### *Where the Sidewalk Ends*… and Beyond!



This was one of the most successful programs I ever did with my class. The students and the parents loved it so much that it became an annual spring event.

In our presentation, we used Shel Silverstein's poetry collection *Where the Sidewalk Ends* and other similar books ("and beyond"). Students learned their favorite poems by heart, practiced using facial expressions and gestures to convey meaning and emotion, and practiced projecting their voices for an audience. They made props to highlight their poem.

We performed our presentation in class, in school, and on a special parent night.

One great thing about this style of presentation is that everyone gets equal billing. There's no one person who is the star—each student has the chance to shine for a short (less threatening) period on stage. The style is also very adaptable. It works for a single student, for a small group, or for a whole class presentation.



*"I'm writing these lines from inside a lion and it's rather dark in here!"*

How to get started: Have plenty of poems available. Collections of poetry (such as *Where the Sidewalk Ends*) are one idea, or you can have students bring in some of their own favorite poems. Spend time letting the kids read poems quietly. Then, be sure to read the poems aloud to the students. When you read to them, use exaggerated expressions. They will love it and you will be modeling what they should try to do. After they are hooked on the poems do the following:

1. Have students sign up as a solo or group participant. (depending on student ability and interest, it is possible to sign up for several poems, individually for some and in groups for others)
2. Let students select the poem or poems they want to learn. Help the students to remember that they will memorize the poem, so it shouldn't be so long that it intimidates them, but that they will also need to perform the poem, so it should be long enough to engage the audience.
3. Make two copies of each selected poem (one for the student and one for your files).
4. Give practice time. Memorization is a useful skill, so work with students to help them find their own best memorization tricks.
5. After the students have the lines "by heart" they need to have them "by expression"… it is time to practice how they will present the poem. It is sometimes necessary to model some concepts like projection and how to address the audience.
6. Once you are satisfied the students know their lines, can project their voices, speak in unison if in a group, and use expression, then you can go to the next step.



*"Oh, I'm being swallowed by a boa constrictor"*

7.  Make props. These should not be elaborate or it will take away from the poems.
8.  Have students figure out the main focus of the poem. For example: "Eighteen Flavors" is a poem about an ice cream cone that has 18 flavors. Our prop was a tall ice cream cone (made on a yard stick). The student held the cone while he/she recited the poem and drops it when the cone drops in the poem. (simple but effective)
9.  Some poems don't lend themselves to props, but students usually feel more comfortable if they have some prop on stage. A funny hat or big shirt is often enough. Have the students help decide, but don't get carried away.
10. Practice with the props.



"Who wants a pancake?"



*"Me and Him, Him and Me,*
*We're always together as you can see."*

11. Decide the order of the poems. It works best to balance solo performances and groups throughout the program.
12. Create a stage manager's guide for yourself, arranging the poems in the guide in the order they should be performed.
13. Practice the entire performance many times in class. Then practice wherever you will be presenting (if different than your room).
14. Schedule your performances. Have it more than once. (One performance for schoolmates, one for parents, etc.)
15. Take pictures or video, the kids love looking at these later.
16. Send each student a note congratulating them on their performance. If possible include a photo of them on stage.