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When it comes to sharing poems with children, there is no magic formula for success. Over the years, however, I have found a few key steps that make it easy to engage students and integrate some basic language-skill reinforcement. In our recent book, *The Poetry Friday Anthology* (2012), poet and collaborator Janet Wong and I borrowed the phrase “take five,” made famous by the Dave Brubeck Quartet, to propose that teachers and librarians take five minutes every Friday to introduce and share a poem. Featuring works by 77 major poets, *The Poetry Friday Anthology* offers one poem a week for every grade level, kindergarten through grade 5, for the whole school year. The book also offers “Take Five” activities, tied to the new Common Core State Standards, for each and every poem.

Why Fridays? In 2006, blogger Kelly Herold brought the concept of Poetry Friday to the “kidlitosphere” on the Internet. The corporate world observes “casual Friday,” and there is a similar perception in the world of education that on Fridays we can relax a bit and take a moment for something special. We can capitalize on the Poetry Friday concept in the library or classroom and take five minutes every week to share a poem and explore it a bit, connecting it with children’s lives and capitalizing on a teachable moment to reinforce literacy learning. Yes, of course you can share poetry on other days of the week, too. But for those who are not already teaching poetry regularly, planning for Poetry Friday makes poetry sharing intentional and not incidental.

The Poetry Friday Anthology makes it easy to find and share a poem with students but, certainly, any book of poetry can jump-start Poetry Friday poem sharing. So, what are the five components of the “Take Five” approach to poem sharing?

1. Read the poem aloud (vary your approach in multiple readings).
2. Read the poem aloud again with student participation and involvement.
3. Take a moment to invite students to discuss the poem; have an open-ended question ready as a prompt.
4. Make a subtle skill connection with the poem—but just one.
5. Connect with other poems and poetry books that are similar in some way.

These steps are quick and simple, and they begin with the

adult leading the poem sharing and then involving children in an active rereading of the poem, followed by a brief discussion, a skill connection, and if time allows, another related poem—all in approximately five minutes. Let’s consider each step in greater detail.



Read the Poem Aloud

The first step in sharing a poem is to read it aloud to the students. Poems are meant to be heard, just as songs are meant to be sung. As poet Brod Bagert has said, “Exactly as songs are not just sheet music, poetry is not just text.” The rhythm or rhyme of poetry can help children begin to get a sense of what artful yet natural language sounds like. If possible, practice reading the poem aloud to yourself a few times to get comfortable with the words, lines, pauses, and rhythm. Poet and anthologist Lee Bennett Hopkins suggests the following in *The Poetry Friday Anthology*: “Mark words and phrases you want to emphasize. Read to the group in a natural style. Follow the rhythm of the poem. Note how the physical appearance of the poem on the page dictates the rhythm and mood.” If possible, display the words of the poem on a poster or chalkboard or with an overhead or digital projector. Seeing the words while hearing them provides additional reinforcement for children who are learning to read or are learning English.

As you get more comfortable and experienced in reading poems aloud, experiment with different ways of making the poem come alive by pairing the poem with a prop, adding gestures or movement, trying out specific dramatic-reading techniques, singing the poem to a certain tune, and so on. If the poem has active verbs in it, add motions or pantomime to your reading. If a physical object is referenced, plan ahead to have that object ready as a poem prop. Vary your voice with whispers, growls, or shouts depending on the words, or create vocal characters for different points of view in the poem. Some poems can be read aloud to a soundtrack of relevant music or sound effects or with projected images, such as nature photos, while others can benefit from finger snapping, clapping, singing, or using sign language, if it fits the content. Other poems might incorporate a few challenging vocabulary words that need a brief explanation before reading. Or, to enhance the listening experience and build comprehension, invite students to close their eyes and visualize the scene or place depicted in the poem before reading it aloud. For variety, you might also consider inviting a guest reader to read the poem aloud, particularly if the reader is relevant to the poem’s content. Maybe a long-distance parent or relative can share the poem aloud via Skype or FaceTime. Finally, consider slowing down or pausing for the last line (or stanza) for greater emphasis.

2

Read the Poem Aloud Again with Student Participation

This tip suggests how to engage children in reading the poem aloud with you. When children participate in reading aloud, they have the opportunity to develop their own oral fluency. In *The Poetry Friday Anthology*, Sara Holbrook reminds us to “show the world that poetry was never meant to simply lie quietly on the page, any more than kids were meant to sit quietly in their seats to read it.”

There are many ways to involve students: in large groups, small groups, partner pairs, and as single volunteers. Experimenting with various approaches to reading and reciting poetry aloud can help students express themselves and build confidence and fluency. One example is echo reading—having students repeat certain words or lines of the poem after you. Note that when leading an echo reading, you need to keep the pace moving so the echo won't interrupt the poem to the point of distraction.

