

Writer's Memo

For this Genre-Based Writing Portfolio, we were asked to write in the genre that feels the most unfamiliar or uncomfortable to us. Poetry was the first genre that popped into my mind. All throughout high school, college, and even in my own teaching now, poetry was the one genre that made me cringe. I felt this way because I didn't "get" poetry. I didn't understand it and thus I definitely couldn't write it. I didn't feel creative enough and felt I lacked the ability to use words as a form of art. It just wasn't me. I am a math person. I like formulas and structure; right and wrong answers. Poetry was too open for me in both the numerous sub genres and the self-expression. When I began thinking about this project, I had figured I would do a free verse poem seeing how it didn't have what I considered set rules and thus be easier. After reading Heard's book, I knew that like her, my poem had to be about something that was important to me and that I had physical feelings about (xii). Thus, I would write a poem about my year and a half old daughter, Lola. Along with her birth has come the greatest joy, heartache, fear, and a slue of other emotions. I thought about all we had been though and set off writing only to get no where. I was frustrated. I had the physical feelings the passion, but I struggled to put it on the paper. I almost gave up and chose a new genre because obviously poetry was just too hard. However, instead I turned to Heard's book. I read the section on form and read about narrative poetry. While I am sure I had once learned about this genre, I hadn't remembered it. From her book I learned that this genre tells a story, something I definitely had, and that it often uses rhyme (Heard, pg. 82). She also mentions how end rhyme can help organize poems (Heard, pg. 80). I instantly felt better. I realized that while free verse poetry is great because it does lack a set format, it was this lack of format that was hindering me. I needed help to narrow my ideas and boundaries to work within. I then changed my thinking and instead of thinking about all the

feelings I wanted to express, I thought about what story I wanted to tell. My original idea was to write a poem about how Lola has taught me so much about life. From Lola's experience, I have learned that focusing on the positive allows you to see the positive instead of dwelling on the negative. Thus, I wanted to tell her story, but at the same time portray this positive outlook she has given me.

One day at work I sat down at the computer and started writing with my idea about Lola teaching me a lesson in my mind. From there my poem just seemed to flow out of me. I was shocked. The ABCB rhyme scheme was not something I planned before hand but is what I began writing. I found this rhyming scheme to help guide my writing, but made sure that it didn't alter what I was trying to say or make it not make sense (Heard, pg. 71). What I found so amazing was that for the first time a poem had come simple to me. I didn't struggle with every word. I just wrote my feelings down on paper. After writing my first draft I felt good. But when it came time to share it with my reading group I was very nervous. I read my poem over and over. Suddenly, all I saw was the lack of metaphors, similes, and other figurative language. I started to have self-doubt and told myself that it was a bad poem because it had lacked these things. Like Heard, "I felt threatened by the world of formal poetry" (pg. 75). After thinking about these thoughts, I thought about Freedman's idea of "removed genres that are learned seem too easily reduced from the rhetorical to the formulaic" as discussed in Devitt's article (pg 343). I saw this as meaning that in using genre studies, we are making genres become a set of criteria and not focusing on the rhetoric of the genre. I looked at my poem and saw the emotion I was expressing as well as the hope and message I was trying to send my audience. Still reluctant, I shared my poem with my group. To my great surprise, they all had positive things to say. They gave me some simple word revisions, but other than that not much else. After making the

revisions they mentioned, I read my poem aloud to myself. In fact, I think during the course of this whole project I have read my poem aloud at least 100 times. I made a couple of changes of the order of things to make it flow more chronologically and then added an ending. I then decided to have a colleague of mine that knew Lola and my story read the poem. She told me that she thought the poem was about our journey and not about Lola teaching me a lesson like I had originally envisioned and to maybe repeat the line about her being where she should be. I read my poem again and saw what she was saying. The ending stanza I had added had almost changed my vision. My writing had taken me to a place I didn't expect to go, but it was a detour I wanted to take (Apol, pg. 90). She also mentioned how the poem brought tears to her eyes. It was then I realized that even though I didn't use formative language, I was able to write a poem that "the reader could not help but be "inside" the feeling in the poem" (Apol, pg. 91). I realized that why I struggled with poetry in previous years was because of gaps in my knowledge of what constitutes poetry.

