

August 28, 2015



Dear Teachers,

I was asked to guide 4th-8th graders in writing about loss to assist Prof. Steven Sametz with composing “A Child’s Requiem,” his musical response to the 2012 tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School. For the students taking part, I developed a reading, drafting, activity, and reading and revision process for 45-90 minute writing sessions.

Due to the sensitive nature of this subject matter (which families had addressed in their own way) we asked for parental permission for their child to work specifically on this project.

Depending on time available, these were the stages:

1. I thanked the students for their willingness to assist Prof. Sametz with his goal of comforting families and friends who had suffered the loss of a child. We spoke about hope as well, as part of the initial conversation.
2. They wrote the beginning draft of a short poem by filling in the blanks of the attached handout.
3. We played a game I called “Link and Shift,” in which they walked around the room to find something that reminded them of an emotion. The class then moved around the room (as if in an art gallery) as each student explained why her or his choice could have emotional significance. In this way, we built a supportive community. For shorter sessions, students remained sitting for this portion.
4. With all students back at their seats, we read brief, revised poems that I had written on several intense emotions. These poems, and the sentences that inspired them, are attached.
5. The students returned to their beginning drafts and either discarded them in favor of a new start, or revised and/or extended their writing.
6. Time allowing, we had a “Silent Display” as students walked to each other’s desk or table to read what each had written. They were asked to reflect on the experience and offer suggestions for sessions with younger students.
7. I collected their writings and thanked them again for their help with this project before they went to their next class or activity.

I hope this explanation and the writing prompts attachment is helpful to you. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at mhazelton@swain.org.

My very best regards,

Marilyn Hazelton

Poet in Residence

The Swain School