Another favorite strategy is to look for any repeated words, phrases, lines, or stanzas in the poem. Write these down or highlight them and display the words, inviting students to chime in on those words as you read the rest of the poem aloud. The same is true for keywords like numbers, days of the week, and months of the year, and for the very last line of the poem—often enhanced by being read in unison.

Students can also provide sound effects for sound words (onomatopoeia), and lines ending with a question mark (question lines) can be spoken by the students (individually or in groups), too. Use words or lines in bold or italics as cues for student participation. Multiple stanzas can naturally suggest group readings for the read-aloud (one group per stanza), and rhyming poems can lend themselves to a guess-the-end activity, as you pause before the rhyming word at the end of a couplet or stanza to allow students to chime in with the final rhyming word. Poems written for two voices or with designated character parts can particularly lend themselves to student participation. Students who hear poems read aloud every Friday and jump in and participate in reading and reciting poetry orally will quite naturally engage in a great deal of verbal interaction, higher-level thinking, and critical analysis.

3

Invite Students to Discuss the Poem

The third step in sharing a poem is to provide a moment for children to respond to the poem. Initially, it can be helpful to have a fun discussion prompt ready, tailored to fit the poem. Try an open-ended question with no single correct answer and encourage diversity in responses. I like to ask a question suggested by the poem, rather than a question about the poem. This helps “break the ice” and connect the poem with the students' own

Professional Resources

Looking for additional guidance in selecting and sharing poetry with students? The 10 titles below are full of practical information, and many are tied to the Common Core and other recent curricular standards.

Conversations with a Poet: Inviting Poetry into K–12 Classrooms. By Betsy Franco. 2005. 240p. Richard C. Owen, paper, \$24.95 (9781572747401).

Outspoken! How to Improve Writing and Speaking Skills through Poetry Performance. By Sara Holbrook and Michael Salinger. 2006. 224p. Heinemann, paper, \$33.75 (9780325009650).

Poetry Aloud Here 2: Sharing Poetry with Children. By Sylvia M. Vardell. 2013. 230p. ALA, paper, \$45 (9780838911778).

Poetry Everywhere: Teaching Poetry Writing in School and in the Community. By Jack Collom and Sheryl Noethe. 2005. 344p. Teachers & Writers Collaborative, paper, \$19.95 (9780915924691). 808.1.

The Poetry Experience: Choosing and Using Poetry in the Classroom. By Sheree Fitch and Larry Swartz. 2008. 32p. Pembroke, paper, \$13 (9781551382234). 808.1071.

Poetry Lessons to Meet the Common Core State Standards: Exemplar Poems with Engaging Lessons and Response Activities That Help Students Read, Understand, and Appreciate Poetry. By Georgia Heard. 2013. 96p. Scholastic, paper, \$17.99 (9780545374903).

The Poetry Teacher's Book of Lists. By Sylvia M. Vardell. 2012. 314p. CreateSpace, paper, \$17.99 (9781475100747).

Reading Poetry in the Middle Grades: 20 Poems and Activities That Meet the Common Core Standards and Cultivate a Passion for Poetry. By Paul B. Janeczko. 2011. 200p. Heinemann, paper, \$27.50 (9780325027104). 808.1071.

Using Poetry across the Curriculum: Learning to Love Language. 2d ed. By Barbara Chatton. 2010. 241p. ABC-CLIO, paper, \$40 (9781591586975).

Writing in Rhythm: Spoken Word Poetry in Urban Classrooms. By Maisha T. Fisher. 2007. 128p. Teachers College, \$44 (9780807747711); paper, \$22.95 (9780807747704). 428.0071.

experiences, which then can lead back to looking at specific words, lines, and stanzas in the poem.

Some poems are immediately accessible, but others need more time to grow on us. Don't be surprised if children refer to a poem days or weeks after you shared it. And not every child will respond verbally; some of the quietest children may experience the poem deeply but not ask or respond to questions in a group setting—and that is OK. Discussion prompts shouldn't overwhelm the poem itself, and be sure that you are not doing most of the talking.

I find that this brief moment for discussion usually accomplishes two important things: it provides a window into

children's understanding of the poem and paves the way for a gentle, inductive-skill-focused mini lesson. Kids often notice things about the poem in this discussion time (like repetition, rhyme, and onomatopoeia, for example), particularly as this practice becomes familiar. You can piggyback on their comments by explaining some poetry fundamentals after they've already observed them (e.g., "Click clack' is an example of onomatopoeia, and poets use this device to suggest sounds, even coining new words in the process"). When this discussion dynamic is in place time after time, children will often volunteer their own responses before you can ask your questions, because they know you are already open to their opinions.



Make a Skill Connection

The next natural step is to focus on a specific language-arts or poetry skill or concept that may be present in the poem—but just one. This includes basics such as rhyme, repetition, rhythm, alliteration, and onomatopoeia as well as poetry forms and types (cinquain, haiku, tanka, acrostic) and techniques such as personification and simile. Although any given poem may demonstrate many of these poetic elements and devices, focus on one key element that is particularly significant for one mini lesson. Remember that you are building poetry understanding one poem at a time—while striving to maintain the joy of poetry, too.

