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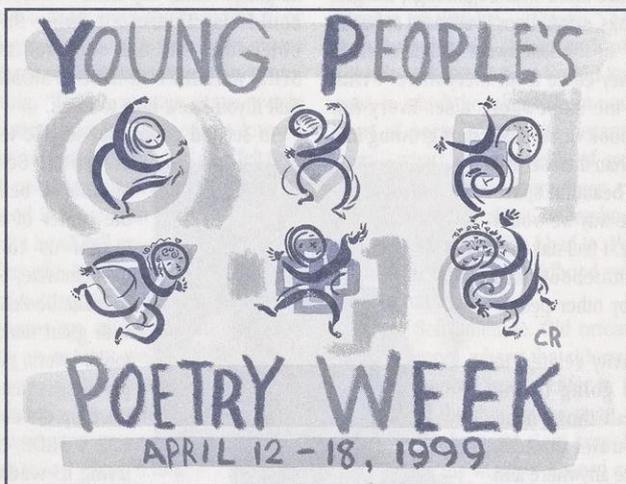
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CBC FEATURES

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POETRY!



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**CBC Features
Poetry!
SWEEPSTAKES**

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MY FIRST TRUE LOVE

Naomi Shihab Nye

Savory syllables. Read them aloud, aloud. My tongue wraps around a noun. I scratch out a word and feel lightened, clearer. How can there be so much power in such a small thing? Pause. Focus. Read it again. All you need is a pencil and a wide-open mind. Sometimes even a phrase tastes full and rich.

My notebooks are filled with beginnings, images, dreamy meanderings, single lines overheard at health clubs, airports, or in the last sweet chunk of sleep before waking. They come from everywhere. I trust they could take me somewhere else. Every few pages of the notebook or so, lines start growing into something larger than themselves.

Poems. With that beautiful space around them—the way we would like our lives to be. I feel naked if I don't carry a notebook and books of poems by other people to read.

A favorite activity related to poem-writing is going to the grocery store—all those neat, enticing lines to travel through. We're free to pause anywhere and stare. I love labels, arrangements of tuberose and tulips, vivid colors side by side. The hope in a heap of new scones. Sometimes I go to the grocery store twice a day—just to feel it all again. Lavish water-spray on elegant cucumbers...twelve different shades and shapes of potatoes risen up from the underworld into our light! Tiny ones! Fat ones! Ho! What's sold here? What can we find? How could we put parts of it together? (What does that beautiful woman have in her cart?) Poems are similar nourishment to me. I wander the aisles of words with a vast appetite, discovering. What would my life have been if I didn't write or read poems? This is one thing I cannot imagine.

Many of us felt befriended by language at an early age, but can't say exactly why. I had, still have (thanks be!), articulate, moody, intelligent parents. They argued. Words rubbed against one another. They told stories. Words flowed. A cricket spoke in the dark.

The first time I heard a poem, something clicked inside my brain. Such a supple, concise exchange! I wanted to make my own. Was it my mother reading to me? But I couldn't even write yet! I think I was always talking to myself back then, as I do now, without apology, shaping words, hearing conversant language inside my head. Wherever you were, you could stay interested doing this. A line in my notebooks that has occurred more than once: STILL WAITING FOR A DULL MOMENT. Nothing was dull if you knew how to think.

In second grade, our terrific teacher, Mrs. Lane of Central School (Ferguson, Missouri), believed poetry was the center of the universe. She taught us to read hungrily, to memorize, to write regularly, to make books. We sewed slowly with giant needles. Words were tools, levers, pulleys. They could pry things open and link us. They lifted up the curtains around us. USE WORDS, our parents said, trying to teach us not to fight. Words let us in to one another's experience. I loved the portable size of poems. They fit in a pocket.



© Photo by Amy Arbus

You could carry ten of them and not feel heavy.

Stepping into the library, I felt dazzled, rich. So many crowds and hordes and forests of words! Finding one's own words was simply the next step. Poetry was never my "ambition"—it was my devotion. A refuge in the middle of so much rushing. Loving words gave me a greater affection for silence, too. Silence was the wide paper on which everything was written.

I remember holding creamy construction paper out at arms' length to read giant poem words as a child. This felt like looking at life. Different, somehow, than simply living it. Better. You could change it a little, for one thing. Improve on it. Exaggerate. You had that power. To stand back and look again at what had been seen or experienced was a delicious luxury. Also, it was like living twice. Getting a bonus.

The metaphors went on and on. You couldn't be wrong. Thank goodness! With all the tests in the world, didn't we also need a place that welcomed us this way? Words were baskets in which we carried everything that happened. I loved and respected them. When someone was very sad, words you carried to their ears might help them feel better.

Words were potent brews, surprising soups stirred over a slow fire. You could choose them. If they didn't taste right, you could try again. Shake in a different herb.

I would hold a poem in my mind the way a musician holds a note. Langston Hughes saying, "I can see your house, babe, but I can't see you..." or Carl Sandburg's fog rolling in on little cat feet. Some poems comforted me more than any person could. Rachel Field writing, "Isn't it strange some people make you feel so tired inside?" helped me know I wasn't alone, or the only oddball who had ever felt that.

These days, 40 years since I first fell in love with poetry, I find I need it more than ever. How is that possible? Shouldn't I be all full up—or all emptied—by now? Those of us who have invested so much time in this vocation of writing and reading know one of its wonders: you never say, or think, it all. A writing teacher said, "It's an endless well!" But you don't know that unless you get in the habit of dropping the bucket in. Words keep inviting us back into our lives, more deeply. Whenever anyone says, "I just can't find the words," I want to say, "Keep trying!"

