

Two Environmentally-Oriented Literature Activities

Beginning in the summer of 2006, myself and Kira Davis worked with director Steve Jacques on a variety of changes aimed at reducing the negative environmental impact of the Hawaii English Language Program (HELP), an intensive English program located on the campus of the University of Hawaii. Our changes included creating a new student orientation on living green in Hawaii, eliminating disposable plates and utensils from HELP functions and designing a series of environmentally-themed Friday activities. In this paper, I will look at two of the Friday activities: a one-day poetry workshop, and a four-day drama activity based on a children's book. The students in both of these activities were adult second language learners, with the vast majority coming from Asian countries. Additionally, both activities were open to students of all levels.

The Greening HELP Project

The Greening HELP Project began with a paper I wrote for a class on program administration. In this paper, I offered some ideas on how a program administrator could make her or his program more environmentally responsible. HELP's assistant director, Steve Jacques, read the paper, and invited me to try to implement some of the ideas. He offered me a release from some of my teaching responsibilities, as well as financial and institutional support. Kira Davis, a fellow English teacher with a background in environmental education, joined me on this project.

Initially, we thought that changing HELP's purchasing decisions would be an important

area to work on. Unfortunately, we were unable to make much headway in finding eco-friendly office supplies in Hawaii. We made some changes, but spent a great deal of time going down dead-ends. After a couple of weeks, we decided to concentrate instead on teaching and materials development. We created a short orientation for teachers, and a two-hour orientation for students. In the student orientation, we introduced students to resources for green living in Hawaii. The two main issues we dealt with were purchasing food and recycling. We introduced concepts such as GMO, locally-grown, organic and processed, and let students know where they could buy healthier types of food and recycle their waste. Overall, I believe that the orientation had a positive impact, although some students resented being forced to learn about environmental responsibility.

In addition, we created a series of Friday activities designed with the environment in mind. The two activities discussed in this paper both come from our second series of Friday activities. The poetry activity is one of three one-day activities that we offered on the first Friday, while new students were attending orientation. The children's book-based drama activity is a four-day activity that is currently underway. I will also briefly discuss Davis' experience using this same activity in an EFL setting.

Using Literature for Change in the ESL Classroom

Lazar (1993) offers a variety of reasons for including literature in the ESL classroom. She claims that that literature can be motivate, provide access to cultural background, encourage language acquisition, expand language awareness, develop interpretive abilities and educate students as a whole person (pp. 15-19). This last reason is the most relevant to the two activities described in this paper. While I agree with Lazar's other reasons, we primarily chose to use

literature in these activities to encourage students to think critically about “the values and traditions of their own society” (Lazar, 1993, p. 19). Motivation was another factor, as we felt that students would enjoy working with both poetry and drama. Language acquisition was not our primary goal, due in large part to the fact that both of these activities were conceived of as short projects to be done outside of the students' usual language classes.

There has not been a great deal written on using environmental literature in the ESL or EFL classroom. Rammal (1996) discusses using environmental literature with EFL students in Palestine. He recognizes the potential for teachers to “...increase their students' motivation by introducing stimulating, controversial ecological topics” (p. 131). Rammal goes beyond simply teaching about the environment, though, suggesting that environmental literature can be used to engage students on the ongoing struggle between Palestine and Israel. One idea of his that resonates with me is organizing a “...bimonthly, hands-on project” (p. 132). One of the primary motivations behind our drama activity is the performance aspect. Students will perform the play at HELP's end-of-term luncheon, introducing their classmates to the issues and ideas included in the story. Hopefully, this will be rewarding for both the performers and the audience. In my teaching, I strongly believe in the importance of not only raising awareness about important issues, but also stimulating students to take action.

Sherlock (2003) outlines a seminar he designed helping Russian EFL teachers design a curriculum integrating environmental education and EFL. To do this, he paired the existing Russian environmental education texts with comparable eleventh-grade English texts. The teachers then did a series of literature circles and jigsaw activities based on the texts. In this way, Sherlock hoped to give the teachers a better understanding of how their students would engage with the literature. At the end of the article, Sherlock includes a list of paired Russian and

English readings which would be useful to anyone planning a similar course. While his curriculum was much more involved than the short program we were attempting to create at HELP, it is still encouraging to see the passion that other English teachers have for environmental issues.

