



## YHBA NOVEL RESOURCES

### ***THIS IS JUST TO SAY: POEMS OF APOLOGY AND FORGIVENESS*** **BY JOYCE SIDMAN** **ILLUSTRATED BY PAMELA ZAGARENSKI**

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#### About the Author

- ✧ Joyce Sidman's website: <http://www.joycesidman.com>
- ✧ Even though she now lives in Minnesota with her husband and two sons, Joyce Sidman considers herself a true Yankee since she was born and raised in Connecticut. Sidman loves spending time in nature and finds that single topic the recurring inspiration for all of her books. When she is not writing or walking in the woods, she volunteers every week at a local children's hospital, helping children find books to read. She spends a few weeks every year at local schools teaching children how to write poetry. In college, Sidman took several poetry writing classes from poet laureate Richard Wilbur, but through all her writing attempts, she has found that poetry for children is what she is the best at writing.
- ✧ During one of Joyce Sidman's teaching immersions at a local school, she had the class of fourth graders help her to write a poem to her mother, an apology for breaking her mother's glass deer figurine many years before. One of the students then suggested that Sidman actually send the poem to her mother. After some revising and editing, Sidman followed that suggestion, and was surprised to receive correspondence in return from her mother, forgiving her for her childhood bought of naughtiness. This made Sidman ponder about apology and forgiveness in general, resulting in *This is Just to Say: Poems of Apology and Forgiveness*.
- ✧ Books written by Joyce Sidman: *Red Sings in Treetops: A Year in Colors*, *Butterfly Eyes and Other Secrets of the Meadow*, *Meow Ruff: A Story in Concrete Poetry*, *Song of the Water Boatman: Pond Poems*, *The World According to Dog: Poems and Teen Voices*, *Eureka! Poems About Inventors*, *Just Us Two: Poems About Animal Dads*
- ✧ Awards for Katherine Applegate's writings: 2007 Henry Bergh Award for Poetry and Illustration, Cybils Poetry Award, ALA Notable Book, NSTS Outstanding Science Trade Book, Junior Library Guild Selection, Booklist

Editor's Choice Book, NCTE Notable Book in Language Arts, CCBC Choice Book, 2006 Caldecott Honor Book, BCCB Blue Ribbon Award, Hornbook Fanfare List, Publisher's Weekly Best Book of the Year, VOYA Poetry Pick 2002, ALA Best Book for Young Adults Finalist, 2003 Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books Blue Ribbon Book, Minnesota Book Award Finalist, ASPCA Henry Bergh Children's Book Award, Bank Street Best Book of the Year, VOYA 2002 Nonfiction Honor List, 2001 Children's Literature Choice Book, Children's Book Council Showcase Book, Infolink Best Book of the Year 2000

- \* Awards for *This is Just to Say: Poems of Apology and Forgiveness*: Claudia Lewis Poetry Award, Lee Bennett Hopkins Poetry Award Honor, 2008 Cybils Poetry Award, SLJ Best Book of the Year

#### Annotation

Poetry giant Joyce Sidman takes the voice of Mrs. Merz, a sixth grade teacher at Florence Scribner School, and all her "sorry" students in *This is Just to Say: Poems of Apology and Forgiveness*. Mrs. Merz's class wrote apology poems to people in their lives using William Carlos Williams' well-known apology poem about eating the plums from the refrigerator ("This is Just to Say"). From the death of the class' lizard to making fun of Mrs. Merz's clothing to secret crushes, the poems from this sixth grade class runs the gamut of humorous to trivial to huge, life affecting events in these children's lives. Although these poems are apologetic in nature, not all of the students said they were sorry or asked for forgiveness, which may not be the best behavior model for real-life students. Because these poems reflect real life, there are some words ("christ" as a swear word and "really pissed off at you") and subjects (suicide and a father abandoning his daughter) that call for teachers and librarians to monitor the ages and maturity levels of students who access this anthology. Mrs. Merz's class delivered their poems to who the apologies were geared toward, and some of them replied back...although not all of them extended words of forgiveness; again, maybe not the best model for behavior for students who read this book. *This is Just to Say* has two parts—apologies and responses, a rather simple notion, no doubt. However, even with a keen memory, most readers will find themselves reading a poem in the response section and having to flip back to the apology section to remember the character and offense for which the apology was written. Confusing, no doubt. The illustrations in the book, on the other hand, are ingeniously creative and well-chosen. Pamela Zagarenski uses a variety of mixed media—from newspaper to school supplies—that carries the story of the poems beyond what the words

themselves say. This poetry anthology, in its essence, just begs the reader to grab a paper and pencil and start their own apology note to someone who's been wronged.

Genre - Poetry

Point of View - First Person

Themes - forgiveness, apologies, honesty, hurting people's feelings, grudges, perspective

Importance of the Title

"This is Just to Say" is one of William Carlos Williams most well-known and well-liked poems despite the fact that it is only twenty-eight words long. Actually, the simplicity and straight-to-the-point nature of this poem is part of the reason that it has so much power. Williams' simple words create clear pictures in the mind of the reader but, at the same time, convey complex meanings. All the poems in *This is Just to Say: Poems of Apology and Forgiveness* are logically modeled after Williams' apology poem.

