LESSON THREE

Discovering the Art of Storytelling

He’s the one we bet on,
He flew like an angel.
He won,
We won, too!

Danny Gross, Grade 6

Purposes:
To introduce students to narrative poetry
To have students create a narrative or story poem

Notes to the teacher:
Tell the students that narrative poetry tells a story.

“The Fawn” by Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892–1950)

Edna St. Vincent Millay was born in Rockland, Maine and educated at Vassar College. Much of her poetry expresses her feelings of joy and sorrow. Her collection of poems, The Harp Weaver and Other Poems won the Pulitzer Prize in 1923.

She is known for creating vivid images and for writing lyric poetry, often using the sonnet format. She had this to say about her work, “I see things with my own eyes just as if they were the first eyes that ever saw, and then I set about to tell, as best I can, just what I see.” She published her first poem while she was a student at Vassar. Among her other publications are these: Renascence and Other Poems; Second April; The Buck in the Snow; Wine from these Grapes; Conversation at Midnight; Huntsman, What Quarry? and There Are No Islands, Any More. She also wrote plays and the libretto for the opera The King’s Henchman.

The Fawn

There it was I saw what I shall never forget
And never retrieve,
Monstrous and beautiful to human eyes, hard to believe,
He lay, yet there he lay,
Asleep in the moss, his head on his polished cleft small ebony hooves,
The child of the doe, the dappled child of the deer.

Surely his mother had never said, “Lie here
Till I return,” so spotty and plain to see
On the green moss, lay he.
His eyes had opened; he considered me.
To thrifty ears, might I have had him for my friend
One moment only of that forest day:
Might I have had the acceptance, not the love
Of those clear eyes;
Might I have been for him the bough above
Or the root beneath his forest bed,
A part of the forest, seen without surprise.
Was it alarm, or was it the wind of my fear lest he depart
That jerked him to his jointy knees
And sent him crashing off, leaping and stumbling
On his new legs, between the stems of the white trees?

Edna St. Vincent Millay

**TASK 1**

In “The Fawn,” Edna St. Vincent Millay describes with absolute clarity what she observes. In her poem, the speaker composes a vivid picture of the animal and the story is told by describing the young fawn as well as the speaker’s desire to connect with the animal. Read the poem and respond to the following questions:

1. In this narrative poem, what does the speaker want from the fawn?
2. What reaction does the animal have when it sees the speaker?
3. What colors does the poet use to help the reader see the fawn?
4. What details does she include to express her feelings about this experience with the fawn?

“**Interlude**” by Karl Shapiro (1913–2000)

This editor, scholar and poet was born in Baltimore, Maryland and educated at the University of Virginia and Johns Hopkins University. His interest in poetry began early and he was writing seriously while an undergraduate. He was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for a series of poems he composed during World War II. Among his published volumes are *Person, Place or Thing; V-Letter and Other Poems; Trial of a Poet* and *Poems of a Jew*. His poetry has changed over the years from a traditional to a more experimental style. He experiments with images and the shapes of poems. His poetry demonstrates narrative skill, simplicity and emotion. He feels the role of the poet is to be a critical observer of the world around him, and then to illuminate the ideas important to him. He is also a critic and his critical essays have been collected in several volumes including *Essay on Rime* and *In Defense of Ignorance*.

Before reading, tell the students to observe the structure of the poem as well as rhyming pattern and use of dialogue.
**Interlude**

Writing, I crushed an insect with my nail  
And thought nothing at all. A bit of wing  
Caught my eye then, a gossamer so frail  
And exquisite, I saw in it a thing  
That scorned the grossness of the thing I wrote.  
It hung upon my finger like a sting.  
A leg I noticed next, fine as a mote,  
“And on this frail eyelash he walked,” I said,  
“And climbed and walked like any mountain goat.”  
And in this mood I sought the little head,  
But it was lost; then in my heart a fear  
Cried out, “A life—why beautiful, why dead!”  
It was a mite that held itself most dear,  
So small, I could have drowned it with a tear.

*Karl Shapiro*

Ask students to comment on whether they can identify with the speaker in Shapiro’s poem. Explain.

Writers of prose can also be poetic. Provide the students copies of Saroyan’s story mentioned below or read it aloud to them.


William Saroyan published his first stories when he was in his teens. In 1934, he published “The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze,” a story which brought him fame. Among his other works are *My Name is Aram; The Human Comedy* and *The Time of Your Life*. Saroyan’s constant theme is his Armenian heritage and his childhood days in Fresno, California. In “The Hummingbird That Lived Through Winter,” Saroyan writes about a man who appreciates a bird’s beauty and is willing to save it. (This story can be found in *Introducing Literature*, Macmillan Publishing Co., 1985).

