



Finding Inspiration Through a Window

I usually write at the kitchen table, where I sit facing the living room window. When I look up from my writing I can see the woods, which relaxes my eyes and my mind.

—Beverly McLoughland

Many poems are written from close observation of the world. If you create an “Observation Window” in your classroom, you provide an added opportunity for students to look at their world carefully and write about what they see or hear. Perhaps your classroom offers a view of a city skyline or an apartment building, or maybe it’s a tree or a parking lot. No matter what the view, students can practice honing their observation skills, which will benefit their writing in any genre.

To begin, outline part of a classroom window with crepe paper, colored tape, or some other material. Nearby, display finished poems that have come from close observation of the world—particularly poems about the same kinds of things your students can see through their classroom window—it might be sky, trees, pavement or even cars. Display examples of *list poems*, which are the easiest types of poems for kids to write, and invite children to write their own list poems.

Have clipboards and poetry paper (paper cut lengthwise to suggest the shape of a poem) at the window, ready for students to write their own observations and poems. You might want to write, “I See . . . I Hear . . .” at the top of a piece of chart paper to keep at the poetry window so that kids can draw or write a list of some of what they see out the window, or they can focus on what they hear. Some kindergarten and first-grade teachers place an easel by the window equipped with chart paper and a marker attached with a string, so that children can draw what they see and then write a few words.

Minilesson

Today we’re going to start a new poetry center in the classroom, called an Observation Window. A lot of writers and poets observe the world around them to get ideas for writing. We can observe the world outside our window and write about what we notice.

Let me read you a poem written by Rebecca Kai Dotlich about looking out a window. As I read “Watching at the Window,” listen carefully for all the wonderful things she observes.

“Watching at the Window”

A corner of cloud
settles between skyscrapers,
a seagull rests
at the tip of a roof,
a yellow taxi *swooshes* by,
cars stop, then go,
a bicycle splashes
through the rain.
Puddles dot
the tops of shoes,
garbage cans,
cracked walks.
Umbrellas cuddle in twos,
a school bus sputters
at the corner,
a crossing guard

swirls a sign,
sips hot coffee,
waves while
a pair of squirrels
hunt for treasure
at the root of the tree;
a blue bit of paper
hugs the street sign,
a puppy tugs
at his leash, and . . .
the swing swings,
the wind teases
the telephone wire,
and a butterfly sails,
then settles
at the window . . .

Turn to the person next to you, and tell each other what you remember the speaker in Rebecca Kai Dotlich’s poem noticed out her window.

I’m going to tape this poem right here near our window for inspiration, and I’m leaving this poetry paper and a few clipboards here so you can write your own observational poems from what you see out the window.

Book Links

Other observation-based books:

Patricia Hubbell

City Kids: Poems

Marshall Cavendish Corporation (2001)

Kristine O’Connell George

Old Elm Speaks: Tree Poems

Clarion Books, 1998

Harry Behn

Trees

Bill Martin Books (1992)

Bobbi Katz

Once Around the Sun

Harcourt Children Books (2006)

Joseph Bruchac and Jonathan London

Thirteen Moons on Turtle’s Back: A Native

American Year of Moons

Philomel (1992)

Jane Yolen

Bird Watch

Philomel (1990)