

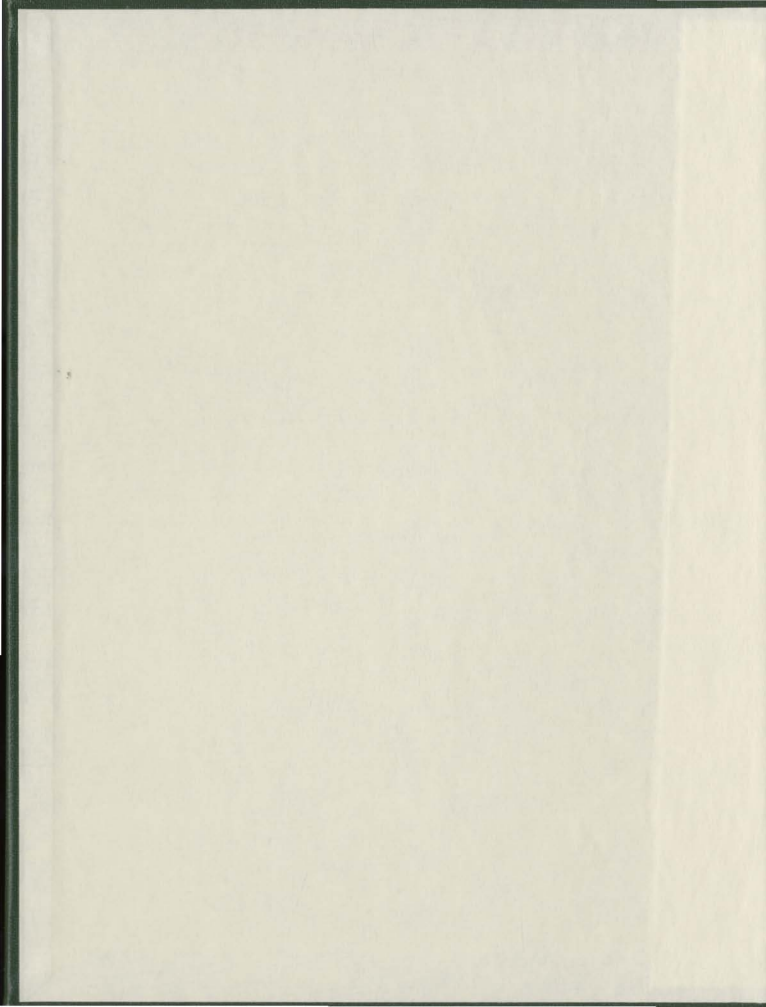
GROWING WITH POETRY:  
ENHANCING AN APPRECIATION OF  
POETRY IN THE PRIMARY CLASSROOM

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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GROWING WITH POETRY:  
ENHANCING AN APPRECIATION  
OF POETRY IN THE  
PRIMARY CLASSROOM

by

Nancy A. Ryan, B.Ed., B.Sp.Ed.

A project report submitted to the  
School of Graduate Studies  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Education

Faculty of Education  
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### Abstract

Poetry has a musical language appeal that is magic to the emotions of young children. Children, however, as they move from grade to grade gradually become less and less enthusiastic for poetry. As adults, many have an immense dislike for it.

This project explores the decline in interest of poetry and looks at what can be done to improve the quality of the teaching of poetry in the primary grades. An informative poetry teacher resource guide to complement the A.P.E.F. provincial primary English language arts curriculum has been designed for primary educators. It is an attempt to promote the aesthetic appreciation of poetry as a pleasurable classroom activity.

The project describes the recent research literature as it relates to the teaching and learning of poetry in the primary classroom. The resource guide contains the most commonly found elements and forms of children's poetry. Each poetic element and form is clearly defined, examples given, and additional poems from specific provincially authorized poetry anthologies are listed. Also included are listings of appealing topics of children's poetry and of children's poets. Suggestions for selecting quality poetry and how to create an affective classroom with poetry are given. Finally, an annotated bibliography of children's poetry books, professional teacher resources and informative Internet sites are described.

Recommendations for implementation of what the resource guide contains are listed for the concern of teachers, schools, school districts, the Department of Education and university.

### Acknowledgements

This project required the help and cooperation of a number of people.

I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Elizabeth Strong, for her encouragement, guidance, and advice. Her knowledge of children's literature was an influential inspiration in the development of this project.

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Most importantly, the writer would like to recognize my father, Donald W.S. Ryan, because this project would not have been possible without him. His expertise in and enduring love for literature created and fostered my love of the language of poetry. I would like to thank him for the hours of suggestions, discussions, questions, patience, and poetry.

This project is dedicated in memory of Zara.

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## CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

### Background of Project

Why take time for poetry? What do children acquire from poetry that they do not acquire from prose? A child finds in poetry what an adult finds – an exhilaration that comes from the compatibility of ideas and form, from the melody and movement of lines, from the flow and force of words, and from the little shivers of delight these qualities induce (Hopkins, 1987; Larrick, 1991). As well, children are closer to the subtleties of language than adults and, unlike adults, children do not take language for granted (Cramer, 2001). More than any other genre, poetry has the power of arousing vivid sensory images and strong emotional responses. And more than any other kind of literary expression, poetry sensitizes a child's ear to the cadence of words and the flow and music of language. McDonald (as cited in Boyd, 1973) introduces his collection of children's poems with the following words:

Poetry can be wittier and funnier than any kind of writing; it can tell us about the world we live in through words we can't forget; it can be tough or it can be tender; it can be fat or lean; it can preach a short sermon or give us a long thought (the shorter the poem, sometimes, the longer the thought). And it does all this through the music of words. (p. 4)

Poetry and music have much in common. Poetry is an aural art like music. It must be heard to be fully appreciated. Poetry began long ago as a speaking and listening experience. A poem was spoken, it caught the ear and was passed along by word of mouth for its inherent delight. Poetry survived for centuries in this way alone. The swing

and beat of the lines made it more exciting and more easily remembered. It had response in bodily movement and sound which added increased pleasure to the magical sounds of the language (Larrick, 1991). Thus, poetry had its genesis and poetry continues to entertain.

The best examples of the enduring quality of poetry are the adored and entertaining nursery rhymes of Mother Goose. These verses are often felt to be simplistic and foolish to the adult ear but have been and continue to be enjoyable favorites by pre-school and primary-aged children around the world because of the inherent sheer delight of the musical language. Nursery rhymes continue to be a dynamic source for pleasure, because of their strong rhymes and rhythms, and especially for their magical element – the sounds of words (Hall, 1989). Alliteration and nonsensical creations summon young children who respond enthusiastically when they hear verse read aloud and do not have to wrestle with word complexities on a printed page.

Young children are natural poets (Cecil, 1994; Cramer, 2001; Fisher & Terry, 1990). They have a natural affinity for rhythm and rhyme – the singsong appeal of language – as they repeatedly play with words and phrases in their skipping games, songs, jingles, and rhymes (Booth & Moore, 1988). Repetitive phrases and word games are an important part of young children's daily play and subsequent language development (Fisher & Terry, 1990).

If teachers want children to grow in their appreciation for poetry, then in their early years, poetry should always be heard and not necessarily seen (Booth & Moore, 1988; Larrick, 1991). Teachers need to help children become so familiar with poetry that



they will naturally grow into adults who will enjoy it, understand it, and thus appreciate it. To do so, children must be exposed to a variety of poetry. They must have poems read to them, they must join in on repeated readings, and they must learn to enjoy it by reading poems aloud until movement, mood, and meaning come alive (Hopkins, 1987).

It is important to take time for sharing poetry so that children will thoroughly enjoy it and learn to appreciate it as a life-long love. More importantly, however, the miracle of poetry is such that teachers can take many experiences of a child's world and give them a new importance, a new pre-eminence, a kind of resplendence that they did not have when they were just everyday experiences. Time for poetry should be a time of lifting young spirits and giving children something to nurture – a life-long love of poetry. Unmistakably children love poetry and if they are constantly exposed to it, poetry will become a part of them.

#### Significance of Project

This project is being undertaken as a result of this writer's interest in poetry and of the inherent qualities of language that make poetry a pleasing literary genre. Language is begging to be stressed in poetry. It is jumping out at the teacher and in many cases the teacher is not grasping it (Denman, 1988; Hopkins, 1987). From personal observations in the classroom, it appears that children are losing enthusiasm and eagerness in poetry as they move through the primary and elementary grades. According to McClure (1990), school-aged children view poetry as the "literary equivalent of liver" (p. 6). Why is this

so when preschoolers demonstrate such a profound interest in the basic elements of poetry and language (Larrick, 1991)?

In reviewing the literature, the following issues frequently appeared: negative school experiences, the overanalysis and interpretation of poetry, ineffective teaching approaches, and negative teacher attitudes (Booth & Moore, 1988; Denman, 1988; Goforth, 1998; Hopkins, 1987; Huck, Hepler, Hickman, & Kiefer, 2001; McClure, 1990; Temple, Martinez, Yokota, & Naylo, 1998). Research also demonstrates that poetry is the “most neglected component in the language arts curriculum” (Denman, 1988, p. 57). Denman maintains that children experience decreasing amounts of exposure to poetry as they go through the grades. If poetry is such “an amazingly effective, but underused genre in literature – based curricula” (Cullinan, Scala, & Schroder, 1995, p. 60), then we need to ask why this is so and what can be done to change this. Why do teachers view the teaching of poetry as being a difficult and unrewarding task?

What can be attributed to this poor teacher performance? Is it due to a lack of familiarity with the ever-growing body of quality children’s poetry? Is it an insufficient knowledge of the basic elements of language and how to best expose these elements to children? Is it a lack of effective teaching methods promoting an aesthetic appreciation of poetry? Is it this writer’s experience that there exists much reluctance on the part of many teachers to include poetry throughout the school day.

David Booth (1988) questions the formality of teaching and the teacher’s own attitudes towards poetry. He states that, together, these can have a negative impact on

children's appreciation and enjoyment of poetry. This supports earlier research by Painter(1970).

In his research, Painter found that elementary children became disheartened by poetry for several reasons. Such reasons as the tearing apart of a poem to find one meaning (the teacher's) and the dull requirement of memorizing certain lines or entire teacher-selected poems without purpose were found to curb students' appetites for this genre. In addition, it was found that elementary children viewed poor oral reading of poetry and dull presentations of poetry by a teacher as a reflection of a lack of teacher enthusiasm. This, in turn, negatively affected their enthusiasm towards poetry.

In related research, Hopkins (1987) found the dissection of words, phrases, and lines by questions such as "What does this line mean?" and "What is the poet really saying here?" soured the taste of a poem for children. He also found that poetry that is too abstract and too complex as well as poetry that is too simple, alters children's appreciation of this particular literary genre. He believes that children need a meaningful balance between that which they can hold and that which they need to reach for.

It is also possible for children to hear too much poetry. That is, when it is read aloud to them in a single, condensed period of time. Ann Terry's landmark study, in 1974, entitled *Children's Poetry Preferences: A National Survey of Upper Elementary Grades*, found that teachers who read poetry aloud for an hour at a time contribute to a child's distaste for poetry. Also found unpalatable by young children were the use of round-robin reading of poetry and the bombardment of poetry in the form of week long poetry study units.

Some teachers are unsure of how to teach poetry. They experience fear and/or anxiety over teaching methods and of a lack of knowledge of the genre. Others neither enjoyed poetry through their schooling nor read poetry, whereas others were too caught up in curricular demands (Temple et al., 1998). Cecil (1994) maintains that most teachers only use the poetry found in literature anthologies. These selections are generally read aloud quickly to the children and the class moves on, they are skipped over and not shared at all, or they may be memorized and recited in a regimental and expressionless fashion. For many children, this is their experience of poetry.

Teachers, therefore, need to take the time to become familiar with poetry and the poetic preferences of children. They must learn how to encourage and help each child find the delight in what s/he is reading. Teachers should strive to work hard to keep from imposing their own interpretations of a poem upon their students. And, above all, teachers need a good supply of poetry to draw from (Booth & Moore, 1987; Cullinan et al., 1995; Goforth, 1998; Huck et al., 2001; Smith, 1985).

In addition, the writer also feels that children need to be exposed to poetry and to language learning experiences that surpass those offered in the *Atlantic Canada English Language Arts Curriculum Guide: Kindergarten-3* (Department of Education, 1999), the provincially authorized primary English language arts children's literature selections, and the provincially authorized resource, *Nelson Language Arts* (Nelson, 1999). The only poetry for certain that children will experience is that which appears in the provincially authorized resources. Furthermore, the content of the Nelson resource and the suggested lesson plans in the teacher guides are lacking in enthusiastic details and effectiveness.

The guides are not focusing very well on how to teach poetry creatively and effectively nor do they promote an aesthetic appreciation for the genre.

A document analysis conducted by the writer of the authorized Kindergarten English language arts resources finds a collection of five big book anthologies of poetry. Three of these big books are comprehensive anthologies and two big books are specialized anthologies – a collection of math poems and a collection of science poems. These five books contain 90 poems clearly printed and colourfully illustrated by many illustrators. These 90 poems include short action rhymes, jump rope rhymes, poems to be sung, nursery rhymes, and longer poems of three and four stanzas. Contemporary children's poets including Mary Ann Hoberman, John Ciardi, Marchette Chute, and Jack Prelutsky are represented in 52% of the poems. The remaining 48% are traditional poems including Mother Goose nursery rhymes and one poem by R.L. Stevenson. The Kindergarten authorized resources do contain a diverse quantity of poetry in terms of poets and poetic forms represented. Much different results were found in the remaining primary grades.

A document analysis conducted by the writer of the nine Nelson student anthologies for grades one, two, and three reveals 36 poems out of the 139 prose and poetry selections. Of these 36 poems, or 26%, there are only 17 popular contemporary children's poets represented in 20 poems. These include such children's poets as Livingston, Chute, Silverstein, and Grimes. No traditional children's poets such as Stevenson, Milne, or Lear are found in this Nelson series. With the exception of two

traditional poems by unknown authors, the poetry found in these anthologies is modern, twentieth century poetry.

There is little variety in the topics of the poems presented in the Nelson series. Only 11 of the 36 poems deal with the popular topics of the self, family, animals, and the feelings of childhood. These are subjects that especially appeal to and are enjoyed by young children (Huck et al., 2001; Smith, 1985; Temple et al., 1998). Young children also enjoy humorous poetry and strange and fantastic nonsense poetry (Huck et al., 2001; Smith, 1985; Temple et al., 1998). These too are infrequently found throughout these student texts. Just 7 poems containing these topics are found in the student texts from grade one to grade three. Finally, there is an obvious scarcity in poetry that instantly invites participation through its elements of rhyme, rhythm, and repetition (Goforth, 1998; Huck et al., 2001; Larrick, 1991). Of the 36 poems contained in the student anthologies, only 10 have strong rhythm, 21 have some rhyme, and 15 have some repetition. There are 6 poems at the grades two and three levels that do not contain any of these basic elements at all.

Of the 39 poetry and prose selections found in the four grade one student anthologies, 11 are poems. Two additional poems are included in the accompanying eight-selection big book, *Join In* (Nelson, 1999). Poetry makes up just 28% of the authorized Nelson resources for grade one. A more detailed look at the individual poetry selections raises additional concerns. The poems lack familiarity. There are no nursery rhymes or familiar chants. There are no examples of short, quick couplet poems and only four quatrain poems. The longer poems are spread out over several pages with just two

lines of print on a page. This does not allow for the unique form of poetry to be observed and appreciated by young children.

The three grade two student anthologies contain 52 prose and poetry selections. Poetry constitutes only 27% or 14 poems. There is a distinct lack of rhyme and an abundance of free verse in these selected poems. Nine poems, more than half, do not contain any rhyme. Almost 80% lack regular rhythm and barely 50% have limited repetition of words or parts of lines. Rhyme, rhythm, and repetition are very appealing to young children and are vital in encouraging participation and interaction with the sounds of language (Culinan et al., 1995; Goforth, 1998; Hopkins, 1987; Larrick, 1991). With one exception, these grade two selections do not lend themselves to natural recitation due to the lack or absence of these poetic elements.

The percentage of poetry in the authorized Nelson student anthologies further declines to 23% at grade three. The two student anthologies contain 48 prose and poetry selections, 11 of which are poems. Another eight poems can be found in the additional teacher resource book of supplementary readings. The grade three selections also generally lack the essential poetic elements of rhythm, rhyme, and repetition. Recognizable rhyme is found in 55% of these poems. 45% of these poems are free verse, a form of poetry not especially enjoyed by primary children (Goforth, 1998; Huck et al., 2001; Smith, 1985; Temple et al., 1998).

As well, children are not being exposed to a variety of poetic forms throughout the grades. The grade one Nelson student anthologies contain four quatrain poems. The grade two Nelson student anthologies have seven free verse poems and just one acrostic

poem. One limerick and five free verse poems appear in the grade three Nelson student anthologies. There are no examples of other popular forms such as nursery rhymes, list poems, or concrete poems.

The teacher guides in this resource also need to be carefully examined in terms of their approach and treatment of poetry. One suggested activity at the grade three level, for example, consists simply of reading a poem to the children twice and then having them complete a cloze activity in which words were randomly deleted. This type of activity certainly does not lend itself to deepening a child's appreciation of poetry. As well, the teacher guides in this Nelson series do not effectively promote the concepts of language as they come through in poetry. The key elements found in children's poetry and the forms of poetry favoured by young children are not highlighted nor explained to the teacher. The writer feels that if children are restricted to these designated poetry selections and prescriptive treatment, then they are being deprived of many wonderful literary experiences.