Conflict

Each poem and its response in this anthology has its own specific conflict, but generally speaking, someone has done something to wrong another person. The following is a list of all the conflicts that occur throughout the book: a student taking the teacher's donuts, a student "assaulting" the nose on the school statue, students pummeling each other during a dodge ball game in PE class, a student making a rude comment about a teacher's dress, a daughter eating freshly-baked brownies without asking permission first, a girl who stabbed her sister in the palm with a pencil, a boy who broke the windows in his father's garage, a daughter who broke her mother's glass deer figurine, a boy picks on a girl that he likes, a boy keeps his hamster confined to a cage, a boy had to see his dog put to sleep, a boy embarrasses his brother, a boy loses the spelling bee because he didn't try his hardest, a girl is not noticed by whom she has a secret crush on, a student "accidentally" pulled the school fire alarm, a dad walked out on his daughter and left her behind, the class lizard died after a student tried to secretly take it home, and a mother read a note given to her daughter by a boy.

Conflict Resolution

The wide array of conflicts in this poetry anthology do teach the reader one lesson, and that is that even though you may say you're sorry for something, the person who you've wronged may not extend forgiveness to you. Some of the characters who wrote response poems do forgive their offenders. Others admit, openly and honestly, that they're still mad about what happened. Still, others, either physically can't (the hamster and the dead lizard) or choose not to write a response poem, so another character steps in to write a response poem. In these

cases, we don't know if there was any forgiveness at all. The important thing to remember is that the majority of the conflict is resolved with the simple step of saying, "I'm sorry."

### Characters

- \* Anthony is a sixth grader at Florence Scribner School and the editor of this poetry unit turned into a book. It was his idea to come up with response poems for the book. Anthony feels that he disappointed his mother when he did not win the spelling bee even though he studied so hard for it.
- \* Mrs. Ruth Merz is a sixth grade teacher at Florence Scribner School and came up with a very ingenious way to teach her students about poetry and taking responsibility for our actions. She looks much better wearing blue than any other color (especially green), and she still holds some guilt for breaking her mother's glass deer figurine when she was a child. Mrs. Merz herself is forgiving and fully appreciates the power of words.
- \* Mrs. Merz's mother has long forgiven her daughter for the glass deer figurine that was broken many years ago, although she is sad that her daughter is now grown.
- \* Bao Vang is a sixth grader at Florence Scribner School and a very talented artist. She produced all the artwork to accompany the class' poetry, and she frequently rubs the nose of the Florence P. Scribner statue for good luck on her spelling tests. Bao Vang loves a good laugh and joking around, so much so that she accidentally pulled the school fire alarm one day.
- \* Mr. Willow is the art teacher at Florence Scribner School and helped Bao Vang in creating the artwork for the poetry anthology.
- \* Mrs. Garcia works in the office at Florence Scribner School and is not oblivious to Thomas's charm, although she is forgiving. Mrs. Garcia plays by the rules and isn't afraid to call a student's parents when he/she is in trouble (Thomas).
- \* Thomas is a sixth grader at Florence Scribner School and stole donuts from the teacher's lounge.
- \* Reuben is a sixth grader at Florence Scribner School and can get quite carried away during a game of dodgeball. He, along with his friend Kyle, doesn't hold a grudge.
- \* Kyle is a sixth grader at Florence Scribner School and enjoys a good game of dodgeball. He is quite honest and, along with his friend Reuben, doesn't hold a grudge.

- ✧ Carmen is a sixth grader at Florence Scribner School and has no problem voicing what she is thinking. She also can tend to get bored in class, and she now regards her teacher quite highly.
- ✧ Maria is a sixth grader at Florence Scribner School and loves to eat brownies, especially the piece in the middle of the pan. She continually turns Bobby down when he asks her to go out with him because she has a good sense of what girls want in a boy.
- ✧ Maria's mother is a neat freak, and messes bother her. She may have betrayed her daughter's privacy when she read a note to Maria from a boy in her class.
- ✧ Alyssa is a sixth grader at Florence Scribner School and still feels bad about stabbing her sister Carrie in the palm with a pencil, even though she can't remember what she was mad at her sister for.
- ✧ Carrie is Alyssa's sister. Carrie is still very upset about getting stabbed in the hand with a pencil.
- ✧ Jose is a sixth grader at Florence Scribner School and is prone to peer pressure. It was Felipe who convinced Jose into breaking the windows in Jose's dad's garage.
- ✧ Jose's dad did not do very well in his academic pursuits while he was in school, although his son Jose is quite an inspiration to him. He does not harbor wrongs done to him.
- ✧ Bobby is a sixth grader at Florence Scribner School and has a crush on Maria, although his way of displaying that is by picking on her.
- ✧ Ricky is a sixth grader at Florence Scribner School and has a pet hamster named Manga. Ricky feels badly that Manga has to stay cooped up in a cage instead of being able to roam freely.
- ✧ Tenzin is a sixth grader at Florence Scribner School and still struggles over having to put his beloved dog Einstein to sleep.
- ✧ Mr. Johnson is a custodian at Florence Scribner School and once had a dog named Sasha that had to be put to sleep. Mr. Johnson is sympathetic and compassionate, perhaps better suited for a school counselor instead of a janitor.
- ✧ DaRon is a sixth grader at Florence Scribner School who secretly admires his older brother Lamar, even though he knows his brother thinks DaRon is weird.
- ✧ Lamar is DaRon's older brother who has definitely experienced the world. He can't help but parent his little brother, since their mother is no longer

around. He wants DaRon to stay young at heart before the world has a chance to claim him. Lamar can tend to be a potty-mouth.

