

Texas Poetry Live: Poetry Exercises for Grades 6 to 16

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Presenters and Contributors

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David Meischen's poetry has appeared recently in *Southern Poetry Review*, *The Southern Review*, and *Texas Poetry Journal*. A high school English teacher for 27 years, Meischen currently works with prospective English teachers at the University of Texas, Austin. He is co-founder of Dos Gatos Press and co-editor of the Texas Poetry Calendar.

Michelle Paulsen, Assistant Professor of English at Victoria College, has published three books of poetry, most recently *Labor and Delivery*. She has been teaching since 1990 and was nominated for a Pushcart Prize in 2002.

Scott Wiggerman is the author of *Vegetables and Other Relationships* and editor of five *di-verse-city* anthologies for the Austin International Poetry Festival. A public school librarian for twenty years, Wiggerman is co-founder of Dos Gatos Press and co-editor of the Texas Poetry Calendar.

Additional Contributors

Anne McCrady (Henderson, Texas) is the founder of Inspirity, a company committed to inspirational publications and programs, and author of the 2004 volume *Along Greathouse Road*.

Patrick Allen Wright (Silsbee, Texas) was born in Beaumont and raised in the Big Thicket; he has resumed his poetic adventures at Lamar University as an English lecturer after many years out of the public eye.

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Observing and Describing

Descriptive poetry *takes you there*; it transplants the reader from the present to the place in the poem. To create descriptive poetry, writers may sit and observe (“Texas Garden in November”), rely on the power of memory (“Stackin’ Sacks”), or turn everyday/seasonal activities into poetry (“The Pecan Trees”). The sit-and-observe exercise below allows students to use imagery and figurative language to create their poems.

The Process:

1. **Read** examples of descriptive poems to the students (see samples above). Help the students visualize the setting, objects, etc. in each poem; then, help them discover other imagery evident in them.
2. Have the students **sit and observe**. If possible, take them outside or to the cafeteria or the library when another class is there—any place where they can observe. If taking the entire group is not feasible, assign the observation for homework.
3. Students should **brainstorm/list** what they observe through all of their senses. It might help to give them a chart to guide them. (Sensory Chart included on the next page.)
4. Next, the students will **turn their observations into a poem**. If you want their poems to rhyme, assign a rhyming poem. If you want them to write free verse or a sonnet or some other form, assign it. Or, leave the form choice up to the students. You could ask them to **include any figurative language** you might have recently studied (simile, metaphor, alliteration, onomatopoeia, etc.).
5. Depending on class size, have students **share their poems**, either with the entire class or in small groups. They will probably be reluctant at first, but remind them that most of their classmates are feeling likewise.
6. Now it’s time to **revise**. Help the students revise for conciseness; compactness; precise, vivid words; etc. Ex: “By killing my roaring diesel engine / I begin to notice my surroundings” becomes “Killing the roaring diesel engine / I notice my surroundings.” Have them eliminate articles. Ex: “The birds fly” becomes “Birds fly.” Reduce progressive tense. Ex: “Bees are buzzing” becomes “Bees buzz.” Avoid clichés.
7. Students are now ready to **rewrite** their poems. Either have them type their poems or neatly handwrite them. Just like any writing, the final draft needs to be **proofread**.
8. **Share** again. Students appreciate the transformations of their own poems as well as those of their classmates. (Plus, the TEKS include listening, sharing, and evaluating!)

Exercise by Mary Margaret Campbell

MARY MARGARET CAMPBELL (George West, Texas) was born into a ranching and rodeoing family in the Brush Country of South Texas; she teaches high school English at her alma mater. She writes poetry as Mary Margaret Dougherty.

Sensory Observation Chart

Place: _____

Time: _____

Sight	Sound
Smell	Taste
Motion	Touch

Stackin Sacks

Shafts of golden sun sneaking into the feed room
through wooden cracks;
A wider angled stream shining across concrete
through the pasture door;
Dark light struggling from the stalls;

Air heavy with horse feed
Thick, stifling
Nose wrinkling
Eyes straining.

