

Poetry Pizzazz

Library Lessons

Grades
K-2, 3-5

by | Judith Snyder

Highlight your library's poetry section and awaken children to the beauty of our language. Engage them in the cadence of words that trip teasingly off the tongue. Let them feel the beat in the earth reach into their hearts. Make poetry come alive through immersion in the sound and rhythm of words.

The following student activities encourage physical, visual, and auditory involvement with poetry. Most can be modified for all grade levels by changing the complexity of the chosen poems. The Teacher Collaboration Ideas provide ways to encourage teachers to use the poetry section and the resource talents of the librarian.

All of these activities can be taught in isolation, but the biggest impact on student learning is made when lessons are planned collaboratively and/or team-taught with the classroom teacher. When adults model for students their love of and excitement for poetry, students respond with enthusiasm—circulation soars and smiles abound.

Student Activities

Feel the Beat

Objective: To develop the understanding of rhythm in poetry

Grade Levels: K-1

Younger students enjoy moving to poems. Simple gestures actively engage early readers. Choose a simple poem like Beatrice Schenk de Regniers' "Keep a Poem in Your Pocket" or Dennis Lee's "Alligator Pie," "Little Bird" (see page 51), or others from *Pictures and Poetry* by Bunchman and Briggs. Write the poem on chart paper or display it on an overhead projector. Read the poem aloud once. Invite the group to read one stanza with

you. Share simple movements that illustrate what is happening in the poem. Read the stanza aloud with the movements before going on to additional stanzas. Give a copy of the poem to the classroom teacher to promote carryover into the classroom. Better yet, team-teach this together.

Experience Onomatopoeia

Objective: To introduce the idea that the rhythm of words in a poem can copy a sound

Grade Levels: 3-5

Engage older students in poetry by challenging them to read a poem as a round. A good poem



for this is David McCord's "Song of the Track" (see page 51). Print it out on chart paper or use an overhead and practice reading the poem aloud, being careful to enunciate the correct vowels embedded in the clickity, clackity words. Challenge two teams to read the separate verses. When everyone is comfortable with the words and rhythm, attempt to say it as a round. The second group begins when the first group starts the second stanza. If students maintain the rhythm, the poem really sounds like a train going over a track.

Poems in Stereo

Objective: To provide meaningful oral reading practice

Grade Levels: 2-5

Choose a poem with four or more stanzas and make copies or display it on the overhead. Divide the class in half and station them at opposite sides of the instructional area. Both groups read the first and last stanzas together. Alternate the other stanzas between the two groups. During the second read-through invite a few students to stand in the middle of the room to get the full effect of the stereo sound.

Visualize and Illustrate

Objective: To identify and visualize events in a poem

Grade Levels: 1-5

Display and read several examples where illustrators have created a book from one poem. Primary students enjoy the rhyme and rhythm of Robert Lewis Stevenson poems. Choose several of these and provide copies for students to read aloud in unison. Then allow students to choose a favorite poem to illustrate. Use different poems for older students, such as "Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening" by Robert Frost. If taught in conjunction with the art teacher, the illustrated books can use a variety of mediums and/or techniques taught in art class.

Poetry Challenge Wall

Objective: To synthesize knowledge of rhythm and rhyme by creating a new product

Grade Levels: 3-5

• **Copy Cat.** Choose several simple poems with an easy rhythm and display them on a bulletin board. Challenge students to use their own words to transform the poem using the same rhythm and rhyme pattern. Models for this activity include the many variations of "The Night Before Christmas" and "The House that Jack Built." The following poems also provide an easy framework for transforming:

- "River in Winter" by Charlotte Zolotow
- "Sidewalks" by Patricia Hubbell
- "This is My Rock" by David McCord
- "Until I Saw the Sea" by Lillian Moore

• **Sing a Song.** Display a poem and challenge students to set it to their own melody. Robert Louis Stevenson's poems work well with this activity, as do many poems in *Poetry by Heart* by Liz Attenborough. Challenge students to create new lyrics to a simple song. Alan Katz's book *I'm Still Here in the Bathtub* is a good model for this activity. You might also try: "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" or "Take Me Out to the Ball Game."

