

# Teaching Reading Skills through Poetry

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## **Overview**

The purpose of this unit is to incorporate poetry into the kindergarten classroom to improve reading skills, encourage language play, and develop stronger relationships with peers and family. It is important to introduce poetry into the primary grades. Often times, poetry is not taught until the middle grades, and at this point it is taught only for cognitive skills and these children tend not to develop a love and enjoyment of poetry. When poetry is brought into the primary grades it is used to teach cognitive skills as well as enjoyed for word play.

This unit will address why poetry is a perfect way to teach reading skills, encourage language play, and develop stronger relationships with peers and family.

## **Rationale**

### Using Poetry to Develop Pre-Reading Skills

Poetry has many benefits for children. Reading poetry can help develop pre-reading and reading skills in young children. Poetry is vocabulary enriched. It teaches grammar and other linguistic skills. It can also improve student's fluency in reading.

Many poems contain rhyme. Knowing how to rhyme will help a child to read. Teaching rhyming words in kindergarten teaches a basic component of phonics and a very important pre-reading skill. Teaching children to find, read, or create a list of rhyming words helps them recognize phonetic sounds. Phonetic sounds are the building blocks of reading.

Syllables can be taught using poetry. Syllables, the division of words, can enhance the students hearing, reading, and spelling (Build a Solid Foundation: Learning Abilities Books). You can have the students clap out the syllables in words to the patterns of poetry.

Alliteration can be introduced using poetry. Students love to hear alliteration, the same initial sounds, in poetry. It is important to have fun with alliteration. Students can even try making their own sentences using alliteration, for example, Megan made messy mud-pies. Depending on the age, students can write these alliterations themselves or you can record them for them.

Teaching students assonance, the repetition of vowel sounds in the middle or ending of a word can easily be taught in poetry. While teaching this skill, it is important to focus on having fun with the sounds of poetic expression, not to worry about spelling rules (Build a Solid Foundation: Learning Abilities Books).

Phonemes, the separate sounds in words, are another concept that can be taught through poetry. Using poetry to teach all the previous concepts gives students short verses to use in order to focus on specific skills. These skills can be taught and reviewed in mini-lessons using poetry or regular lessons using poetry.

### Poetry Encourages Language Play

During the first year of a baby's life, 90% of their vocal exchange consists of playing with language (Cumming 93-101). Children are immediately surrounded with culture of their social environment through this type of language play. This play will most likely include poems in the form of nursery rhymes. Nursery rhymes as a part of culture have exposed children to poetry at a very early age. Being exposed to poetry at an early age has shown that children are able to produce rhymes, rhythms, create songs and their own poems. This was discovered through a study of 200 oral stories told by five children aged between three and a half and five years old, the years right before entering into kindergarten (Cumming 93-101).

Studies have shown that word play is naturally enjoyable. After a study done by D. Crystal of 10 to 11 year olds engaged in creative word play, he states that these 10 to 11 year olds "are inordinately fond of word-play" and "that it is part of the normal human condition to spend an appreciable amount of time actively playing with language...or responding with enjoyment to the way others play" (Cumming 93-101). This takes us to the teacher. If the teacher is encouraging language play in the classroom, it can be seen as positive interactions with students and teachers, giving students a positive experience. It becomes part of the classrooms subculture.

As this subculture of language play becomes a part of the teaching and learning in the classroom, learning becomes more natural. The engagement between peers and the teacher gives a general feel of enjoyment and appreciation for reading. This in most cases is seen as the ideal classroom culture. W. H. Auden said, "Play is what we want to do. Work is what we have to do." Poetry is both of these.

### Importance of Memorizing Poetry in Childhood

The memorization of poetry has its benefits as well. When students memorize and recite poetry they develop enunciation, projection, and clarity in their oral speech. They develop a sense of rhythm, linguistic capacity, and verbal structure. Memorization also exercises a child's mental capacity and develops its flexibility and strength (Owens).

Reciting poetry after memorization, as well as developing enunciation, projection, and clarity, allows students to develop sophistication in their English language speaking. This sets students up for a bright future as those who read, write, and speak the English language at a high level will always be in high demand for good jobs.

Furthermore, the reciting of poetry bring children sheer enjoyment. Children get pleasure from the sounds of the rhythmic language in poetry. They are able to recall lines from poems anywhere they may be - on the bus, in the car, at the park, etc. As they recall the lines of poems, they can enjoy playing with the language with other peers and family members who also know the poems or they can teach them to others.

### Poetry Builds Bridges between Home and School

Language play is a natural part of children's development. It is enjoyed by most children with their families from the time they are born, including many popular songs and nursery rhymes. This beginning of language play at home allows the teacher to connect the child's experiences of language play at home to poetry in the classroom (Cummings 93-101).

