

A POETRY READINESS PROGRAM FOR GRADES ONE AND TWO

by 1264

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## INTRODUCTION

There is surprisingly little information dealing with the area of poetry instruction in the primary grades. Most of the information available concerns teaching the intermediate grades and high school students. However, these are the students who are generally apathetic about poetry instruction. By the time the child reaches the intermediate grade he shares the dissatisfaction and disinterest in poetry of many adults. It seems evident that poetry instruction and lessons in appreciation must begin on the early primary level if any change in the prevailing negativeness is to occur.

Many primary grade teachers have genuinely tried to stimulate an appreciation for poetry in their young pupils, but these attempts have met with little success. Some have even fostered the negative feelings which prevail among the older students.

It would seem foolhardy and boastful to state that this problem has one true panacea. Teachers and educators can nonetheless strive to improve the existing methods and techniques, and they can use the findings of research to aid in their presentations. Although little research has been done regarding poetry



instruction, much has been found to indicate that readiness in this subject field, as in all other subject fields, is most desirable.

Because information is rather scarce regarding poetry instruction on the primary level and because little of this information deals with the subject from a readiness point of view, the writer of this paper has attempted to provide interested readers with a readiness program in poetry for the early primary grades. A teacher's guidebook is presented including methods of motivation and presentation, poetry readiness activities, available materials and an appendix listing appropriate poems which can be used.

It is hoped that this guidebook will add to the somewhat limited quantity of material written to aid the early primary grade teacher in instilling within his students a love and appreciation for poetry.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There is a noticeable lack of interest or attraction associated with the field of poetry. One author explains that there is a great mass of Americans "who love music and would find the world a dull place if all music were removed by a major operation, but who wouldn't even know that poetry had disappeared under a similar surgical cutting."<sup>1</sup> Poetry is too often considered pointless, ponderous, jejune and exceptionally dull. Coleridge's explanation of poetry as "the best words in their best order,"<sup>2</sup> is merely an empty definition for most people. Poetry is indeed "the old man's step child."<sup>3</sup>

The causes for this apparent disinterest are not easily determined. Little or no exposure, incorrect teaching or lack of readiness when taught at school, or simply exposure to the wrong poetry at the wrong time could all be contributing factors. This

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<sup>1</sup>Ray Immel and Helen Ogg, Poetry Least Popular of the Arts. Who is to Blame?, Oklahoma: Cooperative Books, 1939, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup>Samuel Coleridge, from Table Talk, July 12, 1827.

<sup>3</sup>Immel and Ogg, op. cit., p. 4.

negativeness might also stem from a lack of understanding or a misunderstanding concerning the nature of poetry. Indeed few people would even venture to give a definition of poetry with any greater depth than perhaps the fallacious statement — "It's something that rhymes." Enthusiastic readers of poetry, as well as poets themselves, find great difficulty in defining that which, perhaps due to its diversity and personal nature, cannot be reduced to an accurate definition. However, a somewhat adequate definition for the purpose of this paper is that of Mr. M. Friend who states, "It is first of all, a way of writing that is different from prose. It is a more subjective and more personal form of expression. The poet strives to convey to his reader a vivid idea, image, or emotion. He sifts his words carefully, distilling the essence of an impression to its clearest and purest form."<sup>4</sup> Here then is a definition of what the poet tries to accomplish in the form of a poem. A child who responded to the question "What are poems?" gives a concise and perhaps even more exact definition by saying, "They're words that sing without music."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>M. Friend, "Developing a Unit in Writing Poetry," Elementary English, vol. 37, February, 1960, p. 102.

<sup>5</sup>M. Bailey, E. Horrocks and E. Torreson, Language Learnings, New York: American Book Co., 1965, p. 138.

If a change in the prevalent negative attitudes about poetry is to take place the change must be initiated in the schools. Experience has shown, however, that teachers have become, perhaps unintentionally, the perpetrators of these very ideas which they strive to eradicate. Poetry is sometimes badly mistreated by the persons who endeavor to "teach" it. On the high school level it has often become a heavy intellectual exercise which has scared away all but a chosen few. Careful dissection of a poem, which is so often used in poetry classes today, noting the various figures of speech or the different forms of punctuation used, often serves to make the true meaning or feeling of a poem less clear. How can Tennyson's immortal poem, "The Charge of the Light Brigade" be enjoyed if it is remembered thusly --

Half a league comma half a league comma  
 Half a league onward comma  
 All in the valley of Death  
     Rode the six hundred period  
 Quotation marks Forward the Light Brigade  
     exclamation point  
 Charge for the guns exclamation point,  
     Quotation marks he said period

Often the English professors have made out a list of "masterpieces" which they present to their students whether the students like them or not.<sup>6</sup> An analogy has been made that, the many teachers of poetry appear to be like persons

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<sup>6</sup>Immel and Ogg, op. cit. p. 24.

"chasing butterflies with sledgehammers."<sup>7</sup>

There are also some teachers who feel that poetry only has value as an exercise in memorization. The rhyme schemes in many poems easily adapt to memorization more readily than a similar prose counterpart. However, the mere memorization of drab, adult poems, with vocabulary far above the child's comprehension will not help the child to form positive attitudes toward poetry. Memorization, especially when handled as a large group assignment, can cause a serious dislike of poetry. This distaste can be kindled by those who either don't care for the specific poem chosen for memorization, who dislike the idea of memorization, or who find memorization difficult. A writer in the field of children's literature agrees that "to try to force all children to learn the same poems would be to dull the edge of interest for many children and make some actually dislike poetry."<sup>8</sup>

And then there are the teachers who feel the only way to truly "understand" poetry is to "put it in your own words." However, most writers in the field of poetry condemn this as a "vicious practice." "To say a poem in

