

*the creative process of teaching  
poetry to children in tejas & guatemala:  
a collection of poetry, artwork & photography*



*alysa nicole hernández*

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under the direction of  
*diann mccabe*

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by  
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## *acknowledgments*

*"There are no limits but the sky..."* *Cervantes*

A **heart** full of thanks to Diann McCabe, who is an unending source of inspiration to me, and to the students of San Marcos who participated in this project with me. Thank you to Heather Galloway for her patience and leadership.

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**Un mil gracias** to my parents, Sylvia and Joe, who jump-started my love affair with words and to **mis profesoras** at Texas State who have led me, including Kym Fox and Ana Juarez.

**Thank you** to Texas State graduate Norma Sanchez, who helped me with Spanish poetry translations, and to the students in the highlands of Guatemala, who welcomed me into their lives.

Lastly, and most importantly, to the **infinite** possibilities of literacy, and to the fiery spirits of **el duende** and poetry...

*¡Venga!*

## *Why poetry in the schools?*

Growing up, my younger brother and I were sown together by parents rife with idiosyncrasy.

Both love dancing in mornings, in kitchens, with brooms and as the morning tide rises.

Oftimes, my mother walked the inside of our small house reading the poetry of Sylvia Plath and women's history books. She'd stop reading to chide us with her loud voice that often cascaded off the walls, which were wallpapered with fading vegetables.

My father read the poetry of Federico Garcia Lorca aloud, while he paced in and out of rooms.

His favorite poem by Lorca was the 'Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejia.' He'd say the introductory verse of this poem repeatedly, "A las cinco en la tarde..." or "At five in the afternoon. It was exactly five in the afternoon."

Meanwhile, my brother and I blushed relentlessly in front of company. As a result of these experiences, I became a proponent of reading and imagination at a very young age.

I believe that poetry is the opening of the mind and heart to the infinite possibilities of the world. Therefore, in my teaching of poetry at three elementary schools in San Marcos, I hoped to give to give back to students what my parents gave to me.

I aimed to inspire the students to believe in themselves. I also hoped they would begin to inquire about the world around them as much as possible.

At every poetry lesson's beginning I told the students, "Let's be writers and poets and artists now. Don't worry about spelling or grammar. Poets worry about feelings and emotions first and spelling later."



This baffled them at first, especially when their day-to-day schooling revolved around TAKS preparation.

It was a gradual process, but once the children got into the flow of things, their minds were often set a-flutter. The spark poetry provided usually meant the children pressed me for synonyms of words, spelling corrections, grammar lessons

and word definitions.

Students who had been marked as problem children or children with learning impairments, often were able to produce art, if not poetry.

Although the classes and students in Texas and Guatemala will remain anonymous for my project, I thank them all from the bottom of my heart. §



# Who is Kenneth Koch & where'd this idea begin?

*"I was curious to see what could be done  
for children's poetry..."*

Kenneth Koch was an especially reputable poet who taught poetry to children in New York for decades.

In the introductory chapter of his book "Wishes, Lies, and Dreams: Teaching Children to Write Poetry," he discusses some of his first experiences with children and poetry at a school in Manhattan.

Through experiments, trial and error, and a forced digression from the ideas/methods/ways of teaching poetry to adults, he eventually embarks on a life-long journey, and finds a very rewarding career. Koch discusses ideas for poetry, how to teach poetry, and

the differences between the age groups. This chapter discusses the basics in what to do, and what not to do when teaching poetry to children.

Primarily, Koch saw that adults wrote poetry because they had the talent to express and define what they had already discovered about themselves and enjoyed the experience. At such young ages, Koch writes that kids have a lack of writing skills, age, and different motivations.

Children, didn't have much experience with poetry, and had not yet discovered much about themselves, so in order to teach them to write it, he would have to



inspire them, and identify with them.

He writes, "One thing that encouraged me was how playful and inventive children's talk sometimes was...how much they enjoyed making works of art. I had seen how my daughter and other children profited from the new ways of helping them discover and use their natural talents. That hadn't happened yet in poetry. I wanted to find...a way for children to get as much from poetry as they did from painting."

In his adult classes he discussed different writers and assigned the adult

poets to write their own works imitating the styles of selected authors.

Simply stated, young children could not grasp or be turned on by such a task. Instead of authoritatively stating to the children that they would write a poem about a specific thing or in a specific way, he would get their minds turning by asking innumerable rhetorical questions like "How about writing a poem about planes..."

"What would the sky taste like..." "What does the color red smell or sound like..." etc.

Deleted from his vocab-

ulary were the adult words 'assignment' and 'homework,' so that the children would not place the subject of poetry alongside math as something they had to do. He continually encouraged them to get as wild and crazy with their ideas as they wanted so poetry was something fun, something they wanted to do.

Koch noticed the children often enjoyed thematic poetry. Koch discusses some of the difficulty he had in his first experiences teaching the children at New York's P.S. 61, which include anxiety on whether the children would catch on, reading material too difficult, and coming up with things for the kids to write about.

He eventually realized that rather than reading all of a poem by Whitman, maybe an excerpt with an idea associated with something the children do daily or will be writing about is better.