Headline News

Objective: To analyze the plot of a story poem and recreate it in expository writing

Grade Levels: 4-5

Change story poems into an expository writing assignment. Provide copies of a variety of story poems. Assign students to groups of three to read and list facts about what happened to the people (or animals) in the story poem. Their task is to turn the poem into a newspaper article, including a strong headline and the important facts. Louis Untermeyer's book *The Golden Treasury of Poetry* is a good resource for these poems. This activity works best when students have already learned about newspaper writing in the classroom.

Reader's Theater

Objective: To develop reading fluency and expression

Grade Levels: 2-5

Sharing poetry in a reader's theater setting provides an authentic reason for reading practice that

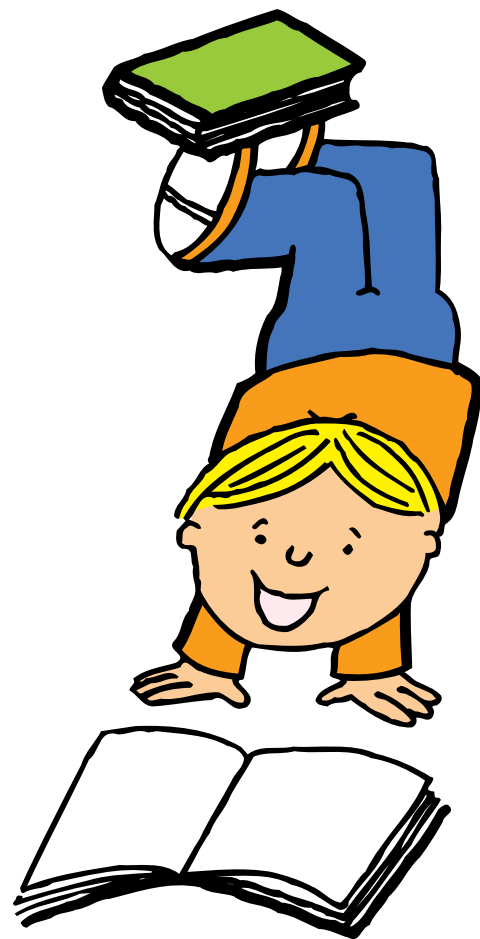
promotes reading fluency. Choose ten poems and allow students time to practice reading the poems aloud. For variety, assign different numbers of students to each poem. Some poems can be read in unison or split by stanzas or lines. Highlight specific poets like A. A. Milne, David McCord, or Karla Kuskin, or focus on a theme like family or weather. Nursery rhymes are also a great source and you don't have to worry about copyright.

Making Connections

Objective: To match a poem to a painting and to compare similarities

Grade Levels: 3–5

Use famous art prints from calendars or your art teacher's collection and display them on a wall. Make copies of some classic poems, laminating them for student use. The task is to read the poems and study the pictures to find commonalities between the two. Students then write a few sentences explaining why they think the two fit



together. Monet or O'Keefe prints work well in the spring, coupled with poetry by Eve Merriam or Christina Rossetti. During February, you may want to highlight famous African American painters like Romare Bearden, Horace Pippin, and Jacob Lawrence, contrasting with poetry by Langston Hughes or Nikki Giovanni. Find additional art and poetry couplings in *Pictures and Poetry* by Bunchman and Briggs.

Teacher Collaboration Ideas

Integrate poetry school-wide and year-round. The more poetry is integrated with current units, the less intimidating it becomes. Anticipate upcoming units and give teachers poems or anthologies on the topic ahead of time. After teachers experience the use of poetry embedded in the curriculum, they will continue to ask for quality poems. The following ideas will get you started.

Power Poems

Collaborate with classroom teachers when they teach descriptive writing techniques. Provide poems that illustrate literary devices being taught. Here are a few suggestions:

Alliteration

- "Dusk" by Paul Fleischman
- "maggie and milly and molly and may" by e. e. cummings
- "Silver" by Walter de la Mare

Simile

- "Autumn Thought" by Langston Hughes
- "Rain Sizes" by John Ciardi
- "Song" by Michael Stillman

Metaphor

- "Fog" by Carl Sandburg
- "Taking Turns" by Norma Farber
- "Winter Morning" by Ogden Nash

Onomatopoeia

- "Clock" by Valerie Worth
- "The Pickety Fence" by David McCord
- "Weather" by Eve Meriam

Students who show understanding of the literary concept can search for poems containing each device. (This is a difficult task, but it can be simplified by limiting the pages within the anthology.)

These poems can then be shared with the class or displayed on a bulletin board.