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<sup>7</sup>L.H. Conrad, "Stimulate Don't Mutilate, "Education Digest, vol. 32, November, 1966, p. 54

<sup>8</sup>Ruth Strickland, The Language Arts in the Elementary School, Boston: D.C. Heath and Co., 1957, p. 402

your own words is to destroy it utterly. . ."<sup>9</sup>

Too often teachers have forever alienated their students from the world of poetry through these harmful methods of presenting, dissecting or mass memorizing of poems. But at the other extreme are the teachers who, through lack of understanding, dislike for the subject or perhaps through oversight, fail to expose their students to poetry of any kind. Several studies have been made concerning the amount of literature and poetry handled in the elementary school. These have consistently shown that there is a definite deficiency in this field. A study made by Pooley and Williams indicates that "at the elementary school level little classroom time is given to literature of any kind, and although children are encouraged to read books, many schools, especially those in rural areas, have poor book collections."<sup>10</sup> In another study, Farmer and Freeman have found that in several schools in Georgia only 4% of class time was devoted to literature or poetry. "This is not surprising" one author writes, "since it (poetry) is accorded so little recognition in the adult world."<sup>11</sup> This lack of exposure is often the cause of misunderstandings about poetry and these

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<sup>9</sup>Flora Arnstein, Adventure into Poetry, California: Stanford University Press, 1948, p. 13.

<sup>10</sup>Pooley and Williams, Teaching English in Wisconsin, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1948, p. 13

<sup>11</sup>Flora Arnstein, Poetry in the Elementary Classroom, New York: Appleton, Century, Crofts, 1962, p. 103.

misunderstandings breed negative attitudes. It is hard to say which is the more harmful, total neglect or mistreatment. However, neither need be the case.

Although the schools have been considerably lax in improving the attitudes of their students concerning poetry it is evident that the formation of positive attitudes lies with our educational system. More specifically this change will have to take place in the early primary grades, before the child has formulated any definite attitude toward the subject. It is at this age (five to eight years of age) that the child shows a fascination with words -- especially those which rhyme. One writer feels that psychologically these rhymes and recurring rhythms help compensate for the disorderliness of everyday language. As the child responds to the sounds around him he especially selects those that repeat themselves, causing a close identification with rhythm and rhyme.<sup>12</sup> Hutchett and Hughes have made a comparison between children and poets. They are both sensitive to rhythm and to their surroundings, they explain. Experience for each is intense and vivid. And if the primary grade teacher has developed a "sensitivity to the beauty in life, if she loves poetry, and if she is alert to the timeliness of relating poetry to the activities of the day, she can help children to continue

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<sup>12</sup>Patrick Groff, "Take Time to Rhyme", Elementary English, vol. 40, November, 1963, p. 762.

to have much in common with poets."<sup>13</sup> What the teacher does with poetry can make the difference between delight and dreariness.

The enjoyment of poetry should play a large part in the young student's association with literature. It should be an integral part of any language arts program in the primary as well as the intermediate grades. The National Council of Teachers in English has maintained that the literature curriculum should consist of "experiences with and through stories, poems, plays, essays and books of information. . ."<sup>14</sup> The importance of poetry in the language arts program has been reiterated by several writers in the field of literature and the language arts. R. Endres has stated that "children and youth who do not have rich and varied experiences with poetry lose contact with a most edifying and important segment of their heritage."<sup>15</sup> Poetry has been endowed with the ability to "make the common sights, sounds, sensations and happenings vitally uncommon. It can give boys and girls a feeling of vibrancy and sensuousness of being alive. It can create precise moods and pictures in the mind, tell wonderful stories, delineate fanciful characters and happenings. It can

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<sup>13</sup>Hutchett and Hughes, Teaching Language Arts in the Elementary Schools, New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1956, p. 304.

<sup>14</sup>National Council of Teachers in English, An Experience Curriculum in English, New York: Appleton, Century, 1935, p. 990.

<sup>15</sup>Raymond Endres, "Children and Poetry", Elementary English, vol. 40, December, 1963, p. 838.



sensitively describe the earth and its creatures, and epitomize the essence and spirit of the man-made world. It can enthrall children with its melody and movement winging its way into their minds and memories."<sup>16</sup> It has also been known to enrich sensory experiences which should be "a basic responsibility of the early childhood teacher."<sup>17</sup> As well as deriving satisfaction and pleasure from poetry, S. Baker feels that poetry can "serve as a factor in maintaining a higher mental health status for the world as a whole."<sup>18</sup> Poetry adds much to the language arts program of the school. This is because the children enjoy it, it stimulates creative expression and it promotes personal growth. Poetry adds a certain richness, beauty and sparkle to life and the inclusion of it in the curriculum can help to develop children who thoroughly enjoy poetry and who can and do interpret it for themselves.

However, even though the study of poetry should be a part of the elementary curriculum, as stated earlier, too often the subject is badly mistreated and children develop negative attitudes instead of positive ones. Poetry cannot be handled as mere memorization, or as an

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<sup>16</sup>Leland Jacobs, "Shortchanging Poetry in Your Reading Program", Grade Teacher, vol. 78, April, 1961, p. 101.

<sup>17</sup>Winton and Fleiss, "You're Asking Us: Ideas for Introducing Poetry to Young Children", Instructor, April, 1966 p. 25.