His first in class poem was a collaborative effort, by himself and the class titled "I Wish." He said this activity lowered the children's

inhibitions with speaking out, and was interactive rather than competitive, as each young poet saw their lines in the poem. This poem unified the class, bonded the teacher to his students, and showed them that poetry could be fun, and vivid.

Koch describes other successful attempts in themed lessons, including Color Poems, Noise Poems, and Dream Poems. He then moved on to harder poem ideas like the Metaphor Poem and the Swan of Bees Poem, which pushed for strange word and sound combinations.

According to Koch, opposing the use of common colloquisms allowed more pleasure and imagery to take hold of the poet's mind. To keep the kids interested he insisted that each idea should be easy to understand, and new. Koch valued self-expression, being crazy, and no singling out of students to praise or chide. He maintained that there should never be a best poem or a winning poem.

*"Music and homeroom noises seemed to be great catalyst to the poetry of the small geniuses."*

The child's ideas or wording should not be changed. Spelling and correct grammar should not be worried about, but he stated that the nature or children was to learn by hands on experience and getting spelling and grammar right was important to the kids. Music and homeroom noises seemed to be great catalyst to the poetry of the small geniuses. Also, repetition and easy speech helps the children think quicker and divide their poetry into lines.

Through poetry, children identify with each other, learn about their emotions, and gain the skills to deal and communicate them. The necessity an outlet such as poetry becomes evident to Koch as the children he sees get older. Once they reach a certain age, around 5th grade, they become more self-conscious and have begun to choose their likes and dislikes, which makes implementing poetry

harder.

Also, in the so-called deprived or disadvantaged children, poetry tends to inspire students to want to write, and it inspires them to do so with correct spelling, English, and grammar. This means they must study harder.

Finally and most importantly, one must excite, and be passionate when it comes to teaching children.

These are the ideas I utilized in my lessons and teaching. They were all introduced, practiced and acted on in Diann McCabe's class, 'Teaching Poetry to Children.'

I stumbled on McCabe's class one jaded semester and I signed up for it.

I thought that perhaps I could inspire children, like my younger cousins and brother, to love poetry and to think reading was and writing was fun. All-the-while, they'd be reading and writing better. §

# *How is this book organized?*

In a nutshell...

The students who worked with me on this project will remain anonymous. I used pseudonyms for all the students whose illustrations, photography and poetry is found within the boundaries of this collection.

Choosing [pseudonyms](#) was easy. I took the first letter of the student's real name and chose another name that began with that letter.

The [artwork](#) that is placed with each poem goes with the student who wrote the poem. I digitally scanned the artwork using Adobe Photoshop.

Many times, I re-typed the poetry because the writing was hard to read. However, I never corrected for grammar or spelling.

Secondly, aside from the [photography](#) at the front of this book, which I took, there are some photographs within the poetry sections. These are not photos I took...

Rather, the photographs were taken by a group of San Marcos middle school students, who were considered "at-risk."

These 13 students were part of an afterschool photo club, which worked with me on my thesis.

I made each student a pamphlet made of poetry from this collection and they went around taking photos of the world around them. Often, the poetry of students their age within the pamphlets served as a [spark](#) or inspiration to the students.

Also, some of the children went beyond just taking the photos. Many added layers and [special effects](#) using design programs.

The [goal](#) of my two semesters of teaching poetry and collecting artwork was to present these third-graders with what I have termed "true poetry," not the overly obvious and rhyming poetry elementary students

*"I respected the students as true poets, capable of writing true poetry and because of this respectable exchange they always did."*

are often presented with. The "true poetry" the children were presented with is that of Federico García Lorca, William Carlos Williams, William Shakespeare and William Blake.

The key for each lesson was in the way I respected the students as true poets, capable of writing true poetry and because of this [respectable exchange](#) they always did. And, during the creative process of poetry some who were dyslexic, shy or depressed often escaped from their shells, if only for 40 minutes.

I truly believe each student was set free on paper to write and draw and through this process they were excited about learning. The children even asked about spelling, grammar, etc. even though they didn't have to spell and punctuate correctly.

These lessons were an escape from the [testing nature](#)

of the schools.

And, finally, how [Guatemala](#) fits into all of this...

During the summer of 2007, I was one of eight students placed in Guatemala as part of an anthropology program, spearheaded by Texas State University and funded by the National Science Foundation. While in Guatemala I studied the creative pedagogical methods used, or not used in the schools.

I also chronicled the implementation of free-writing sessions. Many of the prompts I used were those from Koch's book and my "Teaching Poetry to Children" class. I also took photos, one which is included.

I [did not translate](#) or correct for grammar. The writing in Spanish allows the children's voices to stay true. I also felt it added a cross-cultural effect. I also did not use pseudonyms or any names for that matter. §

## *Lesson one:*

### *'i wish...' & a class collaboration*

*objective:* to begin the poetry/ free-writing experience with an icebreaker & to allow the students free thinking with a minimum of producing three wishes but with no maximum & to get the children excited about poetry & to allow them to see there are no correct or true wishes & to lessen shyness by my writing of a final class collaboration on the front board.

*mood:* light-hearted & energetic & cordial.

