Poetry in Motion

-Poems are drawn from the following list depending on the grade level of the audience.
-The programs for grades K-2, 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12 are quite different from each other and it is strongly suggested that teachers not arbitrarily mix audiences based on their specials or planning periods. Thank you.

Poems and Poets

Rebecca, Who Slammed Doors for Fun, Hillaire Belloc
The Frog, Hillaire Belloc
Jim Who Ran Away From His Nurse, Belloc
Jabberwocky, Lewis Carroll
The Walrus and the Carpenter, Lewis Carroll
Incident, Countee Cullen
Not in Vain, Emily Dickenson
A Narrow Fellow in the Grass, Emily Dickenson
I'm Nobody, Who Are You, Dickenson
The Base Stealer, Robert Francis
The Wood-Pile, Robert Frost
The Road Not Taken, Frost
Grounded, Florence Heide
Changing, Mary Ann Hoberman
Poem, Langston Hughes
Dreams, Langston Hughes
Little Lyric of Great Importance, L. Hughes
The Garden Hose, Beatrice Janosco
Hughbert and the Glue, Karla Kuskin
I Woke Up This Morning, Karla Kuskin
Crying, Galway Kinnell
Someone Came Knocking, Edward Lear
The Owl and the Pussycat, Edward Lear
When My Dog Died, Freya Littledale
Paul Revere's Ride, H.W. Longfellow
Steam Shovel, Charles Malam
Everytime I climb a Tree, David McCord
Books Fall Open, David McCord
This Is My Rock, D. McCord
Lone Dog, Irene Rutherford McLeod

The Island, A.A. Milne
The Market Square, A.A. Milne
The King's Breakfast, A.A. Milne
The Four Friends, A.A. Milne
The Vinegar Man, Ruth Comfort Mitchell
A Speck Speaks, Adrian Mitchell
The Sidewalk Racer, Lillian Morrison
The Adventures of Isabel, Ogden Nash
The Wendigo, Ogden Nash
Merlin and the Snake's Egg, Leslie Norris
The Highwayman, Alfred Noyes
The Raven, Edgar Allen Poe
The Creature in the Classroom, Prelutsky
Alley Cat with One Life Left, Prelutsky
New Kid on the Block, Jack Prelutsky
Peach, Rose Rauter
Keep a Poem in your Pocket, Beatrice Schenk De Regniers

Little Orphant Annie, James Whitcomb Riley
The Raggedy Man, J.W. Riley
"Alas poor Yorick," Shakespeare
"O for a muse of fire!" Shakespeare
Jimmy Jet and His TV Set, Silverstein
Puzzle, Arnold Spilka
The Land of Counterpane, Robert Louis Stevenson
Casey At The Bat, Ernest Lawrence Thayer
Up in the Pine, Nancy Dingman Watson
Listening to Grownups Quarreling, Ruth Whitman
The Song of Wandering Aengus, W.B. Yeats
Poetry in Motion
Teacher prep and follow up materials

Much of my inspiration for the actual shape of Poetry In Motion came from two superb books on children’s poetry:

Knock At A Star, A child’s introduction to poetry; by X.J. Kennedy and Dorothy M. Kennedy, Little Brown, pub.
Pass The Poetry Please, by Lee Bennett Hopkins; Harper and Row, pub.

There are many fine poems in these two anthologies as well as quotes about poetry, classroom activities, and project ideas. The information in this teacher prep packet gives you some of my favorites from the books as well as some original materials. For an in-depth study of poetry I recommend purchasing the above-mentioned books.

FAMOUS QUOTES
The following are interesting quotes about poetry, all by well-known writers of children’s verse. Many of them are used in the Poetry In Motion program without mentioning the authors of each quote. I take the opportunity here to give credit where credit is due:

“I really want a poem to sprout roses and spit bullets.” - Arnold Adoff

“My own personal preference is the music first that must sing out to me from the words. How does it sing, sound - then how does it look?” - Arnold Adoff

“A poem is an experience. Something that has happened to a person.” - Lee Bennett Hopkins

“Nothing - No Thing - can ring and rage through hearts and minds as does poetry.” - Lee Bennett Hopkins

“My poetry is just a bubbling up of a natural foolishness, and the idea that maybe you can make language dance a bit. Being a poet is like being a musician. Language is an instrument and you can’t stop playing.” - John Ciardi

“If there were a recipe for a poem, these would be the ingredients: Word Sounds, Rhythm, Description, Feeling, Memory, Rhyme, and Imagination.” - Karla Kuskin
“Poetry for children should catch the eye as well as the ear and the mind. It should delight, it really has to delight.” - David McCord

“I find it difficult to sit still when I hear poetry or read it out loud. I feel a stinging all over, particularly in the tips of my fingers and in my toes, and it just seems to go right from my mouth all the way through my body.” - Eve Merriam

“A poem is very much like you, and that is quite natural since there is a rhythm in your own body; in your pulse, in your heartbeat, in the way you breathe, laugh, or cry, in the very way you speak. What can a poem do? Just about everything.” - Eve Merriam