Research completed by Burnett and Myers in 2002 suggests that children are engaged in various forms of rich literacy outside of the classroom, and while in the classroom they need the opportunity to explore their own literacy practices in order to build the bridge between home and school (Cummings 93-101). As children's experiences are accounted for, the information they learn about- metaphors, alliteration, onomatopoeia- will have relevance and meaning for them.

Poetry is a part of culture. There have been poems created for public occasions, for work, for weddings, for funerals, and for many other public and private celebrations. Poetry encourages parental bonds. Children and their parents share well-known verses, sing together, and recite poetry on car trips, at bedtimes, and even to say goodbyes.

## Poetry as a Tool with an ESL Child

Poetry can be a great tool to use with ESL students. Many poems are written across languages. Short, common verses could be a great tool for these students.

Many of the problems that are seen in the ESL classroom are that the students do not have the ability to communicate with the teacher in written or spoken form. Poetry gives the ESL students a different way to communicate with their teacher that may appear to be less threatening. This is because poetry allows for these students to take away the stress of correct punctuation and prose structure (Starz 57-68).

Children from all over the world have been exposed to nursery rhymes in their native language. Nursery rhymes are a simple form of poetry. Using these common nursery rhymes help students learn many new vocabulary words in the English language.

It is important to let ESL students know that poems do not always rhyme. The rhyme is a way of creating patterns in sound. These sound patterns can help students to remember words or phrases. Rhyming words have the same ending sounds, but it's important to know that they are not always spelled the exact same way. What matters is the ending sound. Rhyme in poetry is a great way for ESL student to practice distinguishing between sounds (Starz 57-68).

For ESL students, a teacher can use one simple poem and build an entire lesson around the punctuation and capitalization within it. Students can create their own poems as well. As they use their own poems to make corrections in spelling and grammar, as this will take time, it will have extreme meaning to each student who transforms their own poem into an extraordinary piece.

Poems can help to increase an ESL student's vocabulary, to distinguish between verbs and adjectives, develop a rhythm of the language and learn how to use tone for emphasis.

## Making Poetry Choices

There are tons of great poetry collections to choose from. Some may be best for young children such as babies, toddlers, and preschoolers, some may be best for children of elementary age, and other poems may be best for teens. The important thing to realize is poetry can work for all ages!

Mother Goose nursery rhymes are great for young learners. They allow the youngest readers to develop pre-reading skills. Mother Goose's nursery rhymes play with rhymes and sounds, excellent for teaching phonological awareness, where children can simply play with the sounds of her words. A great book of Mother Gooses' nursery rhymes is *My Very First Mother Goose* by Iona Opie. This book contains over 60

nursery rhymes written by Mother Goose (MacPherson). Other poems appropriate and wonderful for pre-readers are *Read-Aloud Rhymes for the Very Young*, a collection of more than 200 poems chosen by Jack Prelutsky and *Here's A Little Poem: A Very First Book of Poetry*, a collection of poems by Jane Yolen and Andrew Fusek Peters (MacPherson).

For children of elementary level, grades 1 through 5, along with nursery rhymes, students at these ages may enjoy looking at poetry in more depth. An interesting book that explains all kinds of poetry is *A Kick in the Head: An Everyday Guide to Poetic Forms* edited by Paul B. Janeczko. This book not only allows students to work with more in-depth poems, it also teaches them about specific types of poetry such as riddles, limericks, and haikus.

For teens, they may enjoy the book *Falling Hard*, a collection of poems edited by poet Betsy Franco. These poems are all about love and all written by teens. This is great because at this point in their life, teens are beginning to see poetry as personal and can relate to this type of writing.

## **Objectives**

This unit is intended for students in kindergarten. It is a five day unit that can be repeated with new poems each week. The objectives of the unit include the following:

- The students will be able to develop pre-reading skills through poetry.
- The students will be able to recognize rhyming words through poetry.
- The students will be able to develop an understanding of print concepts.
- The students will be able to demonstrate reading comprehension through illustrations.
- The students will be able to make predictions based on prior knowledge.
- The students will be able to identify the elements of a sentence.

## **Strategies**

### Shared Reading

During shared reading the entire class is read one story or poem aloud. During this story time all the students are able to hear the story or poem and see the pictures. Shared reading will be used to begin most lessons. Shared reading is a valuable tool to model reading for children. It also gives students rich and authentic literature experience even at their earliest stages of reading. Advanced readers are able to be challenged by the language of the selections and, with the support of the teacher, students who are not as developed in reading are still gaining reading skills needed for success.

