ACTIVITY:
“I AM” Poems: Basin Poetry

Teaching Materials:
- Observation log sheets per student
- Copies of I AM Poem handout (next page)

Getting Ready:
Many of us feel so out of touch with the natural world that we often don’t see what is there beyond the obvious. The focus of this activity is to have students feel that they are a part of the natural world. Plan a field experience for students in order to conduct observations of natural elements. (Refer to Chapter 11). If an actual field experience is not possible, conduct a “guided visit” in the class. Students should sit quietly by themselves and use their senses to observe as much as they can. Discuss elements of the I AM Poem with students. Brainstorm ideas with the class.

Procedure:
Using the format and models of the I AM Poem provided, students should work alone or with a partner to compose an original poem about some element of the Lake Pontchartrain Basin. The following steps are suggested:

1. Using your senses, collect as many observations about the place around you as you can. If possible, return to the same spot on other occasions, especially at another time of day or in other weather conditions. Complete an observation log sheet each time you go. These will help you complete the lines of the poem that begin with “I hear...”; “I see...”; “I touch....”.

2. Using your internal senses, try to feel a connection with the world around you and express what you are thinking or feeling about your observations. This will help you complete the lines of the poem that begin with “I pretend...”; “I worry...”; “I dream....”; “I hope....”.

3. Putting observations and feelings together will help you complete the poem. These are the lines that start with “I am...”; “I wonder...”; “I understand...”; “I try....”.

4. Use a computer and other resources such as clip art or photographs (downloaded from the Internet) to create your I AM Poetry. Type, proof, and edit if necessary. Share your poems with your classmates.
I AM:

Basin Poetry

**FORMAT:**

First Stanza

I am (two special characteristics you have)
I wonder (something you are actually curious about)
I hear (an imaginary sound)
I see (an imaginary sight)
I want (an actual desire)
I am (the first line of the poem repeated)

Second Stanza

I pretend (something you actually pretend to do)
I feel (a feeling about something imaginary)
I touch (an imaginary touch)
I worry (something that really bothers you)
I cry (something that makes you very sad)
I am (the first line of the poem repeated)

Third Stanza

I understand (something that you know is true)
I say (something that you believe in)
I dream (something that you actually dream about)
I try (something you really make an effort about)
I hope (something that you actually hope for)
I am (the first line of the poem repeated)
I am Lake Pontchartrain, watershed of a great metropolis;
    I wonder how people can be so heartless;
    I hear young children playing on my shores;
    I see those same faces corrupting the place where their fondest childhood memories lie;
    I am Lake Pontchartrain, watershed of a great metropolis.

    I pretend that they are ignorant of their actions;
    I feel the pain of neglect of the ones who once did and still should cherish me;
    I touch the hearts of all in the metropolis who once enjoyed my waters;
    I worry about the sickness and whether it will ever be cured enough so people can once again play on my shores;
    I cry pools of brown water and green algae, which turned the people away from me, yet all was done at their own hands;
    I am Lake Pontchartrain, watershed of a great metropolis.

    I understand that there are people who are still true to me and I say to them, “Thank you, you are truly friends;”
    I dream that people can once again walk along my shoreline;
    I try to forgive and forget;
    I hope their eyes open before it is too late;
    I am Lake Pontchartrain, watershed of a great metropolis.

by
Steven Kelly and Michael Zeringue
Holy Cross High School (2000)
I am wetlands, “Haunted Waters, Fragile Land;”
I wonder about my destiny, my fate;
I hear the sounds of pile drivers invading my solitude;
I see life disappearing; I see tree stumps and open water;
I want my life back; I want no more human encroachment.

I am wetlands, “Haunted Waters, Fragile Land;”
I pretend you appreciate I am important for recreation, beauty, and wildlife habitat;
I feel ripples of change;
I touch the heart and conscience of those with vision;
I worry that it may already be too late;
I cry that I may be lost forever;
I am wetlands, stalwart protector and nurturer of life.

I understand your need to use my resources;
I say, “Take care of what you value”;  
I dream that those with vision will be able to protect me;
I try to survive, try to repair your damage;
I hope you teach my worth to all;
I am wetlands, “Haunted Waters, Fragile Land.”

by
Science teacher workshop participants
I Am Urban Runoff

MODEL #3:

I am urban runoff, silent predator, polluter of water;
   I wonder if they see me;
   I hear faint cries of protest;
   I see little action against me;
   I want to continue my reign of terror;
   I am urban runoff.....

I pretend to be harmless, bit by bit, drop by drop;
I feel no remorse, for I am not of my own making;
I touch every living thing within my reach; nothing escapes me;
I worry that the faint cries of protest will become loud actions;
I cry “Wolf”; my real danger in the accumulation of those bits and drops;
   I am urban runoff.....

I understand my effect on all I touch;
   I say I do not care;
I dream that most will continue to ignore me;
   I try to be stealthy in my dirty work;
I hope even those faint cries of protest fade away;
   I am urban runoff.....

by

Science teacher workshop participants
Extensions:

1. Spend at least 20 hours observing nature at a site in the Lake Pontchartrain Basin. Keep a log of your activities. Draw sketches or diagrams of your observations, labeled with date and time.

2. On a computer, find an appropriate design and use it as a watermark to serve as the background for the printed I AM Poem. Display student work around campus.

3. Compile student work into a booklet of poetry. Submit to the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation for inclusion in their quarterly newsletter. Submit student work for consideration for entry in a school or local newspaper or literary magazine.

4. Construct a work of art such as a drawing, painting or sculpture which includes your I AM Poem.

5. Design a poster titled “Lake Pontchartrain: Past, Present, and Future.” Use your observations to develop your poster. Display student work around campus.

Assessment Procedures:

1. Use one of the rubrics provided to evaluate each student’s I AM Poem.

2. Have students develop an appropriate rubric in class.

“\textbf{I Am}” Poem \textbf{Rubric \#1}

\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
Point Value & Evidence of Research & Accuracy of Information & Creativity & Appearance & Form & Language \\
\hline
5 & Scholar & & & & & Language enhances the meaning of the poem \\
4 & Researcher & Informative, interesting, and creative & & & & Language clearly conveys from the meaning of the poem \\
3 & Read information sources & Facts are correct & Informative, interesting, and somewhat creative & Aesthetically pleasing & & Language slightly detracts from the meaning of the poem \\
2 & Skimmed information sources & Mostly correct & Informative and interesting & Legible/typed & Followed form or effectively adapted form & Language detracts from the meaning of the poem \\
1 & Operating in a vacuum & Mis-information specialist & Informative only & What does this say? & Form not discernible & Language obscures the meaning of the poem \\
\hline
\end{tabular}

Total possible points - 22
## I AM POEM Rubric #2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I AM POEM RUBRIC</th>
<th>CLARITY</th>
<th>DEVELOPMENT</th>
<th>ORGANIZATION</th>
<th>TOPICALITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A</strong> Well Constructed</td>
<td>All main points maintained throughout poem; effective writing</td>
<td>All major points developed</td>
<td>All major points connected</td>
<td>Fully developed poem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B</strong> Constructed</td>
<td>Most main points maintained throughout poem; clear writing</td>
<td>Most points developed</td>
<td>Most major points connected</td>
<td>Essential elements of the poem are present.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C</strong> Under Constructed</td>
<td>Not all main points covered in poem; writing unclear</td>
<td>Some points developed</td>
<td>Some major points; all points not connected</td>
<td>Tried to complete the assignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>D</strong> Absent</td>
<td>Main points absent; writing unclear</td>
<td>Lack of development</td>
<td>Lack of plan; no connections</td>
<td>Assignment not completed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>