No old saddles hanging on ropes from rafters
in *this* room.
Only tawny tow sacks;
some full of dry, dusty oats
and some empty, tossed haphazardly aside—
untidy mounds begging for order
like a messy cook's kitchen.

The feed store will pay for these sacks,
in bundles of ten—
Labor too menial for Dad
but apparently not for me.

Mary Margaret Dougherty

MARY MARGARET DOUGHERTY (George West, Texas) was born into a ranching and rodeoing family in the Brush Country of South Texas; she teaches high school English at her alma mater. You can find her poem in the *Texas Poetry Calendar 2006*, October 29.

The Pecan Trees

The last leaves have given up,
limbs laid bare as driftwood,
the gray of winter creeks.

The yard is littered with small branches,
broken fingers, crooked, cracked.
I never see them fall—never!—

but there they are, strewn
across the ashen grass,
the debris of abandoned resolutions.

Bent low to the earth,
I gather and clear them—
leaves, twigs, all the dead things

that have collected around me—
testaments to December's end,
the prayers of another year.

Scott Wiggerman

SCOTT WIGGERMAN is the author of *Vegetables and Other Relationships* and editor of five *di-verse-city* anthologies for the Austin International Poetry Festival. His long-running website is <http://swig.tripod.com>. You can find his poem in the *Texas Poetry Calendar 2006*, inside the back cover.

Texas Garden in November

purple-flowered stalks buzz
in the midday sun.
bees thrust their heads inside
violet cones, dive deep, retract;
one solitary bee sits
on a miniature daisy
washing its face,
front legs sweeping
over compound eyes.

i stop counting the hungry hunters at six,
watch rapt as they plunge
as if in bee-thought choreography;
watch them arch and straighten,
buzz and light down the stalk,
tremble the petals
of the waiting flowers.

Cindy Huyser

CINDY HUYSER (Austin, Texas) is a computer scientist and former power plant operator whose work has appeared in numerous Texas journals and anthologies. You can find her poem in the *Texas Poetry Calendar 2006*, November 12.

No Ideas But in Things

– William Carlos Williams

A poetry workshop/exercise for grades 6-16

I recently moved to Texas, and was continually and immediately struck by the skies. Many days of the week, I would find myself searching for my camera, trying to capture the fleeting feeling that the sky inspired; a feeling of promise, of freedom, of possibility, of things opening up.

Of course, feelings such as this are hard to capture, let alone express in a way that others will feel the same as you (which was my goal). This problem of connecting or representing real life through language is central to this exercise, which usually produces some strong, concrete poetry.

The Process:

1. Either supply, or have your students/participants bring an interesting object or image to class (a “thing”).
2. Then, have them spend five minutes or so listing words, nouns and verbs exclusively (absolutely no adjectives!) that describe or apply to their object or image.
3. Next, have them arrange these words into a poem; you may then allow for other parts of speech to be used, but only as necessary to connect the words in their original list.
4. Finally, and this step is optional, you might attach and/or super-impose the poems on the objects/images, and display them, allowing each participant to see/read the results. (This last step also makes for quite an “art show;” you may want to collaborate with someone in this discipline.)

Exercise by Michelle Paulsen

MICHELLE PAULSEN (Victoria, Texas) is Assistant Professor of English at Victoria College and has published three books of poetry, most recently *Labor and Delivery*.

the first time
i came
here, i was
sold. i knew
the clichés, of course;
but they turned
out to be
mirrors of
the truth.
the sky is
much larger than
the land we
live on. each day
the sky opens
and grants
permission to sit
on the roof
with my shirt off
drinking beer.

Michelle Paulsen

MICHELLE PAULSEN (Victoria, Texas) is Assistant Professor of English at Victoria College and has published three books of poetry, most recently *Labor and Delivery*. You can find her poem in the *Texas Poetry Calendar 2006*, April 23.