With so much of popular culture traveling at super-speed, a certain attention to words helps slow us down. We may become a lily or pebble again. I wanted to be the grasses by the roadside. Just for a minute. Hold. Hum. My wayward, highly distractible mind eases in for a crucial landing. Don't you feel diffusive sometimes? A friend called it "aerobic thinking." Hard for the mind to settle, and rest. After all that cha-cha conversation, I need a silent gravity. Earth.

My mind finds its place again on the page. Feels round, or smooth, or responsible. Truly, I feel irresponsible when I don't notice things well enough, when I slide or slip through a day without catching the way light falls into a room. Am I nuts? Poet Linda Schandelmeier from Alaska wrote, in a poem called "No One is Listening": "I hear the spoon's thunk/ on the side of the glass dish." SHE is listening. I hear that thinking spoon all the way to Texas too. I want to hear the cat down the street turning the block.

Every school day I wake our son up by reading him three poems—it's a pleasure to me, in the flush of morning, to pause with words that way. And I think he prefers it to a blaring clock. A poem gives us back to ourselves. What a mystery! Somehow, we may approach where we are again with clearer vision, who we are, who we used to be.

I tell students we all have a poetry mind, whether or not we all WRITE poetry. The same way we all have a math-mind (to some degree or another), a logical mind, and so on. The poetry mind is that part of the psyche that wants to remember, to treasure, to create, to connect, to see deeply, to expand and imagine, to wander... "Poems," I have written on a thousand boards, "want to look INTO things—not just AT THEM." Poet Gerald Stern once wrote an essay in which he talked about nostalgia being at the heart of poetry—we write because we are in exile from—what? Essential exile of some kind for all of us... For me, it has always been childhood. I didn't want to leave that place. Its freshness and possibility. Its huge tomorrow. But I had to. Poetry keeps it alive in me—the back-seat childhood eyes have not stopped looking out the window.

Oasis. Soft quietude. Old oriental rug. I come to my little room where the skinny poem books live and feel restored just to enter it. Here is the cup of pencils and the thin yellow page. Here, the pointed leaves of bamboo and giant branches of pecan bend down inside my window. A word comes back into its true, shimmering skin. I feel it move. Occasionally I am ashamed of what I said or neglected to say out loud, in public talk. Sitting on panels is my phobia. I think of 200 things to say while other people are speaking, but can barely make sense when I open my mouth. (I'd rather be at the grocery store!)

But I have never been ashamed of what I wrote.

Naomi Shihab Nye's most recent book of poems is FUEL, although her volumes RED SUITCASE and WORDS UNDER THE WORDS: SELECTED POEMS are also available. Her most recent anthologies are WHAT HAVE YOU LOST?, a May 1999 paperback, and THE SPACE BETWEEN OUR FOOTSTEPS: Poems and Paintings from the Middle East. Her novel for teens, HABIBI, won the Jane Addams Children's Book Award, the Judy Lopez Memorial Award for Children's Literature, the Texas Institute of Letters Young Readers Prize, and was an ALA Notable Book as well as a Best Book. She lives in San Antonio, Texas.

WHAT IF SOMEBODY THREW A YOUNG PEOPLE'S POETRY WEEK AND EVERYONE CAME?

Collette Morgan

This year, the Children's Book Council is initiating a special Young People's Poetry Week. My poetry section is stuffed to the gills, the dates are set, the staff enthusiasm is there but something vital is missing. Oh yeah. The Young People. Dang. If only we'd started planning this sooner. Like at birth.

It seems that the connection between kids and poetry is tenuous at best unless it is nurtured and built stronger year by year. Sort of like kids and horses. Sure, everybody knows what a horse is, they've all seen pictures or read stories about them. Some get to be around horses at an early age—even if it's just one slow turn around a tired old pony ring. What makes some kids abandon their interest at the dung heap while others explode into a passionate lifelong relationship with *Equus*? Just 'exposing' them to horses doesn't make them want to maintain a connection with horses throughout their lives. They need experiences to build on, both their own hands-on experiences and shared experiences with peers. And as their knowledge of what horses mean to them grows along with their knowledge of who they are themselves, the connection is forged forever.

Same thing with poetry. You can 'expose' kids to poetry from day one, but it's the continued 'experience' of poetry that will ultimately make the difference. Now don't bother trotting out the old 'easier said than done' excuse to me, mister, because I'm here to tell you, with a little bit of creativity and a whole lot of heart, we adults can experience poetry with our young people just about every day.

Let's start at the beginning. Try to remember your first learned-by-heart piece of poetry. Was it "London Bridge Is Falling Down," or "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star?" Did you drop off to sleep to the soothing images from "all the pretty little *horses*" or a frantic rendition of "sleep, baby, sleep" by a frazzled parent? Chances are, you don't have a clue what you learned first, but given the first line of these childhood

classics, the memory of the words or the feelings comes rushing back.

This is what I think about when selling poetry to the parent or grandparent of a newborn. I count on their own memories and their inherent desire to instill more of the same in their babies. Then I find the poetry that strikes a familiar chord, pair it with illustrations that truly appeal to them and send them on their merry way. It's actually kind of a sneaky device. Find poetry and pictures that the readers love to read and look at, and by golly they'll be much more likely to share that book with their baby again and again.

