

## Writing Fundamentals

## Poets are Careful Observers



## Rationale:

Poets write about seemingly ordinary things in interesting ways.

## Preparation:

Overhead transparency of "Poets Speak: Valerie Worth."

## Teaching:

The idea for a poem can come from anything around you: a pencil, the school bus, the blackboard or your friend's smile. The trick is to learn how to look. Valerie Worth is a master of observation. She has a way of seeing into the smallest, most ordinary objects and finding the stories hidden inside them. Listen to what she has to say about poetry.

► *Read and show "Poets Speak: Valerie Worth."*

What kinds of things do you think you would find in a Valerie Worth poem? What kinds of things do you think her poems would be about?

► *Give students anthology.*

Before we read her poems, let's just look at their titles. Did you ever think you would read a poem about a chair? Joanne Ryder, another poet I admire, once said, "Amazing things are all around me, appearing ordinary at first until I really look closely." Valerie Worth must look at things in the same way.

Read along with me as I read some of her poems.

► *Read 2-3 poems from anthology.*

What techniques does Valerie Worth use to write about objects?

► *Chart student responses.*

Read the rest of the poems in your anthology. What other techniques do you notice these poets using?

Today during writing time try exploring objects in your surroundings. Look closely; try to find the poems inside.

## Conference Questions:

- *What is new or surprising about this poem?*
- *What writing technique can you try in your poem?*

## Text Support

*All the Small Poems and Fourteen More* by Valerie Worth  
*Stone Bench in an Empty Park* by Paul Janeczko



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## Poets Speak: Valerie Worth

“Some of the subjects I write about in my poetry might seem ordinary or trivial—but to me they have fascinating qualities that go beyond their simple appearance.

One of poetry’s most wonderful features is that it can get beneath the surface of things and explore them not as mere objects but as remarkable phenomena with lively personalities of their own. Even such common articles as coat hangers can take on unexpected dimensions within the realm of a poem; and if this can happen with coat hangers, then the world must be filled with other ‘ordinary’ subjects just waiting for poetry to come along and reveal their extraordinary selves.”

from “The Place My Words Are Looking For”

## Poetry Anthology: Poets Are Careful Observers

### coat hangers

Valerie Worth

open the closet  
And there they  
Wait, in a  
Trim obedient row;

Stirred by the  
Air, they only  
Touch wires with  
A vacant jangle;

But try to  
Remove just one,  
And they suddenly  
Clash and cling,

And fling them-  
Selves to the  
Floor in an  
Inextricable tangle

### weeds

Valerie Worth

In the rough places,  
Along the concrete curbs,  
Up railroad banks,  
Next to brick buildings,  
Weeds will grow;

And no one cares  
If they live there,  
Year after year:  
Quietly attending  
To roots, stalks,  
Or even above  
Dusty leaves, a few  
Dim stars of flowers.

### grass

Valerie Worth

Grass on the lawn  
Says nothing:  
Clipped, empty,  
Quiet.

Grass in the fields  
Whistles, slides,  
Casts up a foam  
Of seeds,

Tangles itself  
With leaves: hides  
Whole rustling schools  
Of mice

### The Blue Between

Kristen O'Connell George

Everyone watches clouds,  
naming creatures they've seen.  
I see sky differently,  
I see the blue between-

The blue woman tugging  
her stubborn cloud across the sky.  
The blue giraffe stretching  
to nibble a cloud floating by.  
A pod of dancing dolphins,  
cloud oceans, cargo ships,  
a boy twirling his cloud  
around a thin blue fingertip.

In those smooth wide places,  
I see a different scene.  
In those cloudless spaces,  
I see the blue between.

# Poetry Anthology: Poets Are Careful Observers

## Smile

I was hypnotized  
by a smile  
at the tram stop.

This girl was kissing  
this boy  
and she was smiling

She was smiling  
even when she was  
kissing him.

I couldn't see his face-  
he was turned away  
from me,

but I could see her.  
I could see her smile.  
And her smile

made me smile  
as I hunkered down in my coat,  
put my shoulders up

against the wind  
and pretended that  
I wasn't looking.

Adam Ford

## Subways Are People

Subways are people-  
People standing  
People sitting  
People swaying to and fro  
Some in suits  
Some in tatters  
People I will never know.

Some with glasses  
Some without  
Boy with smile  
Girl with frown

People dashing  
Steel flashing  
Up and down and 'round the town.

Subways are people-

People old  
People new  
People always on the go  
Racing, running, rushing people  
People I will never know.