The environment is not the only global issue that has been brought into the language classroom through literature. Discussing the use of black protest poetry in the EFL classroom, Orkin (2003) says using such poetry "...can widen the horizon of students, some of whom at least are inclined to view poetry as an effete activity or one primarily aesthetic and unworldly" (p. 36). Similarly, we hoped that using literature in environmentally-focused activities would broaden students understanding both of the issues and of the potential of literature. Vandrick (1994) outlines a course using short stories and poetry in order to educate students on social justice. She recognizes that, despite the initial time required to gather materials, using literature helped her students "think critically, make connections, and develop themselves as individuals and as world citizens" (p. 119). In my opinion, developing as a world citizen requires thinking about one's affects on the environment.

Many global issues and environmentally-oriented ESL / EFL textbooks also include some literature-based activities. *Linking Language and the Environment* (Jacobs et al, 1998) features an activity in which students write environmentally-minded haiku and *Global Issues* (Sampedro & Hillyard, 2004) has units devoted to working with drama and song lyrics. Critically-minded literature activities that are appropriate for language learners can also be found in some non-ESL textbooks. *Reading, Writing and Rising Up* (Christensen, 2000) is aimed at high school L1 English teachers and has many poetry activities dealing with developing literacy and cultural identity. It includes a wide array of both professional and student poetry. *Rethinking*

Globalization (Bigelow & Peterson, 2002) is another book aimed at L1 high school students featuring many poetry activities that would also work in the ESL classroom. Three of the poems used in the poetry activity described in this paper came from that book.

The First Friday – Global Issues Poetry

We created three alternative activities for continuing students to attend while new students took part in the orientation. One of these was a poetry reading and writing workshop. For this workshop, I attempted to find poetry that dealt with the environment or other global issues. Because we did not have a great deal of time, I wanted the poems to be fairly straightforward grammatically and not particularly long. Furthermore, I looked for poems that had a structural or thematic element that could serve as a model for student poetry. I came up with six poems: *God to a Hungry Child* (Hughes, 2003), *Where the Sidewalk Ends* (Silverstein, 1974), *Forgotten Language* (Silverstein, 1974), *Green Has an Attitude* (Pero, 2003), *Two Young Women* (Barry, 2003) and *Arguments Against the Bombing* by (Majaj, 2003) (see Appendix A).

I created a reading packet that included each of the aforementioned poems along with discussion and writing prompts for each poem. The first three discussion prompts were common to all of the poems. I asked students to underline and define unknown vocabulary words. Next, I asked them to talk with their groupmates about aspects of the poem that they did not understand. Then, I asked them to discuss the overall meaning or message of the poem. The fourth discussion prompt was different for each poem. With this prompt, I attempted to draw students' attention to the structural or thematic element that they were going to model their writing on. For example, for *God to a Hungry Child* (Hughes, 2002), I asked students to consider the world around them and to discuss whom it seems that God has made it for. The writing prompt for that

poem asked them to write a poem from God explaining some aspect of the world to someone. Each poem had a unique writing prompt that attempted to bring focus to an element or theme that students could use as a model. At the same time, I made it clear that they were free to depart from these models if they felt comfortable doing that.

Before I discuss the manner in which these materials were presented to the students, I want to give a few more examples of the types of elements that I selected as writing prompts. The poem *Two Women* has an interesting structure, wherein each pair of lines gives the perspective of two different women on some aspect of their lives. Thus, I asked students interested in that poem to try writing a poem comparing two people or things using a similar structure. In *Green Has an Attitude*, the color green is used to represent nature. In their poems, I asked students to write using a color to represent something. Also, students were given flexibility in terms of their content. I did not require that they write environmental or global issues oriented poems.