- ✧ Raneesha is a sixth grader at Florence Scribner School who is feels burned because the boy she has a crush on never notices her. She has dark hair and mysterious eyes and is a good runner. Her laugh is infectious, and she is "strong, fierce, and loyal".
- ✧ Mai Lee is a sixth grader at Florence Scribner School who feels that she betrayed her friend Bao Vang by admitting the principal that it was Bao Vang who accidentally pulled the fire alarm.
- ✧ Jewel is a sixth grader at Florence Scribner School whose father has left her many times, and she feels that it is all her fault. As a result, she feels the need to try and be perfect.
- ✧ Jewel's dad hasn't had the best life and was very close to committing suicide, but his daughter helped to sway his thinking. He has good intentions when it comes to things with his daughter.
- ✧ An anonymous sixth grade student at Florence Scribner School tried to secretly take the class lizard home one day, but then the lizard died. This student tried to correct his/her actions by leaving money on the teacher's desk to pay for a new lizard, but he/she has more integrity issues to work through, since he/she stole that money, too.

### Setting

The only fact we know for sure about the setting of this book is that it takes place at Florence Scribner School, a fictitious yet realistic school. The book does not give us any definite clues as to when the story took place because it provides timeless details about the students and their lives; the reader can assume it takes place in the present or in the very recent past.

### Interest Level and Reading Level

It is suggested that this book be read and appreciated by nine to twelve year olds or students in fourth through seventh grades.

### Book Talk

English Teacher: "Here's a poem I once wrote on the board for my classes to read at the beginning of the period:

True Confessions of An English Teacher

Today you will  
silently read  
a book of  
your choice.

No, this  
was not in  
my  
lesson plans.

Forgive me,  
for I am  
so tired  
and so crabby.

I sat at my desk, drinking my coffee, as my students read my poem and then quietly chatted amongst themselves. After a few minutes, one student went to the board, paper in hand, and wrote a response:

To Our Beloved English Teacher

Don't you know  
we'd rather  
read all period  
than hear

you lecture?  
So sit there,  
sipping  
your Starbucks.

You're forgiven.  
We'll appear to  
be reading  
while we're dozing.

And when he returned to his seat, each student pulled out a book and read the entire period...or at least they looked like they were reading."

What things have YOU done, either recently or quite some time ago, that you've never apologized for? Have you ever stolen food from the teacher's lounge? Hit somebody way too hard during a game of dodgeball in PE class? Made fun of a teacher? Mrs. Merz's students wrote their poems of apology in the book *This is*

*Just to Say: Poems of Apology and Forgiveness* because they have done all these bad things...and more. Read it to find out!

### Discussion Questions

- \* "This is Just to Say" (pg. 8) and "Dear Thomas" (pg. 28)
  - Pre-Reading: Have you ever taken something that wasn't rightfully yours? Tell about this. Did you feel bad about it or not? Why?
  - Post-Reading: What do you think about Thomas' mother being called by the school for him stealing a few donuts? Is that a fair consequence for such an offense? What other consequences might he have received?
- \* "Lucky Nose" (pg. 9) and "To the Girl Who Rubs My Nose" (pg. 29)
  - Pre-Reading: What are some of the best ways to prepare for a spelling test?
  - Post-Reading: Florence P. Scribner (speaking through DaRon) says that "maybe spelling isn't so important," and says that other things, like friends and kindness, are much more important. Think of your years of schooling so far. What "bigger" things are more important than things like spelling and subtraction and the periodic table?
- \* "I Got Carried Away" (pg. 10), "Dodge Ball Crazy" (pg. 11), "Dodge Ball Kings" (pg. 30)
  - Pre-Reading: What is your favorite thing to do in PE class and why? What do you gain from it?
  - Post-Reading: Kyle and Reuben said in their joint apology poem, "It hurts but we don't care." Why is this? How can athletes, like football players, for example, play such rough and tough games and not care about it hurting them? What do they gain from this?
- \* "Fashion Sense" (pg. 12) and "Haiku for Carmen" (pg. 31)
  - Pre-Reading: Pick one of your teachers, one that isn't necessarily your favorite, and think of the things you DON'T like about him/her. Now, imagine telling that teacher the things that bug you about him/her. How would you feel? How do you think he/she would react?
  - Post-Reading: Mrs. Merz wrote her response poem in the form of a haiku, and she was very forgiving of Carmen. Write an alternate haiku poem to Carmen, in the voice of Mrs. Merz, but from a very unforgiving and bitter Mrs. Merz.
- \* "Brownies—Oops!" (pg 14) and "Desk Mess—Oops!" (pg. 32)

