

**magnetic  
poetry®**

# In The Classroom

a Guide for Using  
Magnetic Poetry  
in Your Curriculum



# Introduction

*Magnetic Poetry is just the most clever idea we've seen in a long time...[it's] worth its weight in gold....*

From Teaching K-8 Magazine, April, 1998, pp.78-80

A Note from the Inventor:

Though Magnetic Poetry is sold at retail as a novelty, I originally created it as a serious writing tool, or more specifically, as a device to help me break through my own writer's block. Fiddling around with my "poetry kit" (the very first one was stuck to a cookie sheet stored next to my desk) seemed to free up a brain clogged with intimidation, preconception and cliché, and get the rusty language gears lubed up and grinding to a start. It didn't occur to me that a lot of other folks--especially kids--must have been feeling the same barriers when they sat down to write, and that they too might benefit from this simple little tool that helped me so much.

As I write this, five years and millions of Magnetic Poetry Kits later, I can see that my little tool is helping to satisfy a deep-seated need. It's something that gnaws at our collective soul, a craving for strong, potent language, language that transports us to all kinds of incredible places deep within and far away from ourselves. More significantly, I think that Magnetic Poetry is actually elevating that craving, or to mix metaphors, infecting people with the language bug.

And that's crucial, especially in kids. I think that one of the most important things a teacher can do is to get kids playing with words. Word play can ignite a love of language in general, which is essential in a lifetime of reading, writing, and higher thinking and learning. I'd go as far as saying that word play can save lives.

Here's some words on Magnetic Poetry from teachers who've used it; they will give you a feeling for its strengths and potentialities. Following that are some good directed activities using Magnetic Poetry, though I would encourage you to keep a kit installed in some "public" place, with few or no rules; Magnetic Poetry works wonderfully as a completely open-ended, unsupervised game (and you've got enough stuff to do as it is!).

Good luck, and may the muse of the magnets be with you and your students!

--Dave Kapell

**Magnetic Poetry: You'll Wonder How You Ever Taught Without It**  
by Maggie Knutson, MAEd and Angela Lind, MAEd  
Orono, MN and Forest Lake, MN

*An elementary and middle school teacher examine the profound impact Magnetic Poetry has had on their students' learning*

Magnetic Poetry, though sometimes thought of as a toy, has entered our Language Arts classrooms and has been tearing down walls of intimidation and passivity for hundreds of students. In addition to encouraging reluctant writers, Magnetic Poetry has increased the quality of writing from our more advanced students. We believe the words of our students tell most powerfully how Magnetic Poetry has made writing an empowering and engaging experience:

### ...You'll Wonder How You Ever Taught Without It (continued)

I like it because I can write freely. --Tripp, 5th grade

I like Magnetic Poetry because the possibilities of my writing are endless.

--Julie, 5th grade

It's a fun way of learning! --Kelly, 1st grade

#### **Magnetic Poetry: A Valid Teaching Tool?**

It's hard to believe that a collection of simple magnets bearing a variety of common words could so deeply and easily influence students' attitudes about writing. Even before we began using Magnetic Poetry in our first and fifth grade classrooms we knew that students would enjoy playing with the magnets; that was a given. We were wary, however, of Magnetic Poetry's validity as a teaching tool, considering the recent pressure from our state government to focus on basic standards. This pressure has caused us to reevaluate the use of our precious class time. We think most teachers would agree that students need time for play, but we were faced with the questions: Is Magnetic Poetry a wise and valid use of our class time? Can it be used to teach the existing curriculum, or is this going to be an "add on?"

Magnetic Poetry, a "language arts manipulative," supports curriculum and instruction on many levels. For the learner, it is a confidence builder, an open invitation to successful writing experiences. For the teacher, it is a magician, a way to make the curriculum come alive for students.

#### **Magnetic Poetry Builds Enthusiasm and Confidence**

The non-threatening and playful nature of Magnetic Poetry immediately captured our students' attention and drew them in. They began creating new words, simple and complex sentences, and even short stories without ever realizing they were engaging in something educational. The students were composing successfully with little effort. This was especially satisfying to see in our Special Ed. students. Then we observed the most convincing evidence of Magnetic Poetry as a valid teaching tool: the transfer of this enthusiasm and confidence directly to traditional writing activities.