<sup>18</sup>Zelma Baker, The Language Arts, the Child and the Teacher, San Francisco: Fearon Publishers, 1955, p. 64.

intellectual exercise, it must be carefully introduced and thoughtfully handled. It seems strange that although much has been said regarding reading readiness, mathematics readiness and readiness in other fields that little has been mentioned regarding a readiness program in poetry. Truly the first and second graders come to school with a certain love for rhyme and a degree of readiness toward the subject. However this readiness must be nurtured and the teacher must proceed cautiously, endeavoring not to create any negative feelings. This is a big order. And it is an especially difficult job when it is realized that the generation that is coming to our schools is one "with less experience in, and less knowledge of poetry than ever before."<sup>19</sup> The task is also made more difficult in that information including methods which can be used to teach children to enjoy and appreciate poetry are very scarce indeed. Few curriculum guides or books which include practical suggestions regarding poetry instruction have been written for teachers teaching below the fourth grade level. It is with this in mind that the writer of this paper has included a general guidebook for the first and second grade teacher who feels the need to include poetry study and appreciation in the language arts program.

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<sup>19</sup>P. McVickar, "About Poetry and Children", Grade Teacher, vol. 79, April, 1962, p. 75.

A note of caution however, must be made regarding the use of this curriculum guidebook, as well as any attempts to include poetry in the regular school program. It is important that the teacher who endeavors to instill a love and appreciation of poetry in his students must be a lover of poetry himself. Feelings of apathy as well as feelings of appreciation are contagious and the child can easily sense the teacher's true feelings toward the subject. R. Endres, a writer in the field of language arts, has noted that "every elementary teacher is not a teacher of poetry." The poetry teacher must be sensitive to the "nuances, the history, the beauty of language."<sup>20</sup> Therefore, if the primary teacher seeks to handle the subject of poetry without doing damage to the child's natural feeling for rhythm and rhyme and without causing negative feelings on the part of the students, he must genuinely appreciate the beauty of poetry himself.

The following guidebook then is written for those who love poetry and wish to include the study and appreciation of it in their curriculum. It will include methods of introduction, motivation and presentation of a poetry lesson, student activities, a synopsis of skills to be gained and a listing of materials which will be useful in initiating such a program.

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<sup>20</sup>R. Endres, op. cit., p. 838.

## A POETRY READINESS GUIDEBOOK

### Introduction, Motivation and Presentation of Poetry

Before any discussion can take place regarding the method of teaching poetry to primary grade children it is important to establish the kinds of poems best suited for these grade levels. (It should be noted here that the last section of this report lists, according to subject, appropriate poems for this level.) The poetry the teacher chooses to present to the class must not be above the child's level of understanding. The vocabulary, syntax and topics involved must be simple and fully understandable to the child. Each poem should deal simply and directly with life. Although there might be one or two new words introduced in the poem, the teacher must be careful not to use poetry as an introduction to a long or perhaps complex vocabulary lesson. The child should, as a rule, be able to comprehend the meaning of an unfamiliar word through the context of the poem. Trying to make children appreciate poetry beyond their level of understanding creates a distaste for it.<sup>21</sup>

Once poems have been selected which the child can comprehend without great difficulty, it is necessary to

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<sup>21</sup>E.W. Schofield, "Creative Writing of Poetry in the Elementary Grades", Elementary English, January, 1967, p. 68.

decide which type of poem is best to use as an introduction. Many children have had positive experiences at home with childhood rhymes and the traditional Mother Goose rhymes. However, some have already had the negative influence of older brothers and sisters who dislike poetry. The resulting suspicions concerning poetry have often, in the past, been broken down by the use of humorous poems. The light, humorous or "fun" poems are often the most quickly accepted poems. "The more children laugh, the less apprehensive they will become."<sup>22</sup> Poetry will often immediately lose the titles of "ponderous", "dull" or "pointless". It will become more of a treat than a threat. If some boys still have the idea that poetry is for "sissies", which was probably suggested by older schoolmates, a humorous poem about pirates will easily dispel it. Mother Goose rhymes, humorous verse and limericks are good stepping stones to a variety of delightful lyrical and narrative poems.<sup>23</sup> The poems the teacher chooses should be humorous and they should deal directly with the child's world -- real or unreal.

Now that the poems have been selected how must the teacher begin his introduction into the world of poetry?

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<sup>22</sup>G.G. Duffy, "Children Do Enjoy Poetry", Elementary English, vol. 38, October, 1961, p. 422.

<sup>23</sup>Hutchett and Hughes, op. cit., pp. 173, 174.

Lois Untermeyer questioned poets regarding their views on the teaching of this subject. One poet responded, "If I were introducing poetry to children, I would read all kinds of poetry to them and have them read poetry to me. With young children I wouldn't worry about teaching the structure or mechanics of poetry. In teaching I would never force. I would try to help children get at the important feelings and emotions poetry can communicate. I would try to impart my enthusiasm for poetry to them. This is the best way of building enthusiasm in them."<sup>24</sup> In order to develop a sensitivity to the world about them children need to be given many delightful experiences with poetry.

This sensitivity which the teacher strives to stimulate will not come however, from the analysis or "dissection" of a poem. Children of this age are not ready for any deep delving into meaning or syntax. This does not mean, however, that they should not be exposed to poetry. One point of view regarding poetry instruction is this "hands off" philosophy. Proponents of this point of view contend that "the best way to develop understanding of, appreciation of, and sensitivity to poetry is not to study or analyze it.

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<sup>24</sup>Majorie Hovland, "A Year of Poetry", Elementary English, vol. 45, March, 1968, p. 377.

They view children as "naturally" poetic and therefore needful of "little direct instruction in poetry."<sup>25</sup> Young primary grade children are "naturally fond of poetry. Most of them can be stirred by the words and swayed by the rhythm of a poem even when they are far from a full understanding of the deeper meanings".<sup>26</sup> The proponents of this philosophy are also generally agreed that poetry should result, for the most part, from an incident that takes place in the classroom or from something which has captured the imagination of most of their students. "Children will listen with appreciation to poems if those chosen are simple and narrative in form, contain humor and are presented at a time when they enrich a current happening".<sup>27</sup> This spontaneous delving into poetry often yields more fruitful results, especially in terms of attitude, than is created through a set schedule where poetry is studied according to the clock whether the mood is right or not. This does, however, require that the teacher have at his disposal a large number of poems to refer to if such an incident arises.