Extended Metaphor

Students often have a difficult time choosing a topic for a poem, and once the topic is chosen, they often struggle with where to go with it. This exercise is designed to assist them with both challenges. It offers students guidance in how to create a poem based on a single metaphor—and its associated vocabulary and imagery—which is then extended not only throughout a poem, but also applied (extended?) to any topic of their choosing. Model poems: “Palo Duro Canyon,” by Carol Coffee Reposa; “Magic Act,” by Scott Wiggerman; “Grandma Could Mend Anything,” by Lianne Elizabeth Mercer.

The Process:

1. Divide students into groups of three or four. Each group will choose **magic** or **sewing** and brainstorm everything they can that’s related to the topic by way of items associated with it, vocabulary unique to it, etc. Time limit: 5 minutes.
2. Read aloud the three model poems, asking students to listen carefully for any words or phrases that they came up with during the brainstorming session. If they hear one in the poem that is on their list, they should circle it. (Read each poem twice if need be.) Then hand out the poems.
3. Ask the students to identify the topic of the three poems, which is *not* magic or sewing. Explain how what the poets have done is use an **extended metaphor** to develop a poem on three topics entirely different from magic or sewing (it might be useful to point out the two poems based on magic for comparison/contrast, so the students can see how the same metaphor—and even some of the same vocabulary—can be used to create poems on two different subjects!).
4. Have each group choose a topic from below and brainstorm ways in which the words and phrases of the initial brainstorming on **magic** or **sewing** can be applied to their topic. Topics: **astronomy, gardening, hunting, cleaning, sports, building (something), computers, photography, cooking, music, automobiles, dating**
5. Assign students to write a poem—individually—on this topic, and at least **five** of the lines must use an extended metaphor centered around **magic** or **sewing**. This poem can be written in the remaining class time or it can be assigned as homework. Ideally, time will be provided for students to read their new poems aloud so that other students can hear the many possibilities of the extended metaphor.
6. The beauty of the Extended Metaphor exercise is that it can be repeated endlessly by switching the metaphors and topics around (e.g., brainstorm **computers** and **cooking** in step one, and add **magic** and **sewing** to the list of topics in step four), and it does not have to be done as a group exercise.

Exercise by Scott Wiggerman

SCOTT WIGGERMAN is the author of *Vegetables and Other Relationships* and editor of five *di-verse-city* anthologies for the Austin International Poetry Festival. His long-running website is <http://swig.tripod.com>

Palo Duro Canyon

The magic show begins
A few miles out of town
Makes high plains vanish
In thin air, pulls scarves
From sandstone hats
For twenty million years.
Gold and russet roar, red churns
On stones, blue hums in cottonwoods.
I never meet the conjurer
With all those colors up his sleeve
The sorcerer with boulders
In his hands, levitating caprock
Balancing an outcrop on his head.

I never hear his incantations
Dream instead of shades,
Almost see Georgia O'Keeffe
Scrambling up a hill, sketchbook
In her arms to paint some sensual poppy
All those epic flowers
Everything in motion swaying
Past the names designed
To keep them still: Sad Monkey, Goodnight,
Lighthouse, Prairie Dog Town.
I see it all, believe,
Before the artist finally escapes
Leaving just the props.

Carol Coffee Reposa

CAROL COFFEE REPOSA (San Antonio, Texas) has twice been a nominee for a Pushcart Prize and is the author of three books of poetry, including *The Green Room* and *Facts of Life*. You can find her poem in the *Texas Poetry Calendar 2006*, April 9.

Magic Act

I am a magician.
This is my bag of tricks.
In it are thirty-five years
of phrases and phases,
lines long forgotten,
others conjured of late.

Here scraps become nuggets
at the snap of a finger.
Here fragments from a hat
shape into similes,
flutter away like doves.

With sleight of hand
I manipulate metaphors;
I invoke images
with the wave of a wand.
Alliteration is my abracadabra.