- Pre-Reading: What is your most favorite food ever? Think of one outrageous thing you would do just to get that food for yourself.
- Post-Reading: How much privacy should parents give their teenage children? Explain your reasoning.
- ✧ "The Black Spot" (pg. 15) and "Roses Are Red" (pg. 33)
  - Pre-Reading: What is the meanest thing you've ever done to a sibling? (If you don't have a sibling, what's the meanest thing you've ever done to a friend?)
  - Post-Reading: What do you think that black thing is that stays hidden inside Alyssa?
- ✧ "Balance" (pg. 16) and "I'm Telling You Now" (pg. 34)
  - Pre-Reading: Think of a situation when peer pressure could be good. Think of a situation when peer pressure could be harmful.
  - Post-Reading: Describe the importance of the title "Balance" to the rest of the poem, not only on a literal meaning, but a figurative one as well.
- ✧ "Sparkling Deer" (pg. 17) and "For Little Ruth" (pg. 35)
  - Pre-Reading: What does Christmas smell like?
  - Post-Reading: What does the simile "like a piece of crystal taffy" mean?
- ✧ "Not Really" (pg. 18) and "What Girls Want" (pg. 36)
  - Pre-Reading: Think of one thing you have done that you are not really sorry for. Why are you not sorry?
  - Post-Reading: Write a poem similar to Maria's response poem but titled "What Boys Want".
- ✧ "To Manga, My Hamster" (pg. 19) and "Sorry Back, from the Hamster" (pg. 37)
  - Pre-Reading: If you could have any animal in the world as a pet, what would you choose and why?
  - Post-Reading: From an animal's point of view, what are the downsides (the cons) to keeping an animal as a pet?
- ✧ "It Was Quiet" (pg. 20) and "Losing Einstein" (pg. 38)
  - Pre-Reading: Brainstorm a list of words (feelings, thoughts, adjectives, etc.) that we associate with death.
  - Post-Reading: Mr. Johnson told Tenzin, "No one can tell you what it's like until it happens." Think of something you've experienced where even if someone would have been able to tell you what that time would

be like, it wouldn't have helped at all, because your experiences are YOUR experiences. Share your response.

- ❄ "Secret Message" (pg. 21) and "Little Brother" (pg. 39)
  - Pre-Reading: What are the benefits of having siblings? What are the benefits of being an only child?
  - Post-Reading: What are some ways you can live your life "Extra-Large"?
- ❄ "Spelling Bomb" (pg. 22) and "Some Reasons Why" (pg. 40)
  - Pre-Reading: What do you consider to be your most successful, most proud moment of your years of schooling? Why?
  - Post-Reading: Write one more stanza to add on to the end of "Some Reasons Why".
- ❄ "A Waste of Heart" (pg. 23) and "Dark-Haired Girl" (pg. 41)
  - Pre-Reading: Make a list of ten things that you don't like about yourself.
  - Post-Reading: Make a list of ten things that you do like about yourself.
- ❄ "What Was I Thinking?" (pg. 24) and "The River of Forgiveness" (pg. 42)
  - Pre-Reading: When is it okay to lie? Why?
  - Post-Reading: Do you think Mai Lee and Bao Vang have a strong friendship? Defend your answer.
- ❄ "Next Time" (pg. 25) and "My Poem" (pg. 44)
  - Pre-Reading: Brainstorm reasons why you are thankful for your parents.
  - Post-Reading: Describe what you think might have happened to Jewel, how she might have felt, if she hadn't been able to stop her dad from committing suicide through her poem.
- ❄ "How Slow-Hand Lizard Died" (pg. 26) and "Ode to Slow-Hand" (pg. 45)
  - Pre-Reading: What might have been the reason for this anonymous student to take home the class lizard?
  - Post-Reading: *Los perdonamos* is Spanish for "forgive". What other ways are there in our own language to say the word "forgive"?

### Spelling and Vocabulary Words

- ❄ assaulting (pg. 9) - attacking
- ❄ traitor (pg. 13) - a person who betrayed someone else or went against their trust
- ❄ transgressions (pg. 13) - wrongdoings or violations
- ❄ pricked (pg. 14) - pointed
- ❄ linoleum (pg. 14) - vinyl flooring, often found in kitchens or bathrooms

- \* gaped (pg. 14) - stared at
- \* accusing (pg. 14) - blaming
- \* hefted (pg. 16) - to lift up and throw
- \* gritty (pg. 16) - having a rough, sandy texture
- \* burrowing (pg. 19) - tunneling
- \* triumphant (pg. 22) - joyful because of a victory or success
- \* boisterous (pg. 35) - the opposite of quiet and calm

### Indiana Academic Standards Met by Novel Content

- \* English and Language Arts
  - o 6.1.1, 6.1.2, 6.1.4, 6.3.4, 6.3.9
  - o 7.1.1, 7.1.3, 7.3.7
  - o 8.1.1, 8.1.3

### Anticipation Statements

- \* It is important to say that you're sorry when you've done something wrong.
- \* When you say that you're sorry for something you've done wrong, you will be forgiven.
- \* Sometimes if you write your thoughts and feelings down on paper, it will help you to feel better.
- \* Difficulties and stresses in life help to form us into wiser and more mature people.
- \* Avoid making mistakes, because they are humiliating.
- \* A true friend will stick by you, no matter what.

### Read Aloud Passages

- \* "I Got Carried Away" and "Dodge Ball Crazy" pages 10 - 11
- \* "Dodge Ball Kings" page 30
  - o I would choose these three poems to use in a read aloud to get students interested in this anthology because these are perhaps the funniest set of poems in the book. The fact that each Kyle and Reuben, the writers of these poems, write their apology poems directly to each other because of the same dodge ball game and for the same reason makes this poem so realistic and believable. Most all students have had an experience similar to this in a PE class at some point in time, which would help them relate to both Kyle and Reuben.