Next stop, toddlers. Who better to appreciate the intricacies and rhythms of language than an 'emergent speaker' just learning the meaning of words themselves? The content might not seem important at this age (heck, almost everything sounds like nonsense to a toddler), but if the words are strung together well, they have the ability to translate into sheer magic and delight. A group of toddlers will

scatter like mercury if story-time doesn't sustain their interest. Think of toddlers as the toughest crowd ever to judge a poetry slam at the Nuyorican and you've got the basic picture. But bring out something lively, rhythmic, fraught with feeling and performed with energy and that audience will be wrapped around your little finger. Hold that image, and you're well on your way to creating a poetry event capable of engaging the little critics.

Why, you could even borrow a leaf from Paul Fleischman's *JOYFUL NOISE: POEMS FOR TWO VOICES*—and 'double-blast' them. Any parent can handle the saga of Sam-I-Am only so many times before the dreaded monotonous sets in. Enlist another reader (co-parent? older sibling? kindly neighbor?) to read *GREEN EGGS AND HAM* in two voices and you've got instant drama! The typical toddler will be so busy looking from illustration to facial expression back and forth between readers that it will never occur to him/



Collette Morgan and Tom Braun at Wild Rumpus

her to lose interest. In fact, it will probably be so exciting that they'll need to take a nap. As vocabulary skills increase, include them into the reading. Make it a threesome!..a foursome!! Little kids love to do their part and given the sort of selection that includes repetition, they're usually more than happy to chime in—occasionally even at the right spot! Call me optimistic, but I believe that if poetry can be fun at age two, we might actually be on to something.

School starts and Mom and Dad are no longer the keeper of the literary keys. Suddenly, they're not even THERE when the librarian or the teacher or the bookseller does story-time. This is when all hell breaks loose. The savvy adult who knows how to hold their attention also knows that this is the perfect time to continue the poetry journey. True, the power of prose in story kicks in at this time as well, but try jumping rope at recess to MR. POPPER'S PENGUINS. It doesn't have quite the same allure. Body-mind coordination is greatly enhanced when the skipper can succumb to the rhythm of the poem. Here again is an opportunity for a pro-poetry event. Try a skipping exhibition where physical prowess (timing, stamina etc.) is challenged by increasingly complex poetry! Darn near everybody can skip to "Mary Had a Little Lamb" but let's see them try "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night" and throw in a little 'red pepper' after "Rage, Rage Against the Dying of the Light!"

As reading level increases, so does the hunger for more and more and more INFORMATION which leads to an appetite for more and more and more WORDS. What they mean and what they can do becomes increasingly important but just learning how they work shouldn't mean that they lose their most basic entertainment value. One of my favorite employees was adept at shepherding school-age readers to their areas of interest by intoning "Come to my arms, my beamish boy! O frabjous day! Callooh! Callay!," and in just that moment, igniting an interest in Lewis Carroll that they didn't know they had.

It's one thing to be able to relay the correct methodology involved in the mummification of a human body to a sixth grade classroom, and quite another to regale them with the entire text of "Jabberwocky!" Both subjects can be equally fascinating at this age, but usually only the poetry can ignite the passion to learn words by heart. This is an impressive skill and something that seems to be dropping out of the modern curriculum. Hordes of students nowadays make it all the way to and through a diploma without ever once having to recite

"In Flander's Fields" to a crowded auditorium—in unison. Granted, this doesn't sound like a negative omission, but it means that there's no standardized, built-in, 'required' introduction to the age-old institution of the memorization of poetry and therefore nothing to be railed against. That makes my job a little harder. It means that not only do I have to hand sell poetry to kids, but I also have to hand sell the concept of poetry as a creative—sometimes revolutionary—art form that can be either public or private or both. These days, kids don't seem to know where to start.

At Wild Rumpus, we use our retail status as sort of a public forum for older kids. It's a non-threatening venue where participation is valued for the sake of participation. Nothing is off-limits. Everything applies to poetry whether it's a spelling bee or a contest to see exactly who knows all of the correct lyrics to the *Bonanza* theme song. If we can convince kids that poetry can be entertainment, then we can introduce them to poetry as a matter of the heart.

Now's the time to bring on the authors. Let the authors explain (or try to), in person or in print, why and how they got into the habit of writing poetry. Nothing is more fascinating to a group of young humans than finding out about other peoples' habits! Not only does it give them a reason to connect to the author, it gives them a way to connect to the author's poetry. It might even inspire one or two of them to try their own hand at writing. Liz Rosenberg has edited a collection of young people called EARTH-SHATTERING POEMS. In her introduction, she describes poetry as 'a form dedicated to intensity'. At Wild Rumpus, we also describe youth—from toddlers through adolescence as 'a form dedicated to intensity'. Shouldn't it be easier to join these two force fields than to keep them apart? It takes our participation as adults, as readers, as writers, as the voice of experience and/or thwarted experience to let kids know what kinds of poetry exist. Both the 'out there' kind of existence and the 'in here' kinds of poetry have their place at every stage of a young reader's development.

Let's give our young people more than just a turn on the old pony ride and see what happens. Here's to another generation of intensity!

Collette Morgan is the co-owner of Wild Rumpus Books for Young Readers, an unconventional bookstore in Minneapolis, where "independent" is an understatement. When she is not communicating with kids and the adults who respect them, she can usually be found whispering poetry to Shire draft horses.