## Think-Pair-Share

Think-Pair-Share is another strategy that will be used. During Think-Pair-Share, students will think in their head for several minutes about a question or idea, and then they will turn to the person next to them and share their thoughts. Think-Pair-Share allows for an increase in the quality of student responses. It gives students time to think and respond to questions or prompts. It also relieves the pressure off of students who may be intimidated to respond in front of the whole group. As students are discussing their responses they are also talking out their answers and are able to make better sense of their ideas.

## Activating Prior Knowledge

The teacher will activate prior knowledge through each lesson. Through activating prior knowledge, teachers are helping children to connect the text to what they already know. Activating prior knowledge helps students to begin to make connections to the new text they will be reading. When students are able to make connections to text they become more invested in the text they are reading or listening to.

## Graphic Organizers

Students will use graphic organizers throughout this unit. Graphic organizers are a tool that allows students to visually express ideas and concepts. When students use graphic organizers they are able to see undiscovered patterns and relationships that they may not have seen by simply reading or listening to a story. Graphic organizers also help to facilitate conversation about the story and make an excellent reference.

## Modeling

Modeling will be used by the teacher to help convey understanding of new ideas and methods. Modeling is when the teacher demonstrates how to complete different activities by saying aloud the thought process.

## **Classroom Activities**

The following lessons are based on a 5 day cycle. The cycle can be repeated with a new poem each week focusing on new sight words and skills. The poem can be based on your classroom theme, current interests in the classroom, seasons, holiday, etc. The poem I have chosen is just one suggestion. I have included a list of suggested poems as well following the lesson plans.

When beginning this 5 day cycle, each student should be given their own poetry book. It can be a simple 8 ½" by 11" notebook that the students can glue or tape their poems into. Plan for the first cycle to give students time to write their name and personalize their

poetry notebooks through drawings and pictures. Find a special place in the reading center where the Poetry Notebooks can be kept so that students can refer to them during reading time.

### ***Lesson 1/Day 1: Prediction***

Objectives:

- The student will be able to make prediction based on prior knowledge.
- The students will be able to understand the meaning or the message of the poem.

Materials:

- The poem *Hey Diddle Diddle* by Mother Goose

Hey, diddle, diddle,  
The cat and the fiddle,  
The cow jumped over the moon.  
The little dog laughed  
To see such sport,  
And the dish ran away with the spoon.

- The poem *Hey Diddle Diddle* copied on 8 ½” by 11” paper with room for illustrations for each student.
- Pointer

Procedure:

Prior to introducing the new poem, write the poem on a piece of chart paper. To make it easier for students to read, write each line in alternating colors. Begin by showing your students the poem and reading aloud the title. Have students make predictions about what they think the poem is going to be about using their prior knowledge. Have students Think-Pair-Share their predictions. Read the poem aloud. Use a pointer to point to each word as you read it. Be sure to read the poem with inflection. After reading ask the students questions about the poem. For example:

- What was this poem about?
- Was your prediction correct? Why or why not?
- Did you like this poem?
- What did you like or dislike about this poem?

Place the 8 ½” by 11” copy of the poem in your poetry book kept in reading center.

### ***Lesson 2/Day 2: Vocabulary***

Objectives:

- The students will be able to understand the meaning or the message of the poem.
- The students will be able to identify new vocabulary.

Materials:

- The poem *Hey Diddle Diddle* by Mother Goose
- The poem *Hey Diddle Diddle* copied on 8 ½” by 11” paper with room for illustrations for each student.
- Pointer
- Highlighter tape

Procedure:

Reread the poem aloud as a class. Ask students if there are any words in this poem that are new for them and maybe they are unsure of what they mean. Give students the opportunity to underline these words with highlighter tape. Some words the students might choose would be *diddle*, *fiddle*, *sport*, and *dish*. If there are any words you feel are important for the students to learn the meaning of that they may have not picked out, underline them as well with the highlighting tape. After reviewing the new vocabulary words, discuss what each word means. Help the students to use the new vocabulary in similar context to the poem. For example, you can create new sentences using the new vocabulary and have students try creating new sentences as well. Then reread the poem. Ask the students:

- Did the meaning of the poem change now that you understand the new vocabulary?
- Why or why not?

### ***Lesson 3/Day 3: Skill Practice***

Objectives:

- The students will be able to understand the meaning or the message of the poem.
- The students will be able to identify sight words throughout the poem.
- The students will identify the rhyming words throughout the poem.

