

September 2015

My Teacher, Poetry

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Recommended Citation

Kersjes, Rebecca (2015) "My Teacher, Poetry," *The Idea of an Essay*: Vol. 2 , Article 2.
Available at: https://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/idea_of_an_essay/vol2/iss1/2

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“My Teacher, Poetry” by Rebecca Kersjes

Instructor’s Notes

In her literacy narrative, Rebecca Kersjes successfully uses detail, dialogue, and description to tell a story about her road to becoming a literate person. Her journey through time ends in the present day, helping to tease out the significance of her story. It can be often be difficult to convey critical thinking through story telling. If you were peer reviewing this essay, what advice might you give Rebecca to increase the evidence of critical thinking in her story?

Writer’s Biography

Rebecca Kersjes is a third-year Language Arts Education major from Cincinnati, Ohio. Over the years, Rebecca developed a love for writing poems, but currently her favorite style of creative writing is nonfiction prose. In her free time, she enjoys spending time exploring the woods or baking with friends.

My Teacher, Poetry

It is possible to write an entire poem about the way a drop of rain lands on the ground or the beauty of dust dancing in the light streaming through a window. Poetry taught me to see the beauty in everything around me because when I notice these small, beautiful moments, I can write. And when I can find a way to put these moments perfectly into words, I can allow others to experience what I have experienced, and hopefully they will be able to find these beautiful moments in their own life.

When an English teacher said, “Writing is difficult, it takes time and it doesn’t come easy,” I didn’t understand at first. I didn’t understand because I hadn’t taken the next step in writing - the step of moving forward from good, satisfactory writing to beautiful, purposeful writing. As poetry taught me to see the tiny details of life around me it also taught me that each word in a sentence or stanza matters. I had to test each line out loud before I was satisfied. The

exact place the word lies on the page even matters. I realized that if I was to become the writer I dreamed to be I needed to learn to put careful thought into each word I wrote.

For years, I expressed my thoughts best through writing; whether in the form of a poem, or thoughts scribbled down illegibly as I tried to pour everything that was inside my head onto the paper in front of me. It was a release, a safe haven, a place I could let every thought go. These thoughts I wrote down became a secret place for my mind to escape. Yet, a part of myself wanted to let someone else in to see what I had revealed. I struggled to share any of this writing. I thought it was petty and insignificant. When I read through anything I had written it lacked what I thought good writing needed, but I could never seem to break out of the cycle of mundane, boring expressions. It seemed plain and obvious. Too obvious. What you saw is what you got, and that really didn't appeal to my senses the way I wanted.

Still, I continued to write. Good or bad, writing seemed to be a part of who I was through my beginning years of high school. As I look back, I see that writing was a journey I undertook. It was sometimes easy and progressive, I sailed smoothly through poems and stories like the way water slides over stones in a river. Other times writing was painstaking and slow. I had trouble writing anything at all, and if I could come up with anything, it didn't satisfy me. When I read what I forced myself to write it was bland and tasteless, lacking the creativity and fullness good writing requires. It wasn't until I started sharing my writing that I was able to appreciate the beauty behind it and realize my writing had worth and value to other people, not just myself.

Public speaking has never been easy for me. I remember perfectly the first time I shared a poem to a group of people. I showed my youth pastor at church a poem I had written because it matched up with the message he had just preached.

Joe looked at me excitedly "You have to share this with the teens upstairs next service."

I looked at him nervously, "No way, I can't do that."

But I couldn't help but smile. He thought it was good – good enough to share with the other teens. That meant it had some worth and value, something that I had never realized my poetry had. I seemed torn in two; I wasn't sure if I was ready to open myself up

to a crowd of teenagers that could, and surely would, judge me. But the other half of me was excited to see what would happen when I let others see the way I saw the world through poetry. So I said yes.

I found myself standing in front of a room of teenagers mixed with several adults looking at me, expecting me to say something of worth to them. I could feel the heat of nervousness boiling over inside me as my palms began to sweat. I s-s-stuttered my way through each word, bouncing back and forth from one foot to the other. My eyes clung to the words like a lifeline to avoid the all too real stares of everyone in the room. It felt like I couldn't get any words out right. They seemed to either all jumble together too quickly, or stick in my throat, refusing to come out. But then it was over, as quickly as it had begun.

It was until later that I realized I had actually enjoyed sharing my poem in front of a group. I never would have thought that sharing something that I had kept private for so long could be freeing. Despite the satisfaction of that moment, though, I continued to struggle to share my writing in front of people. In class, in church, or even with close friends, it was difficult. What I have learned over the past few years is that even though it may be a struggle to open up my heart for everyone to see, whenever I do only good has come from it. It has helped me grow closer to those around me, helped me connect with new friends and new teachers. It has always been taught in school that we as students need to become better writers. But what I realized is that, though my writing style has improved greatly, writing was my teacher. Poetry taught me to see the world in a different light. I learned that in order to understand the big things in life, I must first notice the seemingly small, insignificant things that I would usually pass over.

Taking criticism from others was always a struggle for me because it took so much courage for me to even share it in the first place. Then when they would critique what I had showed them I seemed to put up the wall again. In time, I realized that not opening myself up to others criticism was holding me back from improving. Poetry again taught me something. Many times I refused to see the mistakes I made, and letting others in to point them out should be considered helpful, not hurtful. Allowing myself to acknowledge the mistakes I made gave me the opportunity to continually grow and change my style of writing. I was able to find the places that felt not

only the most natural, but worked the most successfully.

Writing was a treasure I held onto dearly. It took me on a journey through the years that I never imagined possible. Putting words onto a page seems like such a simple concept, and maybe it is, but it taught me so much more than creating a well flowing sentence. Beauty appeared around me in the simplest of things or ideas as I realized that the most skillful writing comes from taking the time to notice this always-present beauty of life. Poetry taught me to appreciate the small moments in life so that when I formed these moments into a work of art on a page others could then see these moments in their own life. After years of struggling to write what I thought was poetry worth sharing, poetry now takes my hand and leads me step by step through each special moment in my life and stops me when I begin to rush, saying “Take the time to write this down, so when the moment is long gone and you’re feeling lost, you can come back to this moment, and it will be as if it never left you.”