POETRY FOR ALL AGES

Bernice E. Cullinan

Poetry for children contains a secret ingredient for joy. Poetry helps beginners learn how to read, it gives them stories to read. Poetry makes children aware of play with language and it shows them that language has patterns. Kids think poetry is fun, they laugh at its surprises. Poetry, created with word play and word images, interprets and expands a child's world. Poetry creates pictures in children's minds and develops their imagination. Most importantly, poems celebrate families. It strengthens love within the family and treasures family traditions. Beautifully illustrated picture storybooks and poetry books open doors for children. Poetry books, grouped here developmentally, represent diverse cultures and poets whose work stays in print a long time. Because poetry appeals across age groups and is often read aloud to children as well as read by children themselves, we chose not to assign grade levels.

Poems Help Beginning Readers

Poetry and verse help early readers. The lines are short, phrases are brief and sound like natural language.

Janet and Allan Ahlberg. *EACH PEACH PEAR PLUM: AN "I SPY" STORY*. Viking, 1979.

John Ciardi. *YOU READ TO ME, I'LL READ TO YOU*. Houghton Mifflin, 1961.

Joy Cowley. *GREEDY CAT*. Richard C. Owens, 1988.

Lee Bennett Hopkins. *CLIMB INTO MY LAP: FIRST POEMS TO READ TOGETHER*. Kathryn Brown, illus. Simon & Schuster, 1998.

Charlotte S. Huck. *A CREEPY COUNTDOWN*. Joseph A. Smith, illus. Greenwillow, 1998.

Poems Tell Stories

Children want to know what happens. Narrative poems tell a story in rhyme.

Jez Alborough. *WHERE'S MY TEDDY?* Candlewick, 1992.

Lucille Clifton. *EVERETT ANDERSON'S CHRISTMAS COMING*. Jan Spivey Gilchrist, illus. Holt, 1991.

Deborah Guarino. *IS YOUR MAMA A LLAMA?* Steven Kellogg, illus. Scholastic, 1989.

Robert Kraus. *WHOSE MOUSE ARE YOU?* Jose Aruego, illus. Simon & Schuster, 1986.

Rosemary Wells. *NOISY NORA*. Dial, 1997.

Poems Play With Words

Children like the sounds of language and enjoy word play in poems.

Dr. Seuss. *BARTHOLOMEW AND THE OOBLECK*. Random House, 1949.

Denise Fleming. *BARNYARD BANTER*. Holt, 1994

Mary Ann Hoberman. *A HOUSE IS A HOUSE FOR ME*. Betty Fraser, illus. Viking, 1982.

Bill Martin, Jr and John Archambault. *CHICKA CHICKA BOOMBOOM*. Lois Ehlert, illus. Simon & Schuster, 1989.

Maurice Sendak. *CHICKEN SOUP WITH RICE*. HarperCollins, 1962.

Poems Have Patterns

Story poems use patterned language that becomes easy reading material and models for writing.

N. M. Bodecker. *HURRY, HURRY, MARY DEAR*. Erik Blegvad, illus. McElderry, 1998.

Mary Ann Hoberman. *MISS MARY MACK*. Nadine Bernard Westcott, illus. Little, Brown, 1998.

Bill Martin, Jr. *BROWN BEAR, BROWN BEAR, WHAT DO YOU SEE?* Eric Carle, illus. Holt, 1964.

Sue Williams. *I WENT WALKING*. Julie Vivas, illus. Harcourt Brace, 1990.

Poems Make Us Laugh

Humorous poems make children giggle and attract more children to poetry than any other kind.

John Ciardi. *THE REASON FOR THE PELICAN*. Boyds Mills/ Wordsong, 1994.

David Harrison. *SOMEBODY CATCH MY HOMEWORK*. Betsy Lewin, illus. Boyds Mills/Wordsong, 1992.

Dennis Lee. *ALLIGATOR PIE*. Houghton Mifflin, 1979.

J. Patrick Lewis. *RIDDLE-LIGHTFUL: OODLES OF LITTLE RIDDLE-POEMS*. Debbie Tilley, illus. Knopf, 1998.

Eve Merriam. *A POEM FOR A PICKLE: FUNNYBONE VERSES*. Sheila Hamanaka, illus. Morrow, 1989.

Jack Prelutsky. *SOMETHING BIG HAS BEEN HERE*. James Stevenson, illus. Greenwillow, 1990.

Shel Silverstein. WHERE THE SIDEWALK ENDS. HarperCollins, 1974.

William Jay Smith. HO FOR A HAT. Lynn Munsinger, illus. Little, Brown, 1993.

Poems Interpret the World

Poets explain the world in ways that children understand. Vivid images make the world crystal clear.

Kristine O'Connell George. OLD ELM SPEAKS: TREE POEMS. Kate Kiesler, illus. Houghton Mifflin, 1998.

Eloise Greenfield. HONEY, I LOVE & OTHER LOVE POEMS. Leo and Diane Dillon, illus. HarperCollins, 1978.

Nikki Grimes. COME SUNDAY. Michael Bryant, illus. Erdmans, 1996.

Charlotte S. Huck. SECRET PLACES. Lindsay George, illus. Greenwillow, 1993.

Tony Johnston. MY MEXICO-MEXICO MIO. F. John Sierra, illus. Putnam, 1996.

Karla Kuskin. THE UPSTAIRS CAT. Howard Fine, illus. Clarion, 1997.

Nancy Larrick. CATS ARE CATS. Ed Young, illus. Philomel, 1990.