*core method:* enter the classroom with a smile and introduce yourself. give them a story about yourself and your childhood if you expect them to give you a story back. begin by citing wishes of your own, no matter how crazy. remember that there mustn't be any favoritism. the final class collaboration requires one wish chosen from each student's individual work & a final reading. give much praise to lift spirits.

*sample dialogue:* what is the one craziest thing you wish for? close your eyes! now give me two more! do you want a menagerie of animals? do you want to go to australia to run with ostriches? do you want all the candy ever? no worries about spelling!

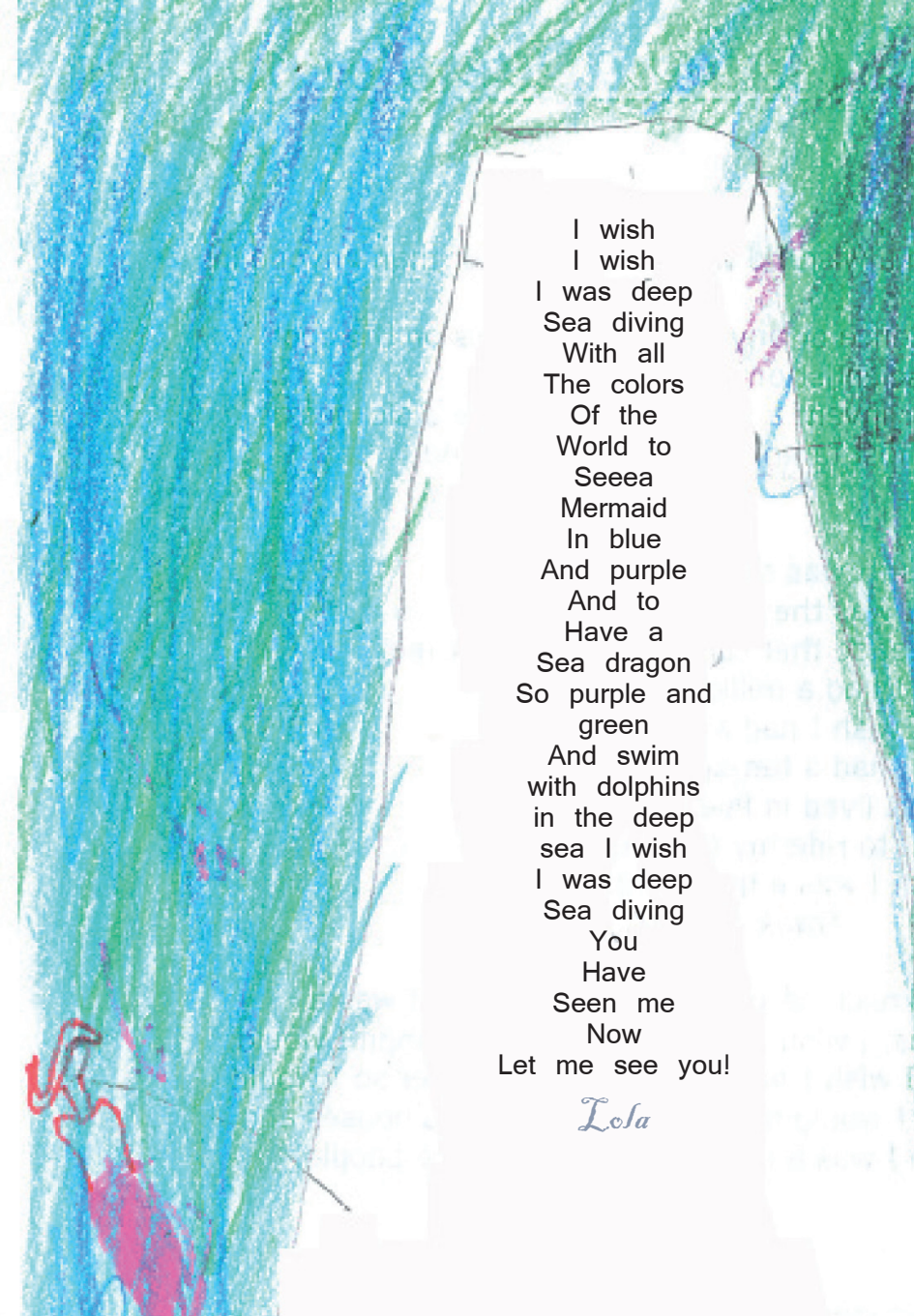
I wish I had a dad  
I wish I had 16,666 dollars  
I wish that dogs could talk  
I wish I had a chocolate bar that would never end  
I wish I could have my own room with stars on the walls and  
Good Charlotte written on the walls with black and green  
I wish I could be a cop in Texas or Tennessee  
I wish I was President of the United States  
I wish I could live at Six Flags  
I wish instead of rain it was French Fries  
I wish I lived in a mall in NYC  
I wish I was on the Spurs team  
I wish I was buff  
I wish Mario World was real  
I wish I was a famous dancer in New York  
I wish I lived in Troy  
I wish I was Supercat  
I wish I had a wild horse that was sweet, of course.  
I wish I had a fancy house.