Magnetic Poetry is more of a challenge than what we do from the book, and more fun! -- Taylor, 5th grade

Magnetic Poetry helped me learn about run-on sentences. --Jason, 5th grade

I like what we did with Magnetic Poetry today because it helped me learn that a sentence doesn't make sense if you don't have a subject and a predicate. --Katie, 5th grade

enormous

dog s

play in

the autumn sun

We also observed improvement in our most advanced and motivated students. Children, even in first grade, have thousands of words in their vocabulary. However, it seems that when students compose a piece of writing, the words they choose come from a very limited menu, so they therefore repeat many of the same words. Magnetic Poetry encourages students to literally draw from a wide variety of words. We observed students, after having used Magnetic Poetry, accessing words from a much broader menu. Along the same vein, Magnetic Poetry emphasizes the importance of word choice. Children are impatient by nature, and writing is no exception.

-Sam Hickel, (age 6)

**...You'll Wonder How You Ever Taught Without It (continued)**

As each magnet is chosen, children experience writing as a series of deliberate decisions about words and word order, thus creating a higher quality product.

**Magnetic Poetry Helps Teachers Make the Curriculum Come Alive**

We know that students learn and retain more when they are captains of their own learning, so we try to view the curriculum through child-centered glasses. Magnetic Poetry is an innovation that helps teachers put many aspects of the Language Arts curriculum literally right in the students' hands. Our students have swapped suffixes, maneuvered sentence patterns, played with parts of speech, and explored shades of meaning. Because of the versatility of this tool, first through twelfth grade teachers can adapt virtually any lesson that involves writing or studying the English Language to make it more child-centered.

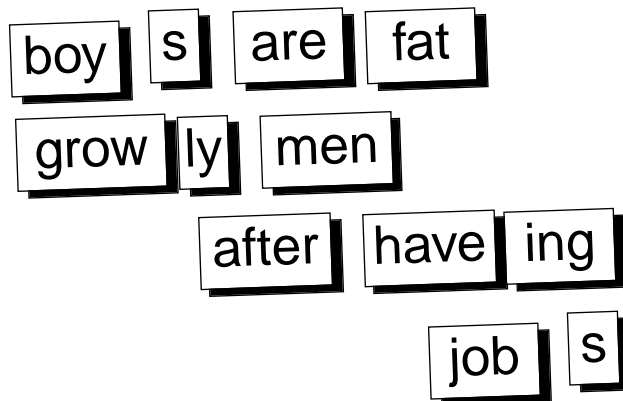
It's easier than thinking up all of those big words by myself. --Lauren, 1st grade

It's fun to be able to mix up words and sentences. --Jennifer, 5th grade

I like Magnetic Poetry because if you make a mistake you don't have to erase it, you just take it off and find something that works better. --Brandt, 5th grade

I like it because it helps me not to use the same words over and over. --Bryn, 5th grade

We view our curriculum as a set of objectives, and we use a variety of materials to ensure that our students are acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary to achieve them. Supplementary materials serve different and necessary purposes. We use text books as a resource, journals to record our thoughts, and novels to explore quality literature. We now have Magnetic Poetry to build on our students' enthusiasm and confidence as writers while making the other language curriculum come alive. We, personally, can no longer imagine teaching without it.



-Lisa Ruth Carpinone, (age 8)

# Directed Activities

## For Pre-Readers

### **Word Snakes**

Have the student line up a few Magnetic Poetry tiles. The group probably won't make sense ("like box dream it candy morning ed"). Read the words aloud to the student (and laugh together). Then, rearrange the tiles, if possible, to make some kind of sense (like "candy box morning dreamed it") and read it aloud again, and discuss its meaning. Then have the student add more tiles to the snake, and repeat the reading aloud and rearranging, taking input from the student. This game can get hilariously silly while exercising the child's language-conceptualization skills; the student may even start recognizing some of the words as the game progresses.