J. Patrick Lewis. DOODLE DANDIES: POEMS THAT TAKE SHAPE. Lisa Desimini, illus. Atheneum, 1998.

Poems Expand the World

Poetry reflects diverse cultures and helps children value their traditions and those of other communities.

Arnold Adoff. SPORTS PAGES. Steve Kuzma, illus. HarperCollins, 1986.

Shonto Begay. NAVAJO: VISIONS AND VOICES ACROSS THE MESA. Scholastic, 1995.

Joseph Bruchac. ON THE ROAD OF STARS: NATIVE AMERICAN NIGHT POEMS & SLEEP CHANTS. Macmillan, 1994.

Nikki Giovanni. SPIN A SOFT BLACK SONG. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1987.

Monica Gunning. NOT A COPPER PENNY IN ME HOUSE. Frané Lessac, illus. Boyds Mills/Wordsong, 1993.

Langston Hughes. THE DREAM KEEPER & OTHER POEMS. Brian Pinkney, illus. Knopf/Random House, 1994.

Leland B. Jacobs. IS SOMEWHERE ALWAYS FAR AWAY?: POEMS ABOUT PLACES. Jeff Kaufman, illus. Holt, 1993.

Paul Janeczko. THAT SWEET DIAMOND: BASEBALL POEMS. Carole Katchen, illus. Atheneum, 1998.

Myra Cohn Livingston. FESTIVALS. Leonard Everett Fisher, illus. Holiday House, 1996.

Naomi Shihab Nye. THIS SAME SKY: POEMS FROM AROUND THE WORLD. Four Winds, 1992

Joyce Carol Thomas. I HAVE HEARD OF A LAND. Floyd Cooper, illus. HarperCollins, 1998.

Jane Yolen. SKY SCRAPE, CITY SCAPE. Ken Condon, illus. Boyds Mills/Wordsong, 1996.

Poems Create Pictures in Your Mind

Word images are the essence of poetry. Poems help children see things in a unique way.

Rebecca Kai Dotlich. LEMONADE SUN. Jan Spivey Gilchrist, illus. Boyds Mills/Wordsong, 1998.

Barbara Esbensen. ECHOES FOR THE EYE: POEMS TO CELEBRATE PATTERNS IN NATURE. HarperCollins, 1996.

Juan Felipe Herrera. LAUGHING OUT LOUD, I FIX: POEMS IN ENGLISH & SPANISH. Karen Barbour, illus. HarperCollins, 1998.

David McCord. ONE AT A TIME. Henry B. Kane, illus. Little, Brown, 1986.

Lilian Moore. POEMS HAVE ROOTS: NEW POEMS. Tad Hills, illus. Atheneum, 1997.

Nancy Willard. A VISIT TO WILLIAM BLAKE'S INN. Alice and Martin Provensen, illus. Harcourt Brace, 1981.

Valerie Worth. ALL THE SMALL POEMS. Natalie Babbitt, illus. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1987.

Poems Celebrate Families

Children appreciate family traditions. They enjoy loving relationships in their poetry and in their lives.

Gwendolyn Brooks. BRONZEVILLE BOYS AND GIRLS. HarperCollins, 1967.

Nikki Giovanni. GRAND MOTHERS: A MULTICULTURAL ANTHOLOGY OF POEMS, REMINISCENCES, AND SHORT STORIES ABOUT THE KEEPERS OF OUR TRADITIONS. Holt, 1994.

Mary Ann Hoberman. FATHERS, MOTHERS, SISTERS, BROTHERS. Little, Brown, 1991.

Lee Bennett Hopkins. BEEN TO YESTERDAYS: POEMS OF A LIFE. Boyds Mills/Wordsong, 1995.

Dorothy and Michael Strickland. FAMILIES: POEMS CELEBRATING THE AFRICAN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE. Boyds Mills/Wordsong, 1994.

Joyce Carol Thomas. GINGERBREAD DAYS. Floyd Cooper, illus. HarperCollins, 1995.

NOTE: I gratefully acknowledge the help of Lee Bennett Hopkins, Charlotte S. Huck, and Nancy Larrick in the preparation of this bibliography.

Bernice E. Cullinan is a distinguished, award-winning educator who loves poetry and children. She began her career as an elementary teacher and was a professor of children's literature and reading at New York University from 1967-1997. She is also a past President of the International Reading Association and currently President of the Reading Hall of Fame. Since 1990, she has been the editor of Wordsong, the poetry imprint of Boyds Mills Press.

ENTICE READERS TO POETRY

Carole D. Fiore

I am from one of the last generations that was forced to memorize poems without having any understanding of their meaning or beauty. For me and many others in my elementary school class, the meaningless words, though pleasant sounding, did little to convey what the author had intended. For me, even the most lovely or inspiring poems became fearful and formidable. It was not easy for me to memorize these strange words arranged in a manner so different from that of ordinary, everyday speech. I truly needed to grasp the meaning, gain an understanding of the concepts and experience what the poem meant or tried to communicate before I could learn it word for word. Once having gained that understanding, the task of memorization became easier, though for me it was still a task that I dreaded. Till this day, I have still difficulty with rote memorization. Those early school experiences left me with lasting memories. Memories that made me tremulous regarding poetry and other situations such as drama clubs where memorization was important and of some consequence.

Yet, over the years, I have learned that poetry is not to be feared. Poetry is to be embraced and cherished. Over the years, I have also come to realize that the love of language is fanned by the love of poetry. And that love of language is what sparks the literacy development. If we are to develop a literate society, we must promote poetry and the love of language from the very day children are born. What made me change my mind and inclination about this literary form that is so easily embraced by the very youngest children, lovers, and people of many ages can be attributed more to several people rather than just a matter of learning to live with it.