A review of the provincially authorized primary English language arts literature selections also reveals a scarcity of poetry. Poetry books comprise 18% of the total collection. Kindergarten has 13 authorized books, however, 23% or 3 books are poetry books. One book is a poetry anthology and the other two are single-poem picture books. Grade one has 24 authorized books, of which 21% or five books are poetry books. These five books consist of three poetry anthologies, one collection of Mother Goose nursery rhymes, and one single-poem picture book.



Grade two has 20 authorized books. Four books, or 20%, are poetry books. These four books are three poetry anthologies and one single-poem picture book. Grade three reveals the lowest percentage of poetry books versus prose books of the primary grades. Out of the entire grade level collection of 16 books, there is only one poetry anthology. This represents a minimal figure of 6%.

It is possible, therefore, that some primary children in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador may only be exposed to 13 poetry books by the end of grade three. Their limited literary experience with quality children's literature will consist of one collection of Mother Goose, four single-poem picture books, and eight poetry anthologies.

There is much need for improvement in the quality of teaching poetry in the primary classroom (Cullinan et al., 1995; Denman, 1988; Hopkins, 1987; McClure, 1990). Teachers need to be acquainted with the essentials of poetry as well as with the concepts of language that frequently are apparent. Teachers need to know the kinds of poetry children prefer, the poets who write for children, and the topics that interest them (Fisher & Terry, 1990). Teachers need to be able to draw upon an exciting accumulation of poetry to celebrate various occasions and they need to have an awareness of effective teaching methods that promote the aesthetic appreciation of poetry (Booth & Moore, 1988; Hopkins, 1987; Huck et al., 2001). Above all, teachers must believe in the flexibility and diversity of poetry (McClure, 1990).

Poetry can work with any grade, any age level. It can meet the interests and abilities of anyone, anywhere, from the gifted to the most reluctant reader; it

opens up a world of feelings for children they never thought possible; it is a source of love and hope that children carry with them for the rest of their lives.

(Hopkins, 1987, p. 4)

A practical poetry resource guide will increase teacher familiarity with the basic elements and forms that comprise children's poetry. It will increase teacher knowledge of the ever-increasing quantity and quality of children's literature. The practical ideas and teaching recommendations in such a guide for bringing teacher and children and poetry closer together will dispel teacher anxiety, motivate teachers, and promote a more positive teaching attitude that will create in children a contagious enthusiasm for poetry.

#### Purpose of Project

The purpose of this project is to design and develop an informative poetry resource guide for primary teachers that will invite them and their children to experience the joy of poetry together in the primary classroom. This guide will complement the *Atlantic Canada English Language Arts Curriculum Guide: Kindergarten-3* (Department of Education, 1999) and the provincially authorized resource, *Nelson Language Arts* (Nelson, 1999). It will provide teachers with the necessary insight into the basic poetic elements and forms that children should be exposed to in order to develop important language concepts and hence develop an aesthetic appreciation of poetry. These specific poetic concepts will be explained for the benefit of the teacher and illustrated through poetry selections found in the provincially authorized English language arts children's literature for the primary grades (Department of Education, 1999). These poems will be a balanced literary diet that reach beyond the initial preferences of young children so as to

develop their taste for more complex and interesting types of poetry. Creative, appealing, and meaningful classroom suggestions will also be included that will encourage teachers, children, and poetry to come together in pleasurable and rewarding experiences. Popular children's poets both past and present and favourite topics appealing to primary children will be listed for quick reference. In addition, an annotated bibliography will be included for teachers who are seeking additional quality resources for their classroom and their school learning resource centre.

#### Definition of Key Terms

This poetry resource guide for primary teachers contains several concepts that may be defined in more than one way. For the purpose of this project, the writer, using information from researchers, defines the following key terms:

##### Comprehensive Poetry Anthology:

A poetry book that contains a collection of poems by different poets on a variety of topics and themes. These poems are selected and arranged in a meaningful format by an anthologist. (Goforth, 1998)

##### Individualized Poetry Anthology:

A poetry book that contains the works of a single author. The poems may evolve around a single subject or theme or they may be selected and arranged into several categories. The poems may be new or old or a combination of both. (Goforth, 1998)

#### Single-Poem Picture Book:

A picture book that contains only one poem, which may or may not be a narrative poem. The illustrations enhance and extend the written text. The poem may be from a previously published collection, or it may be written especially as the text of a picture book. (Anderson, 2002, p. 318)

#### Specialized Poetry Anthology:

A poetry book that contains a shorter collection of poems arranged around a specific theme or subject matter. A single poet or several poets may author it. (Goforth, 1998)

#### Summary

Language is one of a child's first joys. Children naturally fall under the spell of rhythmical language and song and delight in saying nonsensical words over and over again. Young children respond with delight and enthusiasm to the strong rhymes and rhythms of Mother Goose nursery rhymes. These natural instincts are the basics of poetry.

Yet despite this innate instinct of young children for rhyme and rhythm and repetition and the magic of musical word appeal of poetry, children become less and less enthusiastic for poetry. When they grow to adults, many in fact dislike poetry immensely. Why is this so? What can be done to promote the aesthetic appreciation of poetry in the primary grades and to foster an interest in poetry as children graduate from grade to grade?

The research indicates that a number of factors contribute to the neglect of poetry in the primary classroom. Negative school experiences, the overanalysis and interpretation of poetry, ineffective teaching approaches, negative teacher attitudes, and a decreasing amount of exposure to poetry as children move through the grades all play a role in this underutilized genre.

A review of the provincially authorized Nelson resource and the provincially authorized primary English language arts children's literature indicate a minimal number of poetry selections in both the student anthologies and the children's literature selections currently found in classrooms from grades kindergarten to grade three. Poetry books, for instance, comprise less than 18% of the total primary English language arts children's literature collection. There are just 13 poetry books in the entire primary collection. The Nelson student anthologies for grades one, two, and three contain 36 poems but 109 prose selections. Poetry accounts for 26% of this resource's content.

The purpose of this project is to design and develop a poetry resource guide for primary teachers that will complement the existing provincial primary language arts curriculum. It is an attempt to promote the pleasure that poetry can bring to the primary classroom and to foster a lifelong appreciation of poetry for teachers and their students. This guide will give teachers the needed insight into the basic poetic elements and forms that children should be exposed to in order to develop an aesthetic appreciation of poetry.

## CHAPTER II – REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Poetry has an enduring quality that young children find appealing and entertaining. Teachers can help children grow in their appreciation of poetry by constantly exposing them to a variety of poetry throughout the grades. In this chapter a comprehensive review of the research as it relates to the teaching and learning of poetry in the primary classroom is presented. It is this research which provides the foundation for the poetry resource guide developed in this project. The chapter begins with an examination of the meaning of poetry in terms of its distinctive characteristics that distinguish it from prose. Next, the intrinsic and extrinsic values of children's poetry are identified and delineated.

The natural poetic instinct of children is then explored in the chapter, to show that the very youngest children demonstrate a love of rhyme and rhythm and repetition. Teachers need to understand this development and successfully promote this early affinity for language in the primary grades. Next, the research into the poetry preferences of young children is examined. It is important that teachers are aware of the poetic elements, forms of poetry, poets, and subjects that are appealing to children.

Further, the chapter explores the criteria necessary for selecting quality poems and poetry books for children. When choosing poetry, teachers must be able to recognize the merit and appeal of the poems, the poets, and the overall quality of a book. Finally, the chapter looks at the need for teachers to create an affective classroom where children can explore and enjoy language and thus develop an appreciation for poetry.

### What Poetry Is

Perhaps this is best answered in Eleanor Farjeon's verse, "Poetry":

What is Poetry? Who knows?  
 Not a rose, but the scent of the rose;  
 Not the sky, but the light in the sky;  
 Not the fly, but the gleam of the fly;  
 Not the sea, but the sound of the sea;  
 Not myself, but what makes me  
 See, hear, and feel something that prose  
 Cannot: and what it is, who knows?

(Hopkins, 1992, p.18)

Although poetry may be easily recognized, a review of the literature has found that it is not as easily defined. Anderson (2002) states that poetry is difficult to define because "it has many forms and it can mean something different to each person" (p. 304). Goforth (1998) concludes that no one definition of poetry can encompass all of its aspects "because poetry is a subjective, emotional response to words, a situation, a feeling, or a thought that means different things to different people" (p. 208).

Poetry is unique. It has distinctive characteristics that distinguish it from prose. It contains exact word choices. Poetry, according to Laurence Perrine (Huck et al., 2001), is "a kind of language that says more and says it more intensely than ordinary language" (p. 350). It is an intensified language "in its most connotative and concentrated form" that "captures the essence of an object, a feeling, or a thought" (p. 350). Anderson (2002)

states that poetry is “verse [a composition having strong rhythm] in which word images are selected and expressed to create powerful, often beautiful impressions (that may or may not rhyme)” (p. 304). Poems are well-crafted pieces of word creativity.

Poets succinctly express their thoughts and feelings through the use of various poetic elements and forms. Rhythm, repetitive language, sound, imagery, and sometimes rhyme characterize poetry. According to Karla Kuskin, renowned award-winning children’s poet:

If there were a recipe for a poem, these would be the ingredients: word sounds, rhythm, description, feeling, memory, rhythm, and imagination. They can be put together a thousand different ways, a thousand, thousand ... more.” (Cullinan, 1996, p. 17)

Does it really matter what poetry is? What is indeed truly important is what poetry should do. It should make us see, hear, taste, smell, and feel something that prose does not always do or cannot do. Poetry should make us chuckle or laugh, cry, dance, shout, or sigh. It may make us want to clap our hands, snap our fingers, tap our feet, move our legs in marching fashion, or sway to and fro.

#### The Intrinsic Values of Poetry

Poetry is not only an invitation to celebrate language but it is more importantly an invitation to celebrate one’s emotions. The poetic experience is an emotional experience. The meanings of poems come from the hearts and minds of the reader (Booth & Moore, 1988). Poetry, according to poet Carl Sandburg, is personal (Painter, 1970). It has many different meanings from the many different minds of those who read it. Readers may



make out of a poem anything they will and, therefore, make a poem their own. Poetic response is unique. Livingston (1990) writes:

There is no poem that can live, come alive, without a reader. The reader, the listener, breathes into each work of art his own experience, his own sensitivity, and re-creates it in meaningful terms. (p. 207)

Scholar, Louise Rosenblatt, calls this the “lived-through experience” of aesthetic reading (Perfect, 1997). Her transactional theory of reading came about as a result of decades of classroom teaching experience and through the observation of and the reflection on readers’ involvement with literature (Perfect, 1997). According to this theory, meaning is what is negotiated between the reader and the text. It is the sounds, images, and feelings evoked in the reader during the reading event. In Rosenblatt’s words, the reader is free to draw upon “what the signs [text] stir up in the reservoir of past experience in order to make personally significant new meanings” (Karolides, 1999, p. 167). Readers, therefore, through their linguistic and life experiences including ideas, expectations, and attitudes, bring unique knowledge and assumptions to the eminently personal experience of reading poetry. An aesthetic response focuses on the more personally felt aspects and nourishes diverse awareness, sentiments, thoughts, pleasures, and challenges within the reader. What readers bring to the act of reading strongly affects what they can get out of the act of reading. To further this perspective, Livingston (as cited in Booth & Moore, 1988) states the following in her introduction to her poetry anthology titled *A Time Beyond Us*:

Every poem in this collection will not speak for you. But perhaps one, or two, will. And that will be enough. A particular poem is not for everybody. It is for that person who reads or listens to it, finding in its words something that appeals to him. Not everybody will hear the same tune. (p. 215)

Poetry is the music of words (Cramer, 2001; Hopkins, 1992). This music sings to different people in different ways.

Like all artistic experiences, poems perform cognitively and emotionally at one time. And, like all aesthetic experiences, poetry can arouse an appreciation of beauty where it is least expected and foster a recognition of value in things often considered insignificant by appealing to the feelings and thoughts of the reader (Hall, 1989). From a snail, to a raindrop, to a twinkling star, to a road not taken, life is revealed to the reader in a rich personal encounter. Myers (1998) comments that "Carefully selected poetry has the potential to engage readers' minds, to elicit emotional and sensory reactions, and to arouse intrinsic passions" (p. 262). The language of poetry strengthens the observational experiences of sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. "Poetry opens our minds to what is already around us; it teaches us to feel our world more intensely, more joyously" (Denman, 1988, p. 4).

The poet's assembly of carefully chosen (or omitted) words encourages special thought, poetic thought. These thoughts help children to know something in a new way, to see things they previously failed to notice, and to see other things anew (Booth & Moore, 1988). It helps children to develop novel outlooks on the ordinary everydayness of people, experiences, and ideas that surround them. Poetry allows children to see with

different eyes and feel with different sensitivities (Booth & Moore, 1988). Poetry helps children to develop new insights into and fresh outlooks on the ordinary and to develop new perceptions of the world (Huck et al., 2001; Perfect, 1999). Poetry nourishes the imagination. It allows children to envisage a world not previously seen, to vicariously experience other times and places in the past and in the future, and to entertain ideas never before considered (Cullinan et al., 1995; Huck et al., 2001).

Denman (1988) writes that poets are the “caretakers of the human experience” (p.

3). He further remarks:

Poets through the ages have created, by means of their own resources, observations, and genius, poems that are capable of fulfilling the human need to live more fully and meaningfully – poems that beckon us to experience life; that allow our imaginations to be merged in another individual’s vision; that heighten and enhance our perceptions of ourselves, as well as our inner selves. (p. 7)

Poetry can cause children to validate their feelings and help make sense of their life events. Only in poetry can a child’s awareness of self and the exterior world be heightened so dramatically (Hopkins, 1992). This highly public and universal, yet private and personal literary genre allows children to share the deep feelings expressed by others and to express their own deepest emotions in aesthetic response. The poet’s words may cause children to weep, to laugh, to dance, to shudder, or to wonder. The universal language of poetry offers children an outlet for confusing feelings and lets them know they are not alone (Cecil, 1994). An annoying younger sibling, the excitement of the

holidays, the loss of a friendship, or the love for a parent are important experiences that create a myriad of emotions in the life of young children.

Poems can do many things to the reader (Kennedy, 1982). Some poems are pure fun and cause the reader to laugh. Some poets like to spin good yarns and tell stories. Some poems send messages. These poems have a point to make and leave the reader with something to think about. Poems can also share feelings through the many different moods that they express. Finally, poems can start the reader wondering. Poets may show everyday, ordinary things in a new light or they may tell of magical and mysterious places and things (Ryan & Rossiter, 1984).

Kennedy and Kennedy (1982) have the following final words on the humble intrinsic value of poetry:

Poetry cannot redeem the world, but it has undisputed rewards for those willing to receive them. It can, at least for a moment, heighten the experience of being alive. It can sharpen the wits, awaken the imagination, and perhaps even leave a grain of wisdom behind. This seems enough to ask of it. (p. 131)

#### The Extrinsic Values of Poetry

The values of sharing children's poetry in the primary classroom should not be underestimated. Poetry is a powerful stimulus for learning (Booth & Moore, 1988). Poetry provides a variety of educational benefits for children that surpass the benefits offered by any other form or genre of literature. All children can benefit from poetry no matter what their background may be, what experiences they have had, or what age they are. From toddlers to young adults, from reluctant readers to gifted readers, from native

language to non-native language children, and in any grade level or subject area, poetry that enriches has a meaningful place (Booth & Moore, 1988; Hopkins, 1987).

Technically useful in teaching, poetry promotes literacy because it contains language used in the most marvelous forms (Cullinan et al., 1995). The love of reading, early reading success, and later reading fluency are cultivated through poetry. Also promoted are effective listening skills and greater language development in speech and written expression (Andrews, 1988; Booth & Moore, 1988; Cullinan et al., 1995; Hall, 1989; Smith, 1985). According to Cullinan et al. (1995), poetry primarily encourages children “to learn language, to learn about language, and to learn through language” (p. 4). Poetry uses language in vital, fresh, and surprising ways because it is the most connotative and concentrated form of language. Poetry captures the essence of a feeling, object, or thought in an intense and highly structured patterning of a few carefully chosen words (Huck et al., 2001).

Chomsky (1972) states that exposure to quality literature read aloud, including poetry, raises the general levels of language and vocabulary development in children. Smith (1985) maintains that “poems are excellent language models for children” (p. 2). This is echoed by Burns and Broman (as cited in Smith, 1985) who suggest that the elements of vivid language use – form, rhythm, words, and subject matter – are more quickly acquired by children who hear quality poetry read aloud to them daily.

Poetry promotes language development through its word play, an important aspect of language education. As children play linguistically, valuable information about how language works is learned (Booth & Moore, 1988). Toddlers will take an interesting

word that they have heard and say it over and over as they experiment with its sounds. To an adult's ear, a word or group of words may reveal simplicity and silliness; however, to a child's ear, these words are simply magical as they indulge in this fascinating language play. As they get older, preschoolers become eager participants as they chime in on words, then phrases, then whole lines, and finally stanzas of songs and rhymes heard aloud. Young children are great repeaters (Larrick, 1991).

Poetry is a strong motivator that whets the appetite and cultivates a love of reading in children (Andrews, 1988). It generates pleasure and enjoyment as the music of poetry captivates all who are listening (Hall, 1989). The rhyme, rhythm, and repetition of a poet's carefully chosen and highly charged words draw children in and delight their senses, feelings, and intellects (Bennett, 1991). Canadian children's poet, Loris Lesynski (2000), echoes her experiences of the attention-getting personality and holding powers of poetry:

Good rhyming captures children's attention right away. They wonder where it is going, what's the next word. Genuine humor, a good beat, and delectable sounds combine with an intriguing story to have them hanging on with both ears. (Annick Press, biography section)

Poetry that is read aloud is appealing to the ear. It is also more than attention-seeking. In the words of children's poet, Beatrice Schenk de Regniers (as cited in Anderson, 2002):

To my mind, a poem is not completed until it is read aloud... it seems to me that the full power of a poem – the jazzy rhythms, the lyrical cadence, the dance of language, the sheer pleasure of fooling around with sound and meaning – can be

fully appreciated only if the poem is read aloud. This would be particularly true for children. (p. 304)

Poetry that is read aloud also helps children in learning to listen, an essential skill (Hall, 1989). Because of poetry's playful approach with the sounds of language and the use of interesting and intriguing words, children naturally pay attention to it (Cullinan et al., 1995). Young listeners' ears are naturally attuned to the sound patterns, rhymes, rhythms, and repetition of poetry which have a magical holding effect. Lenz (1992) found that reading aloud poetry to her first and second graders had the potential to "capture the ear, imagination, and souls of the listeners" (p. 598).

