

Begin a Poem With a Picture

Poet Nikki Grimes shows how you can write a picture poem

“Sideyard” is one of my favorite poems. Let me tell you how I wrote it. I was looking at a picture one day. I asked myself: What am I looking at? The answer: an old house in the country, with roses leaning against the walls. Their leaves seemed to be fluttering. They made me think about the way the wind sometimes whistles at night. Here is what I wrote down:

The First Draft

*Did you hear it last night, Lord?
I never knew the wind could sing
or sigh the way it did
back through the dogwood trees
behind great grandpa's house
last week
I never saw so many flowers,
either, Lord
You see the way those roses hugged
the porch?
I guess they love that old house as
much as me
Please bless great grandma for
asking me to visit, Lord.*

As I usually do, I began to write using everyday language, as though I were speaking. I knew I would add some rhyme later. But first, I



needed to decide whose house this was, and I needed to explain why the girl in the picture had never seen so many flowers before. I pretended that I was that girl.

The Second Draft

*The wind sang and sighed like an
old woman spookin' the dog-
wood trees back of grandma's
house last night
I never heard the wind sing or sigh
before
not where I live,
not in the city
I never saw so many flowers,
either, Lord.
You see the way those rose bushes
climbed the stair
and hugged that porch?
I guess they love that timber house
as much as me.
God, please bless grandma for let-
ting me come to visit
And while you're at it, Lord
ask her if I can stay again next
year.*

Obviously, the girl enjoyed the sound of the night wind whipping through the trees, but not everybody does. So I added a younger brother to the poem:

From the Third Draft

*The wind sang and sighed like an
old woman spookin' the dog-
wood trees back of grandma's
house last night
My little brother said it was an
awful fright,
but me, I loved it.*

Then—in the fourth and final draft—I added a few more rhymes and finished off the poem. I hope you enjoy reading it!

Now Write a Poem

Find a picture that you like in a book or magazine, or use a picture that one of your friends drew. Try to imagine what the people in the picture are thinking about or doing. If it's a picture of people riding a bus, imagine who's in it and where they might be going or coming from. It helps if you imagine that you are one of those people! Once you've got a few ideas, make up a poem to match the picture.

ILLUSTRATIONS: BETH GLICK