

Collecting Words...Classroom Box of Words (part 1)

Use your journal for writing the words you collect. Be sure to date the entries.

1. Write down some words that you think are cool...*flap, tip, lob, elope, scrounge, scintillating, panache*...
2. Look around the room and at one another's lists and steal some words...*Lamborghini, yalps, wombat, gononomy, limerick*...
3. Make up some words if you wish...*losoonie, flapoon, noplut*...
4. Don't think too much; you can't make a mistake; don't worry about spelling right now...*phantom, strut, tumble, dragon*...
5. Peruse the dictionary and Thesaurus if you wish; don't worry too much about meaning for now. Words carry meaning along with them. Put words down and meaning will begin to rush in...
6. Toss in words from foreign languages...*ciao, je ne sais quoi, zeitgeist*...
7. Go for sound...*hum, fizz, fiddle, fandango, zigzag, ziggurat, folderol, armadillo, tintinabulation*...
8. Look over your words. Give some of the words a color...*vermilion regret, violet wondering, red screech*...(Write your favorite ten of these on small cards for our classroom Box of Words)
9. List the senses and give each sense a color...*peach hearing*...(Put the best 3 in your journal)
10. Play with the Magnetic Poetry trays and see what comes out of you... "white puppy petal/you gorgeous milk fluff/sleep all day/lick tiny love from time/and dream"

~written by a woman named Arielle about her 21 year-old cat, Jumbo.

Do one or both of these with your family for homework:

1. Look at some field guides (birds, plants, flowers, insects, etc.) and list several great words or word groups that you find...*window winged moth, globular springtail, porphyry* (a purple rock named for the Latin and Greek word for purple).
 2. Look at some manuals (computer, car, appliance, vocational, etc.) and see what pops up...*luminosity probe, diesel throttle control tool, acceleration pump link, swivel, internal vent valve, choke hinge pin*...(These are all from a Ford pickup repair manual)
- N.B. If you or a family member or friend comes up with another unusual and lively source of cool words be sure to share this with us...

(These ideas came from *poemcrazy* by Susan Goldsmith Wooldridge, chapter 3, which I've copied for you and want you to read and mark.)

Part two of Collecting Words

1. I would like for you to read chapter 4 of *poemcrazy* which I've copied for you as well. We will do the practice activities both in class and at home throughout the year. You will discover some good ideas for your Box of Words project in this chapter.
2. I will also show you how to do the **HarrellLand Box of Words** activity and the last activity, "personal universe deck of words," which we call **Universe of Language**. (Handouts are attached.)
3. You will prepare and present your Box of Words poem and gononomy by a date to be announced. I believe that you will do some variety of Universe of Language in your 8th grade language arts class, so let's wait and see what Ms. Murphy plans. If you don't do a mandala with the project, I want to do that with you.

Collecting Words--A Museum of Mobiles, Movables, (and Gonomonies?) aka Box of Words

Gononomy: any strange object that is difficult to name, that is curiously unlike anything else,
and that serves no useful purpose*

Using language powerfully requires the kind of work we have been doing lately with words. It requires manipulation, experimentation, and just plain fun! Never accept one way of expressing your ideas. There is always another way that is just as good and often better, more effective, than the first version. Brenda Ueland, a journal writer once said that the ocean itself seems only knee deep to some people. You can guess why, can't you? They don't go out very far, and perhaps never even look down or across the expanse as well.

Learn to go further than knee deep in your writing. Manipulate your sentences—delete from them, invert them, combine them. This is what is meant by syntax (arrangement of words). Your words and phrases (diction) are like clay in your hands—pliable. Learn with your hand, head, and mind to shape and fashion them...

Now that we have worked with our Classroom Box of Words and *poemcrazy* activities, I invite you to move to the next step. **Pick as many words as you want or need from your word collection, and create a short poem about anything you wish, using any form or style you wish.** You may manipulate your words to fit together like a picture puzzle that expresses your idea or vision; or you may let the words manipulate you, moving and changing them like a magician with a magical, verbal Ouija board (or magnetic poetry). Whatever process develops, after a day or two of trying you should have created a short poem that is somewhat unusual or “out of the box.” (Let the handout on **Abstract Poetry** inspire you here)

Then the fun really begins. You will become an inventor, composer, artist, writer, and designer of something that concretely represents your poem. See the words as tangible objects that can be moved around further, decorated, embellished, polished, shaped, simplified, and played with. Your words are your tools; you are the artist. Your poem, in echoes of Archibald MacLeish, “will not mean, but be.” You will create an *objet de arte* this time, but remember that each poem or piece of prose that you write from now on can be thought of in this way—as a concrete creation. You are the master of the words. You arrange them so they look good, sound good, and make the statement that you want to make.

Of course, we aren't the first to enjoy words so much. I will share with you several poems that play with words. (You may want to copy some of them for your Antholio). I wonder if these poets ever made a movable poem. Perhaps they visualized objects in their minds as they composed. For extra credit you could even try to make a gononomy to represent one of these poems I share. (Three additional extra credit options are offered on the Abstract Poetry handout) At any rate, I offer you a tangible, and hopefully useful, method to practice the fun of phrasing, arranging, and hearing poetry. You will become dexterous with syntax, adroit with diction. (And did you just learn two (actually four) new words?) Language is alive, moving, changing, and challenging. Enjoy it!

*Actually, I hope your creation will serve a purpose. It will help you have a dynamic experience with words—their size, shape, sound, and sense. It will encourage you to revise your work continually; to even reject and start over if needed. The more you practice the better you will become. The better you write the more you will love to write. And what you love always seems easier.