

Classroom Ideas for

A WHIFF OF PINE, A HINT OF SKUNK: *a forest of poems*

by Deborah Ruddell, author of *Today at the Bluebird Café: a branchful of birds*

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FOLLOW YOUR NOSE ...

The title poem, *Eau de Forest: A Woodsy Cologne*, is a list poem. In the poem, I try to help you “smell” the forest with my words. Take a walk in the woods (or a park) and make a list of everything you smell -- or imagine that you smell. Back in the classroom, work together to write a class list poem that describes the scent of the place you visited. Don't worry about making your poem rhyme. Just concentrate on using strong nouns that make your poem come alive.

PERK UP YOUR EARS ...

Read *The Night Owl*. In the poem, I try to help you “hear” the owl with my words. I compare his hoot to “a spooky-sounding flute.” Now, listen to a recording of a great horned owl at www.nationalgeographic.com and see what you think!

While you're on the National Geographic site, you might want to listen to the recording of coyotes. Then, read my poem, *Coyote Carolers*. You'll see that I compare the coyotes to a band of Christmas carolers who “sing until their throats are sore”. Can you think of another way to help someone “hear” a coyote's voice with words? What do the coyotes' voices remind you of? Something funny or scary? Brainstorm your ideas as a class.

READY ... ACTION!

The poem, *October Surprise Party*, describes the thrill of being in the woods in October, when the beautiful leaves fall down like confetti. In the poem, I try to help you “see” a little movie with my words. I use some strong action verbs. Can you find them?

This poem describes a chain reaction of events – one thing leads to another, then another, then another. As a class, answer these questions:

1. Where does the action start – down on the ground, or up in the trees?
2. What animal starts the action? How?
3. Then what happens?
4. What happens next?
5. Why do you think I used the word *avalanche*? Isn't that a word that's connected with snow, not leaves? (Hint: There is more than one reason.)

Try making your own “movie” with words -- a short poem or a paragraph that describes a chain reaction of events. Don't forget to use strong action verbs, and let your reader “see” the action unfold.

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MAKE A CONNECTION ...

Poets love to compare things ... this reminds me of that ... this looks like that ... this sounds like that, and so on. It's one of our favorite tricks. In the poem, Chipmunks, Inc., I compare chipmunks to bankers. Can you find any other poems in the book where I've made comparisons between two very different things?

In *The Great Snail Race*, I compare a snail to a horse in a race. As a class, find all the places in the poem where I describe the snail with words that could also be used to describe a horse in a race. When I mention "his saddle rocking side to side," what am I really talking about?

CREATE...

* Pretend that you've never seen Joan Rankin's delicious watercolor illustrations in *A WHIFF OF PINE, A HINT OF SKUNK*. Choose one of your favorite poems from the book, copy it, and illustrate it in your own way using paint, markers, crayon, or collage.

* Read *A Wild Turkey Comments On His Portrait*. Find a good photograph of a wild turkey (www.nationalgeographic.com is a good place to look). Study the turkey's coloring and the details of his feathers carefully. Now, draw or paint a portrait that would make the turkey in the poem proud!

* Make a great horned owl with a pinecone, googly eyes, a yellow felt beak, and a few brown feathers for the top of its head. You'll also need glue and scissors to cut a triangular beak from felt.

READ...

Here are some wonderful books of children's poetry about nature.

Butterfly Eyes and Other Secrets of the Meadow
by Joyce Sidman

Lizards, Frogs & Polliwogs
by Douglas Florian

Old Elm Speaks: Tree Poems
by Kristine O'Connell George