Poetry Place

Produce a movie of students reciting and dramatizing poems. Use videotape or a video editing program to create a forum where students can see themselves perform on T.V.—a highly motivating tool to get buy-in from reluctant poetry readers. If your school possesses the ability to broadcast live or via videotape recordings, use this capability to promote poetry. If not, produce a videotape to rotate among classrooms.

My school developed a weekly pre-taped segment we called Poetry Place that we broadcasted right after the announcements. Students of all ages were encouraged to recite memorized poems using simple gestures, props, or theatrics to create an interesting presentation. Students signed up for weekly taping sessions. If the presentation needed additional practice, students received tips and were encouraged to sign up for tryouts again.

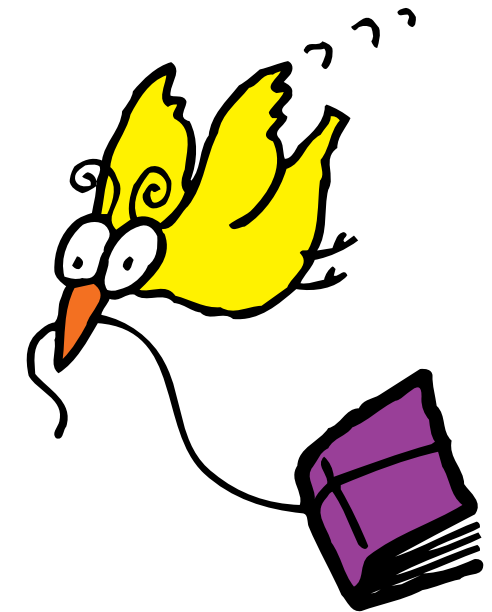
Since the first group sets the tone and expectations for the poetry presentations, you may want to pre-select students with a dramatic flair. Spend extra time with them practicing and providing presentation tips.

Useful presentation pointers:

- Speak clearly and slowly so the poem can be understood
- Use simple gestures that go with the poem
- Consider the phrasing in the poem so it is recited smoothly
- Modify the pace to fit the mood of the poem
- Use expression and inflection to squelch a singsong or monotone delivery

Give students anthologies and allow time to find the right poem. Students may present individually or in groups of any size. Invite classroom teachers to have their whole class filmed reciting a poem as a choral reading.

If you have a large population of foreign language speakers, consider collaborating with the ELL teacher to encourage his or her students to share some favorite poems or nursery rhymes from their own cultures. Even though English speakers can't understand the words, the beauty of the languages still sings—and the ELL students proudly display language proficiency in their native tongue.



Video-editing Hints

In a video-editing program, create a template of several introductory and ending frames with titles and music that can be reused and/or updated with each Poetry Place Movie. Delete the footage of the previous performers and insert the new frames. The template can be updated to disseminate information about tryouts or to give pointers about developing a presentation. When the movie is completed, format it to share on your school network. (**Note:** After the initial creation of the movie template at the beginning of the year, follow-up movies can be completed in as little as thirty minutes from initial taping to finished product.)

If you don't have digital editing capabilities, use a video camera. Create several posters that can be used as title frames for the beginning and end of the movie. Film the poster for a few seconds before taping student performances. Circulate the tape throughout the school for viewing. It isn't as easy to edit the clips, but the extra effort pays off in student smiles.

Why Memorize Poetry?

There is a difference between memorizing facts and memorizing a poem. In her book *Whisper and Shout: Poems to Memorize*, Patrice Vecchione says it beautifully, "The way to really know a poem, to befriend it, is to learn it by heart. Then, it's yours for always. You can take it wherever you go, and don't have to worry about losing the paper it was written on. To remember a poem you have

to really read it, notice its details, the sounds it makes in your mouth, where it takes you in your imagination. Through memorizing poems you develop your ability to observe and remember the details of life.

The poems then influence who you are and who you will become. A memorized poem can become a star to wish upon, or a way to say thanks, or a question you're not sure you want the answer for."