*Class Collaboration*



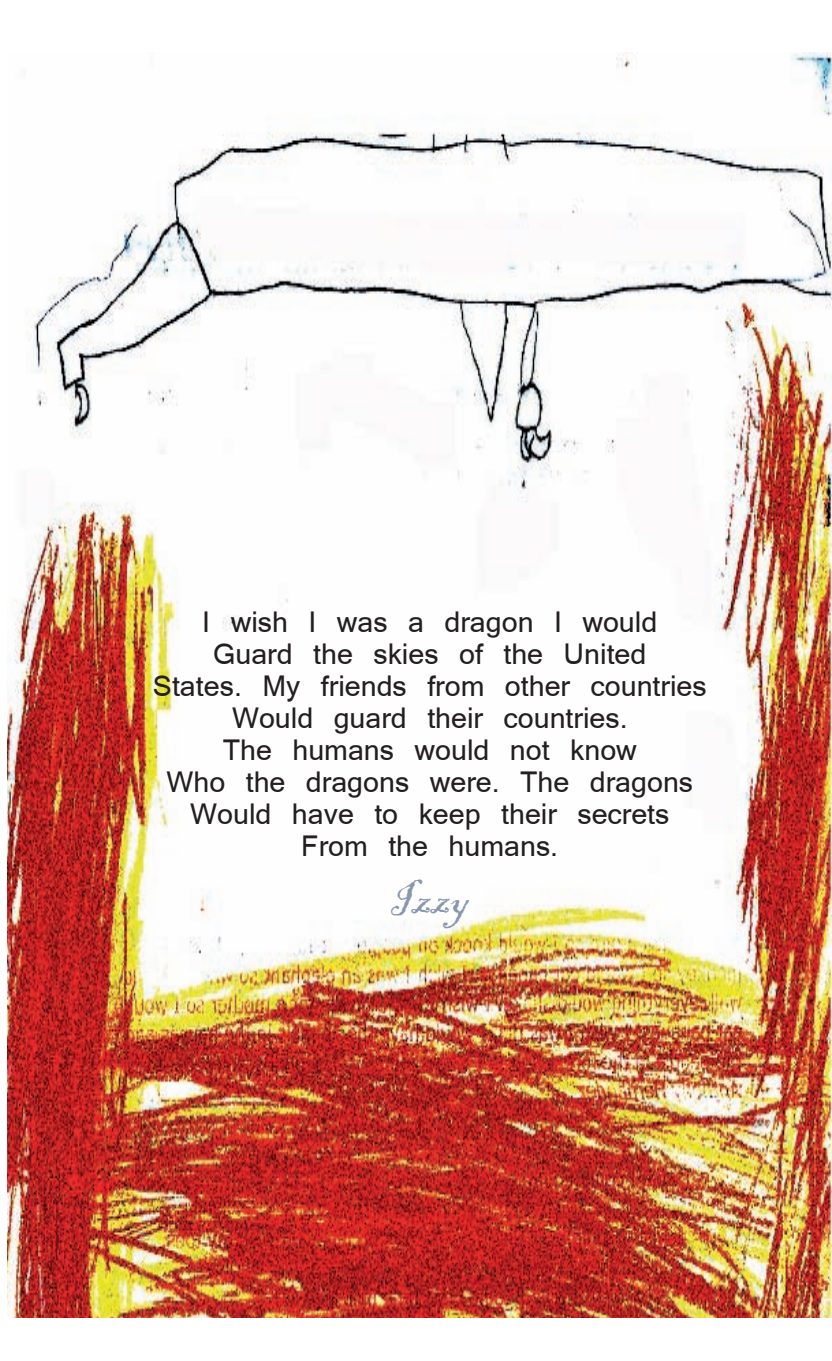
*Susie*



A child's drawing of a mermaid in blue and green water. The mermaid is drawn in red and purple ink, swimming towards the right. The water is filled with blue and green crayon strokes. A white rectangular box is drawn over the water, containing the text.

I wish  
I wish  
I was deep  
Sea diving  
With all  
The colors  
Of the  
World to  
Seeea  
Mermaid  
In blue  
And purple  
And to  
Have a  
Sea dragon  
So purple and  
green  
And swim  
with dolphins  
in the deep  
sea I wish  
I was deep  
Sea diving  
You  
Have  
Seen me  
Now  
Let me see you!

*Lola*

A child's drawing of a dragon in red and yellow. The dragon is drawn in black ink, with its head and wings visible. The background is filled with red and yellow crayon strokes. A white rectangular box is drawn over the dragon, containing the text.

I wish I was a dragon I would  
Guard the skies of the United  
States. My friends from other countries  
Would guard their countries.  
The humans would not know  
Who the dragons were. The dragons  
Would have to keep their secrets  
From the humans.

*Izzy*



I wish  
I was rich  
And have a fancy  
house  
with 100 puppies  
and a  
**giant** blouse

*Adri*

*Veronica*



## Lesson two:

### 'being an animal or, fantastical being'

*objective:* to make poetry an inquisitive experience about real things & to allow the children to explore the animal life around them & to encourage them to imagine life as an animal

*mood:* dramatic.

*core method:* the night before, fasten a tiger mask together from a paper plate, orange marker and orange and yellow yarn. enter the class the next day wearing the mask. rather than greeting them, jump right into the lesson. ask them to close their eyes while you read the selected poem. read dramatically, rhythmically and with pauses. once done, ask them to open their eyes and read along with you. afterward ask if there are any things they noticed about the poem or if there are any words they didn't understand.

