

Children's Poetry

by Traci Wood

When you saw the name of this article, were you:

(a) filled with a sense of expectation because, as everyone knows, poetry enriches your life and fills your soul with beauty?

(b) filled with a desire to find your favorite blanket and go to sleep because, as everyone knows, poetry is a one-way ticket to Snoozeville?

(c) filled with a desire to jump from a moving vehicle in order to escape even the mention of the word poetry? (If so, we had the same 12th grade English teacher.)

or

(d) eager to find out how you can use poetry to help your students become better and more enthusiastic readers?

If you chose (d), you're in luck! For those of you who chose (b) or (c), I plan to be so interesting and informative that you will feel compelled to change your answer.

I love using poetry in my storytime. I don't incorporate it because research says that it is important. I use it because it's fun. Each week a different author "sends" our storytime friends a poetry postcard. We make a big deal of checking the mailbox to see if there are postcards inside. But before I check, the children must convince me of their love of poetry. That's why if you stopped by at 11:00 on a Thursday morning, you would hear an enthusiastic and very loud group of children shouting the following chant.

Shout it, shout it.

Poetry!

Fun for you and fun for me.

Clap your hands.

Stomp your feet.

Feel the rhythm. Feel the beat.

Shout it, shout it.

Poetry!

Fun for you and fun for me.

If I am convinced of their love, we open the mailbox and find a postcard for everyone. These are added to rings and collected over the course of the year. These "rhymes on a ring" can be pulled out and used when waiting in line at Walmart, the doctor's office, carpool line, etc. The point is that there are times in most every day when we are forced to wait, so why not use that time to play with language and have a little fun. Instead of the normal meltdown, you might just find yourself connecting with your kids through the use of poetry. This idea can be adapted to the classroom. If you have ever been asked, for example, to bring your class to the auditorium for class pictures at 9 a.m., and found a line that is worthy of a Rolling Stones concert, then you can understand how nice it would be to whip out your ring and become a poetry hero! Even children who are just beginning to read will gain confidence when asked to take home a ring and "read" it to their parents. This is just one way to incorporate poetry into your day. I know you will already have thought of a million others. It doesn't matter how you do it, just do it! And for those of you who would like to share the "why" of poetry with your parents, the rest of this article is for you!

According to the National Institute for Literacy, poetry is "especially suited to fluency practice because poems for children are often short and they contain rhythm, rhyme, and meaning, making practice easy, fun, and rewarding."

And if that isn't enough, here are eight reasons to integrate poetry into your school day:

1. Poetry develops oral language.
2. Poetry develops auditory memory.
3. Poetry helps children make print connections.
4. Poetry develops phonological awareness (rhyme, rhythm, alliteration).
5. Poetry enhances fluency.
6. Poetry develops vocabulary.
7. Poetry sparks children's interest in reading.
8. Poetry helps children fall in love with language.

So now you know. Poetry is the bomb! It's time to rock your classroom!