Through a cloud of smoke
I utter incantations,
mysterious staccatos
of stops and starts
that materialize slowly
into poems.

Such is the craft
of my magic.

Scott Wiggerman

SCOTT WIGGERMAN is the author of *Vegetables and Other Relationships* and editor of five *di-verse-city* anthologies for the Austin International Poetry Festival. His long-running website is <http://swig.tripod.com>

Grandma Could Mend Anything

In her sweet grass basket, she
kept needle, scissors and a rainbow
of darning cotton, in case
she was handed worn socks or trousers
with a hole in the pocket,
a dress with a ripped seam,
a girl with watering eyes, or an old woman
with a turned-down mouth. Her stitches
were tidy, the needle swift.

The fabric of our lives invited
Grandma's calloused, stiff fingers
to weave soft threads across spirit holes
as though we broken ones
needed to catch our patched breath
so we could do
what we were meant to do,
weave our lives without thought
of scissors or yesterday or
tomorrow.

Lianne Elizabeth Mercer

LIANNE ELIZABETH MERCER (Fredericksburg, Texas) does poem-making workshops with nurses and social workers at Methodist Hospital in San Antonio and will have work appearing in *The Poetry of Nursing*. You can find her poem in the *Texas Poetry Calendar 2006*, October 15.

Framing and Repetition

“Lesson from a Black Cowboy,” by John D. Evans, begins and ends with the same line: “What I learned from Walter Hearn.” The body of the poem develops through a series of answers to the question *how*. This kind of development can be very reassuring to a struggling or reluctant writer: once she/he has the first line, the last line is ready and waiting. And the writer drafts the poem simply by answering the question “How?” several times.

The Process:

1. Read the poem with your students. Help them to discover the open/closing frame, as well as the poem’s development through answers to the question *how*.

Note: If your students are ready for this kind of terminology, introduce them to *anaphora*—repetition of a word/words at the beginning of a series of phrases/clauses (e.g. Evans’ use of *how* to introduce a series of infinitive structures). Remember: Learning to identify anaphora and to appreciate its uses is much more important than memorizing a definition.

2. Have your students brainstorm a list of persons who have taught them lessons about life. Model this process beforehand by naming several individuals from whom you’ve learned valuable life lessons.
3. Ask your students to choose one person from their brainstorm and write the opening line:

What I learned from Name Here

Students are to begin the second line: *Is how*.

4. Allow approximately ten minutes for students to develop the body of the poem—by answering the question *how* several times as vividly as possible. I always encourage students to look at the model poem as often as necessary. Remember: Sometimes imitation *is* the sincerest form of flattery—and a step toward success for the struggling writer. Remember too: We all struggle as writers. This exercise can also work well for confident, accomplished writers. Exercise is good for all us.
5. When students sense the poem reaching its close, they repeat the first line—as the last line. Presto!—A Poem.

Exercise by David Meischen

DAVID MEISCHEN’s poetry has appeared recently in *Southern Poetry Review*, *The Southern Review*, and *Texas Poetry Journal*. Recipient of the Merit Scholarship in Poetry at the 2004 Taos Summer Writers’ Conference, Meischen is co-founder of Dos Gatos Press and co-editor of the Texas Poetry Calendar.

Lesson from a Black Cowboy

What I learned from Wendell Hearn
Is how to handle a stallion
How to catch a calf around the neck
And put him on his back
How to hustle and handle a bumpy ride
Become a master of every curve
How to hold on tight and never let go is
What I learned from Wendell Hearn

John D. Evans

JOHN D. EVANS (Oak Park, Illinois) is a Learning Behavior Specialist in the Chicago Public School system and a member of the Poetry Society of America and the Academy of American Poets. You can find his poem in the *Texas Poetry Calendar 2006*, March 5.

Contrasting Stanzas

“Along the Railroad Tracks,” by Lounell Whitaker, is built on contrast—between the first stanza’s images of snakes, weeds, nettles and the second stanza’s blue sky and blueberries. This kind of structured contrast can make for a quick writing exercise, as well as a successful poem.

