



Southern Nevada  
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# The LeafLIT

## A Literacy Publication

### Putting Poetry in Motion

by  
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Since April is National Poetry Month, there is no better time to put poetry in motion in your classroom. According to Mark Flanagan, poetry is "an imaginative awareness of experience expressed through meaning, sound, and rhythmic language choices so as to evoke an emotional response." While this may seem like somewhat of a complex task for children, poetry actually comes quite naturally to them. Lucy Calkins refers to poetry as "the genre of childhood." Take a moment to think back to how many times you said or heard, "Come out, come out wherever you are" or "Red Rover, Red Rover, send Lisa right over..." Chances are you spent much of your early years chanting these very phrases or jumping to other catchy rhymes.

Why poetry? For children, the benefits of reading and learning about poetry are enormous, but often not thought of as a vehicle to teach skills and strategies within multiple subjects. When taught as part of the literacy curriculum, benefits can include:

- Students having fun with words while working on the trait of word choice
- Students appreciating the sounds of language
- The craft of language being taught (using figurative language, similes, metaphors, rhyme, imagery, onomatopoeia, alliteration, personification, etc.)
- Students being invited to understand and view themselves and their world in new ways
- The ability to teach phonemic awareness, phonics, comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency



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# POETRY

**M**y favorite part of using poetry in the classroom is that all students can be successful. For most types of poetry, there are few, if any, rules and anything goes. Tell students they are free to break the rules of written conventional English, and you'll soon have a poets' society.

## Ideas for Using Poetry in the Classroom

**J**ust as in any other genre study, read aloud a wide variety of poetry. Be sure to include both familiar and unfamiliar poets. Begin an anchor chart titled, "What do we notice poets doing?" Add things such as, "poets turn big ideas into tiny ones," or "poets use descriptive words, not boring words," etc.

- **C**onduct a poet study. Shel Silverstein, Bruce Lansky, and Jack Prelutsky are all excellent suggestions. Keep a chart for each poet, listing techniques the author uses. For example, humor, rhyming words, line drawings for illustrations, frequent line breaks, ellipses, comparisons, alliteration, related topics, etc.

- **P**oems are great for shared reading, especially in the early grades. Select a poem to use for the week and put it on a poetry card. The print of the poem should be large enough for students to see from a distance. Decorate the poetry card with pictures or graphics to support the poem's content. This scaffolds your English learners and emergent readers as they read the text of the poem. The poem can be based on an instructional theme like holidays, insects, colors, shapes, etc. More sophisticated poems can be used for older students. Use the poem during shared reading for one week. Then, move that same poem into a poetry center. Put the poem on sentence strips in a pocket chart. Students can look for high frequency words, reread for fluency, find phonetic elements you are studying, and put the poem in correct sequence after mixing it up.



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In addition, create a poetry folder for each student. Give students an 8 ½" x 11" copy of each week's poem. At the poetry center, students illustrate the poem. When finished, students read their poetry aloud to themselves or a friend for fluency practice. At the end of the year, students have a poetry collection to take home, and with all of the practice provided throughout the year, students should be able to successfully read the poems. Students select a poem from an author or one they have written themselves. Each student then creates a PowerPoint presentation that uses graphics and text to enhance their poem. Students display their presentations as they read their poems aloud. This is a great way to integrate technology and poetry. This is perfect for a "poetry party," which can double as a culminating activity at the end of a poetry study. (Idea and picture courtesy Max Brown and Poetry Slam).

- **S**pring Haiku – Invite students practice syllables by writing haiku on the topic of spring. Haiku is a structured form of poetry. The rules for Haiku are as follows:
  - ◆ The first line must have five syllables.
  - ◆ The second line must have seven syllables.
  - ◆ The last line must have five syllables.
  - ◆ Sample Haiku poem:  
Rain floating softly  
Clouds gathering up above  
Spring makes its way here
- **F**ollow up with an art project that accompanies the poem. Hang poems and art work on a bulletin board.
- **M**akes-Me-Think-of ... Poetry – Poems in this format begin with a word (for example, spring), and they end with that same word. The lines in between lead back to the original word. Here is an example:  
Spring makes me think of grass.  
Grass makes me think of my waterslide.  
My waterslide makes me think of swimming.  
Swimming makes me think of water.  
Water makes me think of rain.  
Rain makes me think of spring.

