**ACTIVITY: Sharing scientific understanding through poetry**

**Activity idea**

In this activity, students write poems about kōwhai trees as a way of sharing their learning. The activity includes sentence starters and examples written by year 5–6 learners working at levels 1–4 of the New Zealand Curriculum.

By the end of this activity, students should be able to:

* recognise that scientific learning can be shared in a variety of ways
* share their scientific understanding of kōwhai through poetry
* illustrate their poems in a way to add more meaning.

**For teachers**

***Introduction/background***

Sharing students’ scientific learning through poetry can be a powerful activity as it combines artistic expression with scientific understanding. Poetry provides a creative platform for students and removes the potential barrier of having to be ‘right’. Sharing scientific knowledge through poems, stories and other fictional modes can make the science more accessible and personal for the creator and the audience.

Ideally, students should complete the poems over a series of lessons, allowing time for students to brainstorm, write and edit their work.

***Create opportunities for building knowledge***

This activity is part of a [wider teaching/inquiry sequence](https://www.sciencelearn.org.nz/resources/3337-exploring-kowhai-matauranga-in-the-classroom) about [mātauranga Māori of kōwhai](https://www.sciencelearn.org.nz/resources/3336-matauranga-maori-of-kowhai). For the poems to be successful, students need plenty of opportunities to be around kōwhai trees – to observe the flowers, pods etc. This will ensure they have the experience/prior knowledge to produce the required language.

[Example poems](#_Examples_of_student) were written by students after completing activities in which they [collected](https://www.sciencelearn.org.nz/resources/3338-collecting-kowhai-seeds-kohikohia-nga-kakano-kowhai) and [planted seeds](https://www.sciencelearn.org.nz/resources/3339-planting-kowhai-seeds-whakatongia-kakano-kowhai) and [observed and sketched](https://www.sciencelearn.org.nz/resources/3340-observing-kowhai-ata-titiro-kowhai) kōwhai trees. The poems were written alongside the activity [Creating kōwhai infographics](https://www.sciencelearn.org.nz/resources/3342-creating-kowhai-infographics), in which students research and create infographics as another mode of sharing their learning.

***Teaching suggestion – sentence starters***

Chloe, the classroom teacher who created this activity, notes: “Sentence starters assist some students to get started on their writing as this is often the most challenging part of the writing process. As a teacher, I have found providing sentence starters for my level 1–2 writers is an extremely empowering scaffolding tool.”

Some sentence starters for this activity:

* As I sit beneath this tree, I can see/hear/smell/taste/feel …
* Little \_\_\_ flower, you are so …
* Seeds that look like … Flowers that look like … Branches that look like … Seed pods that look like …
* Flowers that remind me of …
* Slowly I turn and see …
* Looking through the window on a rainy/stunning day, I see …
* The leaves dance like … The flowers swing like …
* The branches are arms reaching out to me. The flowers are … The leaves are … The trunk is …

***What you need***

* Paper
* Students’ books
* Coloured pencils, felts or crayons

***What to do***

1. Display some [examples of student poems](#_Examples_of_student). Discuss what students notice about the poems:

* What are the poems about? How do you know?
* If the poem does not mention the word kōwhai, how do you know it’s about kōwhai? What words or phrases make this clear?

1. Explain that students will share their learning about kōwhai trees by writing poems. The challenge is to write a poem about kōwhai without using the word kōwhai.
2. Brainstorm the words students know that relate to kōwhai. (It may be helpful to have flowers, seeds and pods available for inspiration. Alternatively, complete this step outside, beneath/near a kōwhai tree.) Record the words for later reference.
3. Brainstorm words/phrases that compare to kōwhai – for example, ballerinas (flowers) or dangly noodles (seed pods).
4. Consider using [sentence starters](#Bookmark2) to provide motivation and/or spark ideas.
5. Provide students with time to write their poems and encourage them to edit, recraft and act on feedback, which may take a series of lessons, or follow a structured writing process.
6. Once the poetry is complete, students apply their observational skills by sketching different components of the kōwhai tree to illustrate and add further meaning to their poem.
7. Consider co-constructing success criteria with students so they can self-reflect if they have completed the task. For example, including a title, name, border, detailed illustrations, colour, three adjectives and two adverbs.
8. Create opportunities for sharing the poems. This gives students’ learning and writing purpose and reinforces the concept that scientific knowledge can be shared through creative modes.

***Extension ideas***

As an alternative to poetry, students can use other creative ways of sharing their scientific learning. For example, they may choose to produce a short drama/play, write a fictional story, create a comic strip or design a piece of multimedia art.

***Acknowledgement***

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**Examples of student poems**





