Background

This lesson falls toward the middle of our unit on poetry. As of this lesson, we have explored many poems for pleasure individually and in groups. We have also preformed beloved poems in many formats (individually, in groups, and as a whole class). In this fashion, we have built a foundation of poetry as pleasure. In order to encourage their appreciation for the genre, I have strayed from probing the students for their comprehension or interpretations of the poems. Instead, I have been asking questions that allow our discussions to begin from their understanding, such as “What do you notice?” Along with fostering their appreciation for poetry, I have attempted to unravel several common misconceptions about the genre that have appeared. Perhaps the most persistent of these misconceptions is the idea that poetry has to rhyme. I am hoping that our lesson on onomatopoeia will emphasize sound in a way that highlights poetry that does not rhyme.

Our introduction to the unit was an exploration of anthologies and other poetry texts that Patty and I have gathered. Students looked for poems that they found pleasurable, and we spent a great deal of time simply sharing them and reading together. From this point, we compared poetry to prose, dissected a poem for its structural elements, and explored alliterative properties. Throughout these other lessons, we have been reading voraciously, coping poems into our anthologies, and generating original works. The work that we have done thus far has helped us to address the two main essential questions of the unit: What is poetry? and How is poetry different from prose? We have only briefly dabbled in the third when we did our two-day exploration of alliteration: How do images or sounds help us to understand the meaning of a poem?

Round Focus

As such, this fourth lesson really comes at a turning point in the unit. Students so far have done an excellent job of digesting poems and poetic concepts. We have even had experience analyzing poems for a device that influences the way a poem sounds (alliteration). However, our lesson on onomatopoeia will require us to think about and discuss not only what these sounds are but also how they change our interpretation of a poem. In this way, we will really dig into the third essential question and the deeper practice of poetic analysis. Students will also be required to be active in all four domains of language: we will be speaking our poems aloud, listening to others present, reading poems, and writing a list of ideas for an onomatopoetic poem (time permitting). In order to facilitate access to all tasks, the lesson will be structured in a gradual release format, with lots of teacher modeling frontloaded at the beginning of the lesson. When they transition to group work, students will read and write with partners so as to lessen the load on any one particular student. These supports will help all achieve my main learning goals: 1) onomatopoeia is just another tool that poets se to enrich their work with sounds and images, and 2) all students will come to see onomatopoeia as another device or “tool” that he or she may use, as a practicing poet in his or her own right, in order to enrich the work that they produce for this unit and beyond.