*sample dialogue:* what is one animal you wish you could speak with? what's the one animal you would be if you could? what would you eat? how would you smell? what would you say? where would you live?!

### *the tyger*

Tyger, Tyger, burning bright  
In the forests of the night,  
What immortal hand or eye  
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies  
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?  
On what wings dare he aspire?  
What the hand dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder, & what art,  
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?  
And when thy heart began to beat,  
What dread hand? & what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain?  
In what furnace was thy brain?  
What the anvil? what dread grasp  
Dare its deadly terrors clasp?

When the stars threw down their spears  
And water'd heaven with their tears,  
Did he smile his work to see?  
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger, Tyger, burning bright  
In the forests of the night,  
What immortal hand or eye  
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

*william blake*





Horse with your  
eyes bright.  
You are like the  
spirited light.  
And where will  
you go when  
there's a fire?  
You will go where  
your heart desires.

*Lily*

*Susie*



I am the koala  
tired  
that sleeps  
twenty hours a day.

*Angel*



Ogre, Ogre everywhere.  
He likes to eat boogers.  
He's so big and hairy.  
His hands can't  
Fit through your  
door and so fat he cannot  
walk.  
He's green and  
can't swim.

*Donnie*



I'm the longest snake I'll slither through the jungle  
& I feel cold & smooth. I Strike very very fast.  
I shall put my name in the dirt.

*Craig*

Cheetah cheetah  
In the dark. Lets  
Play now before  
You cry in the  
Dark. Cheetah, where  
Did you get those  
nice sharp teeth?  
I'm hungry now  
Can I eat you before I  
starve to death?  
I run so fast  
Than any other  
Animal in the  
World. I also  
Can beat all  
The other animals  
In the entire World.

*Jenny*

## Lesson three:

### music & spanish words & colors

*objective:* to provide the children with an interesting poem using abstract ideas & to allow the students to see that free writing is creative and anything goes & to get the children excited about poetry & to allow them to see that poetry can be written in any language or languages & to teach the students a bit about a different culture

*mood:* energetic & dramatic & open-minded.

*core method:* engage the students with 30-60 second snippets of flamenco. take markers from my bag and rapidly draw swatches of color, saying the name in english, then in spanish. read the poem once in english then in spanish, then mixed. .

*sample dialogue:* what is your favorite color? why is this your favorite color? what are the textures associated with this color? when you dream, what color do you dream with? what do the words ruby and emerald, blue and yellow remind you of? how do you say verde in english and green in spanish? which is more lively and descriptive? the use of verde or green?

### sleepwalking ballad/romance sonambulo

Green, how I want you green.	Verde que te quiero verde.
Green wind. Green branches.	Verde viento. Verdes ramas.
The ship out on the sea	El barco sobre la mar
and the horse on the mountain.	y el caballo en la montaña.
With the shade around her waist	Con la sombra en la cintura
she dreams on her balcony,	ella sueña en su baranda,
green flesh, her hair green,	verde carne, pelo verde,
with eyes of cold silver.	con ojos de fría plata.
Green, how I want you green.	Verde que te quiero verde.
Under the gypsy moon,	Bajo la luna gitana,
all things are watching her	las cosas la están mirando
and she cannot see them.	y ella no puede mirarlos.

Green, how I want you green.	Verde que te quiero verde.
Big hoarfrost stars	Grandes estrellas de escarcha
come with the fish of shadow	vienen con el pez de sombra
that opens the road of dawn.	que abre el camino del alba.
The fig tree rubs its wind	La higuera frota su viento
with the sandpaper of its branches,	con la lija de sus ramas,
and the forest, cunning cat,	y el monte, gato garduño,
bristles its brittle fibers.	eriza sus pitas agrias.
But who will come?	¿Pero quién vendra?
And from where?	¿Y por dónde...?
She is still on her balcony	Ella sigue en su baranda,
green flesh, her hair green,	Verde came, pelo verde,
dreaming in the bitter sea.	soñando en la mar amarga.

*federico garcia lorca*

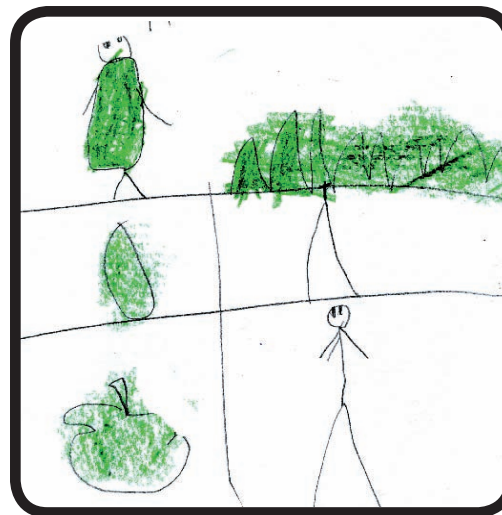




My favorite color is  
blue & green  
& I like to mix  
them

by myself.

*Graig*



The grass is  
verde  
A cucumber is  
green  
A pickle verde  
Apples are  
green.