“Poetry is beautiful shorthand.” - William Cole

“If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold that no fire can ever warm me, I know that is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry. These are the only ways I know it is. Is there another way?” - Emily Dickinson

“Poetry is speaking painting.” - Plutarch

“A lot of people think, or believe, or know they feel - but that’s thinking, or believing, or knowing; not feeling. And poetry is feeling - not knowing or believing or thinking.” - e.e cummings

“Poetry is the most effective way of saying things.” - Matthew Arnold

**WHAT CAN POEMS DO?**

(Poems taken from the enclosed list. Not all listed poems are performed in each program. Some poems are listed under several categories, and you may want to discuss why one poem can do many different things. - eg. Make you laugh and think).

**Make you laugh:** Good Sportsmanship, Rebecca, Who Slammed Doors for Fun..., The Walrus and the Carpenter, Hughbert and the Glue, I Woke Up This Morning, The Diatonic Dittymunch, Homework, Dainty Dottie Dee, I Found a Four-Leaf Clover, Alley Cat with One Life Left, Zany Zapper Zocke, New Kid on the Block, The King’s Breakfast, Little Orphant Annie

**Make you think:** The Raggedy Man, The Vinegar Man, The Seed Shop, “Think As I Think,” Said a Man, Not in Vain,

Send messages: The Vinegar Man, Paul Revere’s Ride, The First Thanksgiving, Rebecca, Who Slammed Doors for Fun... Jimmy Jet and His TV Set, Little Orphant Annie, Not in Vain,

Stir Memories: The Children’s Hour, This Is My Rock, Milking Time

Share feelings: This Is My Rock, Poem, Subway Rush Hour, Dreams, Halfway Down, Invitation, Listening to Grownups Quarreling, Bed In Summer, When My Dog Died

Share Experiences: Every time I Climb a Tree, Milking Time, The Land of Counterpane, I Woke Up This Morning

Start you wondering: What is the Matter With Mary Jane, The Sidewalk Racer, Not in Vain,

Make you feel better: Any of the poems can do that if they are a person’s favorite poem. A favorite poem, memorized and often recited (if only to one’s self) is as comfortable as an old shoe or an old friend, and can soothe a troubled mind.

Take you to far off or imaginary places: The Island, This Is My Rock, The Land of Counterpane

Keep you company: Keep a Poem in your Pocket, (Any poem that can make you feel better can also keep you company.)

WHAT ARE POEMS MADE OF?

Images: Listening to Grownups Quarreling, Not in Vain, A Narrow Fellow in the Grass,

Rhyme: Any of the rhyming poems. You may wish to discuss how poems do not have to rhyme and why they are called poems anyway.

Some non-rhyming poems from program: The Base Stealer, Fog, When My Dog Died, Poem (Langston Hughes), Listening to Grownups Quarreling

Rhythm: The Pickety Fence, The Raven, Annabelle Lee (and any of Jack Prelutsky’s or A.A. Milne’s poems)

Word Music: The Pickety Fence, The Raven, Hughbert and the Glue, Lone Dog

Imagination: The Raven, What is Poetry, This Is My Rock, The Walrus and the Carpenter

Feeling: The Market Square, Listening to Grownups Quarreling, Poem, Dreams, This Is My Rock, The House with Nobody in It

Memories and experiences:  My Papa’s Waltz,  Every time I climb a Tree, Milking Time,  The Land of Counterpane,  I Woke Up This Morning,  Bed In Summer,  When My Dog Died,  Listening to Grownups Quarreling,  A Narrow Fellow in the Grass,  This Is My Rock,  The House with Nobody in It

POETRY ACTIVITIES
(Taken from Pass The Poetry, by Lee Bennett Hopkins)

Best Poem of the Month:  At the beginning of each month, encourage students to find poems characteristic of that month or season of the year. These can be read aloud with each student telling why he or she chose the poem. At the end of the month students can vote for the best poem of that month and it can be displayed in the school on a poetry board. Best poems can be kept in a file to serve as a valuable resource over the years. You can hold poetry festivals with each class preparing their best poem as a performance for other classes.

Boxes and Poetry:  Have students decorate the sides of a cardboard box with interpretations and images from their favorite poems.

Poems about curriculum related subject matter:  For example, if there is a construction project going on near school, bring in poems about buildings; poems about the earth and universe for science classes; poems about food or health; about counting; about different cultures and differences among people from other lands; poems by poets from other cultures; etc.

Poetry and Geography:  Post a map of the USA and the World on a bulletin board. Have available books of poems featuring American and foreign poets. Let the students look through these and other books of poems and encourage them to research the part of the country/world their favorite poet comes from.