### Read-Alikes

- \* Same genre and interest level
  - o *Technically, It's Not My Fault: Concrete Poems* by John Grandits
  - o *Blue Lipstick: Concrete Poems* by John Grandits
  - o *Stone Bench in an Empty Park* by Paul Janeczko

- \* Same Author—Joyce Sidman
  - o *Meow Ruff: A Story in Concrete Poetry*
  - o *Red Sings in Treetops: A Year in Colors*
  - o *The World According to Dog: Poems and Teen Voices*

### Across the Curriculum Connections

- \* Activity: Developing Descriptive Similes
  - o This activity operates upon the requirement that students are already a little familiar with the function and use of similes. First, have students practice creating similes by placing large sheets of white paper around the classroom. On each sheet of white paper, write the start to a simile, like "the car was as \_\_\_\_\_ as \_\_\_\_\_", "the day was as \_\_\_\_\_ as \_\_\_\_\_", and "the child was as \_\_\_\_\_ as \_\_\_\_\_", placing a different simile starter on each page. Have students rotate around the room, each writing their own simile on each sheet of paper. Then, as a class, share the similes and decide on the most descriptive and powerful one for each sheet of paper. The next step is to have students write their own collection of similes in the form of a picture book about the seasons of the year. First give students their planning/brainstorming sheet with similes to finish, such as "the snow was coming down like \_\_\_\_\_", "the blooms on the cherry tree were as \_\_\_\_\_ as \_\_\_\_\_" and "the sun beat down on us like \_\_\_\_\_". There should be a variety of similes to write on each of the four seasons of the year. Students go through some editing, sharing with peers, and then decide on their best similes for each season, choosing four or five to use in their book. Students are responsible for putting together their own creative and neatly done picture book, which includes artwork for each page. Poetry books can be shared with a younger class or placed in the school library for others to read.
  - o Resources/Materials Needed: large sheets of white paper, writing utensils, sticky tack, simile planning sheet for picture book, assignment sheet, materials to make a picture book (white paper, construction paper, scrapbook paper, markers, crayons, colored pencils, etc.)
  - o Indiana Academic Standards Met by This Activity:
    - English and Language Arts: 6.1.2, 6.4.1, 6.4.8, 6.5.6, 7.1.1, 7.4.1, 7.4.8, 7.5.6, 8.1.1, 8.4.1, 8.4.7, 8.5.6,
    - Visual Arts: 6.6.1, 6.6.2, 6.6.3, 6.6.6, 6.7.4, 7.6.1, 7.6.2, 7.6.3, 7.6.6, 7.7.4, 8.6.1, 8.6.2, 8.6.3, 8.6.6, 8.7.4

✧ Activity: School Statue

- Students will design a statue for their school, similar to the statue of Florence P. Scribner in *This is Just to Say: Poems of Apology and Forgiveness*. You might want to direct them to a site like <http://www.bigbronze.com> for ideas of animals, people, etc. to model their statue after. Consideration should be given to the school's mascot; although, to add some variety, you may want to allow students to design a mascot for any school that they've attended in the past. There are many different mediums to choose from for the students' sculptures, but the easiest may be to use clay that will harden when left out to dry, like Crayola Air-Dry Clay (<http://www.crayola.com/products/list.cfm?categories=CLAY>). Students could vote on the most creative sculpture, and then the winner could work with the art teacher to construct a life-size version of their sculpture to place somewhere in the school.
- Resources/Materials Needed: computers with internet access, assignment sheet, air-dry clay, clay modeling tools (art teacher could help with these)
- Indiana Academic Standards Met by This Activity:
  - Visual Arts: 6.1.1, 6.6.6, 6.7.3, 6.7.4, 6.7.5, 7.6.1, 7.6.2, 7.6.6, 7.7.3, 7.7.4, 7.7.5, 8.6.1, 8.6.6, 8.7.3, 8.7.4, 8.7.5

### Book Activities

#### Activity #1 - Apologies in Pantoum

✧ Objectives:

- To increase student familiarity with the poetry form of a pantoum and its specific requirements
- To improve student ability to use specific and descriptive words in his/her writing
- To demonstrate strong editing and revising skills in student writing
- To develop student poetry writing abilities

✧ Student Involvement: This poetry writing activity is designed to be done by individual students. However, without any modifications, a teacher could use this activity in small groups of 2-3 students working to complete this activity together.

✧ Time Involved for this Activity: Plan for about five fifty-minute class periods to complete this lesson.

✧ Timing of this Activity: Reading *This is Just to Say: Poems of Apology and Forgiveness* should be a springboard for this writing activity. Read the

poetry anthology first, discuss, and then lead students in this pantoum writing lesson.