The Process:

1. Read the poem with your students. Help them to discover the contrasts between the two stanzas.
2. Have your students brainstorm a list of places, scenes or settings that have contrast built into them. Model this process by naming places/scenes/settings of your own and briefly describing the contrasting elements of each one you share.
3. As your students to choose a single item from their list and start the first stanza:
We didn’t think about . . .
4. Students are to develop the first stanza by concentrating on the positive (or the negative) in the place/scene/setting they’ve chosen.
5. When students have developed the first stanza, they will skip a line and start the second stanza:
We only knew . . .
6. Students will build their second stanza on contrasts to the first. Encourage your students to look at the model poem as often as necessary. Remember: Sometimes imitation *is* the sincerest form of flattery—and a step toward success for the struggling writer. Remember too: We all struggle as writers. This exercise can also work well for confident, accomplished writers. Exercise is good for all us.

Exercise by David Meischen

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Along the Railroad Track

We didn't think about the possibility
of snakes slithering among the density
of weeds, nor did we consider
the nettles there,

we only knew the sky was blue
and we were young and dewberries
were ready for reaping.

Lounelle Whitaker

LOUNELL WHITAKER (Beaumont, Texas) is a member of the Beaumont Chapter of the Poetry Society of Texas and author of a book of family history in poetry and prose, *Echoes*. You can find her poem in the *Texas Poetry Calendar 2006*, April 23.

Praise for the Un-Praised

In “A Rare but Passionate Ode to Houston,” Mary Gomez Parham uses powerful, evocative images to bring Houston to life. But notice how repetition provides her poem with both structure and rhythm.

The Process:

1. Read the poem with your students. Help them to discover how the poem develops through repetition—of *they haven't/they've never* and *maybe*. Help them to identify the vivid images at work in the poem. (My personal favorite is “brash crickets bray in their dark beds.”) If your students are ready for it, take a look at alliteration (because, brash, bray; grasshoppers, green) and the wonderful sibilance of the poem’s *s* sounds.
2. Have each student brainstorm a list of things/places/experiences that arouse distaste in many people but that the student finds appealing for some reason. Model this process beforehand by identifying a couple of your own. I love Dickens novels, for example, for exactly the reasons that so many secondary students do not.

Note: You could allow students to do the reverse: list things/places/experiences that are generally liked but which they do not like. Most of us have had this experience. I, for example, don’t find Monty Python humorous.

3. Ask your students to choose one item, then write their first two lines and start the third line:

Maybe they hate/like you, subject here
because they haven’t lived you:
haven’t lived

4. Students will develop the poem, using a vivid image or images to finish the third line and move on into the poem. As an image comes to a close, students will begin again—by using variations on *they haven't/they've never/maybe they haven't*. Encourage your students to look at the model poem as often as necessary. Remember: Sometimes imitation *is* the sincerest form of flattery—and a step toward success for the struggling writer. Remember too: We all struggle as writers. This exercise can also work well for confident, accomplished writers. Exercise is good for all us.

Exercise by David Meischen

DAVID MEISCHEN’s poetry has appeared recently in *Southern Poetry Review*, *The Southern Review*, and *Texas Poetry Journal*. Recipient of the Merit Scholarship in Poetry at the 2004 Taos Summer Writers’ Conference, Meischen is co-founder of Dos Gatos Press and co-editor of the Texas Poetry Calendar.

A Rare but Passionate Ode to Houston

Maybe they hate you, Houston,
because they haven't lived you:
haven't lived those soft summer evenings when
brash crickets bray in their dark beds,
grasshoppers wait green with yearning or envy
and blue mosquito hawks hunt under the eaves.
Or maybe they've never lain at night
on a still-warm sidewalk or just
haven't stroked the breathing belly of a toad.
Could be they've never seen cicadas flap frantically
out and away from their capsular wombs
and heard the desperate joy of the cicada-song
they've waited seventeen years to sing.
Maybe they've never rolled with a lover
on fresh-mown St. Augustine grass,
haven't smelled wisteria in March,
haven't stood still in sudden surprise at
the relentless coming of a blue norther.
Or maybe they do know you, reckless place,
but can't bear what's wild in the world.