Since most first and second graders have limited

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<sup>25</sup>Dr. Patrick Groff, "Two Roads to Poetry". Readings in Language Arts, New York: The Macmillan Co., 1964, p. 131.

<sup>26</sup>M. Haliburton and A. Smith, Teaching Poetry in the Grades, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1911, p. 1.

<sup>27</sup>M. Dawson and M. Choate, How to Help a Child Appreciate Poetry, San Francisco: Fearon Publishers, 1960, p. 92.

reading ability most of their experiences with poetry will come from poems read orally by their teacher. This is a very fortunate limitation since poetry was originally composed for reciting and for enjoyment through the ear.<sup>28</sup> It has been said that "the only true poem is the spoken poem", and that "a poem is not a poem until it has been voiced".<sup>29</sup> Poetry has been classified as an auditory art for over 2,000 years.<sup>30</sup> By reading poems aloud to children the teacher can include voice inflection, pauses, the tempo, tone, color and the cadence of a poem which only the experienced reader of poetry can catch. He frees his students from wrestling with the complexities of the printed page and the frustrations resulting from lack of reading vocabulary. Listening is the natural approach to an enjoyment of poetry. It offers the delight of rhythm and pleasing sound patterns. "As children listen they begin to catch the mood of the poem, to appreciate rhythm and beauty of sound, and to gain new and deeper meanings of their everyday world".<sup>31</sup> When the child hears poetry, especially if no illustrations are

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<sup>28</sup>R. Strickland, op. cit., p. 402.

<sup>29</sup>M.H. Arbuthnot, Time For Poetry, Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1959, p. 10.

<sup>30</sup>Immel and Ogg, op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>31</sup>Rosalind Hughes, Let's Enjoy Poetry, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958, p. 189.



shown he can create his own mental pictures of the characters and action and therefore can exercise his own creative imagination which in young children is usually so abundant.

Once the primary student has been introduced to the world of humorous, or stimulating poetry his understanding and experience can be expanded through numerous poetry activities.

### Poetry Activities

Learning is not a passive experience. Especially in the primary grades the student must actively participate in the learning situation for true learning and appreciation to take place. Therefore the teacher of the poetry readiness program must include a variety of activities and experiences.

Because poetry has what Walter de la Mare has called "tune and runningness"<sup>32</sup> or melody and movement, it can easily adapt to creative movement on the part of the child. "Children enjoy the discovery that a poem can mark time for walking, skipping or galloping, just as music can".<sup>33</sup> Young children are naturally rhythmic

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<sup>32</sup>Arbuthnot, op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>33</sup>Strickland, op. cit., p. 406.

and the rhythms and movements in certain poems have a great appeal. Often the teacher and pupils can make up simple poems to accompany daily activities. Sometimes the very sounds of words in a poem can suggest action and response. Often acting out a poem can add a great deal of enjoyment and increase the students understanding of the poem. Not capitalizing on this natural appeal in the rhythm of poetry would cause the poetry program to lose a great deal of sparkle and life. If teachers are to dispel the idea that poetry is dull, they must include creative moving activities such as these.

Choral speaking is another activity which can add life and vigor to the poetry program. Although most students soon discover the pleasure of "saying poetry to themselves" due to the lilt, the sound of the words, or the experience of exercising the tongue on certain "tounge twisters", many will also feel a special thrill in reciting or reading poems aloud together. The embarrassment of reciting alone before a group or of forgetting a line is erased if the child is accompanied by some or all of his classmates. This type of work is especially valuable because it helps the young child develop a freedom from self-consciousness. It also helps his oral speaking due to an "improved quality of tone, a controlled rate of speaking, adequate thought emphasis,

varied pitch and inflection, accurate pronunciation and precise articulation and enunciation".<sup>34</sup> These are some of the positive by-products of choral speaking. However, it must be noted here that the first or second grade teacher should not specifically strive for these goals in choral speaking work. Although they are worthy goals in themselves nothing should defeat the purpose of a simple enjoyment of poetry for the sake of enjoyment alone.

This choral work also should, of necessity, be simple and informal. There are various types of choral speaking activities for the teacher to use. Speaking in unison is perhaps the most frequent method used. However, other types such as the antiphonal or light and heavy voice speaking, verse and refrain type where the teacher reads the verse and the children repeat the refrain, a line-a-child, or any other variety can prove enjoyable. In the book, Let's Read Poetry, the author suggests choral speaking patterns for many of the poems included. These could serve as a valuable introduction into the practice of choral reading of poetry.

Along with choral speaking and recitation the teacher

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<sup>34</sup> L. Abney and G. Rowe, Choral Speaking Arrangements for the Lower Grades, Boston: Expression Co., 1937, p. 31.

could have a "poetry sharing time". Here the child could pick a favorite poem to read or recite. The child might even be encouraged to explain what attracted him to the poem, thus opening up another avenue for expression, appreciation and enjoyment. These poems, which the children choose, could be placed in a class anthology for further reference and enjoyment, or each child might make his own collection. Most published anthologies are costly, impersonal and often contain only a few well liked poems. The books which the children make are expressions of what each child likes and therefore they will be more meaningful and personal than any published collection could be.

An interesting activity that holds great appeal to youngsters on this grade level is setting certain poetry to music. Here the students can learn to appreciate the singing quality, the rhythm and the meter involved in some poems. This activity can also lead to the discovery that many songs are, in reality, poems set to music. This musical background can also aid in the learning of the poem, since the music can act as a reinforcement to the words.