Early in my career, while I was a school librarian in Philadelphia, I was delighted to have the opportunity to meet the Pied Piper of Poetry, Lee Bennett Hopkins. My training was as an elementary school teacher and a librarian and I, unfortunately, was falling into the same pattern as many of my early

elementary teachers. I was asking children to learn poetry without enjoying it. But Lee showed me that children of all ages—as well as adults—need to enjoy the language and the rhythms that poetry offers. I learned that memorization comes automatically, as you read and reread your favorite poems time and time again. I learned through experience that the “strange words arranged in a manner so different from that of ordinary, everyday speech” should and can be enjoyed and relished as a way to escape the ordinary. And for many of the children we work with, providing them a way to escape thought words is a significant and priceless gift.



I started reading poetry to my students as part of our daily routine. I added poems from Mary O'Neill's *HAILSTONES AND HALIBUT BONES* to science units and encouraged art teachers to read these same poems when discussing the color wheel. While classes were studying westward expansion in social studies, I added Vachel Lindsay's “Johnny Appleseed.” To nurture children's language development and critical thinking skills,

I read selections from John Ciardi's *THE MAN WHO SANG THE SILLIES*. Although I had read many of the poets of the Harlem Renaissance while I was in college and graduate school, it wasn't until I met Ashley Bryan and heard his oral interpretations of these writers that I began to understand what they were writing about. His introduction to the authentic sound of Paul Laurence Dunbar and Langston Hughes made me understand the genuine beauty of the language and the meaning behind the words. I became a poetry lover through being exposed to good poetry!

As a school media specialist and a librarian in various sized public libraries, someone who worked with children and teens, and someone who now trains others to work with youth, I have tried to bring my new understanding and enthusiasm for this literary form to all of them. Rather than forcing people to memorize poems, I use a variety of techniques to help

them understand the elegant and graceful language, the beauty; and the emotion that poetry contains.

Starting with the very youngest, I introduce children, their parents, and caregivers to Mother Goose rhymes. These rhymes that have been around for more than one hundred years serve to introduce infants to language patterns. The rhyme and the rhythms serve to comfort young children and lead them naturally to other forms of poetry and language. While a knowledge of Mother Goose rhymes forms a common cultural heritage—how could we understand the “Mother Goose and Grimm” comic strip without an understanding of nursery rhymes and fairy tales?—nursery rhymes in other languages and from other cultures also need to be part of what a young child hears. Simple rhymes in Spanish, French, Russian, Chinese, Haitian Creole, or Swahili allows children to become familiar with the sound of various languages. The latest brain research is telling us that children have the ability to hear and imitate multiple languages when they are exposed to these languages when they are infants.

Make sure that poetry relates to the everyday lives of the children. As children become older, they all have favorite toys and objects. Encourage parents to find a poem that they can read to their children centering on that object. If they are taking a trip to the zoo, gather together poems about the animals that will be seen there. If there is a holiday, event, or a special day in the life of that child, find a poem that expands that event. Regardless of the age of the children, there are poems that are appropriate for all kinds of special times throughout the year.

Reading poetry should be and needs to be an essential element of every library program. The right poem can capture the mood and feeling you are trying to capture and convey to your audience—regardless of the type of program. In story time programs for older children, read or recite poems between the stories you tell or read. Introduce a game or art activity with a poem. Have children act out a poem as you read it aloud. Or, for those children who like to read aloud, let them participate in choral reading. Poems will enrich the language experience you are providing while providing a change of pace in the program. Most youth service librarians think it necessary and fundamental to include finger plays and songs in every story time program for young children; but many do not think to introduce a book talk program with a poem. Do it! It works! Teens are

captivated by poetry. They would listen to it all the time—on the radio—without even realizing it is poetry. Use song lyrics and make the connection to other poems.

Display poetry books and individual poems in a prominent manner and location in the library, school, bookstore, and at home. Have a spotlight poetry book or poem of the day. Have a table top display with a prop that is featured in a poem. Use the calendar to identify those special days and find a poem to go with it. Make sure that people coming to your library, classroom, or bookstore cannot miss running into a poem or two.

A sure fire way to introduce poetry to people of all ages is to have a “Poetry Break.” Originated by Caroline Feller Bauer, this idea has a poetry reader or teller break into a class or office or other area with a sign reading “Poetry Break,” and saying, “Poetry break! Poetry break!” This interruption is sure to get everyone’s attention. The reader or teller reads or tells the poem and leaves just as abruptly as he or she entered. Poems can range from short haiku or limericks to longer narratives or sonnets. Gauge the content and length of the poem by your audiences age and attention span. The first few times you do this, people will look at you and wonder what is going on, but very soon many come to expect these impromptu and spontaneous visits that do more to sell poetry than forcing people to memorize a poem ever could.

As much fun as these poetry breaks are, people gain a better understanding of poetry by hearing the poets themselves read their poetry aloud. Provide tapes of poets reading their own work or tapes of others doing it for them. When possible and practical, invite poets to read their work in person. My own love of poetry was sparked by hearing poetry read aloud by its creators.

Once children and teens are hooked on poetry, provide them with the opportunity to write their own. Sponsor a literary magazine and “publish” the best ones. Since poetry is meant to be heard, provide the teens the opportunity to read their poems to other people. Their enthusiasm, their own love of language and poetry will be infectious. And their passion for poetry will be transformed and transferred to others—other poetry lovers in the making.

