



Science Verse
by Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith

Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith's *Science Verse* is listed in Chapter Nine, "The Reading and Writing Connection." It is included in a section in "Imaginative Writing Through Poetry Appreciation and Writing Workshops" (pp. 366 - 374). It is listed on Table 9.1, "Progression for Poetry Study" under "Poetry to Accompany Content - Content-Science/Nature: (p. 368).

I chose this book because children love the humorous poems and Lane Smith's exaggerated illustrations. To expand poetry appreciation and understanding teachers can use the poems to teach poetic elements such as rhyme and rhythm or compare the poems used for Scieszka's sound alike poems with the poems he used as models such as "Casey at the Bat" by Ernest Thayer for his "Scientific Method at the Bat." The final page of the text reveals the original poems and Scieszka's reasons for using this method.

In addition to increasing understanding about poetry, the book can be shared as part of the science curriculum. During the spring semester of 2005, one of my university students, Niki Crystal, chose the book as part of an authentication project in which she authenticated the poems for their science content. For this authentication assignment, she used fourteen science text books and four web sites. One of her most detailed authentications accompanied Scieszka's "Lovely" which is modeled after Joyce Kilmer's "Trees." Niki introduced her discussion with a comparison of the poetic elements. Next, she used the science text *Health Care Science Technology* (2004) to verify the accuracy of scientific information about the stomach, the small intestines, the kidney, and the tongue. She found that the poem was scientifically accurate. Niki's conclusion about the importance of this class assignment may be the most important to share with college students:

"When I use this book in the fall, I will provide information that I would not have otherwise known. It will be beneficial in providing a 'hook' that will make research appealing. It has been stressed in class time and again the importance for teachers to be familiar with the literature used in the classroom. I also believe it is important for teachers to do extensive research on the literature used in the classroom. Although this is time consuming and may not be done with every piece of literature, I believe it is a good idea for teachers to have ongoing authentication project, adding to a person library of authenticated literature. This project will make a profound difference in my classroom, especially with gifted and talented students."

--Donna Norton

IDEAS FOR SCHOOL CLASSROOMS

Science Verse. I would do a read aloud of this book on science verse. Additionally, the students could enjoy doing choral reading of various verses in the book. I would assign different parts to the class and have them participate in the choral reading activities which bring forth a book of verse like this to life.

I would have them also create their own verse from anything we were studying in science class. I would have the students read their creative work to the class and illustrate their verses. I would display their work in a bulletin board around the room.

I would also ask them to tell me which verse was similar to what they heard in the book. They could have fun naming the poem or verse which was like the different ones in the book.

This book is a great way to get students to write their own creative verses.

I would have to agree with Donna that this would be a great text to help reinforce poetry with students. I think that it would encourage students to look at poetry in a completely different way and see how it relates to areas outside the Language Arts. I believe that with older students, it would be a great activity to have them write their own poems, using their knowledge of the content being studied, and following the format of well-known poems. This would allow students to express themselves and also for the teacher to see what types of information students are taking away from the content that is currently being studied. I believe that this can be used in both social studies and science.

What a wonderful collection of poems. Here are my ideas.

1. A research project could be designed around the topic of any of the poems.
2. Students could do an Author Study of works of Jon Scieszka.
3. Students could choose their favorite poem or a poem whose topic interests them and do an oral presentation.
4. Students could write their own science verses about topics in their science curriculum.
5. Students could do a study in poetry, sharing favorite poems or poems that they've written.
6. Each student in the class could write a poem and they could be collected and bound in a classroom volume of poetry.
7. The original poems that the science verses have been adapted from could be compared and contrasted.

Here's my idea adapted from a fifth grade classroom. The teacher assigned students to groups of 3 or 4 and had them flip through their SS textbook to find someone or some event of interest. They then had to create a song, rap or chant, giving detailed information, and perform it for the class. For SS, they had to have info such as dates, important figures involved, something interesting about the event/person, etc. They also had to have ELA components such as rhythm and tempo, good descriptions (adj, adv). The students loved it and the same idea could easily apply to a science text.

Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith have created a way of introducing students to what Frank Smith calls the "Literacy Club." By way of introducing the fun of recognizing the funny poems as close to the famous poems, they have given teachers a means for creating insider fun with literacy. Introducing any of the original poems first and then the "created for enjoyment" versions just helps students realize that the members of the literacy club, in the well-read world, see similarities often in what they read and enjoys discussing the similarities and differences. This is why there are recognizable themes and story lines.

I would suggest another activity to look at the content of the poems. This might be to read biographies of scientists who worked in the area of science that is in focus. Teachers might begin with the poem, Dino-Sore and "The Raven" by Edgar Allan Poe. Then, students might read *The Dinosaurs of Waterhouse Hawkins* by Barbara Kerley, which was illustrated by Brain Selznick and includes aspects of the original drawings of Benjamin Waterhouse Hawkins, to appreciate and understand how people living in the 19th Century did not even know what a dinosaur was. There are events in that book that show how some artists and scientists had to work together to envision what was unknown at the time. What other artists have dreamed about how life in times in the past was or how life might be in the future? (Jules Verne is just one)

There is an interesting twist in the events in the life of Hawkins. He faced politics and powers that were unappreciative of his visions. How might the times work against the work of scientists or anyone of vision? Are there politics that are considered more important than science today? What research might be done to write about our own times where there are political perspectives that have impact on the advancement of science? (Have the older students look into stem cell research, for instance.) These issues will lead to an interesting debate.