Poetry promotes oral language. Children acquire language when they are surrounded by it and they are expected to communicate to others with it. The language heard, therefore, is the language that will be spoken and later written. Ordinary language heard means ordinary language spoken and written. Poetic language heard means poetic language spoken and written (Cullinan et al., 1995). The special linguistic and formal qualities of poetry affect children's speech and writing in making their own language "more precise, more appropriate, and more deliberated" (Hall, 1989, p. 9). The Mother Goose rhyme "Jack and Jill" is a good example of the distinctive language found even in poetry as simplistic as this illustration. Jack and Jill did not *get* a pail of water but rather more accurately decided "to *fetch* a pail of water". Poor Jill could have been *falling* down the hill after Jack but instead "Jill came *tumbling* after". The language of poetry is more exact and more definite than prose. The language of poetry is creative and alive!

Poetry is a springboard into writing. Booth and Moore (1988) assert "Poetry can evoke in children the urge to write, to create an original poem" (p. 171). Writing poetry is not easy, however Huck et al. (2001) believe that a given poetic structure provides the opportunity to "write like a poet" (p. 390) and produce an acceptable poem. Well-known published poems that children have read or have heard read aloud can serve as models to stimulate their own writing of poetry (Booth & Moore, 1988; Goforth, 1998; Lynch-Brown & Tomlinson, 1993).

Cecil (1994) describes these structures or easy-to-follow "literary scaffolds" (p. 7) as temporary writing frameworks that enable children to achieve success with writing poetry. The scaffold allows children to focus on their ideas rather than on the poem's mechanics. With such a model, children are able to express ideas in ways not possible without the literary scaffold. Form, according to Booth & Moore (1988), "can give children a sense of control and a sense of the economy of poetry" (p. 171). Cecil (1994) cautions, however, that scaffolds should be offered as an option. Some children may wish to adapt a model or the more proficient writers may discard it entirely for their own creative endeavors.

Writing poetry together as a whole class, or group poetry, enables the teacher to model poetry writing. It also allows all children, especially those who are at risk academically, to be a valued contributing member (Cecil, 1994). Children are inspired by one another, they gain experience in cooperative learning, and they build confidence for other independent writing activities (Cramer, 2001; Tannenbaum, 2000).



As important as these functions are for the acquisition and development of language, it is important to remember, however, that the most significant value of poetry is the poems themselves. "Poems have a worth all their own" (Booth & Moore, 1988, p. 27).

### Children are Natural Poets

According to David McCord, a renowned American children's poet, children have a natural poetic instinct (Painter, 1970). Perhaps this affinity for poetry begins in the womb with the soothing rhythms and steady echo of a mother's heartbeat. Infants respond to the melodies of lullabies sung to them with movement, smiles, and "coos". Toddlers experiment with sounds, words, and groups of words as they fall under the spell of rhythmical language and song. The great Russian educator, children's poet, and pioneer researcher of pre-school children's language, Kornei Chukovsky, contends that all children are "versifiers" in their first few years. They have a predisposition to double all syllables, for example, *daddy* becomes *da-da* and *mommy* becomes *ma-ma*. He maintains that it is only in later years that children begin to speak in prose (as cited in Huck, 2001). Young children love to swing, sway, clap, tap, and stomp as they feel the force of language. The ritual of sound is also found in the chants, ditties, counting rhymes, and jump-rope jingles of children at play.

Young children are imaginative thinkers and frequently speak in poetic ways (Cullinan et al., 1995). The characteristic growth of language in the first five years of a child's development is phenomenal. Chukovsky calls this "speech-giftedness" and asserts that "beginning with the age of two, every child becomes for a short period of time a

linguistic genius” (as cited in Huck et al., 2001, p. 9). He calls them linguistic geniuses because children are able to gain mastery in complex aspects of language form and function without the assistance of adult instruction. This feat is accomplished in part as children reconstruct language learning through poetic word play (Booth & Moore, 1988). Children create new words like a poet. This is accomplished because of the repeated inventiveness in their images (Cullinan et al., 1995). A child may see a ladybug and wonder where the “manbug” is. A clear evening may cast “starshine” on the ground from the “diamonds” in the sky.

In a study by Painter (1970), evidence of a sense of rhythm and imagination in young children was found. If children, therefore, naturally have these “basics”, then they are ready for poetry. Furthermore, according to Larrick (1991), “As poetry becomes a part of them [young children], they are ready for more” (p. 64). Most children first come to experience poetry through Mother Goose, an important intellectual and emotional component of our literary heritage. Read or spoken or sung at home by family, Mother Goose rhymes are filled with action; they are succinct and easily remembered. Their characters become familiar and they contain much repetition of sounds and words (Hopkins, 1992).

If children come to poetry naturally, then what happens to young children’s interests when they enter school “mingling and jingling their syllables” and with their characteristic “chatter-patter” (Fisher & Terry, 1990)? We must endeavor to preserve children’s natural kinship with poetry- their love of rhyme and rhythm, the singing of songs, and the delight of jump rope jingles and playground ditties.

### Poetry that Children Prefer

Children's poetry preferences have been the subject of many research studies over the years. The findings have been similar and children's preferences have remained stable (Chatton, 1993; Huck et al., 2001; Smith, 1985).

In 1974 Ann Terry studied the poetry preferences of over one thousand randomly selected elementary school children in grades four, five, and six from four U.S. states. She provided cassette tapes with a variety of poems read aloud. These elementary children listened to ten to twelve poems daily for ten days. Each poem was heard twice. After each selection each child was required to evaluate it by answering the following three questions using a five-point scale:

1. How much do you like this poem?
2. Would you like to hear this poem again?
3. Could this be one of your favorite poems? ( as cited in Smith, 1985, p. 17)

She also surveyed the classroom teachers to determine their poetry preferences and the extent of their use of poetry in their elementary classrooms (Smith, 1985).

Terry found that the children preferred poems containing rhyme, rhythm, and sound, such as Rhonda Bacmeister's "Galoshes" or David McCord's "The Song of the Train". Contemporary poems were generally selected over traditional ones and favourites included those containing humour, familiar experiences, or animal characters. Narrative poems, such as John Ciardi's "Mummy Slept Late and Daddy Fixed Breakfast" and limericks (including both modern and traditional) proved popular. Terry concluded that thoughtful, meditative poems, poems containing much figurative language or imagery,

and poems that contained an adult's rather than a child's point of view were unpopular with children. Elementary children also disliked the serious, sentimental poetry, poems containing inappropriate or old-fashioned language, and poetry with unfamiliar and irrelevant subjects (Smith, 1985).

A second key finding of the Terry study was the decline found in children's enthusiasm for poetry from the fourth to the sixth grade (Smith, 1985). Also important were Terry's findings regarding the sharp decrease in the amount of time teachers spend reading and sharing poetry with their classes as the students progress from kindergarten to grade six (Denman, 1988). She reported that the students' tastes were no more sophisticated in grade six than they were when they entered school. Another notable finding was that the majority of teachers did not stress poetry in their classrooms. These teachers scarcely read poetry aloud to their students or encouraged them to compose their own poetry (Smith, 1985). Terry found that over the nine-month period of her study, 25% of the teachers surveyed read poetry aloud about once a month and 50% of the surveyed teachers read poetry aloud even less. How can children be expected to develop an appreciation of poetry when they hear it less than nine times a year (Denman, 1988)? It is not surprising then that with less and less exposure to poetry, children's interest in poetry declines as they progress up the elementary school ladder.

A similar study to Terry's was undertaken with primary children in 1982 by Carol Fisher and Margaret Natarrella (Huck et al., 2001). They looked at children's poetry preferences of first, second, and third graders from the same schools that were used by Terry in her previous study. The primary students listened to eight poems a day for eight

days. Each poem was scored individually using a point system. A poem really enjoyed received a star, or three points. A poem considered to be all right received an OK, or two points. A poem disliked received a NO, or one point (Smith, 1985).

The statistical analysis of the children's scores revealed some strong and definite preferences. Their strongest preference was for the poetic element of rhyme. Poems that contained rhythm, poems about animals, humorous poetry, and poems about familiar experiences were preferred. Fisher and Natarella found that the primary child disliked the use of imagery and figurative language in poetry as well as the poetic forms of free verse and haiku (Smith, 1985). Yet, despite the fact that these two studies were conducted eight years apart and across grade levels, these studies when taken together reveal that children's preferences as a whole remained essentially the same.

In 1985, Karen Kutiper conducted research similar to Terry and to Fisher and Natarella regarding the poetry preferences of students in the junior high grades. Once again, similar preferences were noted among these seven, eight, and nine graders although a few differences were noted. It was discovered that older students had a preference for more realistic content, whereas younger students enjoyed poems about strange and fantastic events, such as Prelutsky's "The Lurp Is on the Loose". Secondly, the older children were not fond of traditional poetry as much as the younger children in the previous studies were. Thirdly, rhyme was no longer an essential element of a preferred poem (Huck et al., 2001).

The 1993 study of elementary school children's preferences in poetry by Karen Kutiper and Patricia Wilson repeat similar findings of Terry's landmark study (Temple et al., 1998). Their key findings are summarized as follows:

1. The narrative form of poetry is popular with readers of all ages, while free verse and haiku are the most disliked forms.
2. Students prefer poems that contain rhyme, rhythm, and sound.
3. Children most enjoy poetry that contains humor, familiar experiences – and animals.
4. Younger students (elementary and middle school and junior high age) prefer contemporary poems.
5. Students dislike poems that contain (excessive) visual imagery of figurative language. (Temple et al., 1998, pp. 246-247)

In addition, Kutiper and Wilson found that these elementary students showed a convincing interest in the works of contemporary humorous poets, Jack Prelutsky, Shel Silverstein, and Judith Viorst (Hancock, 2000). Amy McClure's (1990) observations of grade five and grade six student selection of poetry for peer reading sessions note a distinct choice for poems containing humour, rhythm, or animals, and poems that were easy to read.

The research certainly delineates children's immediate preferences for poetry, but Huck et al. (2001) poses the following question to teachers: "Are these results an indictment of the quality of the literature program rather than of the quality of children's preferences?"(p.363). Teachers want to be cautious. Teachers should teach beyond

children's preferences because if teachers teach only narrative then these children will preferably respond to narrative poetry. Having little exposure to fine imaginative poetry will not take children beyond their simple rhymes (Huck et al., 2001). Children need to be exposed to a wide variety of kinds of poems and to a wide variety of poets from the great masters like Robert Frost, Emily Dickinson, and Edward Lear to contemporary favourites such as Eve Mirriam, Dennis Lee, and Aileen Fisher, to name a few (Cullinan et al., 1995). Children should also be exposed to the work of children from current and past classes (Cecil, 1994). A menu of poetry also needs to include the humorous as well as the serious, the quaint as well as the not so quaint, and the difficult as well as the easy (Denman, 1988). Fisher and Ntarella (as cited in Glazer, 2000) make the following conclusion:

Since the focus for selecting poems is two-fold, extending children's taste and maintaining a positive attitude toward poetry, teachers and publishers should be clear about their purpose for each choice. We do not want to turn off children by too many poems that are not apt to be popular, and yet we should expand the range of well-liked poetry. (p. 82)

Children require a broad, continuous, and imaginative exposure to the ways in which poets use language (Denman, 1988). Hopefully, this is how they will grow in appreciation and understanding of the finer poems.

### Criteria for Selecting Poetry for Young Children

It is important to be able to make wise choices in selecting poetry to be shared with children. To select quality poetry it is necessary to have a knowledge of the various preferences children delight in and be aware of the poets who write especially for the young. It is essential that children be exposed to a broad range of poetry, including some poetic elements and forms that are common in poetry for children. Teachers must also select poetry that will go beyond their initial preferences of Mother Goose and jump-rope rhymes to include a wide range of finer poetry by children's poets (Goforth, 1998; Huck et al., 2001; McClure, 1990).

According to Hancock (2000), one of the best means of selecting poetry for children is for teachers to read poetry aloud to themselves before they share it with their children. She asserts that a special poem will create excitement within the reader, will appeal to the senses, and its words will flow smoothly. Furthermore, Hancock states that a special poem will make the reader stop and reflect long after it has been read or heard.

Joan Glazer (1997) cites five basic criteria to apply when assessing a poem. She claims using this set of standards will distinguish great poems from good poems. The criteria are as follows:

1. A fresh or original view of the subject is presented.
2. Insight or emotion is shown or felt.
3. Poetic devices are used effectively.
4. Language is used effectively.
5. The voice or persona within the poem appears to be sincere. (p.278)



Cullinan, Scala, and Schroder (1995) also provide a listing of criteria to be used for selecting quality poetry for young children. They maintain that teachers need to choose poems that help children understand the world around them or encourage children to see the world in a new way. Good poems should stir emotions. Poetry should make children laugh, cry, or wonder. It should create mental pictures or images of sight, sound, smell, taste, and/or touch. Finally, they believe that quality poetry should invite children to play with the sounds of its language.

The following list of guidelines will assist teachers of primary children in selecting quality poetry. This compilation brings together the ideas of several authorities found throughout the literature (Denman, 1988; Goforth 1998; Huck et al. 2001; McClure, 1990). The list is not all-inclusive nor are the questions appropriate for every poem. The criteria are as follows:

1. Can children understand the poem or will they need it explained?
2. Will the poem appeal to them and will they like it?
3. Is the poem about childhood things or experiences?
4. Does it view childhood in a nostalgic and sentimental manner? If so, this may not be very appealing to children.
5. What is the purpose of the poem - to entertain, to describe a subject in a new way, or to teach a lesson?
6. Has the poem a sing-song pattern and can children respond to it?
7. Does the rhythm reinforce the poem's purpose?

8. Does the poem have rhyme or is it free verse? If it has rhyme, is the rhyme natural or rhyme for rhyme's sake?
9. Does the poem play with the sounds of language – alliteration, onomatopoeia, repetition? Does this add to the overall effect of the poem?
10. Does the poem create images of sight, sound, taste, touch, or smell and are these appealing to children?
11. Is the poet imaginative and does the poet use common clichés to describe something or does the poet use words in a fresh, new way?
12. Does the poet use appropriate figurative language and can children appreciate and understand the simile and metaphor and personification?
13. Does the shape of the poem or the way words are arranged contribute to its meaning?

Selection criteria are also necessary for choosing quality poetry books. Goforth (1998) maintains that the reader must review the overall quality of a poetry book, the poets included in the book, and the layout of the book. She has developed a list of appropriate questions to assist the reader in determining quality poetry books. The questions are as follows:

1. Are the poems consistent in quality throughout?
2. Are both familiar and new poets included?
3. Are the poems compatible with and appear to reinforce the book's purpose?
4. Do the poems stimulate a variety of thoughts and emotions?
5. Are poems representing various moods ranging from happy to serious?

6. Are the poems too sentimental?

To review the poets included in the book, consider:

1. Is the book a collection written by one poet?
2. If the book is an anthology, does it include a variety of traditional and modern poets?
3. Are exemplary creations of notable poets included?
4. Are exemplary creations of unknown poets included?
5. Are the selected poems included in other poetry books?

To review the layout of the book, consider:

1. Are the poems arranged according to a particular theme?
2. Are appropriate illustrations used to enhance and supplement the poetry?
3. Are the poems and illustrations arranged in a suitable visual design?
4. Does the book include a table of contents, index, or topical headings to help the audience find individual poems? (p. 237)

Employing these suggestions will assist teachers in making quality poetry selections for the sharing of poetry in the primary classroom. Perhaps the foremost criterion to remember is the following from Goforth (1998):

Quality poetry is emotionally satisfying to the audience. A personal relationship and sense of trust develop between the poet and the individual who fully savors and experiences the poem. (p. 208)

### Creating an Affective Classroom of Poetry

Learning about poetry involves more than an explicit teaching of the elements of poetry and by writing or reading various types of poetry in structured lesson formats. Learning about poetry, according to Chatton (1993), involves “falling in love with language” (p. xiv). Children need to learn to love words, to know how words look, to know how words work, to know what words mean, to know how words sound, and to know how words run together. Taking time to explore and enjoy language is essential to developing an aesthetic appreciation for poetry.

Finding meaningful ways for children to experience poetry is the main task of a dynamic and creative teacher. Denman (1988) writes that teachers must focus their sights on helping children grow comfortably into poetry. In order to achieve this, careful exposure to the language of poetry over a long period of time is necessary. He further states that the manner in which poetry is presented to children “will in the end affect their impressions of poetry more than the individual poem or poems themselves” (p.35). Goforth (1998), sums up the importance of the teacher’s role in creating an appreciation for poetry as follows:

Teachers who love poetry encourage children to love poetry!

If you share poetry enthusiastically, your children will share your enthusiasm.

If you search for poetry, your children will search for poetry.

If you share poetry throughout the day, your children will find poems for all subjects.

If you respond to the emotions of the poems, your children will respond emotionally.

If you read aloud quality poems, your children will enjoy reading quality poetry.

If you read poetry with expression, your children will read with expression.

If you model personal reflections about poetry, your children will feel comfortable sharing their reflections with others.