*Ingrid*

Cafe-brown you make me think of cafe broons. You make  
me think of my barrette, my blouse, and mud. You make  
me think of dancing. You make me think of the way you  
sound.

*Jessica*

Azul, a word like no other.

a beauty.

For a blue if mixed with blanco,

a massive beauty.

Drums blue green

—

Bam-BOOM mixing.

Yellow Orange

Cafe Verde

ZZZZ

BANG Boom rosa!

Heads bouncing.

Rosa blooming with a rojo

splat

with all the colors of the rainbow.



*Lupita*

*Cristian*



Black white  
green  
Remind me  
of mexico  
Bald eagles  
and horned  
toads.

*Adan*

Violeta, Violeta you are  
my eyes.

An orange tiger does the  
cha-cha.

Wish me a red tune.

*Lucy*



Azul like the sky & like Sebastian's  
Eyes. My mom smells like rosa & rojo. My dad  
Smells like negro & café my grandpa  
Smells like café, negro & verde.

I love poetry!

*Odafia*





*Teia*

Yes...Everybody wants to live on  
the silver moon.

Yes...the plata moon.

But we are stuck on  
this blue world.

Yes...this azul world.

The heavens are white

Yes they are.

But the heavens are white.

Yes they are.

But the heavens are masters of  
dark black also.

Red is a war color.

Yes, a horrible color of war.  
Green is mother nature's favorite  
color.

*Corey*



The  
color  
blue  
is  
what  
I see.  
What  
do  
you  
see?

*Esteban*



Purple is the  
color of the  
wind. Plata a  
word like no  
other is so  
beautiful  
it dances in  
the air.  
Yellow  
the color of  
the  
sun  
I jumped on  
one day.  
Blue green  
black gold and  
red colors.

*Maggie*

*Joseph*

## *Lesson four:*

### *“come with me”*

*Objective:* to teach the children about onomatopoeias & to provide the children with an the imagination to travel to any place, near or far, taking a friend or family member along with them. using abstract ideas & to allow the students to see that free writing is creative and anything goes & to get the children excited about poetry & to teach the students a bit about a famous poet and antiquated words.

*mood:* energetic & adventurous & whimsical.

*core method:* generally done the week before spring break. walk in with a quick discussion of william shakespeare in my head. i go around the room asking each student where he or she is going for spring break and where they wish they were going. after this, i read shakespeare's poem. then i read it again, this time stopping and pausing at the odd and antiquated words. we act out the words “curtsied” and “hark!” .

*sample dialogue:* what is your favorite place, imaginary or real, near or far? why is this dream place? what is it like there? what are the smells and what can you do there? who will you take and what will you tell them to persuade them to go too?

### *come unto these yellow sands*

Come unto these yellow sands,

And then take hands

Curtsied when you have, and kissed

The wild waves whist

Foot it feattly here and there,

And, sweet sprites, the burden bear.

Hark, hark! Bow-wow;

The watch dogs bark: bow-wow.

Hark, hark! I hear

The strain of strutting

Chanticleer cry

Cockadiddle-do!

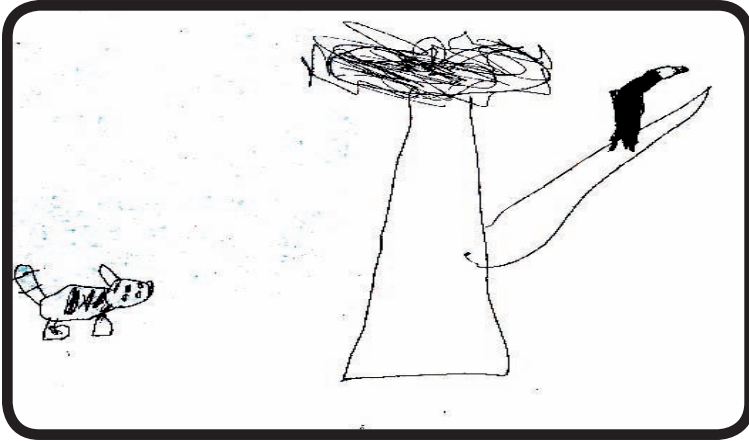
*william shakespeare*



Come with me to a  
magical place  
we will see all  
the things you had in  
your dream.  
We will see all the  
stuff you wanted,  
and your  
dreams will  
come true.  
Magical  
stuff will come true,  
you'll see  
dragons, money, cars,  
anything you  
dream of  
this is  
the  
place  
where  
all  
your  
dreams  
come  
true.

*Robert*

*Georgie*



Come with me  
to a wild rain forest  
we can have a lot of  
animals like birds  
and jaguars.

*Adan*



Come with me to Vegas baby We will hear people  
saying Jackpot! We will go to a romantic dinner.  
It's gonna feel like home. Vegas baby!!

