

Collaborative Poetry

A productive and enriching experience for both you and your teen is spending a day at an art museum, exploring the collections and exhibits on display, and sharing thoughts about particular works. But if traveling to a museum is impractical, here's a fun activity to expose your child to works of visual art and written verse, and in doing so, provide an opportunity for both of you to write creatively!

Observing and interpreting a painting's detail; paying careful attention to the position, function, and sound of a single word in a line of poetry; practicing the several stages of the writing process; collaborating with one whose perspective may be different from her own—these are all activities that will allow your child to develop as a reader, writer, and student.



What You Need:

- Internet access
- Dictionary
- 2 journals or notebooks
- 2 writing implements

What You Do:

1. The first step is to get on the Internet (or take a look in your own library or in your local library) and locate these two works of art:

John William Waterhouse's painting "The Lady of Shalott" (If you live in or are traveling to London, visit the Tate Gallery where you can see the real thing!)

Pieter Bruegel's painting "The Fall of Icarus" (If you are in Belgium, you can see Bruegel's work on display at the Royal Museum of Fine Arts.)

2. Without doing any research on the background of the painters or their subjects, look carefully at the paintings and share your observations, responses and questions. Be attentive to the detail of the work. Each of you will need to have a journal on hand to record your observations.
3. Once you both feel you've explored each work sufficiently, return to the Internet or artbook to investigate the background of each painting. Do some research on Waterhouse and Bruegel, their subjects, and the historical context in which each work was created. As you share your research, ask yourself if and how your initial response to the paintings has changed. Record those thoughts in your journal.
4. Now, imagine a story behind one of these two paintings. Integrate a part of the research you have while allowing yourself to breathe life into a character. Begin recording in your journal bits of your imagined narrative. You will ultimately craft a free verse poem from these notes. You may both select to write about the same painting or you may not, but you will be writing collaboratively as you write your own piece.
5. Consider the point of view from which you will be writing this narrative poem. Will you take on the voice of the Lady? Are you writing from the point of view of Daedalus?
6. Consider your audience. Are you directing the poem to anyone in particular? And what dominant impression would you like to create? Making these decisions is the first step in crafting this short poem. Have fun with these initial scribbles, which may be in the form of a list of details, a series of questions, a first-thought-best-thought response or a list of verbs and nouns.

7. Before you begin to develop your narrative poem, you'll need to do one more bit of research. Locate these two poems:

Alfred Lord Tennyson's poem, "The Lady of Shalott"

William Carlos Williams' poem, "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus."

8. Read each poem aloud, switching back and forth between readers. Share each other's reactions to the poems. What are you hearing? Which words in particular stand out, and why? As you discuss, jot down some of these observations.
9. Together, sit down and, in your journals, begin to write your poems. Be willing to share a line or two as you move through the process of drafting. Have a dictionary on hand and don't hesitate to ask for help from one another. No knowledge of poetic form or meter is necessary for this writing: the point is to create a poem that emerges from the collaboration of parent and child in the activity of observing, discussing, reading and writing.
10. Read your poems aloud to one another, or to the whole family!

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