If you collect poetry, your children will collect poetry.

If you display poetry, your children will add to the display.

If you write poetry, your children will write poetry.

If you present poetry in different ways, your children will respond positively to poetry.

Teachers who love poetry develop poetry lovers. (p. 233)

Huck et al. (2001) also affirms that the teacher is the most important aspect of the classroom environment, creating the climate of the classroom and arranging the learning environment. A teacher must create a social and physical environment in which a love of poetry can grow and blossom. The physical arrangement of the classroom is important in creating an affective classroom environment. Lynch-Brown and Tomlinson (1993) describe such a student-centered environment as an “interactive classroom arrangement” (p. 214).

To create such an environment, student desks are arranged in groups of four to encourage student-student discourse and small group activities. A conference table next to the teacher’s desk in one corner allows for teacher-student and student-student

conferencing. Fisher and Terry (1990), assert a place, other than the authoritative teacher's desk is needed to confer with individual children where a teacher and individual children can sit side by side. Bookshelves are placed around the room in addition to a comfortable reading area in another corner. Having a variety of poetry books attractively displayed and easily accessible for browsing and independent reading for all children is important (Cecil, 1994). A writing centre and an art centre are well-stocked with a variety of materials and supplies that encourage children to write and illustrate poetry and to publish their poems on posters or chart paper or in booklet forms. Students should be encouraged to create personal anthologies of favourite poems and to keep poetry journals (Cramer, 2001; McClure, 1990). A computer with a word-processing program can facilitate the writing process and Internet access provides the opportunity to visit poetry sites to read poems, learn about authors, and publish poetry. A poetry listening center provides children with the opportunities to listen to, follow along, and even record favourite poems. Finally, Cullinan et al. (1995) suggests that poetry should be exhibited around the classroom and in hallways. These poems should include those of published poets and poems by children and should be displayed side by side.

It is important for children to hear poetry being read aloud as a natural part of their every day (Booth & Moore, 1988; Cecil, 1994; Lenz, 1992). This is a vital first step to developing an enjoyment of poetry and it supports the argument for having poems read to children daily (Denman, 1988). Anytime is a good time to read poetry aloud to children, but teachers who make poetry a natural part of the school day will capitalize on exciting, often spontaneous experiences (Huck et al., 2001). A loose tooth, the first

snowfall, a new sibling, or an upset with a friend are great opportunities for poetry sharing. There must also be opportunities during the day for poetry to be shared across the curriculum by teachers, children, and even guests. Poetry not only complements topics taught in other discipline areas, poetry can connect children with a topic and can heighten the emotional appeal of the material (Goforth, 1998). A review of the literature clearly shows that children's appreciation of poetry largely depends upon hearing poetry read aloud and being actively involved in the musical language of poetry (Hopkins, 1992, Larrick, 1991; Lenz, 1992; Sepura, 1994; Straw, Craven, Sadowy, & Baardman, 1993). Poetry is an oral art form and it comes alive when it is heard.

Before reading a poem aloud, Hopkins (1987) suggests that the teacher read it aloud several times to him/herself to get the feel of the words and the rhythm. S/he needs to make pauses that make sense. The poem can then be read with sincerity in a natural voice to the children. Finally, after a poem is read aloud, the teacher should be silent. Often the appreciation of poetry is not fostered by a question period. While follow-up to poetry is important, teachers should not ask children if they liked the poem that they just heard. If children have the desire to say something, they will say it. If they do not, let the poem end with its own final words (Hopkins, 1992). If all that teachers do is talk about poetry, then poetry becomes nothing more than words, words, words! Children respond to poetry, not through teacher's questions and comments but with their whole bodies (Sepura, 1994). With their whole bodies, they "play" with poetry.

The teacher should find and introduce poems that invite participation. Children enjoy playing with the poetic elements of rhythm, sound, and word play. It is this

enjoyment of the sounds of language that draws children to rhyme – Mother Goose, simple songs, jump-rope jingles, and nonsense ditties. Rhyme is the element of poetry most children know best when they first come to school (Temple et al., 1998). To encourage and further develop children's appreciation of poetry, the teacher needs to build upon these familiar rhymes. Then, simple verse may be casually introduced. An effective way to encourage children to appreciate good rhyme is to invite them to supply the rhyming word for a poem read aloud. Most popular children's poems have "end rhyme" where the final word in one line repeats the sound of the final word in another. The teacher reads the first couplet aloud and then the second, pausing before the last word so that the children can supply an appropriate word (Larrick, 1991). Eve Merriam's "Catch a Little Rhyme" and David McCord's "Jamboree" make good starters.

Poetry is also effective in creating unusual and ear-catching sound patterns to which children joyfully respond (McClure, 1990). Many words in the English language imitate natural sounds such as "*The boom of thunder*" and "*The jingle of bells.*" Children need to be given opportunities to produce the sounds themselves. Poems such as "The Pickety Fence" (David McCord) and "The Washing Machine" (Jeffrey Davies) are sure to elicit eager actors to produce such sounds as "fwunkety" and "shlunkety".

As children encounter different poems and have opportunities to experiment with ways of enjoying poetry, new ideas and techniques emerge (Larrick, 1991). The teacher needs to find a variety of means to draw listeners into chanting, singing, and dancing as a poem's rhythm and meaning suggest. Children should be encouraged to present poems through puppetry, song, dance, or pantomime (Larrick, 1991). Many poems lend



themselves nicely to play acting, either with or without words spoken by the performers. Nothing seems to make a poem so real to young children as playing the suggested dramatics of verses read aloud. Pantomime is the simplest because there are no speaking parts. Sometimes children like to add appropriate sound effects and background music as well as some simple props and costumes. Their imaginations take over and they move readily into the poem. Christina Rossetti's "Mix a Pancake" works very well for beginners because it draws the children into it. Children become even more delighted when a poem includes speaking parts. They can act out a mini-drama in a delightful and creative way! One of the best ways, perhaps, to develop an appreciation of poetry is through choral reading.

Choral reading is an activity that contributes to the appreciation and enjoyment of poetry. It is widely endorsed as an opportune classroom activity for fostering interest in poetry (McClure, 1990). It does not have to be a formal, organized activity. A teacher will find that when reading a familiar selection or one with rhyme or rhythm, children will spontaneously join in, essentially creating a choral reading of a poem. Most children cannot resist the physical response that naturally occurs. Children will eagerly clap their hands, stomp their feet, or move their bodies in other ways to the infectious rhythm. A real appreciation of poetry comes through such an enjoyable group activity.

### Summary

Research as it relates to the teaching and learning of poetry in the primary classroom provides a foundation for a poetry resource guide for primary educators. Poetry is difficult to define because poetry can mean different things to different people,

however, it does have distinctive characteristics such as its carefully chosen words that distinguish it from prose. The poetic experience is an emotional experience. It produces an aesthetic response. What is unequivocally important about poetry is the constant discovery and solid emotional core of what poems render to the reader. Poetry evokes total reader response and betters one's appreciation for the vigor of words to capture the essence of objects, thoughts, and feelings (Hancock, 2000).

The research also demonstrates that poetry is invaluable in the classroom. It is a strong catalyst for literacy learning, a powerful motivator for language development, and it can support learning in all curricular areas. Very young children are unusually receptive to poetry. Language is one of the first sheer joys of childhood and as they grow older, they demonstrate their innate poetic nature by experimenting with the sounds of language through play. They appreciate sounds in a truly physical manner.

Children have preferences for poems that contain elements of rhyme, rhythm, and sound, and poems about humour, animals, and familiar experiences. The narrative form is popular as well as contemporary poems. Teachers, however, need to broaden this taste. Selecting quality poetry and poetry books is one way to achieve this. Another is to create an affective classroom in which an enthusiastic teacher surrounds children with the sights and sounds of poetry. The physical arrangement of a classroom can promote this as well as various classroom activities. Puppetry, song, dance, pantomime, and choral reading are some ways for children to enjoy poetry.

### CHAPTER III – DESIGN OF THE POETRY TEACHER RESOURCE GUIDE

Chapter II gives the foundation for developing a poetry resource guide. The research indicates that young children are receptive to poetry and that poetry is invaluable in the classroom. Unfortunately, the research also indicates that children gradually become less and less enthusiastic about poetry as they grow older due to many contributing factors found in the primary classroom.

This chapter explains the design and development of the poetry resource guide for primary teachers (see Appendix A). Each section is described and reasons are given, relating to the research, for inclusion in the guide.

#### Description of the Design

Section I welcomes teachers to the format of the resource guide and to poetry. It encourages teachers to read poetry aloud in their classrooms and to surround children with fine poetry. Beginning with what children are aware of is an effective teaching method. Children's poetry preferences, the subject of numerous research studies, are therefore listed for the teacher followed by an alphabetical listing of poets from the past and the present who write especially for children. Teachers need to take the time to become familiar with the poetry written for children (Booth & Moore, 1988; Denman, 1988; Huck et al., 2001). This knowledge is important for teachers to be able to select quality poetry (Goforth, 1998; Huck et al., 2001; McClure, 1990). Guidelines to assist teachers are therefore listed. Employing these suggestions will assist them in making quality poetry selections for the sharing of poetry in the primary classroom.

Finally, the section concludes with a listing of classroom suggestions to create a social and physical environment which promotes a true love of poetry. The teacher's role as a creative facilitator is presented. Chatton (1993) writes that learning about poetry involves "falling in love with language" (p. xiv) and not structured lesson formats. Denman (1988) states that teachers must focus their sights on helping children grow comfortably into poetry through careful exposure to poetry over a long period of time. Finding ways for children to experience poetry is the main task of a dynamic and creative teacher and 33 are included in the poetry resource book.

In Sections II and III, the most common elements and forms of children's poetry are presented respectfully. Children need to be exposed to these basic poetic concepts in order to develop important language concepts and hence develop an aesthetic appreciation of poetry (Booth & Moore, 1988; Denman, 1988; Hopkins, 1987). Denman and Hopkins further state that language is begging to be stressed in poetry. It is jumping out at the teacher and in many cases the teacher is not grasping it. One reason for this may be due to insufficient teacher knowledge of the basic poetic concepts (Denman, 1988). Each element and form, therefore, is briefly defined and illustrated by one or more examples. To further assist the teacher, additional examples are given from four poetry anthologies. These four poetry anthologies, *My Very First Mother Goose*, *Poems for the Very Young*, *Read-Aloud Rhymes for the Very Young*, and *The 20<sup>th</sup> Century Children's Poetry Treasury*, are selected from the provincially authorized children's literature selections that are currently in the primary classrooms of Newfoundland and Labrador. A second reason for the additional examples is to encourage increased sharing of these

anthologies in the classroom. A document analysis conducted by the writer of the nine primary Nelson student anthologies reveals a total of just 36 poems that are lacking in important variety of poets, subjects, and poetic elements and forms.

The final section, Section IV, of the poetry resource guide is an annotated bibliography of children's poetry, professional teacher resources, and Internet sites. This listing is necessary because teachers need to be aware of the fast and ever-growing body of children's literature and professional resources. As well, children can only develop an appreciation of poetry if they are surrounded by it, see it, read it, and hear it being read (Goforth, 1998; Huck et al., 2001; Larrick, 1991; Perfect, 1997). The writer hopes that teachers and school resource centres will add these titles to their collections.

The children's poetry is broken down into four categories – comprehensive anthologies, specialized anthologies, individualized anthologies, and single poem picture books. Each category is defined and six annotations provided for each. The books are chosen from 1996 to present because poetry books often do not have a second edition. Permissions for poems are often given for short periods of time and at a cost. The chosen children's poetry also takes into account that children must be exposed to a variety of authors, subjects, poetic elements and forms, as well as ensuring representation in terms of gender and race (Huck et al., 2001).

The six annotated professional teacher resources were used by the writer for this project. It is the writer's belief that teachers will find these practical and useful in their classroom. The selections promote an aesthetic appreciation of poetry in a non-threatening way. Finally, the six Internet sites give teachers an overview of the types of

poetry sites currently available. Children's sites, teacher sites, and a poet's web site are presented. It is hoped that teachers and their children will find others that are appealing and enjoyable.

### Summary

This chapter outlined the design and development of the poetry resource guide for the primary grades. Each of the four sections is described in detail with accompanying research to support the writer's choice for inclusion in the guide.

The following chapter, Chapter IV, outlines the writer's conclusions after completing this poetry resource guide project. The chapter also gives recommendations for future work in the area of the teaching and learning of poetry in the primary grades.

## CHAPTER V – CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This project has been an exciting journey for the writer. It has involved exploring current school language arts curriculum, teaching practices, and authorized resources. It has involved investigating a wide range of research literature related to young children and the teaching of poetry. It has also involved asking many questions and seeking many answers. The project has also brought forth much reflection. It has opened up to the writer the possibilities for improving her own teaching of poetry and that of other primary teachers.

To this end, it was a challenge to develop a supplementary poetry resource guide for primary teachers with the goal of promoting poetry as an enjoyable and enriching life-long learning experience. Seeking out the lack of emphasis on poetry in the primary classroom and deciding how to effectively create change was a task requiring much thought, research, discussion, and reflection.

There is a fun part to poetry and this fun part comes through in the language of poetry. Unfortunately, children in the primary and elementary grades do not experience as much of this fun as they can because, generally speaking, teachers of young children are not fully aware of the enjoyment there is in the language of poetry. This project is the result of this finding. It is the writer's attempt to acquaint classroom teachers with the pleasure that poetry can bring to their classroom and to start them on their way to developing a lifelong appreciation of poetry for themselves and their students.

Research found that teachers need to become acquainted with the essentials of poetry as well as with the concepts of language frequently found in children's poetry. The

resource guide contains 13 elements and 11 forms of poetry that are most commonly found in children's poetry. Each element and form is clearly defined and illustrated with examples. In addition, references to specific poems are listed for the teacher. These specific poems are from four poetry anthologies chosen from the provincially authorized primary English language arts children's literature collection. It is the writer's expectation that these selections will be shared along with others chosen by the teacher and/or children.

Research also found that teachers need to become cognizant of the kinds of poetry young children prefer, the poets who write/have written for young children, and the topics that capture the attention of young children. Helpful lists for each of these components are provided in the resource guide for teachers.

The writer also found that there is a need for increased teacher understanding of effective teaching methods that promote the aesthetic appreciation of poetry. The resource guide includes a list of more than thirty ideas on how to include poetry easily in the classroom. In addition, an annotated bibliography of several teacher resources and Internet sites on the teaching of poetry are presented to the teacher.

Finally, and most importantly, there appears to be an overall lack of an exciting and diverse repertoire of quality children's poetry in the primary classrooms and school resource centres. In order to improve the quality of the teaching of poetry in the primary classroom, the writer firmly believes that classroom teachers need to be able to draw upon poetry for a variety of teaching situations and for celebrating various occasions including those planned and those that occur regularly. The resource guide, therefore,



includes many examples of poetry from several of the poetry anthologies that can be found in the primary classrooms. It is hoped that teachers will take these books off the shelves, open them up, and share them with children. In addition, an annotated bibliography of 24 superb poetry anthologies and single poem picture books are included for the teacher. Hopefully these selections will be added to classrooms and resource centres to be enjoyed by teachers and children.

It is the writer's desire that this resource guide will demonstrate to teachers that they and their children can share in the fun and enjoyment of the language of poetry – hence, enjoying language itself. This fun part of poetry will give young children insights into language that they would otherwise not experience. And everyone's lives will be enriched by it.

### Recommendations

This project affirms that something must be done to arouse children's enthusiasm for poetry. Children have a naturally harmonious attitude towards poetry until schooling begins and then an ever-widening decline gradually develops. This project is an effort to keep such a decline from occurring by developing in children an aesthetic appreciation for poetry by giving them an understanding of how language works. This is not a result of what takes place in the classroom only. Much needs to be done, however, at the school level, district level, department level, and at the university.

The writer, as a classroom teacher, makes the following recommendations for teachers, schools, school board districts, the Department of Education, and Memorial University:

### Recommendations for Teachers

1. To examine their attitudes and assess their enthusiasm for poetry.
2. To increase their familiarity with traditional and contemporary poets who have written or who write for children.
3. To be aware of and become familiar with the ever-growing production of quality children's poetry.
4. To develop a knowledge of the basic elements and forms common to children's poetry and how best to expose children to these elements and forms.
5. To examine their teaching practices and use those that promote a love for language in poetry.
6. To look carefully and critically at the suggested treatment of poetry selections in the authorized resources and make modifications as necessary.
7. To include poetry in meaningful ways across the curriculum.
8. To discuss their poetry teaching endeavors with other teachers.
9. To avail of inservice activities especially those dealing with the teaching of poetry in the classroom and avail of other professional development that may be offered.
10. To regularly read professional journals that list and annotate the latest in poetry books for children such as *The Horn Book*, *Language Arts*, *The Reading Teacher*, and *Resource Links*.
11. To be aware that constantly exposing children to poetry results in children being able to read and write better.
12. To be aware that a wide range teaching of poetry gives children insights into

how language works effectively.

12. To be aware that teaching poetry effectively involves using many poems at one time and not just focusing on a single poem.

13. To concentrate during a poetry lesson on a specific aspect of poetry and use many poems to illustrate that aspect.

14. To read poetry aloud every day.

#### Recommendations for Schools

1. To examine staff attitudes and values towards poetry.

2. To determine what can be done to actively promote and support an authentic appreciation for poetry far beyond what the present curriculum resource guides offer.

3. To ensure that every classroom and resource centre has a wide selection of children's poetry for teachers and students to draw from.

4. To encourage workshops and/or inservice training in the teaching of poetry, and encourage teachers to share ideas and teaching experiences with one another.

5. To be aware that the teaching of poetry to young children is an effective way of giving children insights into and an understanding of how language works.

