



POEM FOR TWO VOICES

Overview:

Encouraging exchange of ideas and active debates of opposing viewpoints is one of the strongest, most memorable instructional strategies, according to recent research. One method for combining creative writing with the study of factual events in a history, geography, or economics class is use of the **“Poem for Two Voices.”** This strategy requires students to put themselves into another person’s “shoes” in another time or place, inquiring as to what that individual might say if we could listen to a debate between him/her and an individual from his/her opposing point of view.

This strategy can be an effective follow-up to the analysis of primary sources expressing two opposing viewpoints, asking students to quote from the source or rephrase it in their own words, as they write the “poem.”

Student poems also make for good classroom performances and readers’ theatres, involving groups of students or the entire class.

Procedure:

1. Engage students in a study of two points of view toward an historic or contemporary event. Ask students to jot down important reasoning behind the differing perspectives, which they will later use for reference when writing their “Poems for Two Voices.”
2. Introduce students to the strategy by showing them a sample of a Poem for Two Voices or assigning them to read a sample aloud, as a class. ***(See sample below.)***
3. Assign students into pairs. Each member of the pair is to represent one of two opposing viewpoints. Together, the pair will create a “Poem for Two Voices,” writing statements from their own perspectives AND finding common ground for statements made by both perspectives.

A POEM FOR TWO VOICES

I am _____		I am _____
<i>(Declare what side I have taken this side of the debate.)</i>	<i>(Declare the subject for our debate)</i>	<i>(Declare what side I have taken this side of the debate.)</i>
<i>(Explain the reasoning behind my point of view.)</i>	<i>(Declare a point of agreement.)</i>	<i>(Explain the reasoning behind my point of view.)</i>
<i>(Respond to the previous statement made by my opponent.)</i>	<i>(Declare another point of agreement or rephrase earlier statement.)</i>	<i>(Respond to the previous statement made by my opponent.)</i>
<i>(Use extended reasoning or elaboration to explain my point of view.)</i>	<i>(Summarize with a strong statement what we both agree upon.)</i>	<i>(Use extended reasoning or elaboration to explain my point of view.)</i>

POEM FOR TWO VOICES (*Secondary sample*)

<p>I am Chief John Ross of the Cherokee Nation.</p>	<p>The destiny of the Indian is of great concern and importance.</p> <p>We should avoid the calamity that happened to the Mohegan, Delaware, and Narrangansett people.</p> <p>The encroachment of white settlers onto Indian lands is an endless flow.</p> <p>Into the new lands, whites should not pursue the Indian.</p>	<p>I am Andrew Jackson, President of the United States of America.</p>
<p>We, the Cherokee, reject the idea that we cannot live among the white settlers peacefully.</p>		<p>"All experiments for the improvement of the Indian (situation) have failed."</p>
<p>We have already adopted the white man's dress, language, customs, and even religion.</p>		<p>"(The Indian) cannot live in contact with civilized community."</p>
<p>"The Cherokee, under any circumstance have no weapon to use but argument. If that should fail, we must submit."</p>		<p>All tribes must eventually move to lands beyond the Mississippi, by force, if necessary.</p>
<p>"I still strongly hope we shall find ultimate justice from...the people of the United States."</p>		<p>There, they can find "countless herds of buffalo" and in a 'short time, adapt their own habits."</p>

** Quotations from John Ross taken from address to the Cherokee Nation, July 2, 1836. Quotations from Andres Jackson taken from address to Congress, 1835.*

POEM FOR TWO VOICES *(elementary sample)*

Thomas Jefferson and Richard Henry Lee

I am Thomas Jefferson

I am Richard Henry Lee

I want to talk to you about
this proposed Constitution

We must ratify this
Constitution quickly.

Why are we in such a
hurry? Where is the
emergency?

But we must agree on some
form of government for our
new nation.

A Constitution without a
Bill of Rights is no good.

I agree with you, Richard, but
a country without a government
is chaos.

Government seeks power. If
we adopt this Constitution the
federal government will take
more and more power. The
power of government needs to
be limited before ratification!

The right of free men must be
protected from a tyrannical
government. But I agree that
it is next to useless without a
Bill of Rights.

This country needs a government.