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CLASSROOMS FULL OF POETRY

Katie W. Ray and Lester L. Laminack

Responsible for a curriculum growing more crowded with content, teachers often feel forced to “add a little more on” rather than giving students the slow time to make meaning from their learning. Poetry, carefully positioned alongside the social studies and science curriculum, can add depth and meaning. Whether teaching the horrors of war, the beauty of nature, or the despair of prejudice, poems capture the experiences of people’s real lives and add feeling and emotion to our lessons.

So why poetry? Because of its condensed nature, poetry is uniquely well suited to complementing content area curriculum. While a novel of historical fiction can add as much depth to curriculum as a collection of poetry, reading and interacting around a novel requires a much larger investment of time. A poem is immediate and urgent, and as teachers feel the pressure to fit a lot into limited classroom hours, they can look to poetry to bring important, powerful meanings into their classrooms with this immediacy.

Another advantage to making poetry an integral part of content area studies is its accessibility to the wide range of reading abilities encountered in classrooms. Poems are often read aloud by the teacher, which allows students to focus all their attention on making meaning from the poem. A collection of poems that deals with a content area topic allows students to explore a wide range of the meanings and feelings related to that topic.

To study the content of our world, place our lives in it, and position ourselves alongside the content, we might consider the following possibilities for poetry across the day and throughout the week. The following ideas and suggestions for making poetry a powerful part of the curriculum are gleaned from observations of and interaction with classroom teachers who find joy and power in using poetry in the classroom.

A good starting point: immerse yourself and your students in the genre. You might begin by checking out the anthologies of poetry, collections of poetry by a single author, and individual poems in your school library and setting aside a poetry moment each morning during which you read aloud one of your favorite poems. This will help your students become

familiar with the sounds of poetry. It also enables you to demonstrate the range of topics that poetry can address. The children can begin making charts and posters of favorite poems to be posted in the room.

Ask each child to select a favorite poem, illustrate it, and hang it in the classroom for others to read. This can easily lead to a classroom collection of favorites which could expand to include original poetry written by children and poems written by you.

Children can use themes from the science or social studies curriculum (mammals, seasons, families, state history) to make individual or class anthologies. Poems could be arranged to reflect various aspects of the curriculum. For example, an anthology on mammals could identify the characteristics of mammals and show the variety of animals classified as mammals. An anthology on state history might be organized chronologically to depict events during a particular window of time.

As children become more familiar with poetry they might work in groups to select a poem and develop a choral reading of it for the poetry moment each morning. These could be free choice selections or selections made within the parameters of a theme or topic of inquiry in the room. This activity could develop into having poetry transitions throughout the day (to begin the day, to go to lunch, to end the day) when different children are responsible for sharing a poem.

Younger children might enjoy creating hand and body motions for a favorite poem which could involve skills with listening, movement and the coordination of action and language. Another creative activity is to create a melody so that a favorite poem could be sung, chanted in rhythm, or done as a rap.

In the content areas, students can search for poems that introduce or extend topics of study. These could be collected and compiled by topic. In groups the children could choose a favorite one to divide into sections, illustrate and create a picture book. These books could be read aloud and become part of the classroom collection.

Children could work in small groups to adapt a poem as a play and then perform it for everyone else. You could also have them search for poems that

describe how they feel that day, or have the small groups in search of poems that describe a range of feelings (group 1—angry, group 2—happy, group 3—anxious, etc.).

You could play music in the background while children search through anthologies, books of poetry by single authors, single poems to find poems that fit the music. (This is also great using works of art.) In small groups the children could select a poem or several poems and depict a scene, time period, mood, or event they evoke. These could be paired with music selected by the children and displayed along with art or photos to add dimension. A wall in the classroom, or the classroom door, could become a mural of great lines from poems in the room.

You might find it interesting to have children gather in groups of 6-10 and give each group a poem. Each child would then select a favorite line from their poem. Then ask each group to read their favorite line aloud, creating a new poem. After hearing these read once through ask the groups to spend a few minutes planning and have them create an order for the selected lines to be read. Some lines may become a refrain. Some lines may be read by one voice, some by two voices some by all in the group. Invite them to rehearse in several different ways and then have each group present the new poems.

Following the previous example, children might enjoy rewriting a favorite story as a poem. They could start with just their knowledge of the story and retell it as a poem. Or they might select favorite phrases and lines in the story to build a poem.

As poetry starts flowing through the curriculum you might start “poetry partners” and have students in your class work in teams to share poetry with younger children in other classes. You might also bring attention to the power of poetry by inviting people in the school (principal, secretary, nurse, cafeteria staff, etc.) to come share a favorite poem and listen to the children perform a favorite of their own.



To heighten awareness of poetry as part of your writing curriculum you might also begin reading poems like a writer. To do this you and your students might try some of the following suggestions.

Select a favorite poem and look closely at the “white space” and see how it shapes a poem. Talk about why the author might choose this particular arrangement. Have the children study their

collections of poetry with attention to interesting or unusual uses of “white space.”

You may also have them examine the way lines are started and ended. For example, do they all start with a capital letter? Does every line end with a rhyme? Are the lengths of the lines the same or very different? Can a thought be continued on the next line? After some examination, you and the children might make a list of possibilities for line construction and the use of capitals and punctuation. Make sure that children understand that each line in a poem is a unit of meaning.