6. To make available professional journals that list and annotate the latest in poetry books for children. *The Horn Book*, *Language Arts*, *The Reading Teacher*, and *Resource Links* are excellent journals.

Recommendations for School Board Districts:

1. To provide personnel and resources for the inservicing of primary teachers.
2. To set up a summer institute to consider how teachers can enhance the teaching of poetry in the classroom.
3. To keep teachers and schools informed of new publications in children's poetry and professional resources related to the teaching of poetry.
4. To establish a communications forum through a literacy newsletter so that teachers will be able to share their poetry-teaching experiences with others.

Recommendations for the Department of Education:

1. To make provision in the language arts curriculum for the development of essential language skills and an appreciation of poetry in the primary and elementary grades. Poetry is a vitalizing aspect of language teaching that needs to be given more concern.
2. To develop and provide a collection of authorized children's poetry selections for every primary and elementary classroom and for school resource centres.
3. To consider accepting the proposed supplementary poetry resource guide as an authorized provincial resource.
4. To organize inservice sessions for all primary teachers regarding the material outlined in the proposed supplementary poetry resource guide.

Recommendations for Memorial University of Newfoundland

1. To promote the importance of poetry in the primary classroom in the required courses of the undergraduate primary education program.

2. To offer a graduate education course in developing an appreciation for poetry in the primary grades.

These recommendations demonstrate that all levels of education need to become more involved in promoting poetry in the primary classroom. Teachers have the most important and the most demanding role to play in order to make poetry a daily enjoyable event for themselves and their children.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**Poetry Resource Guide**  
**for**  
**Primary Teachers**

## Appendix A: Poetry Resource Guide for Primary Teachers

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## SECTION I - INTRODUCTION

### Introduction

Welcome to poetry. This is an invitation for you and your students to experience the joy of poetry in the primary classroom. This poetry resource guide is a guide to complement the provincial primary English language arts program. It is not going to tell you all there is to know about poetry. It will offer you some helpful tips, beginning basics, and lots of wonderful poems! The aim of this guide is to help you and your primary children develop a lasting appreciation of poetry. It will be one of the most rewarding experiences you and your children will share together.

This poetry resource guide consists of four sections. The first section lists the topics of poetry that are appealing to young children, the poets who write/have written for young children, and how to select quality children's poetry and poetry books. The section concludes with a listing of quick and easy poetry suggestions to create an affective classroom. The next two sections describe the elements and forms of poetry most commonly found in children's poetry. Each element and form is clearly defined and illustrated with examples. In addition, references to specific poems found in four of the provincially authorized primary children's literature selections give further examples when possible to illustrate each poetic element or form. These four provincially authorized poetry anthologies are *My Very First Mother Goose*, *Poems for the Very Young*, *Read-Aloud Rhymes for the Very Young*, and *The 20<sup>th</sup> Century Children's Poetry Treasury*. The final section provides an annotated bibliography of 24 superb poetry anthologies and single poem picture books suitable for primary grades. Also included are

an annotated bibliography of several teacher resources and a list of six Internet sites on the teaching of poetry.

Poems are well-crafted pieces of word creativity. Some poems are written just for fun and make you laugh. Some are good yarns and tell stories. Some send messages and leave us with something to think about. Poems can also share feelings through the many different moods that they express. Finally, poems can start you wondering. Poets may show everyday, ordinary things in a new light or they may tell us of magical and mysterious places and things.

Perhaps the best thing about poetry is its diversity and flexibility:

Poetry can work with any grade, any age level. It can meet the interests and abilities of anyone, anywhere, from the gifted to the most reluctant reader; it opens up a world of feelings for children they never thought possible; it is a source of love and hope that children carry with them for the rest of their lives.

(Hopkins, 1987, p.4)

The one criterion you need to set for yourself is to enjoy the poems you are sharing with your children. These poems should be a balanced literary diet that reaches beyond the initial preferences of young children and develops their taste for more complex and interesting types. Introduce your children to poetry, surround them with fine poetry books, give them time and space to grow, and support their experiments with language (McClure, 1990). And, above all, take the poetic advice of Beatrice Schenk de Regniers – “keep a poem in your pocket”!

### Appealing Topics of Children's Poetry

Children's poetry preferences have been the subject of many research studies over the years. The findings have been similar and children's preferences have remained stable (Huck, Hepler, Hickman, & Kiefer, 2001). The following is a list of favourite subjects that have been successfully dealt with in poetry:

The self

Family

Weather

Celebrations

Animals

Times and seasons

Humour

Nonsense – the strange and fantastic

Everyday experiences

The feelings of childhood

Pick up a poetry anthology and choose poems that talk about any of these topics. Read them aloud to your students. Enjoy reading them. Have students read them. They are sure to be a hit!

## Children's Poets – Past and Present

**A**

Arnold Adoff \*

Dorothy Aldis

Frank Asch

**B**

Rhoda Bacmeister

Rowena Bennett

Gwendolyn Brooks

Margaret Wise Brown

**C**

Lewis Carroll

Marchette Chute

John Ciardi \*

Elizabeth Coatsworth

Joanna Cole

**D**

Roald Dahl

Walter de la Mare

Beatrice Schenk de Regniers

Emily Dickinson

**E**

Barbara J. Esbensen \*

**F**

Eleanor Farjeon

Eugene Field

Rachel Field

Aileen Fisher \*

*Sheree Fitch\*\**

Paul Fleischman

Douglas Florian

Robert Frost

Rose Fyleman

**G**

Kristine O'Connell George

Nikki Giovanni

Eloise Greenfield \*

Nikki Grimes

**H**

Mary Ann Hoberman

Lee Bennett Hopkins (anthologist)

Langston Hughes

Shirley Hughes

**J**

Paul B. Janeczko



**K**

Bobbi Katz

X.J. Kennedy \*

Karla Kuskin \*

**L**

Bruce Lansky

Edward Lear

*Dennis Lee\*\**

*Loris Lesynski\*\**

J. Patrick Lewis

*Jean Little\*\**

Myra Cohn Livingston \*

Arnold Lobel

**M**

David McCord \*

Colin McNaughton

Eve Merriam \*

A.A. Milne

Lilian Moore \*

**N**

Ogden Nash

Judith Nicholls

**O**

Mary O'Neill

**P**

Jack Prelutsky

**R**

Michael Rosen

Christina Rossetti

**S**

Carl Sandburg

Dr. Seuss

Judy Sierra

Shel Silverstein

*Lois Simmie\*\**

William Jay Smith

Arnold Spilka

Robert Louis Stevenson

**V**

Judith Viorst

**W**

William Wise

Valerie Worth \*

**Y**

Jane Yolen

**Z**

Charlotte Zolotow

\* These poets are recipients of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Award for Excellence in Poetry for Children. Established in 1977, this award was presented annually until 1982. Since then, it has been given every three years to a living American poet for his or her aggregate body of children's poetry.

\*\* Canadian Poets

### Selecting Poetry

It is important to be able to make wise choices in selecting poetry to be shared with children and to know the various subjects that children delight in and to have a knowledge of the poets who write especially for the young. It is essential that children be exposed to a broad range of poetry, including some poetic elements and forms that are common in poetry for children. You must also select poetry that will go beyond your children's initial preferences of Mother Goose and jump rope rhymes to include a wide range of finer poetry by children's poets.

The following are some guidelines to assist you in selecting poetry for children. This list is not all-inclusive nor are the questions appropriate for every poem but it is a good starting point.

1. Can children understand the poem or will they need it explained?
2. Will the poem appeal to them and will they like it?

3. Is the poem about childhood things or experiences?
4. Does it view childhood in a nostalgic and sentimental manner? If so, this may not be very appealing to children.
5. What is the purpose of the poem - to entertain, to describe a subject in a new way, or to teach a lesson?
6. Has the poem a sing-song pattern and can children respond to it?
7. Does the rhythm reinforce the poem's purpose?
8. Does the poem have rhyme or is it free verse? If it has rhyme, is the rhyme natural or rhyme for rhyme's sake?
9. Does the poem play with the sounds of language – alliteration, onomatopoeia, repetition? Does this add to the overall effect of the poem?
10. Does the poem create images of sight, sound, taste, touch, or smell and are these appealing children?
11. Is the poet imaginative and does the poet use common clichés to describe something or does the poet use words in a fresh, new way?
12. Does the poet use appropriate figurative language and can children appreciate and understand the simile and metaphor and personification?
13. Does the shape of the poem or the way words are arranged contribute to its meaning?

### Creating an Affective Poetry-Filled Classroom

Getting ready for poetry means taking time throughout the day to enjoy the rhythm and music of language and to feel a liking for it. Poetry is language in motion. This motion is contagious. It is caught – not taught.

Your role as a teacher is an easy one. You simply need to create and maintain a social and physical environment in which a love of poetry can grow and blossom. As a facilitator, you merely help your children enjoy the language of poetry and be enthusiastic about it for the school year. Children are natural poets and poetry is already a part of their creative nature.

Finding ways for children to experience poetry involves having a variety of poetry books attractively displayed and easily accessible in your classroom for browsing, for independent reading, and for read aloud sessions. Poetry must be within reach. There should be a selection of poetry books in the classroom. A selection of some quality children's poetry books can be found in Section IV. Also provide a poetry listening center so that children will be able to listen to, follow along, and even record their favourite poems.

Here are some more helpful ideas that you may wish to try. Start small. Begin with those ideas that you feel that you can instantly use. Try an idea or two. Add your own. Adapt others. Most importantly, however, feel the rhythm and music of poetry. Enjoy the language! Let children see your enthusiasm for poetry. It will rub off onto them. Enthusiasm is contagious!

1. Read poetry aloud every day.
2. Have children read poetry aloud every day.
3. Invite others into your classroom to recite their favourite verses.
4. Read a poem by a different poet every day.
5. Read poetry to introduce a new unit, project, or activity.
6. Let poetry be an inspiration for a creative writing endeavor.
7. Correlate poetry with prose.
8. Select poetry around a theme.
9. Fill in gaps of time with poetry. It is perfect for those few minutes just before recess.
10. Highlight a "Poem of the Day".
11. Post a poem on chart paper.
12. Read aloud a few selections from an anthology and leave it for children to read on their own.
13. Encourage children to share their favourite selections with the class.
14. Give poetry the spotlight. Just darken the room, turn on a flashlight, and read poems aloud about stars, candles, fireflies, the night, and more!
15. Fill a basket with copies of individual poems.
16. Spotlight a "Poet of the Month".
17. Invite children to write to a poet. Many poets have their own web site with a contact address or an e-mail link.
18. Encourage children to read poetry during independent reading time.

19. Include poetry in your take-home reading program.
20. Encourage choral reading of poetry.
21. Dramatize poetry.
22. Encourage finger plays, pantomime, and bodily movement.
23. Emphasize the musical rhythm of poetry.
24. Have children find poems on a particular subject or topic.
25. Highlight and display appealing words, phrases, or lines.
26. Familiarize yourself with poetry and collect poems in a binder, folder, or box.
27. Create a poet-tree by hanging copied poems on it.
28. Display children's work on the walls and in the halls.
29. Publish individual and class compositions in the school newsletter or newspaper.
30. Have children bookmark their favourite poems with a sticky note
31. Have children collect and illustrate their favourite poems in a class book.
32. Have children create a personal anthology of favourite poems.
33. Encourage children to keep poetry journals.

There is no limit to the imaginative use of poetry with children. As they listen, children will chime in, invent movements and characters, and use song and dance to respond aesthetically to the rhyme, rhythm, and the sparkling bits of language. This is how children bond with the poet's original creation and come up with their own personal thoughts, feelings, and meanings. This is truly growing with poetry.

## SECTION II – THE ELEMENTS OF POETRY

One of the defining characteristics of poetry is its selective language. The poetic experience depends on a poet's ability to use carefully selected language or, the elements of rhyme and sound, rhythm, and/or imagery effectively.

It is not necessary for children to analyze a poem for the elements that the poet uses. You, however, need to be able to understand the language of poetry so to select and share the very best.

This section presents the common poetry elements of **rhyme and sound, rhythm, and imagery**.

### Rhyme and Sound

Children love to play with rhyme. **Rhyme**, the repetition of similar sounds, is a natural part of our language. It is attention getting and pleasing to the ears. It is a fun aspect of poetry. There are several kinds of rhyme. The most familiar is **end rhyme**. Another occasionally used is **medial rhyme**.

There are also specific patterns of rhyme in poetry. These patterns, or rhyme schemes, are described by using letters to stand for the rhyme sounds at the ends of each line. These rhyming patterns are grouped into **stanzas**. A **stanza** of two lines is a **couplet** and a stanza of four lines is a **quatrain**. Some poems may be only a single four-line or two-line stanza. The couplet and the quatrain are frequently used in children's poetry.

Rhyme, however, is not common to all poems. Children need to be aware that all poetry does not rhyme. Rhyme is what they are familiar with and enjoy; however,

children must also experience poetry that does not rhyme. As a teacher, you need to show enthusiasm for this kind of poetry also.

**Repetition** is commonly used by poets to create melody and sound and for special effect. It may be the **repetition of single words, phrases, lines, stanzas, chorus or refrains**. It may also be the repetition of sounds in **alliteration**.

**Alliteration** purposefully holds words and lines together so that similar qualities of sound are heard. Such pleasurable arrangement creates a melody in poetry that appeals to children. **Onomatopoeia** also helps to create a musical quality in poetry. It is the use of words that represent or imitate the sound made such as “zap” and “buzz”.

In this section, **end rhyme, medial rhyme, couplet rhyme, quatrain rhyme**, and the sound effects of the **repetition of single words, phrases, lines, stanzas, chorus and refrains, alliteration**, and **onomatopoeia** are presented.

#### End Rhyme

**End rhyme** is easily recognized. It occurs when the final word in one line is a repetition of the sound of the final word in another. **End rhyme** is found in most children’s poems. A familiar example:

One, two  
Buckle my shoe.  
Three, four  
Shut the door.



Examples: Nearly all the poems in *My Very First Mother Goose*, *Poems for the Very Young*, *Read-Aloud Rhymes for the Very Young*, and *The 20<sup>th</sup> Century Children's Poetry Treasury* have end rhyme. Make your own selections.

### Medial Rhyme

**Medial**, or **internal**, **rhyme** occurs when a word within a line rhymes with a word at the end or near the end of the line. Two examples are:

The **fish** swam around and around in the **dish** all day.

Little Bo-**Peep** has lost her **sheep**

Examples:

*My Very First Mother Goose* – “Jack and Jill”, “Little Jack Horner”, “Pat -A- Cake”,

“Three Little Kittens”, “Star Light, Star Bright”

*Poems for the Very Young* – “Oliver Twist”, “Anna Elise”, “Fire”

*The 20<sup>th</sup> Century Children's Poetry Treasury* – “Weather”

### Couplet Rhyme

The **couplet rhyme** is one of the oldest rhyming forms. It is also certainly the simplest. The **couplet** consists of a pair of lines that rhyme and are usually equal in length. The couplet may stand on its own as a complete poem or it may be one of many stanzas in a poem. For example:

*Rain, Rain*

Rain, rain, go away,  
Come again another day.

Rain, rain, go away  
Don't come back till Christmas day.

Rain, rain, pour down,  
But not a drop on our town.

Anonymous

Examples:

*My Very First Mother Goose* – “Pussycat, Pussycat”, “Humpty Dumpty”, “I Had A Little Nut Tree”, “One, Two, Three, Four”

*Read-Aloud Rhymes for the Very Young* – “Polar Bear”, “Some Things that Easter Brings”, “Raindrops”, “Keziah”

*Poems for the Very Young* - “Hair”, “Jump or Jiggle”, “Goodness Gracious”, “Fairy Story”

*The 20<sup>th</sup> Century Children's Poetry Treasury* – “Trees”, “Moths and Moonshine”, “The Lion Cub”

Quatrain Rhyme

The **quatrain rhyme** is most extensively used. It consists of four lines that may have any one of a variety of rhyming patterns, like the following:

**abab, abba, abcb, aabb**

The **rhyme scheme** is denoted by the letters a, b, c, and d. Similar rhymes have the same letter. If the ending words of a four-line stanza are *eight*, *black*, *sack*, *sight* the rhyme scheme is **abba**. The two “a” lines rhyme and so do the “b” lines. If the endings were *eight*, *sight*, *black*, *sack* the rhyme scheme would be **aabb**. And so on.

Here is a quatrain with **abab** rhyme scheme:

*I See the Moon*

I see the moon,	<i>a</i>
And the moon sees me;	<i>b</i>
God bless the moon,	<i>a</i>
And God bless me.	<i>b</i>

Anonymous

Here is an **abcb** rhyme scheme:

*Icicles*

We are little icicles	<i>a</i>
Melting in the sun.	<i>b</i>
Can you see our tiny teardrops	<i>c</i>
Falling one by one?	<i>b</i>

Anonymous

Examples:

*My Very First Mother Goose* – “Star Light, Star Bright”, “Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John”, “If I Had A Donkey”, “Milkman, Milkman”

*Read-Aloud Rhymes for the Very Young* – “The Raggedy Dog”, “The Old Woman”,  
“Unfortunately”, “December”, “Cat Kisses”

*Poems for the Very Young* – “Happy Birthday To You”, “My Little Old Man”, “Jumble  
Jingle”, “I Can Put My Socks On”, “Boo Hoo”

*The 20<sup>th</sup> Century Children’s Poetry Treasury* – “What Is the Opposite of Hat”, “Sound”,  
“My Window Screen”, “The Sandpiper”, “My Tooth It’s Loothe”

### Repetition of Words, Phrases, Lines, Stanzas, Chorus, and Refrain

**Words, phrases, and lines** are commonly repeated in poetry for a special effect.  
**Repetition** creates and sustains mood and melody. The same can be said of **chorus** and **refrain** which are usually **stanzas**. Many nursery rhymes are full of repetition as well as familiar songs and poems such as “Old MacDonald Had A Farm” and “In the Dark, Dark House”.

