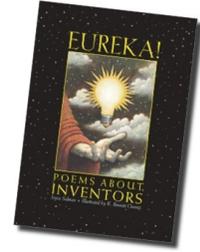


Eureka! Poems About Inventors

by Joyce Sidman



Reader's Guide

These teaching suggestions are for grades 5-8

Note on the word "Eureka!" from the copyright page of the book:

The expression, "Eureka!" originates in a legend told about Archimedes (287- 212 B.C.), a brilliant Greek mathematician known as the father of experimental science. Charged with determining the amount of gold in the king's crown, he noticed one day while bathing that the deeper he sank into the tub, the more water spilled from it. Realizing he had found the key to measuring the volume of an irregular solid, he leapt from the bath and ran toward the palace naked, crying, "Eureka!" (in Greek, "I found [it]!").

WRITING / SOCIAL STUDIES ACTIVITIES

A Moment in Prehistoric History

(social studies, science, writing)

1. **Read aloud** "Prehistory" (p.11).
2. Ask a student to **tell the story** of the poem--what happened first? Then what? Describe the scene.
3. As a class, **brainstorm a list** of things that were probably invented before recorded history: wheel, chair, paintbrush, etc.
4. **Discuss** how the earliest inventions came to be known and recorded; how they must have been invented over and over, in different parts of the world.
5. **Choose one** as a class and brainstorm how it might have been invented. Who might the inventor have been? What were the circumstances? The setting?
6. Reread "Prehistory." Ask students to **pick out images**, smells, sounds, tactile feelings from the poem.
7. Have each student choose an early invention and **write his/her own prehistoric invention story**. Encourage them to use sights, smells, sounds in their stories.

Speaking in a Hero's Voice *(social studies, writing)*

I: Determining Voice

1. Choose several poems with strong voices from the book. Suggestions:
 - "Ode to Spode"
 - "The Real McCoy"
 - "A Length of Pink Ribbon"
 - "Walt Tells It Like It Is"
 - "Wizard"

"An Evening Among Peach Blossoms"

2. Divide your class into small groups, and give them one of the poems. Have them answer these questions, providing specific clues from the poem for each answer:

- Where & when did the speaker live?
- What sort of person is he/she?
- How does he/she see his/her role in life?
- What is motivating him or her to invent?

3. Present findings to the class

II: Write in a Hero's Voice

1. As a class, choose an historical figure from a current area of study.
2. Pick an important, defining moment from that person's life.
3. Using skills acquired during Pt. I group work, write a class poem from that person's point of view, telling the world:

- Who am I?
- How do I see myself?
- What have I just discovered/done/created?
- What do I see/feel/hear/smell at this moment?
- Why am I doing what I'm doing?
- When I look out over the future, what do I see?

4. Ask each student to pick their own historical figure and write an individual poem.

"Just the Cool Stuff" Research Poem (*social studies, writing*)

This could be offered as a creative alternative to a research paper.

1. Read aloud "The Light--Ah! the Light" (p. 37), about Marie Curie. Then read the non-fiction note about her on p. 48. Ask your students:
What have you learned about Marie Curie that you didn't know?
What images stick in your head?
What surprised you?

2. Read them this Note from the Author:

"Marie Curie was a scientific giant, but she was also a fascinating person. After reading many books and articles about her, I was left with several intriguing images that haunted me:

- spitting at the Tsar's obelisk as a child in Poland*
- surviving in the face of discrimination at the Sorbonne with barely enough to eat*
- keeping a glowing bowl of uranium at her bedside*
- the radioactive notebooks*

To me, these were the things that set Curie apart from others, that explained who she was. These were the things--the cool stuff--that belonged in my poem."

3. Ask them to think of an important figure that they have been studying. Without looking at their notes, have them jot down the answers to these questions:

- What is most interesting about this person?
- What didn't I know beforehand that I'm glad I learned?

What surprised me most about this person's life?
What images linger in my mind?

4. Have your students create a poem from these jottings. They should write in first person, from their subject's point of view. They may check back in their research to make sure their facts are historically accurate, but their goal is to use the brief, poetic form to capture the essence (the "cool stuff") of this person.
5. You might want to model points 3 & 4 with your students as a class, using a figure they've all studied. Make a list of their jottings on the board, then reshape them together into a poem.
6. If they want, have them supplement their poem with a nonfiction note to explain other crucial facts about their person.

Did you know that . . .

. . . there are only 22 complete Gutenberg Bibles left from the original 200 copies that Johann Gutenberg printed in 1454? (See "Winged Words", pg. 14.) Five of them are in the United States. One is on public display in the Beinecke Rare Book Library at Yale University. Both the Beinecke Library (which has thin marble walls that let in light instead of glass windows) and the book itself are spectacular; well worth a trip to New Haven, Connecticut!