you can explain your reasoning.

### Conference Questions:

- What places in your work did you practice applying these rules?
- What rule was most useful for you? Show me where you used that rule to help your writing.

### Extension:

*Look for examples of how poets use capitalization for emphasis.*

### Appendix:

“Rules of Capitalization”



# Rules of Capitalization

1. Capitalize the first word in a sentence.
2. Capitalize names of particular persons or places.
3. Capitalize the first word and all important words in a title.
4. Capitalize the title of a person when it is used in place of the name: Mom, Dad, Grandma.
5. Capitalize titles of people when followed by the name:  
Uncle Joe.
6. Don't capitalize a title when it follows "my": my  
grandma, my mom.
7. Do not capitalize names of seasons.
8. Capitalize the first words in lines of poetry.



## Editing II: Punctuating Poetry



### Rationale:

In poetry the spaces between words and stanzas are considered punctuation in a grammatical sense because they serve to organize and clarify the poem. Considering this, some poets choose to include punctuation and some rely solely on white space.

### Preparation:

- *Baseball, Snakes and Summer Squash* p. 35
- *Come With Me* pp. 18–19 and 20–21
- Copies of “Editing Checklist” (see Appendix)

### Teaching:

#### Inform

Punctuation marks guide readers. They help readers read fluidly and understand what they are reading. Poets use white space in the same way that other kinds of writers use punctuation marks. Today we are going to talk about punctuation and white space in poetry.

#### Present

We all know about punctuation marks like commas, periods, and exclamation points. In every genre of writing these things are very important. Every genre, that is, except for poetry. In poetry, there is no one set of rules about using punctuation.

Some poets follow all the rules and use punctuation as they would in any other genre. Mary Testa does this, and so does Donald Graves. Here is one of his poems. *Read and show* *Baseball, Snakes, and Summer Squash*. What punctuation do you notice?

In some poems Naomi Shihab Nye follows all the rules of punctuation. *Read and show* “*Out There*.” What punctuation do you notice?

However, other times she does not follow the rules. *Read and show* “*Somebody’s Story*.” In this poem Naomi uses only white space to

guide the readers. Why do you think she made that choice? *There is not one correct answer. You may find an interesting discussion about voice and who is the speaker of the poem. Perhaps the speaker of the poem is a person or perhaps an object or thing. If it is an object or thing, punctuation rules wouldn’t apply.* Although some poems include punctuation marks and some do not, all poems include white space. White space can serve the same function that punctuation marks do.

For example, we have discussed line breaks. If I am writing a poem and I want my reader to pause before reading more, what can I do? *Give students a moment to respond.* When we use line breaks, we create white space and tell the reader what to do.

#### Engage

Talk to the person sitting next to you about punctuation. Discuss your plans about using punctuation and white space. Share your reasoning.

#### Reiterate

Edit your poems, thinking about punctuation and white space. As you consider how you will use punctuation, be sure you can validate your choices. I will be giving all of you an editing checklist. It will include the proper usage of common punctuation as well as some things to consider about the use of white space.

### Appendix:

“Editing Checklist”



# Editing Checklist

## Punctuation Marks

- Have you ended all your sentences with a period, exclamation point, or question mark?
- Have you used a comma to separate items in a list?
- Have you used a comma before and after quotation marks?
- Have you used quotation marks to punctuate dialogue?
- Have you applied capitalization rules?
- Have you used colons and semicolons appropriately?

## White Space Considerations

- Have you used line breaks to inform the reader when it is time to pause?
- Have you skipped lines to get the reader to stop for a longer beat?
- Have you used white space to highlight or make a word or group of words stand out?