Looking at Lazar's (1993) poetry tasks for the language classroom, I can see that I used several of her ideas. First, she suggests preteaching certain elements of the poem (p. 130). While I did not technically preteach anything, I addressed a variety of vocabulary and grammatical during the initial reading, before students look at the poems more thoroughly in groups. I also used several of her while-reading activities, including having students underline, define and discuss the meaning of certain words and phrases (p. 130). Finally, she also includes the two follow-up activities, namely having students discuss the issues and values of the poem, and having them write their own (p. 131).

I began our two-hour session by giving a brief overview of the activity. Then, I asked for volunteers to read poems aloud. I had a student read each poem, except for *Two Young Women*

(Barry, 2002) which was read by a pair of students. After each poem, I took questions and gave brief comments. As we were doing this, I realized that we were using up too much time reading them aloud and decided not to include *Arguments Against the Bombing* (Majaj, 2002). After reading the five poems, I asked students to choose one that they were interested in and put them in groups accordingly. Two groups looked at *Two Young Women* (Barry, 2002), two at *Green Has an Attitude* (Pero, 2003) and one at *Forgotten Language* (Silverstein, 1974). There was also a student who was very interested in *God to a Hungry Child* (Hughes, 2003) so I asked him to join one of the other groups during the discussion, but to use that poem as his model for his writing. For the next twenty minutes, students went over the discussion prompts in small groups.

The discussions were quite lively. Students explained vocabulary words to each other and expressed their opinions of the poems' meanings. I answered vocabulary questions readily but tried to refrain from telling students the “right” interpretation of the poem. If pressed, I shared my interpretation, but I also stressed that no one but the poet knew the intended meaning for certain. I stopped the discussions at the mid-point of our two-hour session.

After we took a five-minute break, students began writing. I gave them the option of writing either individually or in groups of four or less. I did this to compensate for the fact that there was a full range of levels in the class. The class was evenly split between students writing alone and students writing in groups. Students had thirty minutes to write their poems and, during this time, I encouraged them to share and discuss their writing with their neighbors. In addition, I made myself available to answer questions during this time. Interestingly, I was only asked vocabulary and grammar questions during this time. Students did not seem interested in having my help in terms of content or theme. I stressed the flexible nature of grammar in poetry, but I also attempted to help students express their intended meanings clearly.

At the end of class, I asked for volunteers to share their poems aloud. Several students did this. Students who wrote individually seemed more inclined to share than those who wrote in groups. Almost every student came up with a poem by the end of class, with one group of three being the only students who did not complete the activity.

Extended Activity – Creating an Environmentally-Themed Play

As Lazar (1993) says, the “human conflicts, moral dilemmas or political issues communicated in a play engage students intellectually and emotionally, and can provide a valuable source for discussion” (p. 138). Despite the fact that language learning was not our primary motivation with this activity, the process of reading a story and then writing and performing a play provides undoubtedly offered the students linguistic benefits. As Heath (1996) says, “literature has no rival in its power to create natural repetition, reflection on language and how it works, and attention to audience response on the part of learners” (p. 776).

For this activity, we decided to take Davis' existing two-day environmentally-themed drama activity and expand it into four days. This activity is currently underway and will not be completed until mid-December. Students are being asked to create, practice and perform a play based on the book *Maui-Maui* (Cosgrove, 1995). This book primarily addresses the issue of overfishing, but also promotes the idea of consuming in a sustainable way, in harmony with others. It tells the story of the Amomonies: small, furry, mongoose-like beings who love to fish. They routinely catch and cook much more than they can eat. One day, Maui-Maui, a whale, takes Mom Amomony under the sea to show her how overfishing has depleted the ocean. From that day on, the Amomonies try to live in balance with the world around them.

On the first day, students were given photocopies of the book. They then took turns

reading the book aloud. During this time, the teacher answered questions about grammar, vocabulary and content. The teacher then introduced the concept of using the story to create a play, and gave students a sample copy of a script created from this book. Students were asked to read the script and brainstorm ideas for their own script for homework. In addition, students were asked what language skills they wanted to concentrate on. Many expressed an interest in working on pronunciation, so the teacher decided to spend some time in upcoming classes recording and working on student speech. Even though this activity was not designed with a specific pronunciation focus in mind, it seems appropriate and we are curious to see the result.