Poems about People:  There are thousands of poems about people, famous and otherwise. Stephen Vincent Benet’s “A Book of Americans” features such personalities as Johnny Appleseed, P.T. Barnum, Dolly Madison, and the Wright Brothers. There are poems about make believe people (Rebecca who Slammed Doors for Fun etc...) and about the person next door (postmen, police officers, firemen, doctors, pizza makers, shop owners, etc.) Children can be encouraged to make up short poems about people in their own neighborhood.

Poetry Hunts:  (developed by Dianne Weissberger, Germantown, Pa.) Students select a theme and find ten (or less, depending on grade level) related poems. Poems are transcribed into booklets illustrated with appropriate pictures. On the
last page of each booklet, the student writes a concluding paragraph explaining why he or she had chosen a particular theme and the specific poems.

**Pet poems:** There are a lot of poems about animals, real and imagined. If a child has a particular pet that she is close to, she may be inspired to find a number of poems about that pet, or to even write her own.

**A Picture for a Poem:** Dig into your own personal picture file and post an interesting photo on the bulletin board. Students can hunt for poems they feel fit the mood or describe the illustration. Catchy titles add to such displays and help fuel young imaginations (eg. “Sneak into this haunted house,” under the illustration of an old house.)

You can do the same thing by using pictures drawn by students in an art class. If students are unable to find a poem that goes along with the drawing, they can make up their own.

**Poems to Satisfy Young Appetites:** A bulletin board is set up featuring the question, “What’s For Lunch?” Stapling paper plates and gluing plastic utensils with a paper tablecloth for a background on the bulletin board can depict a table setting. On each plate a food poem can appear. There are volumes of poems about food and many anthologies are divided into categories, which often list food as one.

**Poems to Celebrate by:** Many anthologies about holidays, festivals, and seasons.

**Poet of the Month:** Use a bulletin board and tabletop display to highlight a particular poet of the month. The board can feature biographical information along with several of the poet's poems and a picture of him/her. The table display can feature volumes of the poet’s work, and, if available, a recording of his or her voice.

**A Poet Tree:** Branches can be arranged to create a “Poet Tree” by attaching them to a wall, or built on a sturdy stand (Christmas tree stand, flower pot, etc.). Favorite poems can be attached to the branches for others to read and enjoy.

**MEMORIZATION**

Memorizing poems can be fun if seen as an adventure or challenge. Children get turned off mostly because they are forced to memorize poems and passages that
possess little interest for them. Rather than making them memorize a famous poem or passage, have them pick a favorite poem, or a poem on a favorite subject. They will set out on the adventure of memory in a much more willing manner.

Make the unit one which focuses as much (if not more) on the process and mystery of memorization as it does on the subject of poetry. Learning is based on the ability to memorize! Testing what is learned relies totally on memory. Is there any other single aspect of the mind and intellect that is as important to education as Memory? No? O.K. then, where does the development of memory show up in our curriculum? NOWHERE!!! Students are expected, for the most part, to develop their memories sort of on-the-fly, as if everyone were born with the innate understanding of how to do it; as if it were automatic and all you had to do was to listen carefully to what the teacher was saying and the information would sink in and stay there ready for instant and total recall.

Memory is a fascinating tool of the intellect. It is a mental muscle that responds extremely well to exercise. Conversely, without exercise, Memory fades and atrophies. There are many techniques, which have been developed to exercise and enhance the memory. You can use word associations, visualization, acronyms, linking images with each other, etc.. There are several excellent books available on memory development. Memorizing poetry is one of the best ways in which to explore these tools and observe how they work. The very process of memorization can be observed and discussed when working on a poem. Students can share unique techniques they come up with for memorizing.

Start with short poems and work up to long ones, the longer the better eventually. Students will be amazed at what it is possible to commit to memory. There seems, literally, to be no end to what the brain can store and recall. Everyone can be successful at memorizing more than they thought possible; and such an accomplishment is a ready self-esteem builder. Thirty, forty, or even fifty years later people still proudly talk about poems they memorized in grade school. Some people can still recite them. The basis for Poetry In Motion was my eighth grade memorization and performance at a talent show, of Alfred Noyes’ “The Highway Man.”

Make the memorization process part of a poetry performance. Stage the presentations and rehearse with the students. Having been in front of an audience is an important part of engendering the sense of accomplishment the student needs, and it a great motivator for getting them to work on their poem. Encourage the use of costume pieces, the development of a “character” for the piece (eg. the Alley cat from “Alley Cat with One Life Left”) and rehearse specific movements to accompany the vocal performance.
Have a dress rehearsal where the pieces are performed by the class (no outside observers) and conduct the rehearsal exactly as if there were an outside audience (make up, costumes, lights, cues, no stops for mistakes, etc.). Depending on the anxiety level of the students you may decide on any number of options for the performance itself. Inviting just one class of younger students and holding the show in your classroom can obtain a low threat level. From there you can up the ante as far as an evening show with community attendance and printed programs. It is up to you, but remember, poetry dissolves under analysis. It is lovely to read, challenging to write, but cries out to be performed, to be spoken and listened to. It is a hibernating art and I dearly hope you will join me in its re-awakening.

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