



The TASTE AND TALK OF A POEM:

Adults reading poetry with children



Our earliest experience of language is poetry: nursery rhymes, playground chants, dipping games, jingles, songs. Poems make language taste delicious and are just as much fun for the ear as for the eye. Reading a poem without reading it aloud is like reading music on the page without hearing it played.

Try reading a poem to yourself - quietly. Then close your eyes and ask someone to read it to you aloud.



HIPPO WRITES A LOVE POEM TO HIS WIFE

Oh my beautiful fat wife
Larger to me than life
Smile broader than the river Nile
My winsome waddlesome
You do me proud in the shallow of morning
You do me proud in the deep night
Oh, my bodysome mud-basking companion.

John Agard

Rainbow World: Poems from Many Cultures (Hodder Wayland 2003)



It is great fun for adults and children to read together and poetry books are perfect for this because you can:

- start reading anywhere in the book
- read more slowly
- read it many times
- read aloud (even when alone)
- listen for sounds and rhythms
- enjoy the shapes of poems and look at the illustrations



LONGING

I wish I was a little grub
With whiskers round my tummy.
I'd climb into the honey pot
And make my tummy gummy.

English

Mouth to Mouth: Oral Poems from Around the World

(Walker Books 2004)



Some words go in a straight line from the page to your brain. Words like: "Stop!", "Keep Out", and "Final Notice". Poems on the other hand travel in coils and zigzags. We revisit, reread, we recall, puzzle and ponder.

Children (and adults) can feel a pressure for their reading to be certain and without pause, but with poetry, tentative is good. Thinking aloud helps show young people how adults read.

Poems love their readers. They unfold and stretch when the reader starts to talk...

"That reminds me of..."

"That made me see..."

"What puzzles me is..."

"I wonder if..."

"It made me think..."

... These are just some of the things poets hope you will say when you read their poems.

You can't wear out poems! Like pearls, they get better the more they are used: brighter, warmer, more polished. A good poem will reveal a little extra each time it is revisited.

Some poems look unusual; it is not always easy to know how to read them. It isn't done to deliberately befuddle, it's done to please.



WE REAL COOL

The Pool Player.

Seven at the Golden Shovel.

We real cool. We
Left school. We

Lurk late. We
Strike straight. We

Sing sin. We
Thin gin. We

Jazz June. We
Die soon.

Gwendolyn Brooks

Wicked Poems (Bloomsbury Children's Books 2002)

In this poem, Pulitzer Prize winner Gwendolyn Brooks plays with white space. She wrote this poem nearly 50 years ago and it still fizzes with freshness. If she had written it this way

We real cool.
We left school.
We lurk late.
We strike straight.
We sing sin.
We thin gin.
We jazz June.
We die soon.

some of the fizz would be lost.

So it's fun for they eye - but how do you read it aloud? Many poets say the end of a line counts as a half-comma, which means you don't have to stop dead at the end of each line.

Reading together is special. Children in schools always put their hands up with great pride to tell the class that someone in their family either writes or reads poems with them. But it is not always easy to find this time in busy lives, and W.H Davies writes about this beautifully in his poem, Leisure.



LEISURE

What is this life if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.

No time to stand beneath the boughs
And stare as long as sheep or cows.

No time to see, when woods we pass,
Where squirrels hide their nuts and grass.

Not time to see, in broad daylight,
Steams full of stars like skies at night.

No time to turn at Beauty's glance,
And watch her feet, how they can dance.

No time to wait till her mouth can
Enrich the smile her mouth began

A poor life this if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.

W.H. Davies

Sensational! (Macmillan Children's Books 2004)

If you do find the time to read together, let us know your favourite bedtime poems. Which ones make you laugh, which ones do you come back to time and time again? If they are from CPBS selection books we might be able to put them on the website and recommend them on. Happy reading.



WHEN GOD GAVE OUT NOSES

When God gave out noses
I thought he said 'Roses'
So I asked for a big red one.

When He handed out legs
I thought he said 'Eggs'
So I asked for two, hard-boiled.

When he gave out looks
I thought he said 'Books'
So I said I didn't want any.

When he gave out brains
I though he said 'Trains'
And so I missed mine.

Anon

Sensational! (Macmillan Children's Books 2004)