The idea of feeling restricted by a genre makes me think about the use of genre studies in my own teaching. As Apol makes clear in her article, "a good writer of poetry requires being an active reader of poetry (pg. 90). My first graders are so young and easily influenced. Exposing them to great poetry at an early age can only benefit them in their own writing of poetry. Since I felt so restricted by the "formal format" of poetry, I think it will be very beneficial to read all types of poems. I think often we do look at little children as not having their own thoughts. What this assignment has taught me is that I learned more through experimentation and immersion within the genre. Thus, I believe my students are capable of giving their inferences and thoughts about good quality poetry. Also, teaching them how to write about feelings and not

just limiting them to objects. I want to incorporate Devitt's genre pedagogy and teach my students critical awareness and teach them of the impact their writing has.

Works Cited

Apol, L. (2002). "What do we do if we don't do haiku?" Seven suggestions for writers and teachers. *English Journal*. 89-97.

Devitt, A. *Teaching critical genre awareness*. 337-350

Heard, G. (1989). *For the good of the earth and sun: Teaching poetry*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Examples of Writing:

*Note: I did 3 genres, poetry, blogging, and letter writing. I am an avid reader of food blogging and decided to give it a go. Secondly, writing letters to my daughter is something I had always hoped to do, but unfortunately with the craziness of our lives, this was the first letter I wrote since the one I wrote when I was in labor with her.

"Final Draft"

LOLA

A parent is a child's first teacher,
At least that is what I had been told
So book after book I read to you
While you were in my tummy for me to hold

But little did I know
How different it would be

When you were on the outside
Instead of inside of me

Things didn't go the way as planned
My sweet little girl
One day everything was fine,
The next our lives changed in a whirl

Six short nights I got with you
Sleeping next to me in bed
Then banished to the NICU
Leaving me filled with dread

The days slowly passed
Each one filling me with fear
I sat with you every waking moment
Our futures suddenly not so clear

But at last we brought you home,
Right where you should be
Finally we could begin our lives,
Our family of three

Now I look at all your scars
And the permanent smile on your face
I search for some sign of pain
But never see a trace

Through all the therapies and appointments
You never throw a fit
With a smile and a wave
You never want to quit

How the sayings changed
For it is you that has taught me
all about life
and how it is supposed to be

You have taught me to be strong
And the miraculous power of prayer

How to roll with all the punches
Even when life isn't always fair

Though things haven't always been easy
I wouldn't change a thing
You are the light of our lives
With all the joy that you bring

Finally you are home to stay,
Right where you should be
We are loving living our lives,
As our family of three

Second Draft

A parent is a child's first teacher,
At least that is what I had been told
So book after book I read to you
While you were in my tummy for me to hold

But little did I know
how different it would be
When you were on the outside
Instead of inside of me

Things didn't go the way as planned
My sweet darling girl
Our lives are so different
They changed in a whirl

I look at all your scars
And the permanent smile on your face
I search for some sign of pain
But never see a trace.

Through all the therapies and appointments
You never throw a fit

With a smile and a wave
You never want to quit

How the saying has changed
For it is you that has taught me
all about life
and how it is supposed to be

You have taught me how to be strong
And the power of prayer
How to roll with all the punches
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Though things haven't always been easy
I wouldn't change a thing
You are the light of our lives
With all the joy that you bring

Finally you are home to stay,
Right where you should be
We are loving living our lives,
As our family of three

First Draft

A parent is a child's first teacher,
At least that is what I had been told
So book after book I read to you
While you were in my tummy for me to hold

But little did I know
how different it would be
When you were on the outside
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I look at all your scars
And the permanent smile on your face

I search for some sign of pain
But I never see a trace.