#### *If You Ever*

If you ever ever ever ever ever

If you ever ever ever ever ever meet a whale

You must never never never never never

You must never never never never touch its tail:

For if you ever ever ever ever ever

If you ever ever ever touch its tail,

You will never never never never never

You will never never meet another whale.

Anonymous

Examples:

*My Very First Mother Goose* – “Shoo Fly”, “Baa, Baa, Black Sheep”, “To Market, To Market”, “There Was A Crooked Man”, “From Wibbleton To Wobbleton”

*Read-Aloud Rhymes for the Very Young* – “Singing Time”, “There’s Music in a Hammer”, “Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear”, “The More It Snows”, “The Mistletoe”

*Poems for the Very Young* – “Oliver Twist”, “Zelba Zinnamon”, “Sugarcake Bubble”, “Acker Backer”, “The Songster”

*The 20<sup>th</sup> Century Children’s Poetry Treasury* – “Rules”, “Me”, “Tuning Up”, “For Sale”, “Rolling Down a Hill”

### Alliteration

**Alliteration** is the repetition of the same initial consonant sound in consecutive words or in words close enough together that make us aware of the sounds. This repetition makes poetry fun to read and to recite. Tongue twisters, a treat to teeth and tongue, are exaggerated examples of alliteration as are such phrases as “Fluffy has furry feet”.

Alliteration is often used to create a humorous effect or a musical effect or for sheer pleasure. It helps give a specific mood to a poem and adds to its overall pleasing effect. Jack Prelutsky, for example, creates humour in his poetry with the frequent use of alliteration.

Here is a humorous example of a poem that is overflowing with alliteration. How fast can you say it?

*Betty Botter*

Betty Botter bought some butter,  
 But, she said, this butter's bitter;  
 If I put it in my batter,  
 It will make my batter bitter,  
 But a bit of better butter  
 Will make my batter better.  
 So she bought a bit of butter  
 Better than her bitter butter,  
 And she put it in her batter,  
 And it made her batter better,  
 So 'twas better Betty Botter  
 Bought a bit of better butter.

Anonymous

Examples:

*My Very First Mother Goose* – “Handy, Spandy”, “Pat-A-Cake”, “From Wibbleton To Wobbleton”

*Read-Aloud Rhymes for the Very Young* – “Singing in the Spring”, “Ten to One”,

“Quack, Quack!”, “Toaster Time”, “Skeleton Parade”

*Poems for the Very Young* – “Lily Lee”, “Spaghetti! Spaghetti!”, “Mabel Murple”,

“Tippity, Tippity Tin”, “Song”

*The 20<sup>th</sup> Century Children's Poetry Treasury* – “Doris Skips”, “Weather”, “Sky, Sea, Shore”, “Moths and Moonshine”, “Summer Stars”

### Onomatopoeia

**Onomatopoeia** refers to the use of words that create a sound like the action that it represents such as *meow*, *crash*, and *slurp*. Many words in the English language imitate natural sounds such as the “jingle” of bells, the “pop” of a balloon, and the “sizzle” of butter melting in a hot skillet. Imitating sounds is fun to do. It is naturally appealing to children. These words help to make good poetry. Onomatopoeia helps to give a poem a musical quality. Here is an example:

Tick, tock, tick, tock,  
 Merrily sings the clock;  
 It's time for work,  
 It's time for play,  
 So it sings throughout the day.  
 Tick, tock, tick, tock,  
 Merrily sings the clock.

Anonymous

Examples:

*My Very First Mother Goose* – “Shoo Fly”, “Down At The Station”, “Horsie, Horsie”

*Read-Aloud Rhymes for the Very Young* – “Blowing Bubbles”, “Mud”, “Fish”, “A Little Talk”, “Ears Hear”

*Poems for the Very Young* – “Hair”, “Up and Down”, “Chocolate Milkshake”, “Ping-Pong”

*The 20<sup>th</sup> Century Children's Poetry Treasury* – “Summer Stars”, “Night Sounds”, “Sneeze”, “The Click Clacker Machine”, “Weather”

### Rhythm

**Rhythm** is a part of our lives. We feel the rhythm of our heart beating and of our breathing. We walk in a metrical pattern. Children create rhythm when they jump rope. We hear rhythm in the sound of the doorbell chiming, of the telephone ringing, and of a dripping kitchen faucet. We can feel rhythm when a band goes marching by. Rhythm is all around us every day.

Rhythm is also a part of poetry. Its beat is the music of language. Poets create rhythm when they alternate stressed and unstressed syllables in a line to create a repetitive effect. Poetry is easily sung when it has a regular metrical beat. Songs and hymns are examples. Other poetry written to a metrical beat can also be sung. Nursery rhymes and lullabies can be sung because they have stressed and unstressed syllables.

Metrical rhythm has a variety of patterns. Poets mix metrical rhythms in some of their poems. If you are aware of this, you may be able to give a poem a more pleasant and effective reading. The four most common are:

1. the **IAMB** (da-DUM, da-DUM, da-DUM, da-DUM),
2. the **ANAPEST** (da-da-DUM, da-da-DUM, da-da-DUM, da-da-DUM),
3. the **TROCHEE** (DUM-da, DUM-da, DUM-da, DUM-da), and
4. the **DACTYL** (DUM-da-da, DUM-da-da, DUM-da-da, DUM-da-da).



The **trochaic** and **dactylic** are not as commonly used as the **iambic** and the **anapestic**. They may be used in occasional lines along with the iambic and the anapestic. Also found in many children's rhymes and poems is a **stressed** or an **unstressed syllable** or word at the beginning or end of a line. The rhythm apart from that stressed syllable or word may be iambic, anapestic, trochaic, or dactylic.

Please don't let these technical names scare you! Children actually love the sounds of these foreign words just as much as they love the names of dinosaurs! These four metrical patterns are explained in the following pages.

#### Iambic and Anapestic

The **iamb** is the most common foot or beat in English poetry. It consists of two syllables with the stress (or accent) falling on the second. The words *Marie*, *today*, and *away* are examples. We mark the beat this way: ♪ /. Such a combination of two syllables, whether a single word or two, is called a **foot** or a **beat**. In the following line of poetry are four feet or beats:

Away, away, the birds do fly  
 ♪ / ♪ / ♪ / ♪ /

A poem with iambic beat is *The Little Elf* by John Kendrick Bangs:

I met a little Elf-man, once,  
 Down where the lilies blow.  
 I asked him why he was so small,  
 And why he didn't grow.

He slightly frowned, and with his eye  
 He looked me through and through.  
 "I'm quite as big for me," said he,  
 "As you are big for you."

A second common metrical pattern is the **anapest**. The anapest has one syllable more than the iamb. It consists of two unaccented syllables followed by a stressed syllable. This is a playful sounding beat that is used in limericks and humorous verse. *Disagree*, *Carolanne*, and *anapest* are some examples. Any of these words can be marked this way:  $\cup \cup /$ . Another example, *on the ground*, consisting of three separate single-syllable words can be marked the same way:  $\cup \cup /$ . Like the iamb, the anapest has the stress on the last syllable. The example:

And the spring with the smell of the flowers and the grass  
 can be patterned this way:

$\cup \cup / \cup \cup / \cup \cup / \cup \cup /$

Because the iamb and the anapest are closely alike, they are naturally combined to form a pleasing natural speech pattern. For example:

And she played the horn and he banged the drum  
 can be rendered like this:



### Trochaic and Dactylic

The **trochee** and the **dactyl** are the other two feet that will be discussed. These are the opposite of the iamb and the anapest. Whereas the iamb has the stress on the second syllable, the **trochee** has the stress on the first. The **trochee** is a falling foot. The accent is on the first syllable and is followed by an unaccented syllable. Some examples are *water*, *sunny*, *Judy*, and *gravy*. Any of these words can be marked this way: / ˘. In a line of poetry, the trochee is created this way:

/ ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘

Come here, come now, do not delay

The **dactyl**, like the anapest, has three syllables but, in this case, the stress is on the first syllable. The following two syllables are unstressed. *Elephant* and *Jennifer* and the phrase *Run on in* are some examples. An example of a line of dactylic poetry:

/ ˘˘ / ˘˘ / ˘˘ / ˘˘

Jennifer, Jennifer, run away, dash away

You will not find many lines of poetry that are all trochaic or dactylic. These two are constantly together and are often used with other types of feet in lines of poetry in order for the flow of words to have a natural effect.

Examples of trochaic and dactylic rhythms:

*Read-Aloud Rhymes for the Very Young* – “Sun After Rain”, “Mix A Pancake”, “Fish”, “The Squirrel”

*Poems for the Very Young* – “Tippity, Tippity Tin”, “Go To Bed, Tom”

*The 20<sup>th</sup> Century Children's Poetry Treasury* – “Skyscrapers”, “Buses”, “Monday”, “Autumn Night Music”, “What You Don’t Know About Food”

### Image

A poet uses words to create mind pictures in much the same way as a painter uses paint to create a scene on canvas. Shaping vivid pictures through words involves the use of sensory-rich images of sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. The best poems make us see, hear, smell, taste, and/or feel what they mean. Children especially find this appealing because they have grown up exploring the world around them with their senses – squeezing, looking at, and listening to novel experiences.

Poets may also create fresh, appealing, sensory images by using such literary devices as **simile**, **metaphor**, and **personification**. This is also known as **figurative language**. We use simile and metaphor in our speech every day. Some have become clichés such as *as busy as a bee*, and *thick like pea soup*. Children playing with their toys and adults speaking about their electronic gadgets frequently use personification when they give human attributes and qualities to their non-human objects. The challenge for a poet, then, is to make fresh comparisons – to sense things in new and interesting ways.

It is not important that children know what figurative language is by definition. What is important is that children be taught to make new comparisons. They need to hear poems read aloud to them daily that contain these language elements using familiar images. It helps them to see an object or idea in a way that is new to their senses. We should remember that what is cliché in the adult mind may be a fresh comparison in the child’s mind. Children need to be encouraged to make comparisons in their everyday

language when describing things. And quite often making comparisons is the only way to describe some things.

### Factual

Creating vivid images through words alone is vital in poetry. This picture-making element is especially appealing to children because they love to explore the world around them. **Distinct images** of sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch help to capture experiences and to provoke a mood or response.

Think about the following images:

- the sight of a sparkling starry night
- the sound of green boughs crackling in a bonfire
- the smell of a batch of chocolate chip cookies baking in the oven
- the taste of those cookies before they have even had a chance to cool
- the feel of mud squishing through your hands

Do these **factual images** recapture experiences that you may have had? Do you feel as if you are experiencing these sensory adventures now? Visually minded children respond enthusiastically to this picture-making quality of poetry. An example:

*How Creatures Move*

The lion walks on padded paws,  
 The squirrel leaps from limb to limb,  
 While flies can crawl straight up a wall,  
 And seals can dive and swim.  
 The worm, he wiggles all around,  
 The monkey swings by his tail,  
 And birds may hop upon the ground,  
 Or spread their wings and sail.  
 But boys and girls have much more fun;  
 They leap and dance  
 And walk and run.

Anonymous

Examples:

*My Very First Mother Goose* - "Jack and Jill", "Humpty Dumpty", "Down At The Station", "Little Jack Horner"

*Read-Aloud Rhymes for the Very Young* - "Mice", "Shore", "My Teddy Bear", "Sleeping Outdoors"

*Poems for the Very Young* - "Ears Hear", "Rules", "Egg", "What Is Black?", "Cats"

*The 20<sup>th</sup> Century Children's Poetry Treasury* - "Jump or Jiggle", "Oliver Twist", "Nicholas Naylor", "Sand", "What Are You?"

### Simile

A **simile** is a figure of speech that compares one thing with another using the words *like* or *as*. What is being compared is often unlike except for one quantity of likeness shared by both. Take the example, *The kitten's purring was like an outboard motor*. The sounds of these two unlike objects, the animate kitten and the inanimate outboard motor, have one comparison in common – the purring. Another example is, *The kitten's fur is as soft as silk*. The kitten's fur and silk have one quality in comparison – softness.

Examples:

*Read-Aloud Rhymes for the Very Young* – “The Butterfly”, “Umbrellas”, “Dragonfly”,

“The Star”

*Poems for the Very Young* – “Beetle”

*The 20<sup>th</sup> Century Children's Poetry Treasury* – “Tent”, “Beetles”, “Sunflakes”,

“Ditchdiggers”

### Metaphor

A simile may compare one thing to another but when a simile is placed next to a **metaphor** it is mild-mannered in comparison. A **metaphor** does not make use of the words *like* or *as*. A **metaphor** just comes out and states what it means. It is usually more of an attention-grabber than a simile because the poet refers to an object or idea as if it were another object. Here are some examples:

lemon meringue pie clouds

My fingers are icicles!



A **metaphor** is a condensed way of writing a simile. For example, the simile, *her cheeks are like roses* expressed, as a **metaphor** becomes *her rosy cheeks* or *her cheeks are roses*. The most condensed metaphors are not as easy to spot as similes.

**Metaphors** are descriptions as are similes and we use them in our everyday speech. They do not belong only to poetry. They can also be found in the stories we enjoy to read. Here is an example:

*Icicles*

We are little icicles  
Melting in the sun.  
Can you see our tiny teardrops  
Falling one by one?

Anonymous

Examples:

*Read-Aloud Rhymes for the Very Young* – “A Modern Dragon”, “Johnny”, “An Explanation of the Grasshopper”, “At Night”, “Polar Bear”

*Poems for the Very Young* – “A Good Play”

*The 20<sup>th</sup> Century Children's Poetry Treasury* – “Dragonfly”, “Helicopters”, “Fog”, “The Toaster”, “Wind Pictures”, “At the Bottom of the Garden”

### Personification

**Personification** occurs when the poet gives human qualities to a non-human object such as an animal, a season, a feeling, or weather as though the object was a person. The poet is linking the natural world with human appearance and behaviour. In short, the poet is personalizing an inanimate or non-human object.

Personification occurs in the everyday language of all people. Children love to personify their dolls, action figures, plush animals, and other toys. Adults personify their automobiles, electronic gadgets, and objects in nature. For example, on a clear night one might declare, “The moon is staring down” or on a windy day one might exclaim, “See how the trees are dancing in the breeze!”. Other examples include: the moaning of the wind, the cheerful fire, the angry waves, the friendly cows, the babbling brook, and the sun-kissed oranges.

Here is a poem that is all personification:

Rain, rain, go away!  
 Come again some other day;  
 Little Johnnie wants to play  
 In the meadow among the hay.

Examples:

*My Very First Mother Goose* - “Baa, Baa, Black Sheep”, “Good Morning Mrs. Hen”, “I See the Moon”, “Pussycat, Pussycat”, “Blow Wind Blow”  
*Read-Aloud Rhymes for the Very Young* – “Sun After Rain”, “Look”, “Snowman”, “Fun”

*Poems for the Very Young* – “Song”, “An Umbrella and a Raincoat”, “Spaghetti!

Spaghetti!”, “Rain, Rain”

*The 20<sup>th</sup> Century Children's Poetry Treasury* – “The Snowflake”, “Scarecrow

Complains”, “Buses”, “Crab Dance”, “Skyscraper”

### SECTION III – THE FORMS OF POETRY

There are many kinds of poems: long poems, short poems, poems that rhyme, poems that do not rhyme, poems that sing, poems that tell a story, nonsense poems, picture poems, and poems with a particular or peculiar form.

**Form** refers to the overall design of a poem. It is the framework of a poem. A poet may choose from a variety of forms or a poet may choose not to follow the rules of rhythm and rhyme and stanzas.

It is not important that primary children be able to recognize form, but some terminology may be shared with them. What is important is that you expose the children to various forms of poetry. Like food, too much of one thing is not the best. Children will develop an understanding of and an appreciation for a wide variety of poems only if they are frequently exposed to many varieties.

This third section will look at the following common forms of children's poetry: the couplet, the quatrain, nursery rhymes, riddles, limericks, list poems, acrostic poems, narrative or story poems, lyrical poems, free verse, and concrete or shape poetry.

#### The Couplet

The simplest and shortest form of traditional poetry is the **couplet** which has just two lines that rhyme. A poem may be just a couplet or a poem may have many couplets. A couplet as a poem expresses a complete thought, usually serious but sometimes humorous and witty. For children, use the couplet as a two-line poem. There are many examples to be found. The couplet is an easy form that the children can write. This couplet by Robert Louis Stevenson is titled "Happy Thought":

The world is so full of a number of things,  
I'm sure we should all be as happy as kings.

Examples:

*My Very First Mother Goose* – “Little Jumping Joan”

*Read-Aloud Rhymes for the Very Young* – “Polar Bear”, “Happy Thought”

*Poems for the Very Young* – “An Umbrella and a Raincoat”, “Peter’s Pop Kept a Lollipop Shop”

### The Quatrain

The **quatrain** is a four-line stanza and is the favourite and most widely used English verse form. It is generally the stanza form for ballads and for many other poems. It may also be a poem in itself. The quatrain is usually written in iambic meter (da-DUM, da-DUM, da-DUM, da-DUM) and comes in a few different rhyming patterns such as: **aabb, abba, abab, abac, abcb**, or even **aaaa**. Here are some examples:

#### *I See the Moon*

I see the moon,  
And the moon sees me;  
God bless the moon,  
And God bless me.

Anonymous

*I Eat My Peas With Honey*

I eat my peas with honey,  
 I've done it all my life:  
 It makes the peas taste funny,  
 But it keeps them on the knife.