## For Early Readers

### **Word Mastery Collection**

Have the student pick out the words that he or she can read and stick them in a specially-designated area. If the student doesn't know how to read any words yet, pick out a simple starter word, like "mom," for instance. The student will memorize, study and familiarize herself with that word for future recognition, and will take pride in knowing how to "read" that word when quizzed. Build a collection over time, taking care to sound the

words out with the student, and adding words at a rate the student can handle. The student will take great pride in their growing "word collection."

### **Letter Recognition**

Ask students to separate out all of the words that begin with a certain letter.

### **Sound Recognition**

Ask the students to separate out all of the words that have a certain sound in them (a hard "K" sound, for instance, would include cool, like, music, dark, etc.). To teach rhyme, ask the students to find and group together words that end with the same sounds (grow, rainbow, go, etc.).

### **Alphabetical Order**

Ask the students to arrange the tiles in alphabetical order.

### **The Search**

Take a look at a scattering of word tiles, and pick one without pointing to it or touching it. Then ask the child to find that word (ala "Where's Waldo?").

*Magnetic Poetry Paint in action. Our non-toxic primer allows any porous surface to hold magnets.*



# Directed Activities

## Sentence Puzzle

With the student not looking, construct a sentence, then mix it up and ask the student to form a sentence using only those tiles. It's okay if theirs turns out different than yours; compare your differing sentences.

## One of These Words is Not Like the Other...

Select a group of words that have something in common. Add one word to the group that does not fit in. Ask the student(s) to identify the word that doesn't belong and explain what the words have in common.

## Group Activities

### Spontaneous Writing Teams

Divide students into small groups (4-5 students per group) and supply each group with a Magnetic Poetry Kit and a magnet receptive surface such as a cookie sheet, Magnetic Poetry Composition Journal or Metal Display Board. Announce a preconceived poem title, and give the groups 10 or 15 minutes to compose a poem for that title. Hint: make your poem titles somewhat vague and universal, like "Summer is Almost Here" or "Sunday Morning" or "Long Car Trip" or "Eating a Peach." After the allotted time has passed, call "Time!" and have a representative of each group read aloud the title followed by their poem. Another member of each group should write down the poems. Repeat as time allows.

### Tag Team Poetry

Separate a Magnetic Poetry Kit into two piles: one containing only nouns, verbs and adjectives, the other everything else (articles, pronouns, word endings, etc.). Turn the noun-verb-adjective pile face down; the "other stuff" pile remains face up. A "contestant" approaches the piles (placed near a steel surface or Magnetic Poetry Composition Journal) and chooses 4 noun-verb-adjective tiles (blindly) and up to 3 "other stuff" tiles (they may pick through the pile). They then compose a line of verse on the wall or journal. Their turn should last a total of 2 minutes or less; if they go over, or if their line makes absolutely no grammatical sense, they're out (and their tiles go back into the piles). The next contestant repeats the process, adding on to the line above... they may place it before or after the existing verse, but it must link grammatically. Repeat until all of the tiles are used up, or all of the contestants are out, and then enjoy your spontaneous



# Directed Activities

poem (which will probably be quite bizarre, but possibly quite amazing). This activity works best with the Really Big Words kit and a large steel surface such as most chalk boards, or a wall painted with Poetry Paint (the paint that holds magnets). Things can get pretty hilarious...

## **Story Starter**

Use Magnetic Poetry to write a provocative first sentence of a story. As we've all heard, the first sentence is arguably the most important, and undoubtedly the most difficult of any story (the blank page can be very intimidating, especially to kids). Have the whole class write their own stories, each starting with the same first sentence; read the finished (very short) stories aloud and compare.

## **The Word Wall**

The above activities can be completed on a "Word Wall". Using the Really Big Words Kit (formerly the Humongo Kit) with its extra large word tiles, and a magnet receptive chalk or wipe-off board a Word Wall can be used to introduce new words each week, or can be used to construct daily messages or poems composed by the whole class. The Word Wall could also simply function as an activity center for students to play with language. Magnetic Poetry's non-toxic Poetry Paint can be used to create a Word Wall if your classroom does not have an existing surface.