Following a study of lines you may want to look at stanzas in poetry. You might reexamine the same poems and let children help you discover what they can about stanzas, such as some that have uniform numbers of lines, some that divide the poem into different images, etc. You might type out the text of a poem in prose fashion and let the children try their hand at dividing it into lines, stanzas, and white space.

You might also look closely at the punctuation in poems. Do you find periods? commas? exclamation marks? quotations? In this examination see what your children can discover about the uses of punctuation in poetry?

You can help children discover different types of poetry by showing them that some poems tell stories, some are brief and powerful images, some are list poems, etc. Once you’ve shown examples of the types have children look for and categorize (in their own ways) poems by type. Following this exploration you might also look at the variety of topics addressed through poetry. It might be fun to make a list of all the topics of poems they can find in a given time period, say fifteen minutes.

There is tremendous potential for poetry across your curriculum and throughout your year. We hope these suggestions help you begin to realize some of that potential with your students.

Katie W. Ray and Lester L. Laminack both teach language arts education at Western Carolina University in Cullowhee, North Carolina. Together, they have co-authored SPELLING IN USE: Looking Closely at Spelling in Whole Language Classrooms and are co-editors of Primary Voices K-6, a journal for teachers published by the National Council of Teachers of English.

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<p>CANDLEWICK PRESS Attn: CBC Materials 2067 Massachusetts Avenue Cambridge, MA 02140-1338</p>	<p>a] Poster for WESLANDIA by Paul Fleischman, illustrated by Kevin Hawkes b] Candlewick Read-Aloud Riches: Cassette of 12 Candlewick preschool favorites c] Author and illustrator Feature Stories for WESLANDIA, GOOD JOB, LITTLE BEAR, and WHEN I WAS YOUR AGE</p>	<p>a] Self-addressed 10 x 13 envelope, 3 oz. first class postage b] Self-addressed 6 x 9 envelope, 6 oz. 1st class postage c] Self-addressed 9 x 12 envelope, 2 oz. first class postage</p>
<p>CHARLESBRIDGE Attn: CBC Offer 85 Main Street Watertown, MA 02172</p>	<p>a] Bookmark for TO BE A KID by Maya Ajmera and John D. Ivanko b] Lunch Bags for BUGS FOR LUNCH by Margery Facklam, illustrated by Sylvia Long</p>	<p>a-b] Self-addressed label, 1 oz. first class postage (per piece)</p>
<p>CLARION BOOKS Attn: CBC Materials 215 Park Avenue South New York, NY 10003</p>	<p>Package including Bookmarks (30) selected from Spring 1999 picture books; Poster for WORKSHOP by Andrew Clements, illustrated by David Wisniewski; Author Brochure for Tololwa Mollé</p>	<p>Self-addressed 6½ x 9½ envelope, 4 oz. first class postage</p>
<p>GREENWILLOW BOOKS Attn: CBMD/Lucero 1350 Avenue of the Americas New York, NY 10019</p>	<p>Poster for MY DAY IN THE GARDEN by Miela Ford, illustrated by Anita Lobel</p>	<p>Self-addressed label, 3 oz. first class postage</p>
<p>HARCOURT BRACE CHILDREN'S BOOKS Attn: CBC Materials 525 B Street Suite 1900 San Diego, CA 92101</p>	<p>a] Bibliography of African American interest titles b] Poster for THE SHAMAN'S APPRENTICE by Lynne Cherry and Mark J. Plotkin, illustrated by Lynne Cherry c] Bibliography of alphabet books d] Coloring Sheet for SAFE, WARM & SNUG</p>	<p>a-c] Self-addressed adhesive mailing label d] Self-addressed #10 envelope, 1 oz. first class postage</p>
<p>HARPERCOLLINS CHILDREN'S BOOKS 10 East 53rd Street 15th floor New York, NY 10022-5299 Attn: Craig Dean</p>	<p>a] Bookmarks (5) for GOOD ENOUGH TO EAT written and illustrated by Lizzy Rockwell b] Readers Guide for THE KING'S EQUAL by Katherine Paterson, illustrated by Curtis Woodbridge c] Readers Guide: for JULIE'S WOLF PACK by Jean Craighead George, illustrated by Wendell Minor</p>	<p>a-c] Self-addressed adhesive mailing label</p>

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- b] **Postcard** for IN PRAISE OF OUR FATHERS AND OUR FATHERS, compiled by Wade and Cheryl Hudson
- c] **Teaching Guides** (3) for COURTNEY'S BIRTHDAY PARTY by Dr. Loretta Long (*Sesame Street's* Susan), illustrated by Ron Garnett; JUST AN OVERNIGHT GUEST by Eleanora E. Tate; FROM A CHILD'S HEART by Nikki Grimes, illustrated by Brenda Joysmith
- d] **Biographical Flyers** for Nikki Grimes and Mari Evans
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241 First Avenue North
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New York, NY 10010

- a) **Poster** for DR. WHITE by Jane Goodall, illustrated by Julie Litty
- b) **Poster** for LITTLE BUNNY'S SLEEPLESS NIGHT by Carol Roth, illustrated by Valeri Gorbachev
- c) **Postcard** for DR. WHITE by Jane Goodall, illustrated by Julie Litty
- d) **Bookmark** for NICKY AND THE BIG, BAD WOLVES by Carol Roth, illustrated by Valeri Gorbachev
- e) **Bookmark** for USED-UP BEAR by Clay Carmichael

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555 Broadway
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353 Main Avenue
Norwalk, CT 06851-1552

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