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- **S**tudents can use watercolors to produce a background. When the paint dries, have students write their poem on the paper. The two previous projects can create a wall-to-wall portfolio of student work -- just in time for a spring Open House.
- **P**oetry and Social Studies – Students may be surprised to learn that they are not so different from the great people of our past and present. First, have students complete the following poem format using themselves as the subject:

\_\_\_\_\_ (first name)

\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_ (three personal characteristics or physical traits)

Brother or sister of \_\_\_\_ (or son or daughter of)

Who loves \_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_. (three people, things, or ideas)

Who feels \_\_\_\_ about \_\_\_\_\_. (one emotion about one thing)

Who needs \_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_. (three items people need)

Who gives \_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_. (three objects people share)

Who fears \_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_. (three items)

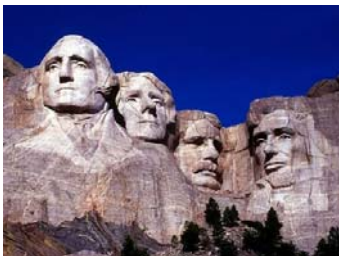
Who would like to see \_\_\_\_\_. (one place or person)

Who dreams of \_\_\_\_\_. (one item or idea)

A student of \_\_\_\_\_. (your school or teacher's name)

\_\_\_\_\_ (nickname or repeat your first name)

- **O**nce students have finished their autobiographical poems, introduce them to biographies of historical people. Have each student pick and research a famous or historical person of interest. Students then use the same poem format to write about their famous person. (Some wording may need to be changed to fit the newly formed biography poem.) Have students mount pictures of themselves and their famous person alongside their poems on construction paper. As an extension, students could write essays comparing and/or contrasting themselves with the famous person who was the subject of their poem.



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- **List Poems** – For this poem, have students jot down a list of personal likes and dislikes. Ideas could include favorite foods, activities, heroes, sports, games, clothes, etc. In small groups, have students share their lists with one another and add to their lists. Then, have students circle entries on their lists that are most meaningful for describing themselves. Students use the circled entries to create a list poem. See sample below.

I am Jesse Taylor.

I like cheese, steak, shrimp, ice cream, apple pie, hockey, basketball, and fantasy stories.

I dislike spinach, chicken, chocolate cake, baseball, tennis, and romance stories.

All this ... and more ... make me who I am.

I am Jesse Taylor.

These poems would serve as a good getting-to-know-you activity at the beginning of the year or introduction page to a portfolio at the end of the year.

## Ways to Engage Your Students in Poetry

- **Number one: Make it FUN!** Share the funniest poems you can find with your students. Dress up. Act them out. Use a booming voice or a whisper or a creaky old voice or a French accent or whatever is appropriate for the poem you are sharing.
- **Celebrate holidays with poetry.** Valentine's Day, April Fool's Day, Halloween, birthdays, etc.; they all make great days for sharing fun poems.
- **811 (like 911) is for poetry emergencies!** Have kids find a poem from the library. They'll find them under 811.

By Kenn Nesbitt

## Other Quick and Easy Ways of Using Poetry in the Classroom

- Wrap individual poems as gifts and have a gift exchange.
- Keep a basket of poems handy in classrooms, libraries, or bookstores for quiet times.
- Organize a poetry reading complete with microphone and hot cocoa.
- Design a bulletin board or paint T-shirts from intriguing first lines of poems. (Such as: *I can fly, of course...*)

# POETRY

## Other Quick and Easy Ways of Using Poetry in the Classroom Continued...

- There's something special about listening to poetry in the dark. Dim the lights and use flashlights to read poems. TOASTING MARSHMALLOWS: Camping Poems by Kristine George is the perfect book pick for this.
- Fill a shopping bag full of old hats. Let every child choose a hat to wear while reading a poem aloud. Read aloud "A Flower Pot is Not a Hat" by Martha Moffett, "Ho for a Hat" by William Jay Smith to set the mood. Hats could include rain hats, fur hats, sports caps, straw sun hats, etc.
- Invite a student or staff member to read a poem during morning announcements.
- Older students can write original nursery rhymes and make a book to share with younger classes.
- Poem in your pocket: On a certain day, have students wear something with a pocket and carry a poem in it. Have students share their poems with one another.
- Invite other classrooms or parents to a Poetry 'n Punch celebration. For homework, have students practice reading a poem aloud. Props and costumes could complement their selection. Using the microphone on the stage adds to the celebration.
- Cover a large table with paper and have students write poems on it. The finished poster could then be used as a large wall display.

Visit [http://www.kristinegeorge.com/kids\\_tips\\_01.html](http://www.kristinegeorge.com/kids_tips_01.html) for an animated "mini-web" with writing tips for students.

Ideas adapted from Kristine George.

Visit <http://www.rpd.net/teachers.html> for Literacy Resources

# POETRY

This is all that I shall say,  
I will say no more,  
except the teaching of poetry is anything BUT a bore.  
Read poetry every day,  
to your children at school,  
and they will remember you forever,  
and think you are *way*COOL!  
For in their hearts and their minds,  
you will have planted a seed,  
one that grows and searches to find,  
great poetry to read.

By Denise Johnson

## Poetry References

Poetry: Powerful Thoughts in Tiny Packages by Lucy Calkins and Stephanie Parsons

[http://www.educationworld.com/a\\_special/poetrymonth.shtml](http://www.educationworld.com/a_special/poetrymonth.shtml)

<http://www.readingonline.org/electronic/webwatch/poetry/index.html>

[http://www.kristinegeorge.com/celebrate\\_poetry.html](http://www.kristinegeorge.com/celebrate_poetry.html)

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