The class can play games with poetry by capitalizing

on the rhyming effect of many poems. One game might be to substitute other rhyming words to make the poem either more meaningful or more fun. In this activity the teacher can use the volume of material which can be found on rhyming words to increase interest in this type of poetry, as well as indirectly improving reading skills.

Often the class will create activities from situations and experiences to add to their enjoyment and appreciation of poetry. Writers on the topic, however, have warned against making any activity compulsory. If the child feels inspired, for instance, to illustrate a favorite poem, this can add tremendously to his understanding and enjoyment. However, one author has warned against requiring illustration of a poem for all students. "The confusion here is that we ask a child to show us what is not truly his honest feeling, for how can it be transferred to a picture. Further than this, we are suggesting that the ability to draw and the ability to feel are the same".<sup>35</sup> Along with this warning many writers in the field of poetry teaching have advised against using poems as reading exercises due to their extreme difficulty.

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<sup>35</sup>McVickar, op. cit., p. 127.

Often a child will lose the whole thought or significance of a poem because he cannot read and interpret it properly. However, the meaning can be quite evident and clear if this same poem is read to him. "It is appreciation and enjoyment" not the ability to read and interpret poetry, "that is important at the elementary school age".<sup>36</sup>

Poems are usually short enough and can cover such a broad range of topics that they can easily be inserted into the school program at any time. They can be substituted for a story or record at rest time or story time, or they can be added to the social studies, science or language arts program. They can enhance any particular unit of work, and can even be used in the physical education program in relation to action work or at game time to add verbal enjoyment to the physical activity. "Poetry activities need not take away from other subjects. They can correlate with reading, writing, music, art and social studies. Best of all the children discover the beauty, the inspiration, the solace, the fun and the joy of poetry. They learn to love it if someone opens the door".<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>R. Strickland, op. cit., p. 407.

<sup>37</sup>R. Hughes, op. cit., p. 132.

Each of these above activities can lead to a better understanding and greater appreciation of poetry. However, no single activity can have the range of impact available through the creating of original poetry. A real oneness with the world of poetry is often experienced when the child uses the rhythm and creativity within him to compose his own poetry.

Perhaps the most frequently asked question is "How do you get children to write?" "Children are naturally creative. . . Creative language, picturesque expression, come to the young child as naturally as speech."<sup>38</sup> One writer has mentioned that the creative child is, "mentally speaking, a healthy child. For the time being he is well adjusted, happy, released."<sup>39</sup> This creativeness cannot be taught. No one can be taught to write a poem. "But as a teacher, you can remove the blindfold of prejudice and misconception and hope for the best."<sup>40</sup> It is the teacher's job to motivate and to see that the child's natural creativity is released and guided into productive channels. But before these creative energies can be used the teacher must first see that the children have acquired some background in poetry. There

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<sup>38</sup>F.J. Arnstein, Adventure into Poetry, California: Stanford University Press, 1951, pp. 38, 39.

<sup>39</sup>\_\_\_\_\_, Poetry in the Elementary Classroom, New York: Appleton, Century, Crofts, 1962, p. 107.

<sup>40</sup>M. Friend, op. cit., p. 102.

must necessarily be many previous lessons and much prior preparation involving teaching the pupils to enjoy and appreciate poetry. "Before creating their own, children need to be exposed to a wide variety of poetry's many forms."<sup>41</sup> This background can be gained through the variety of poetry activities mentioned earlier and most assuredly through the frequent and continuous reading aloud of fine poetry written on the child's grade level.

Many of these poems can be poems created by other children. This very often will prompt the question "Why can't we write some of our own poems?" It must be noted here that it is important not to insist that each child write a poem. All children are not immediately inspired by the same subject. However, eventually they will most likely be encouraged by the works of their classmates and they too will want to try their hand at this activity. "Making a specific assignment to write poetry is one of the fastest ways to cause students to develop negative feelings toward it."<sup>42</sup> Instead of forcing the children, the teacher can make the children poetry-conscious and give them every possible opportunity

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<sup>41</sup>Mary Buckles, "An Approach to Teaching Poetry: Spontaneous Deliberation", Elementary English, January, 1966, p. 64.

<sup>42</sup>M. Chase, "Magic of Poetry", N.E.A. Journal, vol. 53, December, 1964, p. 8.



to write it. When a topic is mentioned that has potential, as far as the creation of worthwhile poems is concerned, the class might discuss the subject, the teacher might write various descriptive words on the board, some rhyming words might be noted in case a child wishes his poem to rhyme, and time should be given for the activity. Various alternative activities must be suggested for those who do not feel creative or poetic at the time.

Another problem to avoid when assigning creative writing tasks is in regard to the false conception that all poetry must rhyme. The children should not be forced to rhyme or to try to pattern rhythm especially in their early stages of writing. This often causes a "forced style". "They should express simply and vividly their sensory impressions and their emotional reactions to their experience."<sup>43</sup> Children best write in free verse because meter and rhyme are too difficult for most young children to handle. "When children are not restricted to rhyme or pattern, the teacher often will be surprised at the response of even the slower and less able children. Perhaps this is caused by the freedom and the absence of grammatical rules and restrictions."<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>E.W. Schofield, *op. cit.*, p. 69

<sup>44</sup>M. Dunn, "Writing Poetry in the Elementary School", *Elementary English*, vol. 45, March, 1963, p. 339

But most children will write down simply what they think and feel. The children will also eventually discover that "the employment of rhyme leads them into statements that are irrelevant to the subject of the poem or to their original intention regarding it."<sup>45</sup>

Since writing is often too cumbersome for the primary grade child, some children might want to dictate their ideas while the teacher writes their exact words. The poem would then be read back to the child for any corrections or substitutions he might wish to make.