Over the next three Fridays, students will continue writing and rehearsing their play. If time permits, they will spend some time on the last Friday creating props and costumes. Finally, at the end-of-term lunch, the students are planning to perform their play. At this lunch, there will be approximately one hundred students and teachers in attendance. Hopefully, this performance will serve both as a motivator and a reward for the students involved.

This type of activity could also work in an EFL setting. Davis, the activity's creator, recently used it in her teaching at a university in Hunan, China. She normally began classes by asking three students to share aloud from their journals. In early October, she offered the idea of writing and performing a play based on *Maui-Maui* instead of doing their usual shares. This was presented as an optional activity that students could volunteer for if they were interested. Students were quite willing to volunteer, but three of the four classes failed to adequately prepare for their performances. Perhaps this was due to the fact that the entire writing and rehearsing process took place outside of the classroom and away from teacher supervision.

Davis gave each group of six to eight students a copy of *Maui-Maui* and two copies of the sample script. They were told to read the story and the script and to write their own script. In the

script, students were to make sure that the speaking parts were distributed equally. The performances were to be five to ten minutes long. The script was to be turned in a week before the performance so that Davis could correct unclear grammar. Students had three weeks to prepare and were reminded each week to be working on their plays but success was limited. One group, however, did a very good job and seemed to both enjoy the experience and entertain their classmates. This was not the first time that Davis has used environmentally-themed plays her teaching and she is currently planning a semester long course for the fall of 2007 in which students will write and perform their own drama.

Student Feedback

After completing the poetry activity, I asked students to complete a feedback form (see Appendix B). For the most part, their responses were quite positive. Most appeared to enjoy the activity, even though several expressed that looking at and writing poetry was new and challenging for them. Comments like the following two were fairly common:

First, I think it's difficult to write poem, but it was kind of fun!

I like to write the poem. It was very special experience.

Several students also mentioned that they appreciated the opportunity to write a poem in English, something that many of them had not done much before.

I couldn't imagine that I write the poem in English. It's exotic.

Trying to write poem is my first. It was so good. I didn't have any dislike parts.

I've never written about poem for a long times. I was very pleased to write a poem in a group.

It seems that many students enjoyed writing poetry even though it was somewhat challenging and

unfamiliar to them. In the future, I will definitely try to incorporate more poetry writing in my teaching. I typically use a lot of freewriting in my teaching, and it would certainly be possible to convert some of these activities into poetry writing. In addition, as a result of putting together the materials for this poetry writing workshop, I now know of a variety of global issues oriented poems that would serve well as models.

Interestingly, only one student overtly addressed the environmental nature of the poetry that we looked at in this activity. Students seemed to focus more on the form of what we looked at than the content. This is reflected in the poetry that the students wrote as well. Only a couple of the poems dealt with environmental issues. Perhaps if this activity were done in the context of a class on global or environmental issues students would be more inclined to focus on the content than the form. Regardless, I was quite satisfied with their poems and am pleased that many of them enjoyed the experience. The students appeared to be very engaged in the activities, as they were quite active both during the group discussions and in the writing portion. Furthermore, several of the students seemed particularly interested in sharing their poems with their classmates. Despite my satisfaction, though, there were several problems that I will attempt to address in my next poetry activity.

Limitations and Reflection

The most common complaint on the student feedback form was a perceived lack of time. I completely agree but, unfortunately, the two-hour limit is inherent in HELP's Friday activity structure. In the future, however, I would offer fewer poems in order to give the students more time for discussing and writing. In addition to the time constraints, I also sensed that, by the time we finished reading all of the poems, some students were feeling overwhelmed. I wanted to

include six poems because I wanted to offer a variety of topics and levels, but in hindsight I can see that six was too many. I think three poems would still offer students a range of difficulty and topics, while consuming significantly less time at the start of the workshop. In addition, while working on this paper, I came across Hess' (2003) nine-step model for helping language learners unlock the meaning of a poem. Handling a single poem in this manner could be a very worthwhile alternate activity.