*Odalia*



Come with me

to Wonka World

There's candy

roller coasters and swirly wirls and

big

sounds like

dropping water

and taffy and

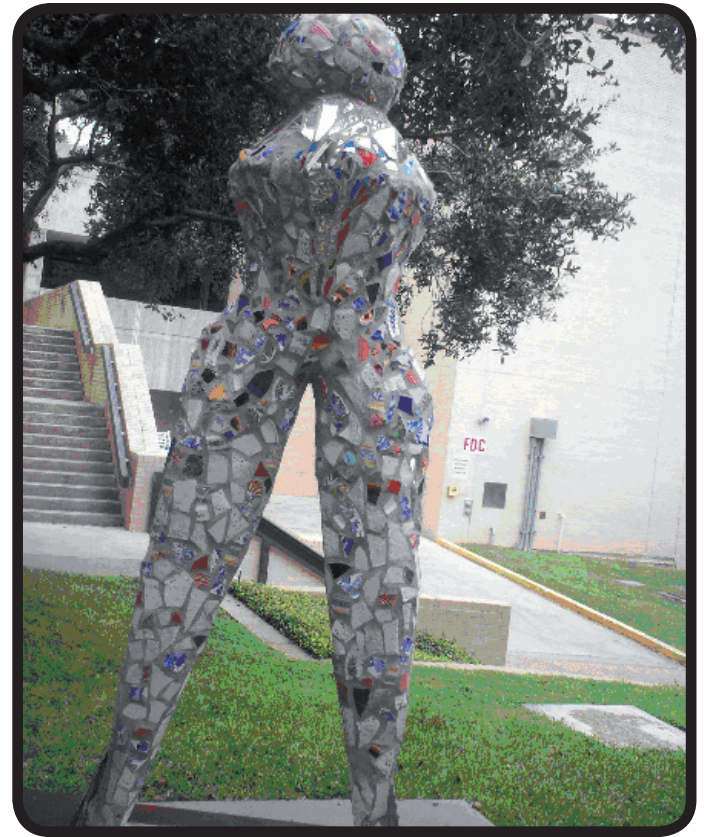
tallys.. and there are

big **f a t** donuts

with

black **swirls.**

*Adrian*



Come with me to a party with  
shining lights and  
lots of

music.

We can do lots

of games and food.

We

can do lots of dancing together

just me and you

*Minnie*

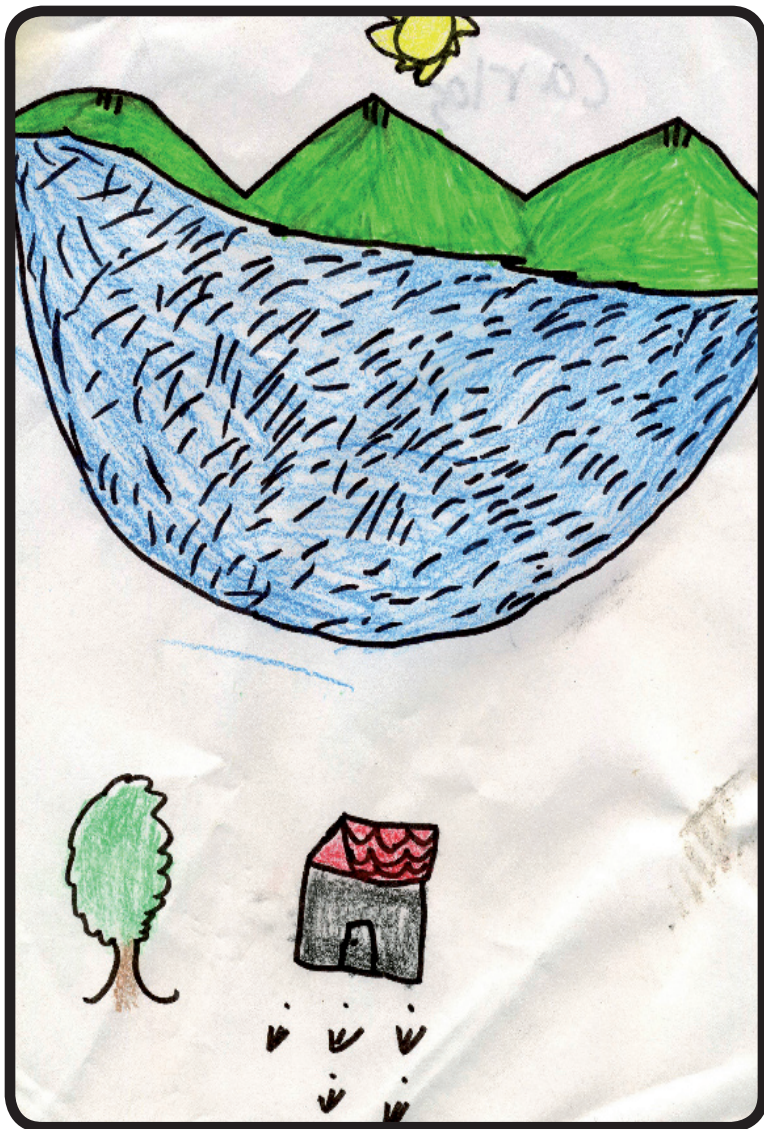
*guatemala*





El toro camino  
El dise, el toro,  
Bamos con mi mama  
Dise mi mama,  
Donde sta mi mijo,  
Donde sta mi ijo





En mi pueblo se ve muy linda,  
en la noche se ve las montañas  
verdes y las rosas amarillas y los  
lagos verdes que amoroso se  
ve las ramas verdes y el  
cielo azul.



