

Harrison

To: Principals  
From: David L. Harrison  
Regarding: **Word of the Month Poetry Challenge**

Dear Principal,

Since October 2009 I've sponsored **Word of the Month Poetry Challenge** on the blog page (<http://davidlharrison.wordpress.com>) of my website (<http://davidlharrison.com>). Adults and students nationwide write poems inspired by the Word of the Month and post their results where hundreds of readers visit.

Students whose early experiences with writing are fun and challenging are more inclined to value writing and enjoy doing it. Taking a single word and discovering the stories it holds is that kind of entertaining experience. Once students feel successful using the One Word Challenge, teachers might introduce words germane to their own class units -- triangle, global, president, extinct – that will reinforce learning and reasoning skills.

**Word of the Month Poetry Challenge** is not a writing program. It's more like mental calisthenics to keep the imagination limber. When students who say they have nothing to write about realize they've taken a random word, considered it's potential, made a list of approaches, and created a complete poem, they become proud, excited, and more confident of their writing abilities.

Monthly Hall of Fame Poets are elected by popular vote for adult and student divisions. Student winners are posted on YAAGroup (Young Authors and Artists Group, <http://www.yaagroup.org>) and receive a free 1-year membership that provides access to professional tips and suggestions by a team of successful authors and editors. I serve on that team along with Jerry Spinelli and others.

My fifteen books of poetry and rhymes for young people plus books with Timothy Rasinski and Gay Fawcett (reading fluency), Bernice Cullinan (poetry in the classroom), Kathy Holderith (poetry across the curricula), and (in progress) Mary Jo Fresch (phonemic awareness) convince me that **Word of the Month Poetry Challenge** provides a significant experience for students who participate. You can read more about the value of using poetry as a teaching tool in my chapter on poetry ("Yes, Poetry Can!") in *Children's Literature in the Reading Program, An Invitation to Read*, published by International Reading Association in 2009.

Thanks for reading this. I hope you will encourage teachers in grades three and up to participate in **Word of the Month Poetry Challenge**. If you have comments or questions, please leave them for me to answer. Thanks very much.

David