

Steady Hands: Poems About Work

author Tracie Vaughn Zimmer

illustrators Megan Halsey and Sean Addy



Discussion Guide:

Pre-reading:

Brainstorm a list of twenty-five jobs or careers. Choose one of them. What would your day be like if you held that job? Can you think of five tasks you would do or responsibilities you would have? Circle any other jobs for which you can identify five details of a typical day.

Questions to consider:

1. Why do you think the author decided to frame the collection with the poems "Morning" and "Night"? What poetic elements do you notice?
2. What do the fisherman (page 9) and the baker (page 10) have in common? Which job would you prefer and why?
3. Can you identify the metaphor in "Tow Truck Driver?" (page 12) and the simile in "Sheriff's Deputy" (page 13)? Which line is your favorite in each poem?
4. Find all the tools mentioned in the poems. Which tool would you most like to learn how to use? Are there tools that everyone should know how to use? Why or why not?
5. Read the poems on page 18 and 19. Do you think the writer's job is similar to the artist's or not? If so in what way?
6. Do you like things to be neat and orderly the way the retail clerk (page 22) does? Do you think people are tidy or messy by nature or is this something they learn or choose? Why?
7. In "Personnel Administrator" it says: "Fingernails don't lie and neither do shoes." What does that mean? What else could you add to this list?
8. Read "Teacher" (page 26) Do students really know their teachers' tastes? DO you think teaching is a difficult job or an easy one? What makes you think that?
9. How has being a librarian (page 29) changed over the last fifty years? Can you identify other jobs in the book that have changed a lot over time?
10. What are the questions the park ranger (page 33) must answer? Can you think of questions that the cafeteria cook, the flight attendant, the waiter and the babysitter might be asked again and again?
11. What is an entrepreneur (page 40)? Do you think anyone can become one? What type of business would you start?

12. Compare two careers and list the pros and cons of each. Discuss.
13. Which poem is your favorite? Does it describe your favorite job?
14. Which illustration is your favorite? How do you think it was made? Can you use any of Megan Halsey and Sean Addy's techniques in creating your own art?
15. Make a list of five careers you would like to explore and write about.

Creating your own career poem:

1. Research a job you're interested in or interview someone who holds that job to find out what a typical day is like. Better yet? Visit him or her in the workplace and take good observational notes about what you see, hear, smell, taste and touch.
2. Discover details. Try to find out some odd facts about the career that only an insider would know. Remember: use your senses!
3. List verbs you might use to describe the actions needed for this job.
4. Imagine that you're taking a snapshot- one moment on one day- of the person at work. What would you focus on?
5. Draft your poet. Play with similes, metaphors, personification, etc. Experiment with line breaks. Use strong, vivid words and images.
6. Read your poem out loud. Revise revise, revise until it sounds just right!
7. Create an illustration for your poem inspired by Megan Halsey and Sean Addy's multilayered collages. You can use small objects, photos, dried leaves and flowers, your own drawings or paintings and paper of all kinds. including magazine and newspaper clippings, wrapping paper, packaging, stationery, notebook pages, maps- whatever suits your poem!

Vocabulary:

Sort the jobs in the collection into a variety of categories: indoor/outdoor, active/sedentary, introvert/extrovert, education/training. Brainstorm other categories and discuss why jobs belong in each one.

Word work:

Select words from the poems "Morning" (page 7) and "Night" (page 48) and create as many new words as you can by adding prefixes or suffixes. Example: fresh>>refresh, freshen). Then create as many compound words as you can. (Example: sun>> sunshine, sunbeam.)

History:

create a timeline for a career you are interested in pursuing. When was this career first established? What famous or important people have been members of the profession? What innovations or inventions have changed the job over time?