The teacher must always remember to accept each child's contribution with praise. Even in the very beginning of the child's adventure into creative writing the child must experience success, not at the adults level of appreciation but at his own level. He must feel that even his most feeble attempts at creating a poem have merit and worth, and the teacher must be careful not to dispel this idea. Frustration will quickly cause loss of interest in this, or for that matter, any field.

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<sup>45</sup>F.J. Arnstein, Poetry in the Elementary Classroom, New York: Appleton, Century, Crofts, 1962, p. 28.

As mentioned earlier, a specific subject will often suggest a poetry writing activity. Often activities can be suggested which will also provide opportunities for writing poems. These activities should be such as to raise the emotions of the children and inspire them to create. "When children sincerely create poetry, they do so because of an inner urge for expression. Consequently, the highest type of work is done when the child's emotions are aroused and when he is led to be keenly aware of certain sensory impressions, particularly visual and auditory images."<sup>46</sup> Since a walk outside on a spring day, for instance, should arouse virtually all of the senses, such an activity might precede a creative writing time. Contact with pets and animals or the observation of small objects to see how they look and feel could also remind a child of something of which to write. The teacher must learn to capitalize on such activities as listening to music, painting pictures or the contagious holiday spirit as lead up activities to the creative writing of poetry. If the teacher has this sensitivity, even an interesting word, story or unit of work could serve as an inspiration and therefore an incentive to write poetry.

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<sup>46</sup>Hutchett and Hughes, op. cit., p. 309.

As the teacher guides the children in their creative writing endeavors his chief concern should be in the "process through which growth takes place" rather than in the "finished products". He must help the child to gain "self-assurance and a feeling of security through their achievements. Often fear, joy, jealousy and hate are released for some children as they express themselves in poetry."<sup>47</sup> One teacher has written that a creative writing exercise had led her to "discover facets of their authors' personalities" which she might never have suspected, found or enjoyed -- "indeed, that they (the students) might never have suspected."<sup>48</sup>

Once a poem has been written the subject should be dismissed for the time. However, it is important that the teacher provide opportunities for the sharing of each other's poems and for the recognition of this creative task. This can in turn suggest other poetry activities. Final copies of the poems could perhaps be illustrated by the authors (only at the child's suggestion or approval), and these poems could be put into a class anthology or each child could make his own folder. These should be accessible for leisure reading. A program could be presented in which some

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 325.

<sup>48</sup>M. Chase, op. cit., p. 11.

of these original verses are recited chorally or individually. Some of the poetry could be included in the school magazine or entered in poetry contests in commercial magazines. But whatever the activity associated with this original poetry, the child must be made to feel that his contribution is of value. This feeling of success and worth are vital if creative poetry writing is to continue.

Creative writing can be a climax to an exciting introduction into the world of poetry. But just because its nature is somewhat climactic, it does not follow that the study of poetry must end there. Poetry writing can, in turn, act as a further stimulus to hear and study other poems on the child's level of understanding. The motivational activities can therefore be used again in the classroom, only, in this context, they will serve as enrichment and not merely introductory activities.

Through the study of poetry children can grow in many ways. They can develop a sensitivity to beauty, they can gain a vividness of sensual images, they can gain an appreciation for sound and aptness of words and development of a depth of feeling they might not otherwise experience. A child can grow in imagination and in his power to think in concrete and

abstract ways; he can acquire a valuable form of self-evaluation and most of all he can gain a feeling of achievement through self-expression which is perhaps one of the most important overall goals of our educational system.<sup>49</sup>

Poetry, more than any other language form, can cause "an exhilaration that comes from the compatibility of ideas and form, from the melody and movement of the lines, from the little shivers of delight these qualities induce."<sup>50</sup> Teachers who include poetry in their curriculum will soon discover its value, for it has the unusual quality of powerfully influencing ones emotions. It can "comfort or amuse children, it can wake them up or quiet them, or it can give them fresh courage when life seems a little grim."<sup>51</sup> As one writer has concluded, "A language program without poetry would be like a Christmas tree without lights or a birthday cake without sparkle. Poetry adds richness, beauty and sparkle."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Hutchett and Hughes, op. cit., p. 306.

<sup>50</sup>M.H. Arbuthnot, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>52</sup>Bailey, Horrocks, Torreson, op. cit., p. 32.

### Materials

To add variety and interest to the program the teacher should make full use of the audio-visual aids available on the subject. Although material aiding in poetry readiness and appreciation is extremely limited, there are some excellent films, filmstrips, records and flannel and pegboard aids available. The tape recorder can also serve as a valuable aid, both in listening to poems and as a means for children to record their choral and verbal activities with poems. This can also create a real incentive toward expressive reading. Video tapes, slides, posters and transparencies can also be made by the teacher to aid in poetry presentations. Closed circuit and educational television must not be overlooked in formulating a truly creative poetry readiness program.

The following list of materials includes many of the audio-visual materials available to the primary grade teacher to use in stimulating and encouraging the student in a poetry readiness program. The list is necessarily incomplete since each teacher will find an even greater variety of films, filmstrips, and aids to deal with the topic from the approach she chooses. If, for instance, the teacher wishes to begin a study of poetry using the circus as a spring board, the myriad

of materials available on that subject are at her disposal. The following is merely a listing of materials dealing directly with the subject of poetry, and therefore it is only meant as a beginning to a listing of the materials which could be used in a poetry readiness program.

