

OBJECT WRITING: THE POETRY OF THINGS

Age Range: Middle School (Grades 6-8)

Activity Time: 45 minutes



THE RED PENCIL

By Andrea Davis Pinkney, illustrated by Shane E. Evans, and published by Little, Brown

THE FESTIVAL

Welcome to the Beautiful Blackbird Children's Book Festival! Where is the festival happening? Right here in your space, in your hands. By writing a piece of your own inspired by *The Red Pencil*, you are taking part in a celebration of books and book creators from across the African Diaspora. Your writing joins theirs in creating poems and stories built on roots, identity, and resilience.

THE BOOK

Look for the reading from the *The Red Pencil* on BeautifulBlackbird.com. In her Sudanese village, Amira Bright dreams of learning how to read and write. Her prized possession is the perfect drawing tool, a twig that was gifted to her by her father on her 12th birthday. After her village is attacked and she flees to a refugee camp, another gift—a red pencil—opens her mind to the healing possibilities of art and writing.

THE WRITING ACTIVITY

Andrea Davis Pinkney wrote her novel in free verse, meaning that there is no set rhythm or rhyme. Instead, the poetry is short and to the point, using only the most necessary words. Illustrator Shane W. Evans added line drawings to select poems, and the drawings and words echo each other. This style of combined poetry and drawing is not new! Many poets have played with combining art and writing.

Inspired by Amira's passion for drawing and writing, you are going to pick a special object as inspiration for a poem. This object can be something that symbolizes your best self. It can be something that makes you feel free and confident. You are welcome to add a drawing, too!

1. Writing Warm-up: Start with an object grab!

Take a walk around your house and collect a few objects that spark an interest.

These could be any items that remind you of something meaningful: a favorite toy, a worn piece of clothing, a family heirloom, a thoughtful gift you were given, a kitchen utensil, etc. The objects can be anything, but they should each mean something to you.

Come back to your writing space and lay the objects out in front of you.

Close your eyes, or blindfold yourself, and pick an object. Slowly explore it with the senses of touch, smell, sound, and taste (as applicable!) before opening your eyes or removing the blindfold and exploring it, finally, with the sense of sight. As you explore, take note of what you're observing. If you have a partner, have them record your observations. If you are alone, take notes after you have removed the blindfold. A simple graphic organizer (we can attach one!) can be helpful. It will be a word bank to come back to.

Here are some helpful questions to guide your exploration:

- What is the weight of your object? What would you compare its weight to—as light as a feather or as heavy as your bookbag?
- What does the object sound like? What if you rub it or shake it?
- What does the texture feel like in your hand? How about on your cheek? Can you open the object or feel inside it?
- What does the object smell like? Does the smell remind you of anything?
- How do you react to the texture or smell? Do you recoil, soften, smile?

- Is it safe to taste the object? If not, does its smell remind you of a taste?
- What is the object's shape? Its color? Is it transparent, translucent, opaque?
- What does the object remind you of?
- Where was it made? Who owned it before you? What was its journey before it got to your home?
- Give this object a new name, a personal name, a nickname, or a pet name. Why did you choose it? What do you refer to this object as? ex. If it's a toy car, do you call it your toy car or "Philly the car"?

Pick ONE object to focus on for your writing.

Now that you have explored all of your objects - which one are you most interested in? Which one do you feel most attached to? Which one do you want to write about?

2. Writing Warm Up: Finding What Intrigues You

Now, do a few **fast writes** about the object to find what ignites your interest.

Pick three or four prompts from the list below, or find your own inspiration.

For each prompt, write **nonstop for 3-5 minutes**.

Setting a timer makes it feel like a challenge. Don't overthink your writing here! Just put pen or pencil to paper and see what comes until the time is up. You might surprise yourself.

- What sort of life does this object live? What's its story?
- What memory does this object conjure from your own life story?
- How do you feel about your object?
- How does it feel about you?

- What would you ask this object if you could understand its language?
- What might you use this object for?
- What advice would you give to someone encountering this object for the first time?
- Imagine the future for this object. What lies ahead?
- What do you hope for your object?

3. Write A Poem

Look back at your fast writes. Is there anything that makes you think, "Hmm, could I say more about that?" **Underline or Highlight** parts that you like and surprise you. Take parts of your fast writes—underlined or not—and use these to grow a poem!

Play around with word order, line breaks, imagery. You can also add in metaphors and onomatopoeia to expand your ideas. If you want, add a simple line drawing that highlights an idea in your poem.

Examples from The Red Pencil: pg. 54 Drawing, pg. 56 Hand, Twig, Sparrow, pg. 64 Lines, pg. 70. Broken Bottle Dolly, pg. 71 Toy battles, pg. 184-186 The Red Pencil, pg. 279 I Am

Share your Experience! If your family, guardian, or teacher agrees and if you can protect your privacy, share your poem with us online with the hashtag #BeautifulBlackbirdFestival.

Thank you to Telling Room for designing this writing activity as part of their support of the Beautiful Blackbird Children's Book Festival!