Poems for Two Voices: An After Reading Strategy

*The Importance of Being Earnest* by Oscar Wilde (Signet Classics, 2004)

**Purpose of this Strategy**

Poems for two voices are set up to tell two sides of a story or to compare and contrast two concepts or experiences. Students love the sound of these cleverly crafted poems that are designed to be read aloud by two voices, sometimes alternating and sometimes simultaneously. As an after reading strategy, poems for two voices can also be used to help students consider text structures and an alternate form of writing. They also help students to recognize and analyze inner conflict in literature.

**Directions**

**Step One**
Share with your students several poems for two voices. For instance, here is the beginning of a short poem called “Honeybees” from *Joyful Noise:*

- Being a bee
- Is a pain.
- I’m a worker
- I’ll gladly explain.

- Being a bee
- Is a joy.
- I’m a queen
- I’ll gladly explain.

**Step Two**
Ask students to divide into two groups to read the poems in columns as they are written.

**Step Three**
When students are familiar with this format of poem, encourage them to use this style of writing to compare and contrast characters or elements they are reading. For example, they might choose to compare the personalities of Jack and Algernon, or perhaps the opinions of Dr. Chausable and Lady Bracknell. They might choose to compare the Victorian view on marriage with a more contemporary view, or maybe a life of hard work compared to a life of idle leisure. The possibilities are endless. It is important for students to focus first on learning the information through reading. Help students to look over what they have read and decide what important information to highlight in their poem for two voices.

**Step Four**
If students feel comfortable with the idea, have them get into partnerships and work together, each reading one voice, to perform each students’ poem to the class.

**Assessment**
The assessment for this activity can be informal, possibly even based on completion. The important concept of this activity is to be sure that students are able to pick out two differing people or ideas from their reading and, drawing on quotes, personality traits or descriptions from the play, successfully compare and contrast the two in their poems for two voices.