Returning again to Lazar's (1993) list of poetry tasks, there are a few ideas that I would like to experiment with the next time I bring poetry into the classroom. If we had more time, I would like to try some of the pre-reading activities, such as guessing the theme from the poem's title or asking students to brainstorm about how they would respond to the situation presented in the poem (p. 129). I am also interested in trying some other while-reading activities, especially having students fill in gaps in the poem or guess what will happen next (p. 130). The activity that most appeals to me, however, is the post-reading activity in which students imagine that they are making a film based on the poem and brainstorm appropriate visual images (p. 131). I have never asked students to come up with visual imagery in the language classroom, and I am very curious to see how students would respond.

Another problem was that, because this was done as a Friday activity as opposed to in a regular class, students from all levels were able to participate. This led to a wide range of English levels, and this was problematic during the group discussions. One student commented that "it difficult to discuss with students at different level." I also observed that, in a couple of the groups, the higher level students did the majority of the speaking. While this does not necessarily mean that language learning was not taking place for the other students, if I were to do this activity again I might try to divide the groups by level. I did not do this because I wanted

to give students as much freedom as possible in choosing their poem.

In addition to having too many poems, I believe that this activity was done with too many students. I did not put a limit on student enrollment, and ended up having 23 students. Our classroom was relatively small, and this created a problem with noise during group work. Also, it was a little difficult to coordinate the group formations with so many students. Next time, I would like to try this activity with a maximum of fifteen students.

In terms of the drama activity, we do not yet know which elements were successful and which need to be improved. One interesting realization that came out of the first meeting, however, is the range of possible directions in which it could be taken. Davis and I had originally designed it primarily thinking about how to make it enjoyable for students and conducive to awareness raising about environmental issues. The students and teacher, however, decided to make pronunciation one of the main parts of the activity. It does not take much imagination to see that vocabulary, grammar, writing, pragmatics and other language elements could also be readily focused on with this type of activity.

One final difficulty, interestingly, has to do with an advantage of using literature. Clearly, one of the reasons that students enjoyed the poetry activity was that it was something new. This unfamiliarity, however, can also be intimidating. During the first term, we offered the drama activity and no students signed up for it. In part, I believe this was due to the fact that the idea of writing and performing a play seemed too daunting. If a teacher is able to coach students past their initial trepidation, I believe that students can and will enjoy these types of activities.

Conclusion

Overall, I have been inspired by bringing literature into my language teaching. In the

past, when teaching about environmental and global issues, I have never included literary components. It is clear from the feedback, however, that many students appreciated the opportunity to do a different type of reading and writing. Davis received similar comments from students doing the drama activity. After doing these activities, it certainly seems that “literary texts are a rich source of classroom activities that can prove very motivating for learners” (Lazar, 1996, p. 773).

In addition, to increasing student motivation, it is also now apparent to me that there is an array of global issues and environmentally-oriented literature available for teachers looking to create language learning activities. Although it is somewhat time consuming to pull together appropriate readings, once that is done, adapting them for different types of activities will not be difficult. Furthermore, I enjoyed reading through poems, attempting to find ones that I thought would fit in my lesson plan.

Despite my belief in the power and beauty of literature, I used to feel that it was more important to use global issues materials for my class content than to use literature. I now realize that this is a false dichotomy. Recently, my teaching has been focused on developing hands-on projects that aim at encouraging students to think critically about their role in the world and to consider alternatives. Now, I see that literature can be an integral and powerful part of this type of activism-oriented language teaching.

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Appendix A – Poetry Materials

God to a Hungry Child

Hungry child,
I didn't make this world for you.
You didn't buy any stock in my railroad.
You didn't invest in my corporation.
Where are your shares in Standard Oil?
I made the world for the rich
And the will-be-rich
And the have-always-been-rich.
Not for you.
Hungry child.

Langston Hughes

1. Underline a few (3-5) vocabulary words and talk to your group about what they mean. Write their definition next to them
2. If there are any parts of the poem that you are confused about or don't understand, ask the people in your group.
3. Talk about what the poem means. What do you think the poet is trying to say? What is the poet's message or point?
4. Look at the world around us. Who does it seem that God made this world for? Why does it seem that way?

