

1. EXPLORING SENSORY EXPERIENCE

You receive information the same way everyone else does--through the senses. What you *sense* (see, hear, smell, feel and taste) affects what you *think*. Can you ever hear sleigh bells without thinking of Christmas? The senses are like windows that open directly to experience, and people who live in the same culture share many of the same sensory impressions. Sparkling tinsel, the sharp scent of pine, warm gingerbread cookies, and smooth red ribbon are all images that say "Christmas" to many of us.

Try an experiment. On the lines below, write something about Christmas that relates to each of the five senses. Try to think of at least one descriptive adjective to go with each impression, like *smooth* red ribbon, or *sparkling* tinsel.

Christmas:

_____ (sight)
_____ (sound)
_____ (touch)
_____ (taste)
_____ (smell)

Merry Christmas!

Do you know what you've just done? You've written a poem!

Your poem doesn't rhyme, but poem and rhyme aren't necessarily the same thing. In fact, the poetry you'll be writing in this section will almost certainly be better if it *doesn't* rhyme. The reason is that while you're busy thinking of words that rhyme (*Ummmm*, *'plink,' 'pink,' 'sink,' 'stink'...*), you may overlook the very words that would best express your feelings. I have only one rule for poetry:

Poetry is the art
of choosing words to say
just what you want to say
in the smallest possible space.

More than any other kind of writing, poetry works with feelings and impressions. This is where your senses come in.

 **EXERCISE 1-A.** Think of your favorite season of the year: winter, spring, summer or fall. Each season has its special character, its own holidays, smells, sounds, and activities. On a blank piece of notebook paper, write a poem about the season you like best. Don't let the assignment scare you--just use the model of your Christmas poem. That is, write the name of the season on the first line, write an impression from this season for each of the five senses, and end with the name again, modified by a descriptive adjective that sums up the whole experience for you.



Do you like what you've done? Ask two people--a parent and a friend, for example--to read your poem and tell you if the words you chose suggest the season to them. You may want to change a line or two, or think harder about a particular taste or smell. When your poem is perfect (or as perfect as you can make it), copy or print it.



 **EXERCISE 1-B.** Write similar poems about the other three seasons. Think about them, write your impressions, and correct the lines. If you like them, chances are someone else will too, so consider this:

Copy or print your poems on good-quality paper. If you print in “landscape” format and fold the paper in half, it makes a perfect booklet size. Add illustrations, choose patterned paper or card stock for a cover, and sew or staple the pages together. Your original poetry would make a priceless, one-of-a-kind gift for a parent or grandparent (and it wouldn't cost much!).



 **EXERCISE 1-C.** Now for a challenge. Try writing a poem about a color, describing how that color would taste, smell, sound and feel. Here's an example:

Purple looks rich, like a king's robe.
Purple feels soft and smooth as velvet.
Purple smells dark and sweet as violets.
Purple sounds like the mellow notes of a French horn.
Purple tastes dark and wild as blackberries.

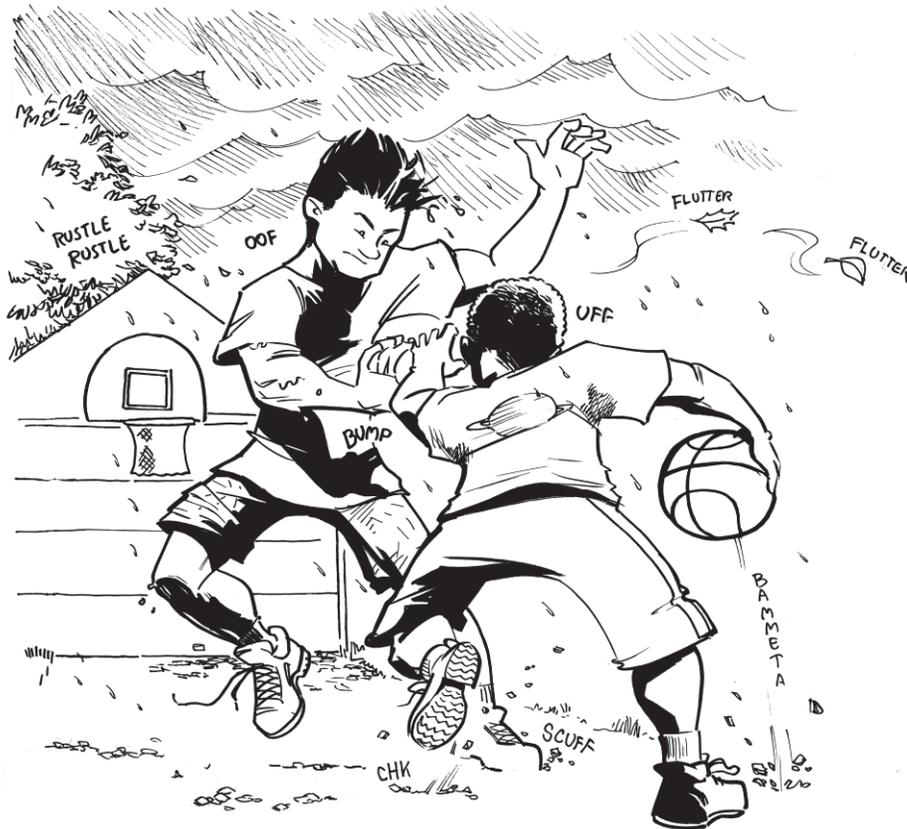
If purple doesn't appeal to you, think of robin's-egg blue, or vermilion, or ochre. Think about two or three colors and write poems comparing how they would look, sound, taste, smell, and feel. Follow the pattern given above, or use your own pattern.

WORDSMITH - PART THREE



A collection of color poems would make an attractive little booklet, too. Maybe Emily Dickinson got started this way.

On pages 108-109 you'll find six poems written by young people ages 10-15. Read them carefully, and notice how *all* five senses are involved. Some of the poems have an obvious pattern; others don't. Did you notice that poetry isn't necessarily about flowers and sentimental feelings? You can make a poem about *anything*—even a basketball game. What kind of sensory impressions can you imagine from this picture? What would you be feeling, hearing, and smelling?



EXERCISE 1-D. Write at least one more poem on any subject you choose: a favorite place, a holiday, a sports activity, or a parade. Include at least one **sensory image** per line. (How many sensory impressions can you imagine from the picture above?)

Read your poem several times, and change words and images until it says what you want to say. Make corrections, then copy or print.