Anonymous

Examples:

*My Very First Mother Goose* - "Star Light, Star Bright", "I See the Moon", "Hickety, Pickety, My Black Hen", "Davy Davy Dumpling", "Jack and Jill"

*Read-Aloud Rhymes for the Very Young* - "Blowing Bubbles", "My Sister Laura", "Picnic Day", "Too Sad", "The Very Nicest Place"

*Poems for the Very Young* - "Today I Saw A Little Worm", "Dan, Dan", "Man Fat", "Snow Thoughts", "Someone Stole the Hedgehog"

*The 20<sup>th</sup> Century Children's Poetry Treasury* - "The Gentle Cow", "Red-Winged Blackbird", "The Potato Versus The Pea", "Notice", "Concerning Love"

Nursery Rhymes

**Nursery rhymes** delight even the youngest of children. Their rhythm, rhyme, and repetition appeal to both preschoolers and to school-aged boys and girls who respond with pleasure to this naturally inviting form. The rhythm and rhyme of the verses, the musical qualities of the language patterns and of alliteration, and the repetition of lines bring out joyful responses in children.

Nursery rhymes provide opportunities to join in a variety of responses like stomping feet, clapping hands, and dancing around a circle. The pure nonsense found in many of the rhymes really finds expression in giggles and laughter. Nursery rhymes are fun poetry.

Traditional nursery rhymes include many different forms of verse such as the following: telling a story, games, counting, lullabies and prayers, riddles, and tongue twisters. Of all poems, nursery rhymes need to be read aloud to children.

Examples:

*My Very First Mother Goose* – all nursery rhymes

#### Riddle Poems

**Riddle poems** are word puzzles that are cleverly written by poets who are careful not to directly give away the subject of the poem. Instead, the poet gives distinct and definite clues about the subject to help the reader guess what it might be.

Some riddles are short, others are long; some are easier to solve than others; some are very old and others are very new; some have rhyme and some have no rhyme. The no rhyme can be written as **free verse**. Whatever the case, children are fascinated and delighted with riddle poems. They are fun to solve.

Here is a riddle from Mother Goose:

Little Miss Etticote

In a white petticoat.

The longer she stands

The shorter she grows.

(A candle)

Here is one written in free verse:

What has  
four legs  
a head  
and one foot? (A bed)

Examples:

There are none in the authorized anthologies. *Riddle – Lightful: Oodles of Riddle Poems* and *Riddle-icious* by J. Patrick Lewis are outstanding collections of poetic puzzles. Here are some others:

Lives in winter, dies in summer,  
And grows with its roots upward! (An icicle)

It has a head like a cat, feet like a cat,  
A tail like a cat, but it isn't a cat. ( A kitten)

As I was going to St. Ives  
I met a man with seven wives;  
Every wife had seven sacks;  
Every sack had seven cats;  
Every cat had seven kits.  
Kits, cats, sacks, and wives –  
How many were going to St. Ives? (One)



## Limericks

Children especially enjoy this nonsense form of verse. **Limericks** are as appealing to children as are nursery rhymes. A limerick is a five-line poem that is humorous, involving a character, a setting, and an ironic twist in the final line. It has an **aabba** rhyme scheme and a bouncing anapestic rhythm (da-da-DUM, da-da-DUM, da-da-DUM, da-da-DUM).

Edward Lear popularized limericks more than a century ago. He has been called the Poet Laureate of the Limerick. Lear, however, did not originate the limerick. The first book of limericks was published in England in 1821, more than fifty years before Lear, and before this, Shakespeare used a limerick in *Othello*.

Today, such modern poets as John Ciardi, Arnold Lobel, Ogden Nash, X.J. Kennedy, and Myra Cohn Livingston have written limericks. They are excellent for reading aloud because they are quick and attention getting. Children are sure to respond with laughter and delight. Here are two examples from Edward Lear:

There was an Old Man with a beard

Who said, "It is just as I feared!

Two Owls and a Hen,

Four Larks and a Wren,

Have all built their nests in my beard!"

There was a Young Lady whose chin  
 Resembled the point of a pin;  
 So she had it made sharp,  
 And purchased a harp,  
 And played several tunes with her chin.

Examples:

*Read-Aloud Rhymes for the Very Young* – “An Old Person of Ware”, “A Small Pig Who Wept Tears”

#### List Poems

We all use lists – shopping lists, to-do lists, wish lists. A list is a great way to organize one’s thoughts. A list poem, then, is not really new.

A **list poem** is a free verse poem. It usually has no rhyme. It is composed of a title which is the subject of the poem. Its lines are short – one word, two words, three or more, or very short sentences that list ideas or bits of description about the subject of the poem. These lines are the fact images of the poem that could range in length from just a couple of lines to a poem of many lines, depending on how much detail is added. Such a poem may be serious or humorous. A list poem is not a difficult poem to write.

Here is an example titled “Going On A Holiday”:

This is what I need for a holiday:

A swimsuit

A toothbrush

Running shoes

Orange Crush

And a teddy-bear at night

To hug when the light

Goes out.

D.W.S. Ryan

Examples:

*Read-Aloud Rhymes for the Very Young* – “Fish”, “Johnny”, “Wide Awake”, “Ears Hear”

*Poems for the Very Young* – “Jump or Jiggle”, “Sand”, “Ping Pong”

*The 20<sup>th</sup> Century Children’s Poetry Treasury* – “My Name Is”, “Tuning Up”, “Rules”, “Egg”, “Magic”, “Sidewalks”

#### Acrostic Poems

An **acrostic poem** is a free verse poem. It does not have to rhyme but it does attempt to tell a story or describe someone or something. Its subject is its title. The letters of the word (the title) are aligned vertically and begin each line of the poem. Each line says something about the subject. Subjects like rain, cats, an apple or abstract ideas such as love or friendship; or names of family members, friends, or pets may be the topic of an acrostic poem. Like the list poem, it is not that difficult to write.

An acrostic poem may contain single words written as a list on each line. Or, it may have several words on each line. Or, it may even be a sentence or several sentences that continue throughout the poem. Or, it may be a combination of any of these possibilities. It is a fun poem to write. Here are some examples:

*Summer*

Sunny days and  
Unbearable heat.  
Millions of  
Mosquitoes.  
Emerald grass and  
Ripe berries.

N. Ryan

*Cats*

Cuddly  
Agile  
Theatrical  
Sensitive

N. Ryan

Examples:

There are no examples of acrostic poetry in the four cited provincially authorized anthologies. Perfect for the primary classroom, though, are four beautifully illustrated alphabet books with an acrostic poem for each letter of the alphabet written by Steven

Schnur. The titles are: *Spring: An Alphabet Acrostic*, *Summer: An Alphabet Acrostic*, *Autumn: An Alphabet Acrostic*, *Winter: An Alphabet Acrostic*.

### Story Poems – Narrative Poems

A **narrative poem** tells a story. Telling a story in poetry form appeals to younger and older children alike. A narrative poem may have rhyme or it may be free verse. It may be as simple as a nursery rhyme such as *Hey Diddle Diddle* or a long epic such as *The Odyssey* or nonsensical as Lewis Carroll's *Jabberwocky* or Edward Lear's *The Owl and the Pussycat*. It may be humorous or serious.

In these poems the poet-narrator describes something that has happened. The poet is not a part of the story, unlike lyrical poetry, and does not comment on it. S/he simply tells the story.

A most popular narrative poem is '*Twas The Night Before Christmas* by Clement Clark Moore. There are presently over fifty published editions of this Christmas story alone. The favourite narratives today that are sure to bring a smile to every listener are those that tell of outrageously funny characters and situations created by the absurd poetic minds of Jack Prelutsky and Shel Silverstein.

Plan to build up a file of story poems that you feel will appeal to the interests and ages of the children in your class. You can do this gradually over time as you come across such poems. Before you know it, you will have quite a comprehensive collection! The more poems you have at your fingertips, in all categories, the more confident you will be in teaching poetry and the more adept you will be in dealing with it in all its forms.

Examples:

There are no examples of narrative poetry in the authorized anthologies. In addition to those mentioned above, other popular narrative poems include “The Quangle Wangle’s Hat” by Edward Lear, “The Gingham Dog and the Calico Cat” and “Wynken, Blyken, and Nod” by Eugene Field, the old English carol titled “The Friendly Beasts”, and “There Was An Old Lady Who Swallowed A Fly”.

### Lyrical Poetry

The **lyric poem** has a song-like quality that sings its way into the listener’s mind. It may be descriptive or thought provoking, expressing the personal thoughts, feelings, and emotions of the poet. It has no prescribed length or structure. The only requirement is that it must have an appealing subject and an exhilarating sense of melody and rhythm. Traditional lyrics, and most modern ones have metrical rhythm and can be sung. Popular songs and hymns are examples of such.

Most of the poetry written for children is lyrical. *A Child’s Garden of Verses* by Robert Louis Stevenson is a charming collection of traditional verse that has an unforgettable singing quality. Here is “The Swing”:

How do you like to go up in a swing,  
 Up in the air so blue?  
 Oh, I do think it is the pleasantest thing  
 Ever a child can do!

Up in the air and over the wall,  
 Till I can see so wide,  
 Rivers and trees and cattle and all  
 Over the countryside –  
 Till I look down on the garden green,  
 Down on the roof so brown –  
 Up in the air I go flying again,  
 Up in the air and down!

Lyric is a term that covers a wide range of poetry. As a matter of fact, we can say with some certainty that poetry that is not narrative is lyrical. For primary children, however, we will limit the definition of lyrical poetry to that kind of poetry which expresses personal thought and feeling – feeling of delight or sadness, of humour, joy, surprise, and the like.

Examples:

*Read-Aloud Rhymes for the Very Young* – “The World”, “Chums”, “Ode To Spring”,  
 “Good Night, Good Night”, “Dreidal Song”  
*Poems for the Very Young* – “That May Morning”, “The Secret Place”, “This Is My  
 Rock”, “Trees”, “Woodpecker”

*The 20<sup>th</sup> Century Children's Poetry Treasury* – “Afternoon on a Hill”, “Something Told the Wild Geese”, “A Poem Is a Little Path”, “Covers”

### Free Verse

Just as its name implies, this pattern of poetry allows poets more freedom to create their own rules about writing and shaping a poem. **Free verse** has no prescribed pattern and it is not restricted to rhyme or traditional rhythmic patterns. It does not contain the rhyme and rhythm normally associated with poetry. Free verse does have rhythm but not a metrical rhythm. Its rhythm is natural speech. It does not have the rhyme of traditional poetry but it can have occasional rhyme. Rhyme comes through in alliteration, assonance, and consonance.

Free verse does not have any stanzas as such. Its divisions may be verse paragraphs. And, it has no fixed length of line. A line of free verse may be just a single word or a single letter. Some poets, like e.e. cummings, have used a single punctuation mark as a line of free verse.

In free verse, all traditional metrical rules are relaxed or cast aside. Language flows freely and words or phrases or lines are frequently repeated. This form of poetry will not appeal to children as traditional poetry does, but they might be encouraged to try writing poetry in a free form.

It is important to share poetry written in free verse so that children will have opportunities to hear poetry without rhyme or regular metrical pattern. As you do with narrative poems, keep a file of what you think are suitable poems that children will enjoy and respond to. For example, take a sentence such as:



Cherry blossoms are like tinted snow on the trees.

and write it like this:

Cherry blossoms  
are  
like tinted snow  
on the trees.

Or:

Cherry blossoms  
are like tinted snow  
on  
the  
trees.

Or:

Cherry blossoms  
are  
like tinted snow  
on  
the  
trees.

How the poet arranges words, phrases, or sentences in free verse is entirely up to him/her.

There is no regular pattern to follow. It is a free arrangement. That is why it is **free verse**.

It is the freest of all verse forms.

Examples:

*Read-Aloud Rhymes for the Very Young* – “Halfway Down”, “Big”, “Toaster Time”, “The Mistletoe”, “Wouldn’t You”

*Poems for the Very Young* – “I am Running in a Circle”, “Portrait of a Motorcar”, “The Moon”

*The 20<sup>th</sup> Century Children’s Poetry Treasury* – “A Circle of Sun”, “Jacks”, “Fog”, “I Can Fly”, “White Cat Winter”

#### Concrete or Shape Poetry

**Concrete, or shape, or picture poetry** is poetry that presents its message not only in its words but also in its visual arrangement of the words on the page. Combining art with poetry creates visual images that are irresistible to children’s eyes. Such poetry is fun and humorous. It catches on with children and draws out their creativity and can be contagious. Children will certainly want to create their own shape poems! Concrete poetry is the one form of poetry that appeals to the eye more than to the ear!

Words, phrases, and sentences can take the actual shape of the subject of the poem. The arrangement of words forms a visual picture on the page. This form also makes it possible for a poem to be read in different ways such as in a circular fashion or down the page and up again in a “V” shape. The poem may be just a single sentence or part sentence. Naturally, it does not have to have rhyme or metrical rhythm. Arrangement of words and letters make up the structure of the poem.

Creating shape poems stimulates the creative imaginations of young children. Here is one simple example, the word Christmas shaped like a tree:

M  
ER  
RYC  
HRISTM  
A  
S

Examples:

*My Very First Mother Goose* – “Sally Go Round the Sun”

*The 20<sup>th</sup> Century Children's Poetry Treasury* - “I Was Walking in a Circle”, “Elevator”,  
“The Salmon”, “Shakes and Ladders”, “Egg”, “Rolling Down A Hill”.

In addition, the following poetry collections are full of fabulous concrete poetry and are recommended for the primary classroom: *Doodle Dandies: Poems That Take Shape* by J. Patrick Lewis, *Flicker Flash* by Joan Bransfield Graham and *A Poke In The I* selected by Paul Janeczko.

## SECTION IV – ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

In this section a concise review of selected resources presently available to primary teachers is presented. Twenty-four poetry anthologies and single poem picture books suitable for young children are annotated. These books have been chosen from among those published since 1996 because today's poetry anthologies usually have time limits placed on permissions to use certain poems. Next, six easy-to-read teacher resources appropriate for anyone wishing to promote poetry in the primary classroom are outlined. Finally, six Internet sites are reviewed. Some of these sites are for teachers and some are children-oriented. These annotations are not all-inclusive but they will get you started. There are many more fantastic children's poetry books, teacher resources, and Internet sites that you will discover!

### Comprehensive Anthologies

A comprehensive anthology contains a large number of poems from many well-known poets. The poems are selected and arranged in a meaningful format by the anthologist. Every classroom should have at least one anthology of quality children's poetry.

Attenborough, Liz (ed.) (2001). *Poetry by Heart: A Child's Book of Poems to Remember*.

New York: Scholastic. ISBN: 0439296579 (5-9 years)

A wide-ranging collection of poetry from short, easy to recite verses to longer classics. It is a distinguished mix of the traditional and the contemporary including poems from William Shakespeare, Robert Frost, Lewis Carroll, Emily Dickinson, Charlotte Zolotow,

Judith Viorst, and Roald Dahl. The poems are arranged around nine themes including “Fur and Feathers”, “Love and Friendship”, and “Peace and Quiet”. A different artist illustrates each theme. An assortment of poetic forms takes children from short couplet and quatrain poems to longer narrative poems.

Cullinan, Bernice (ed.) (1996). *A Jar of Tiny Stars: Poems by NCTE Award-Winning Poets*. Illustrations by Andi MacLeod. Honesdale, PA: Boyds Mills.

ISBN: 1563970872 (7-9 years)

A collection of best-loved poems selected by children as their favourites from the poems written by the ten NCTE Award-winning poets: Arnold Adoff, John Ciardi, Barbara Esbensen, Aileen Fisher, Karla Kuskin, Myra Cohn Livingston, David McCord, Eve Merriam, Lilian Moore, and Valerie Worth. Also included are brief biographical sketches of each poet, portraits of the poets, and splendid pen and ink drawings accompanying the poems.

Dyer, Jane (ed.) (1996). *Animal Crackers: A Delectable Collection of Pictures, Poems, and Lullabies for the Very Young*. New York: Little, Brown & Company.

ISBN: 0316197661 (PreK-6 years)

A diverse collection of 62 tenderly illustrated poems ranging from classic Mother Goose to the contemporary poems of David McCord, Eve Merriam, and Jane Yolen. Young children will chime in with the alphabet and counting rhymes and act out the playtime

rhymes. There are also short verses about shapes, colours, the seasons, food and animals. The book closes with a selection of tranquil poetry about the night.

Hopkins, Lee Bennett (ed.) (1998). *Climb Into My Lap: Poems to Read Together*.

Illustrations by Kathryn Brown. New York: Simon & Schuster.

ISBN: 0689807155 (PreK-9 years)

Acclaimed anthologist, Lee Bennett Hopkins, has gathered over 50 wonderful poems that beg to be read aloud. This collection of story poems, finger plays, lively rhymes, funny poems, story poems, and poems containing the make-believe will delight the ears and the hearts of young children. This anthology includes works from the classic poets such as R.L. Stevenson, Edward Lear, and Lewis Carroll, along with newer voices including Nancy Willard and Mary Ann Hoberman. Kathryn Brown has lovingly illustrated this book.

James, Simon (ed.) (2000). *Days Like This: A Collection of Small Poems*. Cambridge,

MA: Candlewick. ISBN: 0763608122 (6-9 years)

A catchy anthology containing 19 short, simple poems from the old to the new. Poems by Eve Merriam, Ogden Nash, Charlotte Zolotow, and others describe the small child's everyday surroundings. There are poems about sleeping outdoors, watching the rain, walking through the woods, playing on the beach, walking a crowded city sidewalk, and jumping on the bed. Complementary line and watercolour illustrations by James show lots of children having fun.