Mary Gomez Parham

MARY GOMEZ PARHAM (Houston, Texas) has published scholarly essays on Latin American literature in many journals and books in the U.S. and Latin America, as well as poems in magazines like *The Caribbean Writer*. You can find her poem in the *Texas Poetry Calendar 2006*, June 18.

Structure, Senses, Metaphor

“Sea Glass,” by Cynthia Bowen, uses a deceptively simple structure: three short stanzas, each beginning with the same line (“When I am old”), each developed by appealing to the senses, each developing the metaphor implicit in the title.

The Process:

1. Read the poem with your students. Help them to discover the poem's structure and its images. A discussion of sounds would be appropriate, especially Bowen's reliance on *s* sounds. Have your students consider the poem's title and how all the poem's images of age are also images of sea glass.
2. Assign an adjective that would be appropriate for your students or have them brainstorm and help choose one. *When I am happy* or *When I am sad* could work for most secondary students. Or, instead of, *When I am old*, you might try *When I am 25*.
3. Once the class has settled on an adjective for the opening line, brainstorm metaphors that would help to develop the poem.
4. Have small student groups choose a metaphor from the list and brainstorm things about the metaphor that would help to develop the meaning of the adjective in the opening line. (Or conduct this step as a guided discussion with the entire class.)
5. Have students draft a poem in three stanzas. The title is the metaphor. The first line of each stanza is the same: “When I am adjective.” Each stanza is developed using sensory images that relate to the title metaphor.

Note: Depending on the maturity and independence of your students as writers, you might ask students to go through this whole process independently—choosing their own first-line adjective and their own metaphor.

Exercise by David Meischen

DAVID MEISCHEN's poetry has appeared recently in *Southern Poetry Review*, *The Southern Review*, and *Texas Poetry Journal*. Recipient of the Merit Scholarship in Poetry at the 2004 Taos Summer Writers' Conference, Meischen is co-founder of Dos Gatos Press and co-editor of the Texas Poetry Calendar.

Sea Glass

When I am old
I shall plunge wrinkled, weathered feet
Into soft, yielding sand
Feel it sift through my toes
And settle in my soul

When I am old
I shall stroll along the surf
Searching for ancient sea glass
Swept from the bottom of the ocean
And tossed by the wave of a hand
To land

When I am old
My rough surface will be worn sleekly smooth
From decades of rolling tides
And my jagged edges will be carved curves
Made perfect for holding and caressing
By the sands of time

Cynthia A. Bowen

CYNTHIA A. BOWEN (Austin, Texas) has a love affair with Galveston Island and belongs to a writer's group which strives to critique one another's work directly and honestly. You can find her poem in the *Texas Poetry Calendar 2006*, September 24.

Rituals

Rituals are the things we do over and over to celebrate special events. Easter egg hunts, Hanukkah presents, Fourth of July fireworks, candles on birthday cakes – these are all rituals. There are also other more personal rituals that are important to us, things we do within our families or on our own. These everyday actions make great ideas for poems with “voice.”

The Process:

1. Write down some the rituals in your life: what you do the first day of school, the lucky socks you wear to play every soccer game, the books your mother read to you each night, the rhyme you recite when you see the first star, the jokes your dad tells at dinner, the way your grandmother says goodbye, funerals.
2. Choose one of your rituals to write about, but don't start your poem yet! First, brainstorm a list of details about the ritual. Use all five of your senses. Notice even the little things: the way light slants, how a shirt smells, the click of a key, what is in a pocket.
3. Next, sit quietly and open your heart. Remember the ritual and let yourself feel like you do when it is happening. Make some notes about the feelings that come to you: comfort, peace, sadness, laughter, even anger or hurt feelings.
4. Now, look over your two lists. Think of some comparisons about your details and feelings that will make things clearer to someone reading about your ritual. For instance: as smelly as a wet dog, light like a full moon, mad as a fire ant. If you like rhyming poems, look for words in your lists that rhyme.
5. Finally, it is time to write!