After reading or listening to the story, have the students discuss it in small groups. Ask them to consider the following questions:

1. Describe the condition of the bird at the beginning of the story.
2. Discuss how the old man and the boy help the bird.
3. Why is the man’s love for the beauty of the hummingbird so touching? Explain.
4. What is the old man’s last remark? How does it connect with the theme of the story?

**TASK 2**

Observe an animal or animals. It could be a pet animal, either yours or a neighbor’s; it could be an animal you observed in a competition or a race; or it could be a creature you wanted to bring home as a trophy. Write a narrative poem in which you tell your reader how you came to know
What happened to it? How did you feel about it? Use specific details to describe your experience.

**Student Samples:**

**The Race From Heaven**

That night  
the smell of horses  
was as sweet  
as cherries.  
My friend and I were  
full of curiosity,  
our first night at the races!  
Watching those glorious horses  
lying down the track!  
Each wonderful horse  
possessing its own  
special power.  
Time to bet!  
Which one? Which one?  
It was immediately apparent.  
The beauty of that one,  
that one horse  
was overwhelming.  
He was as graceful  
as a blooming rose,  
yet as strong as a tank.  
He appeared determined, just  
like a brave marine.  
He’s the one we bet on.  
He flew like an angel.  
He won,  
We won, too!

 Danny Gross, Grade 6

**The Need for a Pet**

A dog from across the street? Yes!  
This dog was strange.  
He was not familiar.  
From a stop sign he ran to me.  
Automatically, I ran the other way.  
But then I saw that  
He was friendly.  
He stopped and stared,  
Looking as if he thought  
I were a king.  
I felt for that dog who looked so lonely.  
I knelt down  
To pet him.  
I walked away,  
He followed me.  
I walked to my house,  
And he followed.  
He stayed at my side for the night.  
Then tragedy struck!  
His owner came,  
And whisked him away.

 Steven Stiglitz, Grade 6
From Joy to Sadness to Joy

There she was
staring
staring with innocence.
Her eyes gleaming, like glitter
had fallen into them.
But she was fading away,
away into darkness.
“Doctor, will she be okay?
Will she?”
“Bye, Princess, good-bye,
See you tomorrow.”

Two weeks later
and still,
still in the kennel.
It seems as if they had operated,
operated on her soul
not on her “blind” canine eye.
She went from a world of joy
to one of sadness.

More operations followed.
I went from a world of joy
to one of sadness.

Then, one day,
the sun shone brightly.
A slight breeze shook the leaves on the trees.
It seemed like a perfect day, but it wasn’t.
If I were holding her in my arms, then maybe,
just maybe, it would be a perfect day.

I heard a horn
beeping, beeping.
I dashed downstairs
and there she was
shaking and shaking
on the lush green grass.
Seeing me, she walked
then ran,
then jumped
into my arms.

Oh, it was a perfect day!

Alex Kaplan, Grade 6

The Final Moment

I watched the little gray kitten
Looking sicker than ever,
Its little black eyes half closed.

I watched it there.
I closed my eyes
Trying to think
That I was only dreaming
But I knew
I wasn’t.

The kitten slowly closed its eyes,
And I knew
No longer
Would it be
In pain or in fear,
For it was in a world
High above us
Resting there peacefully
Watching over us.

Linda Klein, Grade 8
First Hunt

The weather is frigid.
I am sitting beneath thousands
Of green pine trees.
My hands and feet feel frostbitten.
A shotgun rests across my lap.
The barrel is a cylinder of ice.
I am waiting, waiting for the slightest
Movement or murmur of sound.
Suddenly, I hear a crack.
Tree limbs are bending.
I glance up and see a
Squirrel. Its fur looks like
It is sprinkled with cinnamon.
I get up slowly, slowly and ease
My finger on the trigger.
I get the squirrel in the sight
of my gun and gently squeeze
The trigger.
The squirrel hits the ground.
My legs are shaking like a wet
Puppy’s.
My very first trophy!

Ian Boswell, Grade 6

The Snail

The snail—
One of the slowest animals alive,
A small helpless creature
With little to look forward to in its
Short life.
I saw one yesterday on my front step
Devoting several hours of its life to
Cross from one side to the other.
I knew it wouldn’t make it.
Someone would surely step on it,
I almost did myself.
I picked up the little snail
And put it in a bed of flowers safe
From harm’s way.
I knew it was a snail—
It couldn’t talk, or understand
What I had done—
But if it could
I know what it would say.

Darren Himeles, Grade 8