Look at the overall structure of the poem and think about how you could make a similar poem yourself. Talk to your group mates about your ideas. Try writing a poem from the point of view of God to a person (or thing). If you want, you can include some global or environmental issue in your poem, and you can use this poem as a model. If you're trying to think of an idea, think of a problem or something that is difficult or unfair in the world, and imagine how God would explain that.

Appendix A – Poetry Materials (cont.)

Where the Sidewalk Ends

There is a place where the sidewalk ends
And before the street begins,
And there the grass grows soft and white,
And there the sun burns crimson bright,
And there the moon-bird rests from his flight
To cool in the peppermint wind.

Let us leave this place where the smoke blows black
And the dark street winds and bends.
Past the pits where the asphalt flowers grow
We shall walk with a walk that is measured and slow,
And watch where the chalk-white arrows go
To the place where the sidewalk ends.

Yes we'll walk with a walk that is measured and slow,
And we'll go where the chalk-white arrows go,
For the children, they mark, and the children, they know
The place where the sidewalk ends.

Shel Silverstein

1. Underline a few (3-5) vocabulary words and talk to your group about what they mean. Write their definition next to them
2. If there are any parts of the poem that you are confused about or don't understand, ask the people in your group.
3. Talk about what the poem means. What do you think the poet is trying to say? What is the poet's message or point?
4. I have underlined some places where the poet made some interesting or unusual word choices. He puts words together that we don't normally think of as being a pair. Why do you think the poet did this?

Look at the overall structure of the poem and think about how you could make a similar poem yourself. Talk to your group mates about your ideas. Try writing a poem about a place that is special to you. Perhaps you can describe a beautiful place in nature. Feel free to take as much or as little from the structure of the poem as you want.

Appendix A – Poetry Materials (cont.)

Forgotten Language

Once I spoke the language of the flowers,
Once I understood each word the caterpillar said,
Once I smiled in secret at the gossip of the starlings,
And shared a conversation with the housefly
in my bed.
Once I heard and answered all the questions
of the crickets,
And joined the crying of each falling dying
flake of snow,
Once I spoke the language of the flowers...
How did it go?
How did it go?

Shel Silverstein

1. Underline a few (3-5) vocabulary words and talk to your group about what they mean. Write their definition next to them
2. If there are any parts of the poem that you are confused about or don't understand, ask the people in your group.
3. Talk about what the poem means. What do you think the poet is trying to say? What is the poet's message or point?
4. This poet talks about having forgotten a language that let him communicate with nature. Do you think he really used to be able to talk to houseflies? If not, what do you think he means by this? He uses this forgotten language as an extended metaphor. What does it represent?

Look at the overall structure of the poem and think about how you could make a similar poem yourself. Talk to your group mates about your ideas. Try writing a poem about something you knew or had before and have lost. You can think about things that children know / have that adults do not have. Some ideas are innocence, imaginary friends, etc.

Appendix A – Poetry Materials (cont.)

Green Has an Attitude

The green smears itself
against gray sky
and clutters everything with green
Green has an attitude
It takes over
It doesn't ask permission
Green slaps itself all over
Bushes trees grass creepy vines
People try to fight back by
painting houses white yellow and blue
by filling the air with dark smoke and smog
Building whole cities with only
a few trees
Crisscrossing the landscape with
industrial junkyards
no green would be caught dead in

No, what you don't realize is,
It's a war
Green's got an attitude

People have to show green
who's boss

Alice Pero

1. Underline a few (3-5) vocabulary words and talk to your group about what they mean. Write their definition next to them
2. If there are any parts of the poem that you are confused about or don't understand, ask the people in your group.
3. Talk about what the poem means. What do you think the poet is trying to say? What is the poet's message or point?
4. What does “green” represent in this poem? If there is a war between “green” and people, which side do you think the poet is on? Why?

Look at the overall structure of the poem and think about how you could make a similar poem yourself. Talk to your group mates about your ideas. Try writing a poem about the struggle between man and nature. You can follow this poem's model of using the color green to represent nature, or you can try to do it in another way.

Appendix A – Poetry Materials (cont.)

Two Young Women

I'm 18, and years older than that.

I'm 18, and I can't believe I'm that old.

