



Gifts from the Heart: WRITING Activity

Perie J. Longo, PhD, MFT, PTR

LIGHT AS METAPHOR FOR HOPE, PEACE AND HEALING

Scroll down for fun adaptation for families.

As the longest night of the year approaches with the Winter Solstice, the symbol of light and its return is laced throughout time in song, story and poetry as well as cultural and religious traditions. In ancient times, people gathered around the heart of a fire to honor the coming light. Haiku writer Raymond Rosliep (1917-1983) wrote a 3-word poem that captures this notion: *light/lights/light*. Poet Mark Strand, who died this past November, wrote in his poem “The Coming of Light,”

*...the candles are lit, as if by themselves.
Stars gather, dreams pour into your pillows...*

In his poem “The Uses of Light” Gary Snyder writes, “It warms my bones/say the stones...” Thinking of Snyder’s line, a prompt might be to consider what varied subjects in nature might have to say about loss of light and its return as a way of writing outside the box. What would trees say, the moon, darkness itself, a fire?

An example of this is the ancient chant from the Passamoquody Native American tribe.

*For we are the stars.
For we sing.
For we sing with our light.
For we are birds of fire.
For we spread our wings
over the sky.
Our light is a voice. . .*

Our voices are light. Words often reveal feelings otherwise not expressed. Here is a poem by 5th grader Angel Singh written two years ago, inspired by the above chant.

Light

For I am the Light
For I twinkle and shimmer

For I brighten up the world
so people can see all the wonderful gifts
nature has to offer

For I see everything
Clouds drifting across the sky,
trees swaying in the wind
For I hear the laughter of people
as they step outside and see my light

For I hear the seasons changing,
leaves dropping from the trees
that tower above

For I wonder why people cry,
why teardrops slide down cheeks.
What could make you sad
on this beautiful planet?

For now it is time for me to go,
For my light to dim and dissolve
into blackness
For I know when the night is over,
I will shine my shimmering light again

Angel Singh, Gr. 5

Ideas to consider:

- Choose any aspect of Light to write your poem: sunrise, sunset, star/s, moon, trees, fireplace or campfire, Menorah, Darkness, or the month of December itself.
- In the voice of your chosen subject: Say what you do, i.e. special actions or qualities
- Say what you see or notice
- Say what you hear
- Say what you feel
- Say what you smell or taste if it fits
- Say what your voice sings or talks about
- Say what you wonder, wish or long for
- Use repetitions here and there, and maybe a simile (comparison using “like” or “as”).

- You may use repetition of the word “For” as in the above poems, or simply begin with the phrase “I Am...” An example follows.

December

I am the season when rain sings to the earth
and cold seeps between your bones,
sends you running to the fireplace.
Lights snap on early in every home
while children make *wish-wish* sounds
that whisper in the shadows.

You turn attention to those you love,
make plans to do right, feast,
bake cookies, brighten the night
and dash like stars
across each other’s paths.
By morning, I paint the sky crimson
that lights the sky around the world

so everyone looks up and waits
for a little more light each day
for I am December making way
for the new, maybe peace, more love.
See me shining inside the eyes
of a child. Hold me in your heart
for tomorrow’s hope.

by Perie Longo

Adaptation for Families

When my children were young, close to Christmas, I had run out of time to get stocking stuffers. My mother who was visiting, said, “Write them each a poem!” What a concept! And so I did. I don’t know if they kept the poems, but it was fun for me. The above exercise can be adapted, changing the “I” to “You”. A child could also write a poem for a parent or grandparent. It could begin, “To me you are like the ...” and continue each line repeating “You are the...” picking images from nature, things that person loves. I remember a child writing some years ago to a grandmother, “You are the peanut butter/ of my peanut butter cookies.” An example of some beginning lines follows.

To...

You are the one who dances.
You dance with your heart.
Your heart glows with light
You run as fast as a shooting star
Your eyes are filled with light

that chases away the darkness.
Each day your bounce lightens
my day. You are my every day light!

Above all, have fun. There is no wrong way to write a poem. The Joy and Love of the Season
be with you. ~Perie Longo

Perie J. Longo, PhD, MFT, PTR is a marriage and family therapist and registered poetry therapist in private practice since 1990. She is an instructor for the [UCLArts and Healing Social Emotional Arts Certificate Program](#) and is active in the [National Association for Poetry Therapy \(NAPT\)](#), for which she has served as Executive Director, President, and long-time mentor/supervisor for those seeking certification in this field. In 1998, she received the Outstanding Achievement Award from the NAPT and in 2004 she received the NAPT's Distinguished Service Award. Since 1986, she has taught poetry for grades K-12 through [California-Poets-in-the-Schools](#). To learn more, visit: <http://www.perielongo.com/>.

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