Material Type

Purchase Through

Films:

"Let's Read Poetry"	Bailey
"The Red Carpet"	Macmillan
"Time of Wonder"	Viking

Filmstrips:

"Living Poetry Series"	McGraw Hill
"Poems for Children"	Eye Gate
"Mother Goose Rhymes"	Eye Gate
"Stories of Famous Poems"	Eye Gate
"Social Studies Rhymes for the Very Young" (series)	Eye Gate
"Mother Goose Village" (series)	Eye Gate
"Songs and Rhymes" (series)	Weston Woods

Filmstrip and Sound Recording:

"Old MacDonald Had a Farm"	Educational Record Sales
"Mary Had a Little Lamb"	Educational Record Sales
"Mother Goose Rhymes"	Educational Record Sales



Filmstrip and Sound Recording:  
(continued)

"The Owl and the Pussycat"	Educational Record Sales
"Sleeping Beauty"	Little Brown and Company
"The Little Black-eyed Rebel"	Educational Record Sales
"Casey at the Bat"	Educational Record Sales
"The Red Carpet"	Macmillan
"Time of Wonder"	Viking
"Storytoons, Series C" (includes Casey at Bat and Mother Goose Rhymes)	Bailey Films
"Storytoons, Series A" (includes "The Owl and the Pussycat" and "My Shadow")	Bailey Films
"Seeing the World Through Poetry"	Educational Activities
"Rhymes and Riddles"	Educational Reading Service

Records:

"Mother Goose Favorites"	Eye Gate
"Twenty-five Nursery Rhymes"	Eye Gate
"More Mother Goose"	Eye Gate
"Mother Goose, vol. II"	Eye Gate
"A Child's Garden of Verses"	Eye Gate
"Carl Sandburg, Reading Poems for Children"	Educational Record Sales
"Traditional Mother Goose with Cyril Ritchard"	Educational Record Sales

Records: (continued)

"Classics in Poetry"	Teacher's Publishing Corp.
"Let's Say Poetry Together"	Educational Record Sales
"Poems for the Very Young"	Educational Record Sales
"Rhymes of Nature"	Educational Record Sales
"Fun with Language and Poems"	Educational Record Sales
"Casey at Bat"	Weston Woods
"The Owl and the Pussycat"	Weston Woods
"Wynken, Blynken and Nod"	Weston Woods
"Custard the Dragon"	Weston Woods
"Treasury of Children's Verse"	Educational Record Sales
"Poet's Gold"	Educational Record Sales
"A Treasury of the World's Best Loved Poems"	Listening Library
"Discovering Rhythm and Rhyme in Poetry"	Educational Record Sales
"Miracles - Poems Written by Children"	Educational Record Sales

Tapes:

"Casey at Bat"	Weston Woods
"The Owl and the Pussycat"	Weston Woods
"Wynken, Blynken and Nod"	Weston Woods
"Custard the Dragon"	Weston Woods

Transparencies:

"Happy Time Rhyme Time"	Educational Reading Service
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Flannel Board Materials:

"Rhyming Pictures"	Hammett Company
"Mother Goose Rhymes"	Hammett Company
"Mother Goose Combination"	Hammett Company

Pegboard Materials:

"Objects that Rhyme"	Hammett Company
"Rhyming Pictures"	Hammett Company

Games:

"Rhyming Puzzles"	Hammett Company
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The chief resource, however, of the poetry readiness teacher will be a large collection of favorite poems, readily available. Audio-visual materials are frequently out of reach and take time to set up. However, any exciting incident such as a neighborhood pet show or a new baby in someone's family can be enhanced tremendously by the reading of an appropriate poem on the subject. Each interested teacher will probably form his own anthology, or have several appropriate volumes for his specific grade level available for such an occasion. The spontaneity of the occasion will be lost

if the teacher has to search through volumes of material or take a trip to the library because an appropriate poem is not near at hand.

There is a wealth of collected poems and anthologies. Any teacher however, who enjoys poetry and who wishes to impart this enjoyment to his pupils must have his own collection. "For a primary teacher such a collection is indispensable."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Zelma W. Baker, The Language Arts, the Child and the Teacher, San Francisco: Fearon Publishers, 1955, p. 76.

## APPENDIX

The following poems were selected by this writer as appropriate for the primary grade level. Most of these poems have been used with much success in the primary classroom. The poems represent a full scope of subjects which might arise with this age group. The poems also contain a good deal of humor, which seems most vital in a poetry readiness program.

Below is a listing, first, of the anthologies used in selecting these poems, and then a listing of the poem titles and authors with notations referring the reader to anthologies in which the poems can be found.

### Poetry Anthologies:

- A. Arbuthnot, May Hill, Time For Poetry, Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1959.
- B. Cole, William, editor, I Went to the Animal Fair, New York: The World Publishing Co., 1958.
- C. Hufford, Grace T. and Laura M. Carlisle, My Poetry Book, Chicago: The John C. Winston Co., 1934.
- D. Larrick, Nancy, editor, Piping Down the Valleys Wild, New York: Delacorte Press, 1968.
- E. \_\_\_\_\_, editor, Poetry for Holidays, Illinois: Garrard Publishing Co., 1966.
- F. Milne, A.A., The Christopher Robin Book of Verse, New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1967.
- G. Peterson, Isabel J., The First Book of Poetry, New York: Franklin Watts, 1954.

- H. Stevenson, Burton E., editor, The Home Book of Verse for Young Folks, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1929.
- I. Stevenson, Robert Louis, A Child's Garden of Verses, New York: The Heritage Press, 1944.
- J. Love, Katherine, editor, A Pocketful of Rhymes, New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1946.
- K. Werner, Jane, editor, The Golden Book of Poetry, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1947.