I get up before sunrise, because I have to be at work.

I get up at 6, because I need time to do my hair and makeup before school.

I walk two miles to work, the blisters on my feet open from wear.

I drive to school, and walk carefully, because I need to keep my shoes clean.

I spend my day inside a factory, with hundreds of other girls, unable to take breaks, and unable to leave.

I spend my day in classes, wanting only to get out.

I would give anything to go to school, to learn, to be able to get somewhere in life.

I would give anything to be done with school. Who cares anyways?

I would quit, but I can't. I have parents, brothers and sisters to support, and jobs are hard to find.

I'd drop out, but then my parents would be pissed.

At 4:00, we get a five minute break for water, and then it's back for more work.

At 3:30, we get out, and I head for basketball practice.

I sew the Swoosh on, time after time, hour after hour, until my fingers bleed, and my knuckles ache.

I lace up my Nikes, my new ones.

I earn barely enough to live, and not even near enough to help my family. I get paid per pair, and I can only make so many.

These cost me \$130, and everyone has a pair.

My lungs burn with every breath, and I cough up dust every night when I get home.

My lungs burn as I run up and down the court, but I know it only makes me stronger.

I sew pair after pair, trying to earn enough to buy food and clothes.

These shoes hurt my feet. I think I'll buy a new pair.

I go home, and cry. I want out, but it's such a vicious cycle. I work to get out, but I always need to work a little more before I have enough.

I go home, and lie on my water bed. I can't wait till college. I can get out.

Deidre Barry

Appendix A – Poetry Materials (cont.)

1. Underline a few (3-5) vocabulary words and talk to your group about what they mean. Write their definition next to them
2. If there are any parts of the poem that you are confused about or don't understand, ask the people in your group.
3. Talk about what the poem means. What do you think the poet is trying to say? What is the poet's message or point?
4. Which parts of these two women's lives are similar to yours? What else can you imagine about these two women? Where do they live? What are their houses like? What are their lives like?

Look at the overall structure of the poem and think about how you could make a similar poem yourself. Talk to your group mates about your ideas. Try writing a poem where two different people give their points of view on their lives, showing the reader what is the same and what is different. Feel free to include some cultural, global or environmental issues. You can use this poem as a model for structure, alternating lines from each person, but you can change the structure if you want, too.

Appendix A – Poetry Materials (cont.)

Arguments Against the Bombing

consider the infinite fragility of an infant's
skull
how the bones lie soft and open
only time knitting them shut

consider a delicate porcelain bowl
how it crushes under a single blow
-- in one moment whole years disappear

consider that beneath the din of explosions
no song can be heard
no cry

consider your own sky on fire
your name erased
your children's lives “a price worth paying”

consider the faces you do not see
the eyes you refuse to meet
“collateral damage”

how in those words
the world cracks open

Lisa Suhair Majaj

- The two phrases in quotes are phrases that people who support a war sometimes use. “A price worth paying” expresses a belief that the people who died have died for a worthwhile reason. “Collateral damage” refers to innocent people who are killed by accident during a war.
 1. Underline a few (3-5) vocabulary words and talk to your group about what they mean. Write their definition next to them
 2. If there are any parts of the poem that you are confused about or don't understand, ask the people in your group.
 3. Talk about what the poem means. What do you think the poet is trying to say? What is the poet's message or point?
 4. This poem is called an “argument”. How does the poet make her argument? If you could summarize it in one sentence, what is she asking the reader to do?

Look at the overall structure of the poem and think about how you could make a similar poem yourself. Talk to your group mates about your ideas. Try writing a poem about an environmental or global issue where you ask the reader to consider how the issue affects children (either children today or children in the future). If you want, you can use the structure of the poem as a model, beginning each stanza with “consider”. Feel free to change the structure as much as you want, though.

Appendix B
Environmental Poetry Feedback

How did you feel about this activity overall? Which parts did you like? Which parts did you dislike?
What would you change?

Do you feel like you understood the poem that you talked about in your group? If not, what could we have done differently?

How did you feel about writing a poem? What could we do differently next time to make that more successful?

Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience doing this activity?