El gallina come el maiz  
 el gallina tiene aua i come  
 El gallina el saltamos el aua  
 el gallina tiene muerte  
 La gallin e muy bueno



gallina



gallina



gallina

Yo jugar con pelota



yo quere saltar el grama



yo quere comer helado

yo quere comer manzana

yo quere jugar con perro



Yo jugar con pelota

yo quere saltar el grama

yo quere comer helado

yo quere comer manzana

yo quere jugar con perro

El volcán

colorido

Que bonito volcán

es muy bonito volcán

Que bueno volcán

Es muy bonito volcán





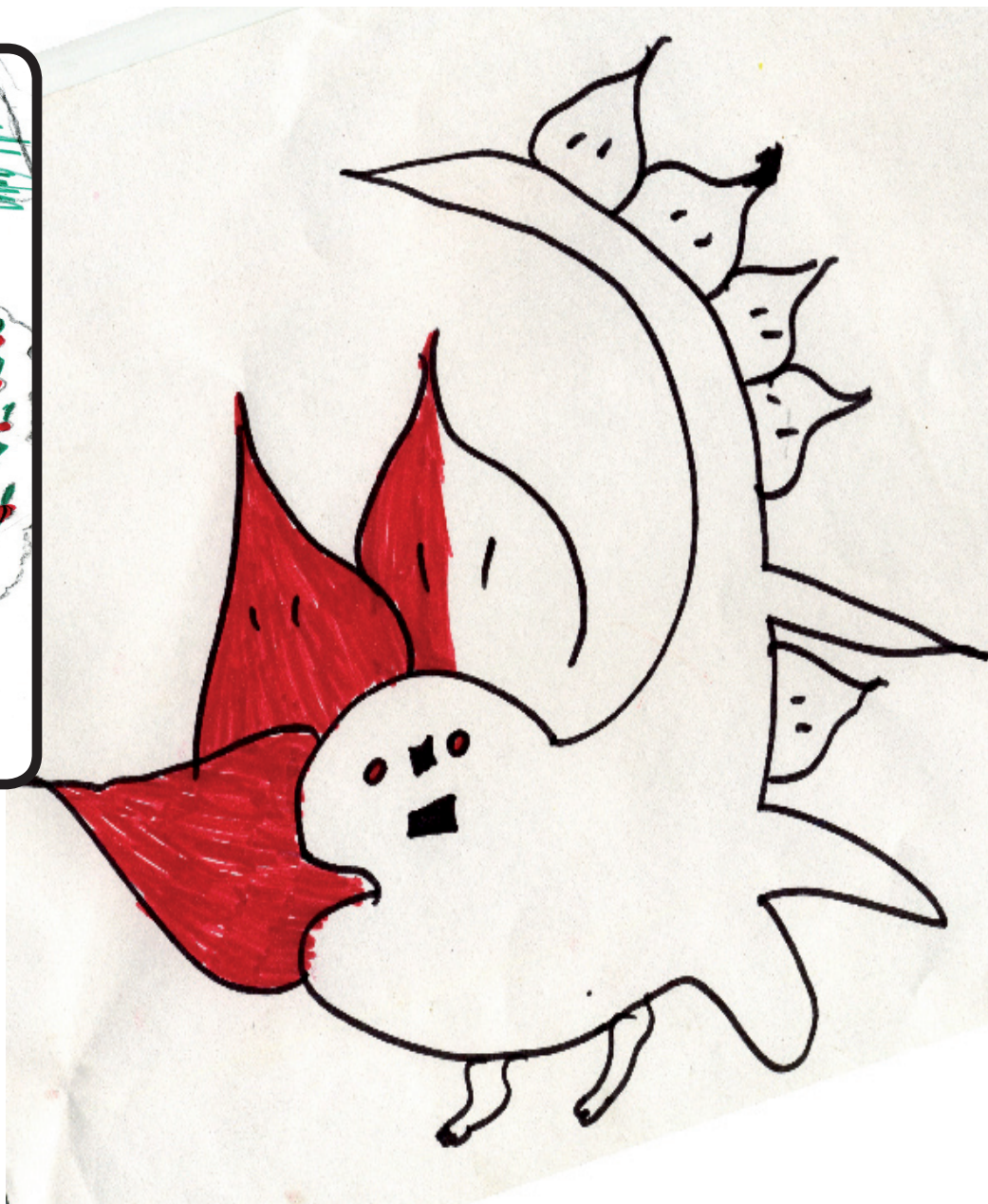
~~rosado~~ <sup>rosado</sup> que te quiero rosado  
rosado viento rosado ramas  
El barco sobre el mar  
y el caballo en la montaña  
con la sombra con la cintura  
ella sueña pelo rosado  
Bajo el sol



rosado que te quiero rosado  
rosado viento rosado ramas  
El barco sobre el mar  
y el caballo en la montaña  
con la sombra con la cintura  
ella sueña pelo rosado  
Bajo el sol



Rojos son tus uñas  
rojos son tus labios  
rojos son tu corazon  
rojos son tu sangre







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*Students of the Spring 2005 Teaching Poetry to Children Class*