## **Individual Activities**

*Note: While most of the following activities focus on creative expression, you will notice that many begin with separation of word types, which is itself a grammar exercise. The beauty of having your students perform this somewhat mundane activity is that there is a prize at the end: a more open-ended creativity game.*

### **Manufacturing a Metaphor**

Place all of the nouns in a pile face down. Ask the students to pick two out of the pile ("dog" and "mountain," for example), and grammatically link one to the other without using "like" or "as", even if it makes no apparent sense: "a mountain of dogs" or "the mountain is a dog." The students are then asked to extend and give sense to the metaphor using other words in the kit: "my life is a mountain of dogs" or "the mountain is a huge dog leaping into the sky."

For another, more personal variation, stick up the words "I am a," and ask the students to pick one tile out of the noun pile ("storm," for example, which becomes "I am a storm"), and extend it the same way as above: "I am a summer storm raining cool over you."

### **Spawning a Simile**

Same as above, but use "like," or an adjective plus "as" to link the two nouns ("morning is like the moon" or "morning is as white as the moon" or "I am like the moon" or "I am as white as the moon"). Again, ask the students to extend the simile: "morning is like the moon, cool and silent" or "morning is as white as the moon, and as warm as the sun" or "I am like the full moon, about to go small" or "I am as white as the moon, now that it is spring."

### **Producing Personification**

Have the students separate out all of the words that are mainly associated with humans, such as: he, she, hand, walk, they, pretty, love, play, cry, happy, pretend, whisper, and so on. Then have them separate out the inanimate objects (nouns) like butterfly, summer,

morning, bug, rainbow, ocean, etc. From the “inanimate” pile, choose one word (“ocean,” for example), and from the “human” pile, choose one verb (“play,” for example). Now, form a simple sentence using the two words (“the ocean plays” or “the ocean is playing” or “the ocean is playful”). Explain that this is simple personification. Now ask the students to try their hands at carrying the image further (“the ocean is playing her sad music for me” or “the ocean is as playful as a baby boy,” for example).

## ElectroMagnetic Poetry Kit Activities

ElectroMagnetic Poetry, the software version of the Magnetic Poetry Kit, lends itself well to most of the above activities, but offers additional possibilities. ElectroMagnetic Poetry is highly customizable, allowing the teacher to add their own vocabulary lists to the mix, change the color, size, and fonts of the words and tiles, and change the backgrounds on which the tiles float. In fact, each student could have their own individualized version of the kit saved for their particular needs. ElectroMagnetic Poetry also comes loaded with six different languages, with an instant translation feature, allowing students to click on an unfamiliar word and get its English translation (or, for E.S.L. students, English words can be customized to click to their non-English translation). ElectroMagnetic Poetry can be used as either an application or a screen saver. Poems can be saved, printed out, and e-mailed to friends or to our web site for commentary in a public forum. Here are some other ideas:

### For Pre-Readers: Alphabet Blocks

Open ElectroMagnetic Poetry with only blank tiles (select the “Blanks” handful file), and fill them with letters of the alphabet; you may want to do this with three or four handfuls so that there are plenty of tiles floating around. Increase the font size to, say, 72pt-- the tiles will expand to accommodate the larger font. If you’d like, change the color of the tile and type to the student’s favorites. These large “block” tiles will be easy for computer-beginners to grab and move around with the cursor. Have the student grab and line up the letters of the alphabet in order as they float by. More advanced students can spell out their names, or other words.

### Picture This

Pull up one of the scenic backgrounds (such as Clouds or Pasture), and ask the student to write a poem about (and artfully positioned on top of) the scene. If you’d like, use one of your own scanned photos or drawings for the background picture (see the instruction manual).

### Freeze!

When the teacher yells “Freeze!,” the student freezes the tiles on the screen and tries to make a poem using all of the visible tiles within a set time limit.

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These are just a few ideas for Magnetic Poetry in the classroom. Most importantly, Magnetic Poetry is supposed to be fun, a manipulative to help teach students about language. We hope you find this information useful and we would love to hear from you. Please forward any comments about Magnetic Poetry in the Classroom to:

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have

fun