Through all the therapies and appointments
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Things didn't go the way as planned
My sweet darling girl
Our lives are so different
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How the saying has changed
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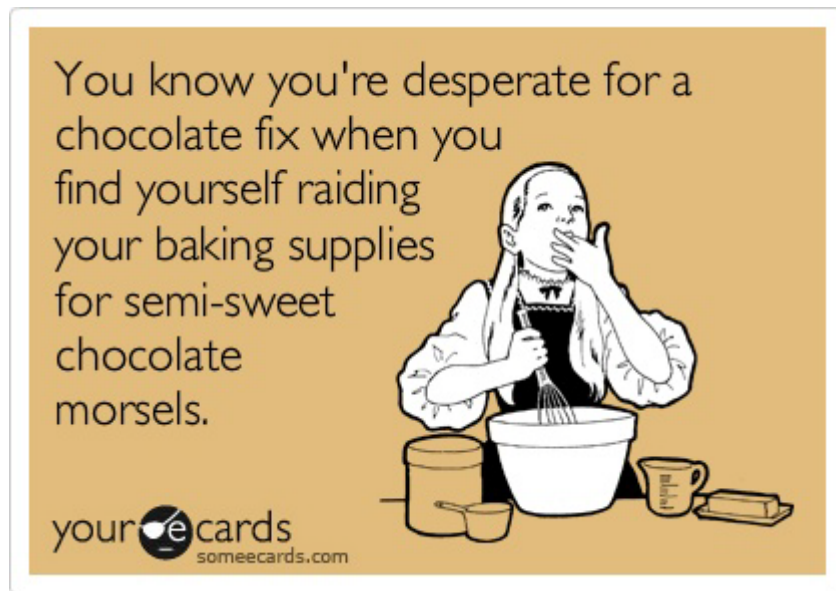
Though things haven't always been easy
I wouldn't change a thing
You are the light of our lives
With all the joy that you bring

The First Step is Admitting the Problem

Hello. My name is Amy and I...I'm an emotional eater.

As far back as I can remember I have always loved sugar. If there were cookies in the house, I had little self control. I didn't notice it becoming a problem until I got older. As I am sure you all know, the bigger we are, the bigger the problems in our lives. It started off with being really stressed. I was doing a lot of work so I thought I earned a couple cookies. Then over the years it has become worse. Stress at work equaled ice cream. Problem with my husband...couple of brownies. Feeling of being out of control; cake; don't mind if I do! Even feelings of happiness led to mindless eating of anything sweet.

When I found the following someecard on Pinterest, I laughed hysterically because it was so me. This is something we all do. Right? It's not just me?



Anyway, this love of sweets turned into to my love of baking. Being a big baker and emotional eater is like being an alcoholic and working at a liquor store...obviously not the best combo. Anyway, one day I was really stressed out. My students were driving me NUTS! I deserved something good. After reading many blogs, I found my victim. One dubbed a "Homemade Kit Kat Bar". They are full of (you guessed it!) chocolate and peanut butter (duh!) and also some graham cracker crumbs and Ritz Crackers. Oh, yes. These little guys are delicious.



They are the perfect salty sweet combo. An amazing combination for an emotional eater! Graham cracker crumbs, sugar, milk, and butter melt together on the stove to create the yummy, chewy, sticky, and gooey filling that binds this all together. It's spread over layers of Ritz crackers and then topped off with melted chocolate and peanut butter.



The end result is something amazing. My husband cried when he took his first bite. That might have been because I was shouting something about how if he got one single crumb on the kitchen floor he'd have to lick it up, because so help me, I am not sweeping the floor again for as long as I live! Then again, maybe he was just crying because these bars are so darn delicious. It's hard to say.