Your job is to use words to help the reader “see” the ritual you have chosen. Think of your ritual as a photograph or a movie. Use your lists of memories, details, feelings and comparisons. Describe the event for them so they can feel your emotion with you. If you do, you will have a poem that will be about events and feelings that belong especially to you but that other people can understand and enjoy.

And that is what poetry is all about, after all!

Exercise by Anne McCrady

ANNE McCRADY (Henderson, Texas) is the founder of *Inspiritory*, a company committed to inspirational publications and programs, and author of the 2004 volume *Along Greathouse Road*.

Ritual

Each year we stand on this cusp,
this cliff of white rock above Onion Creek,
clinging to the end of summer,
the beginning of fall,
breathing the dry-weed air
on the first day of dove season.
As the sun slumps over the fields,
we hunt for joy, sit for an afternoon,
philosophers in rancher's clothes
sharing old photographs, new plans
each held up as proof that life—
like the spring-fed trickle
that snakes through
these chalky ledges—
is constantly changing,
moving, gathering, pooling,
leading us toward whatever waits
downstream.

Anne McCrady

ANNE McCRADY (Henderson, Texas) is the founder of Inspiritry, a company committed to inspirational publications and programs, and author of the 2004 volume *Along Greathouse Road*. You can find her poem in the *Texas Poetry Calendar 2006*, September 3.

Linked Stanzas for a Group Poem

“Delusions of a Modern Quixote,” by Patrick Allen Wright, has seven stanzas of three lines, ten syllables per line. To create a class poem, have each student write a single sentence of thirty syllables in three lines, ten syllables each. Each stanza will depict some image of action, much as has been done in the poem.

The Process:

1. Read the poem with your students. Discuss it with them: three-line stanzas, ten-syllable count per line, images of action to develop each stanza.
2. List the following phrases on the board/overhead:
I have seen
I have lain
I have swum
I have walked

Have students brainstorm more action verbs.

3. Have each student choose an action verb and begin her/his stanza:
“I have verb ”

Each student will write a single stanza of three lines, ten syllables per line, using vivid description of an action.

Note: For focused practice in sensory imagery, you could have all students work with the same sense (*I have seen, I have heard, I have tasted . . .*)

4. After revision, assemble student stanzas into a class poem. Post it for all to see.

Exercise by Patrick Allen Wright

PATRICK ALLEN WRIGHT (Silsbee, Texas) was born in Beaumont and raised in the Big Thicket; he has resumed his poetic adventures at Lamar University as an English lecturer after many years out of the public eye.

Delusions of a Modern Quixote

You ask what control I have; it is this:
For years now, I have been learning what is
necessary for a fish to soar high—

to breathe with gills above the clouds' vapor,
to smile a fish's grin at the vulture,
nodding at the scavenger's six-foot span.

I have seen whole trees jump up, root and all,
festively running on distended limbs
into the valleys that spread themselves wide.

I have lain on mountains that breathe lively,
giving quakes and buckles, sliding at faults,
yielding orogenesis in two folds.

I have swum among the waves at high tide,
where fish are ensnared by paralysis—
toxic tendrils of spineless jellyfish.

I have walked the highland's twisting pathway,
sliding down on the gravel, then kissing
the precipice squarely with opened mouth.

So now, I tread the inconsistent air,
a mere child-like amphibious assault
among the clouds, the moon, the sun and stars.

Patrick Allen Wright

PATRICK ALLEN WRIGHT (Silsbee, Texas) was born in Beaumont and raised in the Big Thicket; he has resumed his poetic adventures at Lamar University as an English lecturer after many years out of the public eye. You can find his poem in the *Texas Poetry Calendar 2006*, January 15.