Materials:

- The poem *Hey Diddle Diddle* by Mother Goose
- Students poetry books

- Pointer
- Post-it Notes
- Chart paper for skills sheet

Procedure:

Reread the poem aloud with your students. They should know the poem by now. Have students take out their poetry books. Have students read aloud finger pointing to each word in their poetry book. This is the day to focus on sight words and specific skills. For this poem, the specific skill is rhyming words. Have students search for words that match this skill. In *Hey Diddle Diddle* students would find the words diddle and fiddle and moon and spoon. For this poem and skill you can have the students chart other words that rhyme with diddle and fiddle and moon and spoon such as riddle, middle, goon, and tune. Students will begin to see that rhyming words are not always spelled the same, but must sound the same at the end. Be sure to identify how these rhyming words are different than word families. Continue with this list until students cannot find any more rhyming words.

#### ***Lesson 4/Day 4: Sentence Structure and Print Concepts***

Objectives:

- The students will be able to develop sentence structure.
- The students will be able to identify sight words throughout the poem.

Materials:

- The poem *Hey Diddle Diddle* by Mother Goose on chart paper
- Sentence strips
- Pocket chart
- Pointer

Procedure:

Prior to rereading the poem aloud, write each line of the poem on a sentence strip. Cut the sentence strips apart so that each child will have at least on part of the poem. Reintroduce the title of the poem. Read the poem aloud to the class. Distribute sentence strip pieces of the puzzle. Give the students time to read their part of the poem and become aware of where it may fit in the poem. Explain that each student has a part of the poem. Start from the beginning of the poem and have students put the poem back together in the correct order as you read the poem aloud. Students will stand when their part of the poem is read and place their sentence strip in the pocket chart in the correct order. Students can also refer to the poem on the large chart paper as a guide. Continue until the poem is complete. Then read the poem aloud as a class.

\*For short poems such as *Hey Diddle Diddle* you can repeat the poem several times giving group of students a chance to put the poem back together.

### ***Lesson 5/Day 5: Comprehension***

Objectives:

- The students will be able to understand the meaning or the message of the poem.
- The students will be able to identify sight words throughout the poem.
- The students will identify the rhyming words throughout the poem.

Materials:

- The poem *Hey Diddle Diddle*
- Students poetry books
- Pointer
- Crayons/markers

Procedure:

Read the poem aloud as a class. Be sure to track the words with your pointer. Discuss the poem's message or meaning. Have students orally share their thoughts and feelings about this poem. Give each student a copy of the poem. Now that the students understand all the vocabulary, allow the students to draw a picture that represents the poem at the bottom of the page. Encourage students to use as many details as they can from the poem in their picture.

After completing their picture, students can revisit old poems and practice reading them on their own or to a partner.

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## **Appendix**

### *Standards*

The Core Curriculum of the School District of Philadelphia is aligned to the Pennsylvania Academic Standards for Literacy. These standards include instruction on the following topics: Learning to Read Independently; Reading Critically in All Content Areas; Reading, Analyzing, and Interpreting Literature; Types of Writing; Quality of Writing; Speaking and Listening; Characteristics and Functions of the English Language; and Research. A few of the main standards are will be focusing on are:

1.1.A. Learning to Read Independently: Identify the purpose of a specific text (e.g., tell a story, get information).

1.1.D. Learning to Read Independently: Use self-monitoring comprehension strategies (e.g., assess and review predictions, make associations, question and clarify meaning).

1.1.E. Learning to Read Independently: Acquire a basic reading vocabulary by identifying common words (e.g., environmental print, word families, high-frequency words).

1.1.F. Learning to Read Independently: Recall new vocabulary in listening and visual contexts.

1.1.H. Learning to Read Independently: Demonstrate reading of keywords and selected sentences (e.g., choral reading, chants, rereading familiar text, patterned sentences) and recall key concepts of the text.

1.2.C. Reading Critically in All Content Areas: Identify different types of genre.

1.3.A. Reading, Analyzing, and Interpreting Literature: Respond to and discuss a variety of literature through Read-Alouds and Shared Reading.

1.3.C. Reading, Analyzing, and Interpreting Literature: Identify the literary devices in rhyme and repetition.

1.3.D. Reading, Analyzing, and Interpreting Literature: Identify language patterns (e.g., choral reading, reading aloud, predictable books, pattern books, nursery rhymes).

1.3.F. Reading, Analyzing, and Interpreting Literature: Respond to and discuss a variety of types of literature.

1.4.A. Types of Writing: Use early forms of writing, dictation, or illustrations (e.g., story, personal experience, poem) to express ideas.

1.4.C. Types of Writing: Use illustrations to state an opinion.

1.5.C. Quality of Writing: Organize words into a complete sentence.

1.6.B. Speaking and Listening: Listen to a selection and share information and ideas.