❄ Indiana Standards Met By This Activity:

- English and Language Arts - 6.4.1, 6.4.8, 6.4.9, 6.5.6, 6.5.7, 7.4.1, 7.4.8, 7.4.9, 7.5.6, 7.5.7, 8.4.1, 8.4.7, 8.4.8, 8.5.6, 8.5.7

❄ Lesson Plans:

- Before the Lesson - Ensure that students have some previous knowledge of reading and writing poetry; a pantoum is not the easiest poem to write and therefore should not be the first poem a middle school student has ever written. Make copies of all necessary assignment sheets. Secure time in a computer lab for students to type their poems at the end of this lesson.
- Step One - Hand out to the students copies of the Playing With Pantoums: Brainstorming sheet and have them complete it.
- Step Two - Re-read Anthony's poem "Spelling Bomb" on page 22 as well as his author's note at the bottom of the page. Explain to students that they are going to write an apology poem of their own using the same format that Anthony used.
- Step Three - Hand out to students copies of the Playing with Pantoums worksheet and go over it with them, explaining as you go. This is also a good time to provide students with a copy of the rubric you will use to grade their pantoum with.
- Step Four - Students will follow the directions on their assignment sheet to write their pantoum. They will revise, peer edit and revise, and then type their final draft in the computer lab before turning their poem in for a grade.
- Step Five - Publish student work in whatever format you choose.
- Step Six - Evaluate the effectiveness of this activity.
  - To get students' feedback, ask a few questions orally ("Did you enjoy writing your pantoum?" "Was this slightly challenging for you?") and having the students indicate their yes/no answer by something as simple as a thumbs up (yes), thumbs down (no), or a thumb to the side (kind of).
  - As the educator, reflect on what went well with this activity and what didn't go as planned. Make notes on things to change in this activity for the next time it is used.

❄ Documents Included:

- Playing With Pantoums: Brainstorming sheet

- Playing With Pantoums assignment sheet
- Playing With Pantoums Peer Revising and Editing Checklist
- Playing With Pantoums grading rubric

### Playing With Pantoums: BRAINSTORMING

On this paper, create a spider web organizer. In the center oval, write "Things I Should Apologize For", and come up with at least 7-8 possibilities. Then, for each possibility, come up with at least 3-4 details that describe what happened, why, how you felt, etc. When you are done, decide which possibility is the most promising to write a poem about.

## Playing with Pantoums

What is a Pantoum?

Pantoums were first created in Malaysia in the 1400s and were short poems that rhymed and were either spoken or sung. The British and the French played around with this original form of the pantoum in the 1800s and turned it into the format that we recognize today. The traditional pantoum consists of repeated lines and end rhyme in an ABAB pattern.

Does a Pantoum HAVE to rhyme?

Like so many things, WHAT you are saying is just as important as HOW you say it. If using rhyme in your pantoum makes the wording sound too forced (in other words, if it sounds more like Dr. Seuss than you), you may want to omit the rhyme and use the descriptive words that you want to use. Or if you find yourself spending more time trying to find words that rhyme than actually writing down your thoughts, you may want to omit the rhyme altogether.

What is the Exact Format of a Pantoum?

Quite simply, the pantoum says everything twice! Pantoums are written in 4-line stanzas (called quatrains), and they can be as many stanzas long as you want them to be. Starting with the first stanza, the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> lines are used as the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> lines in the second stanza. In the last stanza, the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> lines of the first stanza are used to end the poem. Let's look at an example using a 5-stanza pantoum:

First line	Seventh line
Second line	Ninth line
Third line	Eighth line
Fourth line	Tenth line
Second line	Ninth line
Fifth line	Third line
Fourth line	Tenth line
Sixth line	First line
Fifth line	
Seventh line	
Sixth line	
Eighth line	

Look back at "Spelling Bomb" on page 22 of *This is Just to Say: Poems of Apology and Forgiveness*, comparing this format to the poem.

### How do I Write a Pantoum?

First, decide on the topic and the details you want to include in your pantoum using a brainstorming technique. Once you have some ideas of what you will be writing, you're ready begin a rough draft of your poem. \*\*For this assignment, you will be writing an apology poem, just like the ones in *This is Just to Say: Poems of Apology and Forgiveness*. Here's how to get started on your poem:

- 1) Go ahead and write your first stanza (and remember what was said above about rhyme).
- 2) Using the format above as your guide, write your second and fourth lines into your second stanza, and then keep building that stanza around those lines, adding new and unique fifth and sixth lines.
- 3) Keep following the format to finish the first draft of your poem.

### What is the Next Step?

It's time for some revising, first on your own. Read back through your poem, looking at the following aspects:

- ❑ Is your topic clear? Does the reader have all the necessary details, background, feelings, etc. to understand what happened that you are apologizing for? If it's not, then you'll need to add more describing and details.
- ❑ Look at your diction (word choice). First go through your poem and circle words that could be improved upon and made more specific. Just remember that if you change a word in a line, you need to change it again when that same line is repeated!
- ❑ Do you have a title yet? Remember that it's often better to think of a title after you've written the poem. Choose something that will draw in your reader, making them wonder exactly what your poem is about. Be creative, and try to come up with a word or a phrase that's not already used in your poem.
- ❑ Now consider how you can slightly alter the same repeating lines a little bit, just to add some impact and emphasis. Look at "Spelling Bomb" line 1, repeated again at the end. It's slightly altered for effect. Line 6 and its repeat line are slight altered for effect. Find a couple of lines in your poem to do similar things with.
- ❑ Do you want to add capitalization to your poem? What about punctuation?

When Can I Turn This In for a Grade?

Soon...just a few more things to do.

- Find a partner to swap poems with. Read through your partner's poem, completing the revising and editing checklist as you go and making suggestions for changes on his/her poem.
- Make the necessary changes to your poem. If you're unsure of anything, ask a peer first and then the teacher if you still need help. Consult the grading rubric to make sure you've done the work to earn yourself the grade that you desire.
- In the computer lab, type up your poem. It should be a legible basic font, and your entire pantoum should fit on one piece of paper. Remember to include your name either at the top or the bottom of the poem. Double check what you've typed before you print it out and turn it in.