Bibliography

- *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems* by Langston Hughes. Knopf, 1994. (Includes "Autumn Thought.")
- *The Golden Treasury of Poetry* by Louis Untermeyer. Golden Press, 1959. (Includes "Silver" and "Fog.")
- *I'm Still Here in the Bathtub* by Alan Katz. Margaret K. McElderry Books, 2003.
- *One at a Time: Poems* by David McCord. Little, Brown, and Company, 1986. (Includes "Song of the Track" and "The Pickety Fence.")
- *Pictures and Poetry* by Janis Bunchman and Stephanie Briggs. Davis Publications, Inc., 1994. (Includes "This Is My Rock.")
- *Poetry by Heart* by Liz Attenborough. Scholastic, 2001. (Includes "Until I Saw the Sea," "River in Winter," and "Sidewalks.")
- *The Random House Book of Poetry for Children* by Jack Prelutsky. Random House, 1983. (Includes "Alligator Pie," "maggie and milly and molly and may," "Silver," "Song," and "Fog.")
- *Sing a Song of Popcorn* by Beatrice Schenk de Regniers. Scholastic, 1988. (Includes "Dusk" and "Weather.")
- *Talking Like the Rain* by X. J. Kennedy and Dorothy Kennedy. Little, Brown, and Company, 1992. (Includes "Taking Turns," "Winter Morning," and "Clock.")
- *20th Century Children's Poetry Treasury* by Jack Prelutsky. Knopf, 1999. (Includes "Alligator Pie," "Rain Sizes," and "Fog.")
- *Whisper and Shout: Poems to Memorize* by Patric Vecchione. Cricket Books, 2002.

Theme Related Anthologies:

- *Hand in Hand: An American History through Poetry* by Lee Bennett Hopkins. Simon & Schuster, 1994.
- *If You Should Meet a Crocodile: Poems about Wild Animals*. Puffin, 2001.
- *I Want Another Little Brother: Poems about Families*. Puffin, 2001.
- *Lives: Poems about Famous Americans* by Lee Bennett Hopkins. HarperCollins, 1999.
- *A Snowflake Fell: Poems about Winter* by Laura Whipple. Barefoot Books, 2003.
- *Weather: Poems for All Seasons* by Lee Bennett Hopkins. HarperTrophy, 1995.

Online References

For Reader's Theater techniques and background:

- www.readingonline.org/electronic/carrick/
- www.stemnet.nf.ca/CITE/langrt.htm
- www.comm.unt.edu/histofperf/r2.htm
- www.loiswalker.com/catalog/teach.html

Templates for different poetry forms:

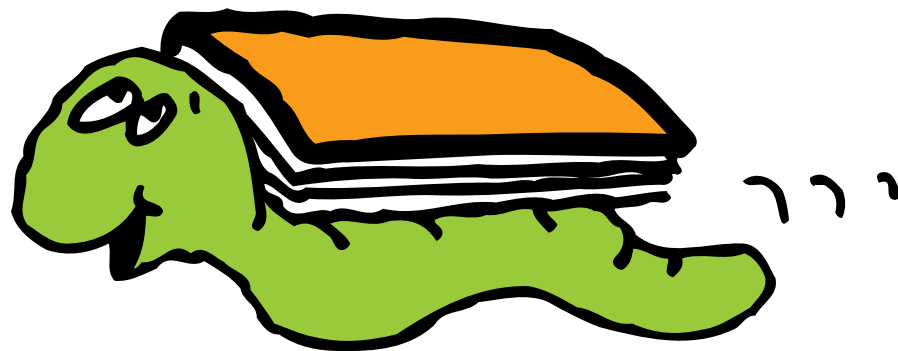
- ettcweb.lrk12.nj.us/forms/newpoem.htm

Additional classroom lesson ideas:

- teacher.scholastic.com/writewit/poetry/

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Judith Snyder has more than thirty years of experience in elementary classrooms and libraries in the Cherry Creek School District in Aurora, Colorado. She is a professional storyteller, freelance writer and the author of Jumpstart Your Library, three books featuring ready-to-use library lessons, available this fall from UpstartBooks.



Little Bird

—Anonymous

Once I saw a little bird
Come hop, hop, hop.
And I cried, "Little Bird,
Will you stop, stop, stop?"
I was going to the window
To say "How do you do?"
But he shook his little tail,
And away he flew.



The Song of the Track

by David McCord

Clickety-clack,
Wheels on the track,
This is the way
They begin the attack:
Click-ety-clack,
Click-ety-clack,
Click-ety, clack-ety,
Click-ety
Clack.

Click-ety-clack,
Over the crack,
Faster and faster
The song of the track:
Clickety-clack,
Clickety-clack,
Clickety, clackety,
Clackety
Clack.

Riding in front,
Riding in back,
Everyone hears
The song of the track:
Clickety-clack,
Clickety-clack,
Clickety, clickety,
Clackety
Clack.