Homemade Kit Kat Bars

adapted from Taste Of Home, April/May 2010

- 1 1/2 cups graham cracker crumbs
- 1 3/4 cup packed brown sugar (original recipe calls for 1 c. sugar and only 3/4 c. brown sugar but I am obsessed with brown sugar!)
- 3/4 cup butter, cubed
- 1/3 cup milk
- 2 sleeves Ritz crackers (about 80 crackers)
- 1 1/2 cups semi-sweet chocolate chips
- 3/4 cups peanut butter (original recipe calls for 1 1/4 c., but I thought too much peanut butter would overwhelm the chocolate flavor, and we could NOT allow that to happen)

In a medium saucepan, combine the cracker crumbs, sugars, butter, and milk. Bring to a boil, stirring constantly. Cook and stir for about 5 minutes more.

Grease a 9×13 pan and place a single layer of Ritz crackers along the bottom. Top with half of the graham cracker crumb mixture. Repeat layers once and then top with the remaining Ritz crackers.

In a microwave safe bowl, combine the chocolate chips and peanut butter. Microwave on low, stopping to stir occasionally. Do not overcook or the chocolate will burn. Pour over the crackers and refrigerate until firm. Cut into bars and enjoy!

My Dearest Baby Girl,

When you are a child, you dream of your future. What job you will have, who you will marry, where you will live. I was different. I never thought of any of those things. All I knew I wanted was to be a mommy of a sweet little girl. You see, your Nanny and I have always been the best of friends. With two brothers and Papa, Nanny and I stuck together in the house full of boys. We went everywhere together and talked about everything. I loved our connection and grew up feeling my life wouldn't be complete without having that same connection with my own child. My biggest fear in life was I wasn't going to get my baby girl. When Daddy and I found out we were having a baby, we were over the moon. It was the moment when I first heard the tiny drumming sound of your heartbeat that I knew you were my one true love. The day I found out you were a girl was the most amazing day. Your Nanny and I cried tears of joy. Your daddy looked nervous. He has all brothers. Once my tears dried, my thoughts quickly drifted to my new best friend and all of the amazing things we were going to do together. The love I felt for you was unimaginable and it has only grown since. The day I gave birth to you was the most amazing day of my life. You were so beautiful and perfect. Your Daddy and I made a wish and you came true!

While you appeared perfect and the doctors and nurses kept telling us so, I had a nagging feeling something was wrong. You made this grunting noise and hardly ever cried. With the doctor's permission, we took you home, so excited to start our new lives as a family of three! My dream was complete. However, my dream slowly began to crumble when 10 days after you were first placed into my arms; you were taken away from me, along with my heart. The fear of losing your child is the worst fear of all. I watched for months on end as doctors performed countless number of tests, pricks, and spent hours researching what was wrong with you. You

went from a perfectly healthy newborn to a baby requiring oxygen/CPAP to breathe and tubes to eat. Nobody knew what was wrong. Your Daddy and I were beside ourselves. Every night we had to go to “sleep” with your bed empty next to us. I called every night to find out how you were doing and spent every awake moment at your bedside. It wasn’t fair. When the diagnosis finally came, it didn’t bring many answers. While the diagnosis brought many fears and bad thoughts, I looked at my darling Lola and knew you would achieve big things. You were a fighter. No matter what any doctor had done to you, you always went with the flow and never complained. You were strong and would not let anything get into your way. When we brought you home after 70 days in the NICU, it was bittersweet. It was so amazing to have our baby home where you belonged, but scary since you were trached and on a vent and required nurses to help us take care of you 16 hours of the day. Once home, you continued to amaze us every single day. Every milestone you met brought tears of pure joy to my eyes. Every smile melted my heart. With each passing milestone, I began to see you proving me right. You were a fighter. You were Lola. You weren’t like the other children on the internet. You were you and you were our little miracle. Now nearing two, I cannot believe how far you have come; we as a family have come! You are the apple of your daddy’s and my eye. Though life has not been easy for you, or for us in the past couple of years, we have grown stronger and closer because of it. You have surprised all your doctors and us! My dreams for us that I once thought were lost, are now brighter than ever! I am so excited to show you the world and fill it with tons of wonderful experiences. Your life has given me something I will never, ever lose. You've brought love into my life, a love that will never fade. You really are my true love!

I love you to the moon and back,

Mommy