Congratulations...You can now add "Pantoum Pro" to your list of scholarly capabilities!

## Playing with Pantoums: Peer Revising & Editing Checklist

Your Name \_\_\_\_\_

Whose poem are you reviewing? \_\_\_\_\_

- ❑ Consider what it is that the writer is apologizing for. What other details about it might be helpful to know that the writer didn't include?
  
- ❑ Consider HOW the writer is apologizing. Are his/her feelings clear, or is it just a simple report of what happened? How can this be improved?
  
- ❑ Circle any "blah" words that need to be more specific and descriptive. Try to give suggestions on what to change these words to.
- ❑ Look at the title. It should catch your attention and make you want to read the poem to find out more. It should be creative and not repetitive from something already in the poem. Come up with at least two other ideas for a title for this poem and write them next to the writer's title suggestion.
- ❑ Did the writer slightly alter a few of the repeating lines to add more emphasis and effect? If so, is it effective or can you think of any changes to make? If they didn't, write down suggestions in the poem on how to alter some repeating lines so that they add an emphasis to the poem.
- ❑ Re-read the poem for spelling errors, making corrections as needed.
- ❑ Is punctuation used? If so, make any corrections as needed.
- ❑ Is capitalization used? If so, make any corrections as needed.
- ❑ Write two specific and positive remarks about this poem:
  - 
  -

## Playing with Pantoums: Rubric

Name \_\_\_\_\_

TRAIT	LOOKING FOR...	COMMENTS	POINTS
Choices in Format	Choice of rhyme, capitalization, and punctuation is effective		/5
Title	Relative, interesting, and creative		/10
Diction	Words are clear, concise, specific, and not overused		/5
Spelling	Correct spelling is used throughout		/5
Format	Correct pantoum formatting is used effectively		/10
Revising	Rough draft is included, effort was taken to improve upon the rough draft		/5
Topic	The reason for the apology is clear with enough info and details given		/10

Total points \_\_\_\_\_/50

## Activity #2 - Ancient Apologies

### \* Objectives:

- To broaden students' knowledge of one person or event in history
- To improve students' abilities in using specific and descriptive words in his/her writing
- To demonstrate strong editing and revising skills in student writing
- To develop student poetry writing abilities
- To exhibit students' abilities to write from a new and different point of view

\* Student Involvement: This poetry writing activity is designed to be done by individual students. However, without any modifications, a teacher could use this activity in small groups of 2-3 students working to complete this activity together.

\* Time Involved for this Activity: Plan for about five fifty-minute class periods to complete this activity. More time will be needed depending on who is doing the picture book artwork and what methods they use.

\* Timing of this Activity: Reading *This is Just to Say: Poems of Apology and Forgiveness* should be a springboard for this writing activity. Read the poetry anthology first, discuss, and then lead students in this writing lesson.

### \* Indiana Standards Met By This Activity:

- English and Language Arts - 6.1.1, 6.1.2, 6.2.8, 6.3.4, 6.4.5, 6.4.8, 6.5.6, 6.5.7, 7.1.3, 7.4.4, 7.4.5, 7.4.8, 7.4.10, 7.5.6, 7.5.7, 7.7.2, 7.7.5, 8.1.3, 8.4.4, 8.4.5, 8.4.7, 8.5.6, 8.5.7, 8.6.7, 8.7.2, 8.7.14
- Note: it is possible that some Social Studies standards may be met by this activity, but that depends upon the historical figure that each student chooses.

### \* Lesson Plans:

- Note: Since I teach at a Christian school and integrate the Bible and Biblical truths into my English and Language Arts lesson plans, this lesson does rely upon the use of the Bible and Biblical characters. However, this lesson can easily be adapted by using any historical figure and accessing the internet to do research on that figure.
- Before the Lesson - Prepare copies of all needed handouts. Ensure that students bring their Bibles to class and have access to concordances. Students have already had practice in writing poetry.
- Step One - Distribute to the students copies of Ancient Apologies: Brainstorming worksheet and have students complete it.

- Step Two - Since the end result for this lesson is to put all the class' ancient apologies together into a picture book, each student needs to pick a different Biblical character (or, if the same character is used twice, it should be for different "offenses"). For this reason, as students have decided on which character to write about, you may want to keep a running list of the characters and offenses on the board. Then, students need to complete the Ancient Apologies: Gathering Details brainstorming worksheet to develop necessary details to use in their poem.
- Step Three - Hand out to students copies of the Ancient Apologies: Assignment sheet and discuss it with them.
- Step Four - Students will follow the directions on their assignment sheet to write their ancient apology. They will revise, peer edit and revise, and then type their final draft in the computer lab.
- Step Five - Determine who will be creating the artwork for each poem, whether it is each student doing his/her own artwork or a group of creative and talented students who will split up the artwork responsibilities. Provide any needed artwork supplies and possibly computer access as well. When all artwork is completed, grade the poems and compile them together into a class book of poetry titled "Ancient Apologies".
- Step Six - As the educator, reflect on what went well with this activity and what didn't go as planned. Make notes on things to change in this activity for the next time it is used.