Poems About Animals:

- "A bird came down the walk." Emily Dickinson, C, D, J.
- "The Animal Store." Rachel Field, A, B, D.
- "The Blackbird." Humbert Wolfe, A, C, H.
- "Bingo Has An Enemy." Rose Fyleman, A.
- "Cat." Mary Britton Miller, G.
- "Chanticleer." John Farrar, A, C.
- "The Elephant." Helaire Belloc, A.
- "The Frog." Helaire Belloc, C, K.
- "Furry Bear." A.A. Milne, B, F, G.
- "Grasshopper Green." Anonymous, C, H, K.
- "Grizzly Bear." Mary Austin, A, D.
- "The Hairy Dog." Herbert Asquith, A, D, G.
- "The Jolly Woodchuck." Marion Edelf and Dorothy Grider, B, D.
- "Kindness to Animals." Laura E. Richards, A, H.
- "The Little Turtle." Vachel Lindsay, A, D, K.
- "Little Charlie Chipmunk." Helen Cowles Lecron, A, G.

"Mice." Rose Fyleman, A, C, D, G, K.

"The Purple Cow." Gelett Burgess, A, D.

"The Secret." Anonymous, A, K.

"The Squirrel." Anonymous, A.

Poems About the World Around Us:

"Color." Christina G. Rossetti, K.

"Falling Snow." Anonymous, G.

"The Falling Star." Sara Teasdale, D, G, J.

"Fog." Carl Sandburg, A, C, G, J, K.

"Galoshes." Rhoda W. Bacmeister, A.

"My Shadow." Robert L. Stevenson, A, C, D, G, H, I, K.

"Rain." Robert L. Stevenson, D, I.

"Smells." Christopher Morley, A, C.

"The Snowman's Resolution." Aileen Fisher, G.

"The Wind." Robert L. Stevenson, C, D, H, I.

Poems About Man and His Family:

"The Balloon Man." Dorothy Aldis, A.

"Christopher Columbus." Rosemary and Stephen Vincent Benet,  
G, I, J.

"Godfrey, Gordon, Gustavus Gore." William Brighty Rands,  
A, C, G, H.

"Mr. Nobody." Anonymous, H, K.

"My Brother." Dorothy Aldis, A.

"The Pirate Don Durk of Dowdee." Mildred P. Meigs, A, K.

Poems About Holidays:Halloween:

"The Goblin." Rose Fyleman, A.

"Hallowe'en." Harry Behn, A, F.

Thanksgiving:

"Thanksgiving Magic." Rowene Bennett, A.

Christmas:

"Bundles." John Farrar, A.

"A Visit From Saint Nicholas." Clement Clarke Moore,  
A, C, J.

New Year's Day:

"New Year's Day." Rachel Field, A, F.

Poems About Make Believe:

"The Elf and the Doormouse." Oliver Herford, A, C, D,  
G, J, K, H.

"The Little Elf." John K. Bangs, C, D, H, K.

"The Tale of Custard the Dragon." Ogden Nash, K.

Poems to Read Just For Fun:

"Animal Crackers." Christopher Morley, D, K.

"Eletelephony." Laura E. Richards, A, B, C, D, G.

"The Engineer." A.A. Milne, F.

"Forgiven." A.A. Milne, F, G.

"A Good Play." Robert L. Stevenson, I.

"Halfway Down." A.A. Milne, F.

"Hiding." Dorothy Aldis, A.



"Hoppity." A.A. Milne, A, F.

"If We Walked on Our Hands." DeRegniers, C.

"A Modern Dragon." Rowena Bennett, A, D.

"Only My Opinion." Monica Shannon, A, C.

"Some Fishy Nonsense." Laura E. Richards, A.

"The Swing." Robert L. Stevenson, C, I, J, K.

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A POETRY READINESS PROGRAM FOR GRADES ONE AND TWO

by

GERALDINE MAE BARROW

B.S., Houghton College, 1965

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AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE

College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
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## ABSTRACT

There is a noticeable lack of interest or attraction associated with the field of poetry. Poetry is too often considered pointless, ponderous, jejune and especially dull. The causes for this apparent disinterest are not easily determined. Little or no exposure to poetry, incorrect teaching, lack of readiness when poetry is taught, or simply exposure to the wrong poetry at the wrong time could all be factors contributing to this disinterest.

If a change in the prevalent negative attitudes about poetry is to take place it must be initiated in the schools. More specifically this change will have to take place in the early primary grades, before the child has formulated definite attitudes toward the subject. Most first and second graders come to school with a certain love for rhyme and a degree of readiness toward the subject. However, this readiness must be nurtured and the teacher must proceed cautiously, endeavoring not to create negative feelings.

The task is also made more difficult in that information giving methods which can be used to teach children to enjoy and appreciate poetry are very scarce indeed. It is with this in mind that the writer has included a general guidebook for the first and second grade teacher who feels

the need to include poetry study and appreciation in the language arts program.

The poetry the teacher chooses to present to the class must not be above the child's level of understanding. The light, humorous or "fun" poems are often the most easily accepted poems.

In order to develop a sensitivity to the world about them, children need to be given many delightful experiences with poetry. Since many first and second graders have limited reading ability, their experience with poetry often comes from poems read orally by their teacher. Once the primary student has been introduced to the world of humorous, or stimulating poetry his understanding and experience can be expanded through numerous poetry activities.

The primary grade student must actively participate in the learning situation for true learning and appreciation to take place. Activities might include creative movement exercises, choral speaking work, setting poems to music, making poetry anthologies, having a poetry sharing time, playing games with poems, illustrating poems and the creative writing of poetry.

A listing of materials is included to aid the teacher in formulating a truly effective poetry readiness program. An appendix of appropriate poems is also included, giving



suggestions regarding where the poems can be found.

Teachers who include poetry in their curriculum will soon discover its value for it has the unusual quality of powerfully influencing the young student's emotions as well as the emotions of adults.