

Gayle C. Heney Teaches at Peabody Essex Museum

I was selected to give a poetry workshop for the 4th *Annual Massachusetts Poetry Festival* at the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, MA on April 21, 2012. The workshop, entitled “Youth Ekphrastic Poetry” took place in Art Studio B and the interactive Art and Nature Center. Students, ages 5 – 11 and their caregivers, were introduced to ekphrastic poetry, which is poetry that takes inspiration from art.

We wrote what I like to refer to as community poetry, in which workshop members offered stanza lines in response to a first line I created for the participants. We composed quatrains and haiku poems while contemplating swans, and imagining what might be contained in a tapestry-covered box. We then moved into the Art and Nature Center, which included a hands-on exploration of water entitled *Ripple Effect*.

The excitement was palpable as the workshop’s 5 through 11-year-olds walked or skipped in an installation containing a ladder suspended horizontally above the floor. Water flowed through a see-through sluice complete with light that danced on the children below. Students also experienced a large, black, caldron-like, art piece that had mist billowing up and out. One student took off her hat and “captured” the mist, quickly redirecting and releasing it elsewhere. They also wrote poems and designed pictures on construction paper for another artist to possibly include in an upcoming exhibition.

As the workshop leader, it’s difficult to convey the enthusiasm these students radiated as they wrote poems based upon their experience of and interaction with art at the Peabody Essex Museum. They laughed and eagerly shared their original poetry. At least one student decorated her poems with her own artwork. Their exciting interactions with the art in the Peabody Essex Museum’s exhibitions are revealed in their poetic compositions.

The following poems were composed by some of the 4th *Annual Massachusetts Poetry Festival’s* youngest participants:

Water I can almost feel the connection
Like I am the water
It's healthy
Well the sunshine makes water shine like
A cat too
By: Ella Rose

Flowing Water

Sounds like a flowing stream
Little specks of light on the floor
Water running down a track
Don't touch the bucket!
By: Alex

Red and brown smooth wood
Inside rattles unknown somethings
Waiting to escape
By: Sofia

Mysterious Mist

Big geyser like moist thing
Spilling over the edges
Hot then cold and wet
By: Alex

music
eraser
yummy snack
remains of clam chowder on tongue
marker
pencil scratching

talking
chlorine
smooth table
By: Sofia

Water

Water that you drink.
Water that you can swim in.
Playing on the beach.
By: Alex

gluck gluck gluck flowing
rushing like a woodland spring
whirlpools of spring
By: Sofia

Almost like an egg
Brown, red and tan in color
Pointed at the tip
By: Alex

hot then cold
gas
uncatchable
yet touchable
overflowing like a waterfall
shooting up like a geyser
foggy black goblet of fire
By: Sofia