#### Documents Included:

- Ancient Apologies: Brainstorming worksheet
- Ancient Apologies: Gathering Details brainstorming worksheet
- Ancient Apologies: Assignment sheet
- Ancient Apologies: Peer Revising and Editing Checklist
- Ancient Apologies: Rubric

## *Ancient Apologies: Brainstorming*

On this paper, create a spider web organizer. In the center oval, write "Ancient Apologies". In the next ovals that branch out from the middle, come up with at least 7-8 possibilities of Biblical characters who had something to apologize for. Then, branching off from each of those characters, write down what that character needs to apologize for. When you are done, decide which person is the most promising to write an interesting poem about.

## *Ancient Apologies: Gathering Details*

<i>Biblical Character's Name</i>	
<i>The situation he/she needs to apologize for</i>	
<i>Who is this character apologizing to?</i>	
<i>Who else was involved in this situation?</i>	
<i>Brainstorm sensory details about this situation (sights, sounds, smells, noises, tastes)</i>	
<i>How do you think the main character feels after what happened?</i>	
<i>How do you think the person or people being apologized to feel after what happened?</i>	

## *Ancient Apologies: Assignment Sheet*

For this assignment, you will use Joyce Sidman's *This is Just to Say: Poems of Apology and Forgiveness* as a model to write another apology poem of your own. This time, you will choose the format of the poem, but it will be from the point of view of a Biblical character who has done something that calls for an apology.

### *What do I do first?*

You should have already completed two brainstorming activities to decide upon which Biblical character to use and the details to include about the apology. Your next step is to decide what format of poem you want to write. Do you want to write a rhyming poem? Do you want to write a poem that imitates William Carlos Williams' poem? Do you want to attempt another pantoum? A collection of haikus? Choosing no format at all is a fair choice, and then you will be writing a poem in free verse.

### *Can I start writing now?*

Yes, please do! Go ahead and draft your poem, not worrying yet about punctuation and capitalization. Do try to decide when and where to use stanzas and develop the format of your poem.

### *What is the Next Step?*

It's time for some revising, first on your own. Read back through your poem, looking at the following aspects:

- ❑ Is your topic clear? Does the reader have all the necessary details, background info, feelings, etc. to understand what happened that your Biblical character is apologizing for? If it's not, then you'll need to add more describing and details.
- ❑ Is your point of view convincing? Does your poem sound like that character could have potentially written it (in this century, of course!)? Is it in first person, or does it sound more like a Biblical report?
- ❑ Look at your diction (word choice). First go through your poem and circle words that could be improved upon and made more specific. Then, change them!
- ❑ Do you have a title yet? Remember that it's often better to think of a title after you've written the poem. Choose something that will draw in your reader, making them wonder exactly what your poem is about. Be creative,

and try to come up with a word or a phrase that's not already used in your poem.

- Look back at the format of your poem. If you are following a certain prescribed format, did you follow all the directions? If you wrote in free verse, is your use of capitalization, punctuation, stanzas, repeating, rhyme, effective? (Not all those aspects have to be in a free verse poem, either)

### *When Can I Turn This In for a Grade?*

Soon...just a few more things to do.

- Find a partner to swap poems with. Read through your partner's poem, completing the revising and editing checklist as you go and making suggestions for changes on his/her poem.
- Make the necessary changes to your poem. If you're unsure of anything, ask a peer first and then the teacher if you still need help. Consult the grading rubric to make sure you've done the work to earn yourself the grade that you desire.
- In the computer lab, type up your poem. It should be a legible basic font, and your entire poem should fit on one piece of paper. Remember to include your name either at the top or the bottom of the poem. Double check what you've typed before you print it out and turn it in.

*Ancient Apologies: Peer Revising & Editing Checklist*

Your Name \_\_\_\_\_

Whose poem are you reviewing? \_\_\_\_\_

- After you've read the poem, the character and situation should be obvious. Are they? If not, offer suggestions on how to improve this.
  
- What details could the writer add--sensory details, background info, feelings, etc. to understand what this Biblical character is apologizing for?
  
- Consider the point of view of this poem. Are the Bible character's feelings clear, or does it sound more like a report of what happened? How can this be improved?
  
- Circle any "blah" words that need to be more specific and descriptive. Try to give suggestions on what to change these words to.
- Look at the title. It should catch your attention and make you want to read the poem to find out more. It should be creative and not repetitive from something already in the poem. Come up with at least two other ideas for a title for this poem and write them next to the writer's title suggestion.
- Re-read the poem for spelling errors, making corrections as needed.
- Consider the format used in this poem. If it is a specific format, have all the rules been followed? If not, make any needed changes. If it is written in free verse, are the choices and use of stanzas, rhyme, capitalization, punctuation, etc. effective? If not, make any needed changes.
- Write two specific and positive remarks about this poem:
  - 
  -

*Ancient Apologies: Rubric*

Name \_\_\_\_\_

TRAIT	LOOKING FOR...	COMMENTS	POINTS
Format	Choice of format, rhyme, capitalization, punctuation, and stanzas is effective		/10
Title	Relative, interesting, and creative		/10
Diction	Words are clear, concise, specific, and not overused		/10
Spelling	Correct spelling is used throughout		/5
Revising	Rough draft is included, effort was taken to improve upon the rough draft		/5
Topic	The reason for the apology is clear with enough info and details given		/10
Point of View	Written in a convincing point of view		/10

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 Total points \_\_\_\_\_/60

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