

Happy Poetry Month

Tips to Celebrate with Rhyme!

There are all kinds of poetry, and many are non-rhyming. Rhyme, however, does have a special place in helping children to develop literacy skills. It is also a lot of fun from toddler age all the way through the elementary years.

Pre-K

- Choose a puppet to become a “poetry puppet”. You can give it a personality of its own as a creature who adores rhyme. Through the familiarity of the puppet (I use a “poetry pig” but any animal or person will do) the children begin to associate poems with fun.
- Introduce a short poem each week (Jane Yolen’s anthology “Here’s a Little Poem: A Very First Book of Poetry” is a good pick). Read and recite it each day; even preschoolers can quickly learn a new poem by heart.
- Using hands, feet, and body to act out parts of the poetry makes the lines memorable and fun.

Grades K-2

- Read aloud rhyming poems and books. Many poems are stories. Classic rhyming books such as those by Dr. Seuss (try some of his lesser known ones like “I Had Trouble in getting to Solla Sollew”) have a story to tell that is made more humorous and memorable by the rhyme scheme.
- This age group is school-tested on their ability to both generate and recognize rhymes. Keep it silly and successful by opening the rhyme games to words that may not be real and have a certain “Dr. Seuss” sound. They can learn to rhyme anything this way: dish, gish, nish, pish etc.
- A fun game to play with the kindergarten and first grade crowd is “pass the puppet”. It works best with small groups. The adult asks for a rhyme to a word she proposes and gives every child a chance to come up with one. Each child passes the puppet to the next child who answers correctly. This game can also be played with guessing if two words rhyme or don’t rhyme.

Grades 3-5

- Poetry is meant to be heard. Kids at this age often enjoy reading a fun poem aloud to the class (perhaps from a Shel Silverstein collection).
- Students can dramatize silly poems in pairs or small groups
- Students can generate their own “nursery rhymes” by using traditional ones and changing them around. Creating parodies is an excellent way to play with rhyme and learn to make poems. (For example, “Jack be nimble, Jack be quick” could start “Jane be clever, Jane be smart....”)

Rhyme on! Karen Jo Shapiro

Karen Jo Shapiro is a published author of two poetry collections for children; “I Must Go Down to the Beach Again and Other Poems” (Charlesbridge, 2007) and “Because I could Not Stop My Bike and Other Poems” (Charlesbridge, 2003).

