

WORD ECONOMY EXERCISE TEMPLATE

by Nikki Grimes

When I first began writing poetry as a child, my challenge was always to tell a story or paint a picture using as few words as possible. That's what word economy is all about, and if applied, it will do much to strengthen the writing of your students.

In general, when I revise a poem for word economy, I'm looking to do the following:

1. Eliminate unnecessary word repetition
2. Eliminate unnecessary adjectives, adverbs, or modifiers
3. Eliminate words or phrases that are already implied
4. Minimize use of articles

For the Michael Rosen anthology, *Food Fight*, I wrote a poem titled "Pineapple Surprise." Here are two drafts of the poem. The version in the left column was the original draft. In the revision process, I focused on cutting the fat from the poem, by paying attention to the above. The final result is in the right column.

My grandma wasn't much for hugging.
She was entirely too frail
to give me piggy-back rides
and moved too slow
for games of hide and seek.
But sometimes,
while I played alone,
she would magically appear
with pineapple upside-down cake

which took considerable time to make,
because of all those
honey-glazed pineapple rings
clinging to the bottom—
or were they
clinging to the top?
Dotted with Maraschino cherries pop-
ping with tooth-tingling
tangy sweetness
two thick layers of the most buttery,
gooey, scrumptiously chewy
pineapple-licious yellow cake
which grandma baked
for nobody else but me.

Grandma wasn't much for hugging.
She was entirely too frail
to give me piggy-back rides
and moved too slow
for hide and seek.
But sometimes,
while I played alone,
she would magically appear
with pineapple upside-down cake
which took considerable time to make.

Honey-glazed pineapple rings
clinging to the bottom—
or was it the top?
Maraschino cherries pop-
ping with tooth-tingling
tangy sweetness,
two thick layers of buttery,
gooey, scrumptiously chewy
pineapple-licious yellow cake
baked for nobody else but me.

Here's a second example of applying word economy to a poem. Again, the goal is to eliminate the fat to produce a tighter, smoother flowing draft.

First Draft

Washing dishes
I sink my hands into
rivers of soapy water
soft as sea foam.
I close my eyes
and float in the ocean,
sun warming my cheeks,
breeze tickling my skin
until I'm in
trouble with Mom
who yells, "Gabby!
Stop daydreaming
and finish those dishes!"

Second Draft

Washing dishes
I sink my hands into
rivers of soapy water
soft as sea foam.
I close my eyes
and float in the ocean,
sun warming my cheeks,
breeze tickling my skin
until Mom yells, "Gabby!
Stop daydreaming
and finish those dishes!"