Sage, Allison (ed.) (1998). *The Hutchinson Treasury of Children's Poetry*. London:

Random House. ISBN: 0091767482 (PreK-12 years)

A treasury containing over 300 of the best poems from the past to the contemporary including R.L. Stevenson's "Where Go The Boats", Eleanor Farjeon's "Cats", and Judith Viorst's "Secrets". It begins with traditional Mother Goose nursery rhymes and continues with rhymes and poems for young children. Next, poems for older children and a section containing classics by Keats, Shelley, and Shakespeare are included. This collection is an eye-catching blend of 50 master illustrators, including Kate Greenaway, Quentin Blake, and Rachel Isadora.

#### Specialized Anthologies

A shorter collection of poems on a specific topic is the trend in poetry publication today. Specialized poetry collections are organized around a particular subject or theme. A single poet or several poets may author these anthologies. These themed collections certainly suit the style of thematic instruction of today's classroom. Every classroom should have several quality specialized collections.

Mavor, Sally (ed.) (1997). *You and Me: Poems of Friendship*. Illustrations by Sally

Mavor. New York: Orchard. ISBN: 0531300455 (7-9 years)

A collection of 19 poems that celebrate the important relationships in children's lives. Poets including Karla Kuskin, Langston Hughes, Judith Viorst, and other newer voices explore family, friends, pets, and children themselves. This lively collection is

complemented by lively illustrations. It is Mavor's unique detailed fabric relief artwork that really makes turning the page so hard to do.

Nicholls, Judith (ed.) (2000). *Someone I Like: Poems about People*. Illustrations by Giovanni Manna. New York: Barefoot. ISBN: 1841480045 (6-9 years)

A personal collection of poems about the relationships children have with those around them – parents, siblings, extended family, and friends. A familiar subject to all. Poets of many different backgrounds from around the world explore the feelings of happiness, sadness, love, and anger. Giovanni Manna multiculturally illustrates the 26 poems.

Opie, Iona (ed.) (1999). *Here Comes Mother Goose*. Illustrated by Rosemary Wells. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick. ISBN: 0763606839 (Birth-7 years)

The large print of the text and the vividly appealing illustrations make this oversized Mother Goose volume especially appropriate to share with the very young. The rhythm and rhyme of the selections offer opportunities for language play through active participation and response. The collection of more than 60 traditional nursery rhymes is attractively placed on each page without overwhelming the reader. Many of Rosemary Wells' glorious full-page ink and watercolour illustrations face a rhyme. This is a superb Mother Goose collection.



Prelutsky, Jack (ed.) (1997). *The Beauty of the Beast: Poems from the Animal Kingdom*.

Illustrations by Meilo So. New York: Knopf. ISBN: 067987058X (4-9 years)

A collection containing over 200 poems about the animal kingdom. From creepy crawlies, to creatures of the deep, to those that take flight, to beasts of the land; over 100 twentieth century children's poets from around the globe are presented. Meilo So has lustroously illustrated this treasury with vivid watercolour paintings.

Prelutsky, Jack (ed.) (1998). *Imagine That!: Poems of Never-Was*. Illustrations by Kevin

Hawkes. New York: Knopf. ISBN: 0679882065 (7-9 years)

A collection of an assemblage of the 50 weirdest poems by such comical poets as Dr. Seuss, Lewis Carroll, Dennis Lee, Sheree Fitch, and, of course, Jack Prelutsky. The reader's imagination is poked at and tickled in many unimaginable ways by such creations as the Flotz, the Wendigo, and the Spangled Pandemonium. Hawkes' uncanny illustrations complement the weird and the odd that is sure to be loved by young children.

Smith, William Jay and Ra, Carol (eds.) (1996). *The Sun Is Up: A Child's Year of Poems*.

Illustrations by Jane Chambless Wright. Honesdale, PN: Boyds Mills.

ISBN: 1563970295 (5-9 years)

The seasonal pleasures of each month is celebrated in this collection of 25 poems from January's white blanket, to the kite days of March, to the lazy August afternoon, to October's gold, to the first snow of December. There are classics from R.L. Stevenson,

Eleanor Farjeon, and Langston Hughes as well as current poems from Smith and Ra. The watercolour illustrations by Jane Chambless Wright capture the spirit of each month.

### Individualized Anthologies

Individualized poetry anthologies contain the works of a single author. The poems may evolve around a single subject or theme or they may be selected and arranged into several categories. The poems may be new or old or a combination of both.

Hoberman, Mary Ann (1998). *The Llama Who Had No Pajama*. Illustrated by Betty Fraser. New York: Harcourt Brace. ISBN: 0152001115 (5-12 years)

A lively collection of 100 poems containing the elements of fine poetry and speaking to children by drawing on childhood experiences. Delightful nonsense, swinging rhythms and whimsical illustrations appeal directly to the young. Selected from over forty years of her work, Mary Ann Hoberman covers everything from applesauce to snow to windshield wipers. Her poetry will tickle the funny bone and help the reader to see the world from a slightly different perspective.

Lillegard, Dee (2001). *Hello School!: A Classroom of Poems*. Illustrations by Don Carter. New York: Knopf. ISBN: 037581020X (4-6 years)

An exciting collection of 38 short, quick poems overflowing with fantastic rhyme. Familiar objects of the primary classroom such as beads, cubbies, the calendar, new shoes, the water fountain and a tambourine remind young readers that poetry really is all

around them. The brightly coloured three-dimensional paintings by Don Carter unveil the characters of simple classroom items.

Moore, Lilian (2001). *I'm Small and other verses*. Illustrations by Jill McElmurry.

Cambridge, MA: Candlewick. ISBN: 0763611697 (4-6 years)

A cheerful collection of short poems about childhood. The diverse topics are those that are familiar to the young child and include growing, feet, sand, waiting, and a bundling snowsuit. The larger print and the uncomplicated cheery illustrations by Jill McElmurry invite younger readers to spend time with this text.

Prelutsky, Jack (ed.) (1997). *Dinosaur Dinner (With A Slice of Alligator Pie): Favorite Poems by Dennis Lee*. Illustrations by Debbie Tilley. New York: Knopf.

ISBN: 0679970096 (5-9 years)

A hilarious collection of some of Dennis Lee's silliest poetry, including "The Perfect Pets", "Alligator Pie" and other catchy poems with strong rhythm and rhyme. Chosen by the master of nonsense himself, Jack Prelutsky, this book is foolishly illustrated by Debbie Tilley.

Schnur, Steven (2001). *Summer: An Alphabet Acrostic*. Illustrations by Leslie Evans.

New York: Clarion. ISBN: 0618023720 (7-9 years)

In a unique and inventive fashion, Schnur's alphabetically-arranged acrostic poems celebrate the sights and sounds of summer. The splendid season is celebrated through the

collection of seasonal words from awning to hike to mosquitoes to vegetables to zodiac.

Leslie Evans' hand-coloured linoleum-cut illustrations are striking and captivating.

Companion books: *Autumn: An Alphabet Acrostic* (1997), *Spring: An Alphabet Acrostic* (1999), *Winter: An Alphabet Acrostic* (2002).

Schoonmaker, Frances (ed.) (2000). *Robert Louis Stevenson*. Illustrations by Lucy

Corvino. New York: Sterling. ISBN: 0806949562 (5-9 years)

Robert Louis Stevenson's poetry has been captivating young and old alike for more than a century. Thirty-two of his most pleasurable children's poems, mostly from his classic children's book, *A Child's Garden of Verses*, are magically illustrated in detailed watercolors. Also included is an introduction about the life and work of this classic children's poet.

#### Single Poem Picture Books

No classroom should be without the single poem editions of several traditional and contemporary poems. The picture book format blends the text of a poem with beautiful, stunning illustrations to create not only a memorable oral reading experience but a striking visual one, too. The vibrant, detailed visual cues offered by the illustrations prompt young children to chime in with eagerness and enthusiasm to the poetic text.

Asch, Frank (1999). *Song of the North*. Photographs by Ted Levine. San Diego, CA:

Harcourt Brace. ISBN: 0152012583 (6-9 years)

A wonderful celebration in verse and photographs of seven creatures that inhabit the vast rugged land of the North. Fish, birds, and animals are presented in their pristine surroundings through Ted Levine's brilliant nature photographs. The poetic text is simple and repetitive and provides a few facts about these northern inhabitants. At the end, a child is shown touching the earth and listening to nature's songs being sung by these living things. Each creature is identified on the last page.

Fitch, Sheree (1997). *There's a Mouse in my House*. Illustrations by Leslie E. Watts.

Toronto, ON: Doubleday. ISBN: 0385255616 (6-9 years) **CANADIAN**

A charming, fun to read tale told in rhyme, a young boy must try to get rid of a mouse from his house. The mouse, trying to avoid certain death asks the boy to grant her three final wishes. And so, over a glass of ginger ale and a piece of cheese, she tells her unbelievable yet sincere story to a listening boy. Will he side with his hysterical mother of the storyteller with whiskers as fine as feathery spaghetti? The illustrations by Leslie Watts are just as amusing and unforgettable as the poem.

Fitch, Sheree (2001). *No Two Snowflakes*. Illustrations by Janet Wilson. Victoria, BC:

Orca. ISBN: 1551432064 (7-9 years) **CANADIAN**

This book celebrates the closeness of the wonderful differences in our world. It is a poetic response from Lou, a Canadian child, to Araba, his pen pal who asked him "What is

snow?”. The sights, sounds, tastes, and touch of the white snow are described in rich, lyrical verse and are compared to Araba’s familiar warm sand. Janet Wilson’s oil paintings affectionately illustrate this poem.

Little, Jean (1999). *I Know An Old Laddie*. Illustrations by Rose Cowles. Toronto, ON: Viking. ISBN: 067088085X (7-9 years) **CANADIAN**

Children enjoy the nonsense poem, “I Know An Old Lady Who Swallowed A Fly”. They will definitely enjoy this newest dimension of an old laddie who swallowed a flea... and a piranha... and a puffin... and a wapiti... and a giraffe... and more! He is an obvious relative but with a slightly different and distinct taste. Rose Cowles eccentric collage illustrations bring additional humor to the verse. Of course the big question is... does he die?

Miranda, Anne (1997). *To Market, To Market*. Illustrations by Janet Stevens. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace. ISBN: 0152000356 (4-6 years)

This picture book begins with the familiar favourite nursery rhyme about buying a fat pig at the market. It continues with the unfamiliar rhyme, however, as the narrator returns to the market to buy a hen and then again to buy a goose, then a trout, and more! Each time she returns home she finds that the animals have invaded her house and caused a calamity that grows and grows. The collage illustrations by Janet Stevens compliment the wackiness of this contorted nursery rhyme.

Wolfe, Francis (2001). *Where I Live*. Toronto, ON: Tundra. ISBN: 0887765297

(7-9 years) **CANADIAN**

A stunningly illustrated picture book with double-page spreads that bring the reader to the seashore through a variety of fresh perspectives. The simple verse is also invigorating to the heart and the mind. In this book, sunbeams “sparkle like diamonds on the water” and evening breezes “dance with ... bedroom curtains”. The reader can vicariously experience the coolness of the ocean on one’s feet and the sea breeze blowing through one’s hair through the words and art.

#### Teacher Resources

The following listing contains six practical books that promote poetry in the primary classroom. You will find many valuable suggestions, ideas and strategies to bring children and poetry together in the classroom in meaningful ways.

Cullinan, Bernice, Marilyn C. Scala, & Virginia C. Schroder (1995). *Three Voices: An Invitation to Poetry Across the Curriculum*. York, ME: Stenhouse.

ISBN: 1571100156 (Primary–Elementary grades)

A practical book that focuses on three aspects: developing a love of poetry, discovering how poetry works, and using poetry in content areas. These three sections contain 33 specific strategies, almost 300 quick suggestions for pursuing poetry in the classroom, and many examples of student work. Personal accounts from Scala and Schroder telling how they found each strategy to work in the classroom are insightful.

Harrison, David L. & Bernice E. Cullinan (1999). *Easy Poetry Lessons that Dazzle and Delight*. New York: Scholastic. ISBN: 0590120506 (Grades 3-6)

This book is the work of a poet, David Harrison, and of a teacher, Dr. Bernice Cullinan. It contains 50 reproducible poems and activities that illustrate the elements and forms of poetry. An interesting and practical first chapter shares favourite ways of celebrating poetry in the classroom by a variety of teachers. The following sections are divided into short strategy lessons on specific poetic elements and forms. Concise explanations are provided and activities that engage the students in exploring illustrated reproducible poems are given. A handy glossary of poetic terminology and a listing of poetry anthologies can be found at the back.

Hopkins, Lee Bennett (1998). *Pass the Poetry, Please*. (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). New York: HarperCollins. ISBN:0060277467 (Primary-Elementary grades)

Teacher-poet-anthologist, Lee Bennett Hopkins, presents numerous suggestions and activities to get teachers and students interested and involved in the reading, writing, and enjoyment of poetry from Mother Goose to Dr. Seuss and beyond. Twenty-four contemporary children's poets are also introduced through brief biographies. This is an updated version of a well-known resource of over 25 years.



Larrick, Nancy (1991). *Let's Do A Poem: Introducing Poetry to Children*. New York:

Delacorte. ISBN: 0385302924 (Primary grades)

Nancy Larrick is a popular anthologist and expert on reading. This is a good resource book, overflowing with ideas on how to bring children and poetry together in imaginative and meaningful ways. Larrick focuses on the rhythm, language, movement, and drama of poetry and shows how to bring these poetic elements and young children together in exciting and meaningful ways. 98 favourite songs and poems from folk literature, Mother Goose, and well-known poets such as Gwendolyn Brooks, John Ciardi, Karla Kuskin, and David McCord are included.

McClure, Amy A. (1990). *Sunrises and Songs: Reading and Writing Poetry in an*

*Elementary Classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann. ISBN: 0435085077

(Primary-Elementary grades)

A book for those who want to make poetry an important part of their classroom teaching. It is the story of two elementary schoolteachers and their multi-age, rural classroom of fifth- and sixth-grade students with no previous experience with poetry. The journey discusses the ups and downs of poetry writing, reading, discussion, sharing and presenting techniques experienced by these educators. Why some teaching strategies worked and others did not are also shared. This book will assist teachers in learning how to introduce poetry to children and will encourage the writing and refining of poetry.

Sweeney, Jacqueline (2000). *Fun 15-Minute Poetry-Writing Activities*. New York: Scholastic. ISBN: 0439117658 (Grades 2-4)

A fun collection of quick and easy poetry writing activities. Twenty-five model poems written by favorite children's authors on a variety of popular topics are illustrated on reproducible pages. Teacher pages share background information about the poem and provide tips for presentation. Simple to follow steps for triggering children's thinking, promoting class discussion, and encouraging children to write their own terrific poems based on the model are given. This book promotes the use of poetry across the curriculum.

#### Internet Sites

There are many Internet sites related to poetry. The following six provide an overview of the types of poetry Internet sites that are available. There is a children's site where they can learn about poetry and publish their own poems, sites that provide teachers with suggestions on how to promote poetry in the classroom, and a children's poet's web site. Many poets have their own web sites, however, Kristine O'Connell George's was chosen because of its instant appeal of recorded poetry clips and illustrated poems. You are sure to find many other appealing sites.

[www.gigglepoetry.com](http://www.gigglepoetry.com) This is a web site of humorous children's poetry by Bruce Lansky and Meadowbrook Press. Children will enjoy this large archive of illustrated comical poems. A "Poetry Fun" link contains poems children can read and rate, quick fill-in-the-blank poems, and a poetry theater of poems for choral speaking. A "Poetry

Class” link teaches children how to write some simple forms of poetry. A companion web site for teachers, [www.poetryteachers.com](http://www.poetryteachers.com) offers ideas for performing poetry, getting children excited about poetry, and has fun lesson ideas for promoting beginning poetry writing.

[www-personal.umich.edu/~pfa/dreamhouse/nursery/rhymes.html](http://www-personal.umich.edu/~pfa/dreamhouse/nursery/rhymes.html) This uncomplicated site contains over 300 Mother Goose rhymes that can be easily identified through a helpful alphabetical master list. They are easy to print because there are no graphics. There are also links on reading aloud to children and an annotated list of some Mother Goose treasures.

[www.kristinegeorge.com/](http://www.kristinegeorge.com/) This is one of the best children’s poet’s web sites. Children will enjoy reading the captivating illustrated poems of Kristine O’Connell George and listening to her recorded poetry clips. George gives teachers many noteworthy ideas and resources for teaching poetry, including a link with more than 30 ways to celebrate poetry. Helpful teaching guides for several of her poetry collections are available here as well as useful links to other poetry web sites.

[www.educationworld.com/a\\_curr/curr399.shtml](http://www.educationworld.com/a_curr/curr399.shtml) This is an informative curriculum article by poet Kenn Nesbitt titled, “A Good Poem Will Give You Goose Bumps”. Nesbitt discusses why poetry is important to children and how teachers and parents can inspire

their children to love poetry. Teachers will find a practical and helpful list of ways to meaningfully engage children with poetry.

[www.rifnet.org/205/205\\_index.html](http://www.rifnet.org/205/205_index.html) "Poetry, Fun with Words" is for teachers who wish to promote poetry in their classroom. Featured items include a discussion of what poetry is, strategies for reading poetry aloud by Lee Bennett Hopkins, and tips on teaching poetry to children. A key feature is a message board. Here, teachers may participate in an ongoing discussion about poetry.

[www.boydsmillpress.com//poetryhouse.tpl](http://www.boydsmillpress.com//poetryhouse.tpl) "House of Poetry" by Bernice E. Cullinan was first published as a booklet to spread an enthusiasm for poetry among teachers of young children. It is a must read for those who wish to promote an enjoyment of poetry for their children. There are many quick classroom ideas, strategies for introducing poetry into other curriculum areas, advice for building a love of poetry, and a link on how poetry can assist children to learn to read.

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