Here we can incorporate the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), or whatever curricular standards are in place for your area, in a natural, incremental way. What are the expectations regarding poetry outlined in CCSS? In sharing poetry with kindergartners, we capitalize on their developing knowledge of language, their joy in learning and playing with words, and their emerging understanding of how words should be spoken, spelled, read, and written. First we focus on enjoyment and understanding; then we guide students in recognizing and responding to poems. We can explore the rhythm of poetry as well as the power of rhyme and the sounds of words.

Common Core Connections

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.K.5.** Recognize common types of texts (e.g., storybooks, poems).

With first-graders, we shift slightly to guide students in understanding how poets express feelings in poetry and appeal to the senses through language. We can also help them understand and identify the words and phrases poets use to communicate emotions and convey sensory experiences through

Common Core Connections

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.1.4.** Identify words and phrases in stories or poems that suggest feelings or appeal to the senses.

In second grade, we extend that same anchor standard as we guide students in responding to the rhythm of poetry and recognizing how rhyme is used in poems. We can also explore how repetition and alliteration can help shape a poem and how meaning emerges.

Common Core Connections

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.2.4.** Describe how words and phrases (e.g., regular beats, alliteration, rhymes, repeated lines) supply rhythm and meaning in a story, poem, or song.

By third grade, we support students in responding to poetry in various forms, exploring narrative poems that tell stories, lyrical poems that explore questions and emotions, and humorous poems that make us groan or laugh. We help students understand how poets use lines and stanzas to build poems in distinctive ways.

Common Core Connections

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.3.5.** Refer to parts of stories, dramas, and poems when writing or speaking about a text, using terms such as *chapter*, *scene*, and *stanza*; describe how each successive part builds on earlier sections.

Then, in fourth grade, we also guide students in responding to poetry in various forms, articulating themes from key ideas and details in the poems. In sharing poetry aloud and in print, we can assist students in understanding how structural elements such as verse, rhythm, and meter help shape a poem.

Common Core Connections

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.2.** Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text; summarize the text.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.5.** Explain major differences between poems, drama, and prose, and refer to the structural elements of poems (e.g., verse, rhythm, meter) and drama (e.g., casts of characters, settings, descriptions, dialogue, stage directions) when writing or speaking about a text.

In fifth grade, the emphasis is on helping students respond to poetry in various forms, articulate themes from key ideas and details in the poems, and explain how the poem's speaker reflects upon a topic and shapes it with a particular point of view. We can guide students in understanding word meanings and how figurative language such as metaphors and similes function in poetry. We can also discuss how structural elements such as stanzas and line breaks help to shape a poem and how visual and multimedia elements contribute to the meaning, tone, or beauty of a poem. These goals connect with the following standards:

Book Links

CLASSROOM CONNECTION:
TAKE FIVE FOR POETRY
BY SYLVIA M. VARDELL

Common Core Connections

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.2.** Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.4.** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative language such as metaphors and similes.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.5.** Explain how a series of chapters, scenes, or stanzas fits together to provide the overall structure of a particular story, drama, or poem.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.6.** Describe how a narrator's or speaker's point of view influences how events are described
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.7.** Analyze how visual and multimedia elements contribute to the meaning, tone, or beauty of a text (e.g., graphic novel, multimedia presentation of fiction, folktale, myth, poem).

By sixth grade, the standards become more detailed and specific, including understanding figurative and connotative meanings of words; analyzing the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone; considering how a particular stanza fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the theme; and contrasting the reading and multimedia experience of a text and various forms or types of poetry in terms of their approaches to similar themes and topics.

Common Core Connections

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.4.** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.5.** Analyze how a particular sentence, chapter, scene, or stanza fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the theme, setting, or plot.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.7.** Compare and contrast the experience of reading a story, drama, or poem to listening to or viewing an audio, video, or live version of the text, including contrasting what they “see” and “hear” when reading the text to what they perceive when they listen or watch.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.9.** Compare and contrast texts in different forms or genres (e.g., stories and poems; historical novels and fantasy stories) in terms of their approaches to similar themes and topics.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.10.** By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 6–8 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range

All this may seem a bit overwhelming at first glance, but the idea is to develop this poetry appreciation incrementally, one poem at a time. With *The Poetry Friday Anthology*, students engage in reading, sharing, and discussing 36 poems across the school year, one poem per Poetry Friday. But we can share poems from a variety of wonderful poetry books, such as Marilyn Singer's newest work, *Follow Follow* (2013), the sequel to her popular fairy-tale-themed reverso-poem collection, *Mirror Mirror* (2010); or Jack Prelutsky's new *Stardines Swim High across the Sky and Other Poems* (2013), a blending of the animate and inanimate; or Caroline Kennedy's comprehensive anthology *Poems to Learn by Heart* (2012). Using this five-step approach, we can take any poem we enjoy and share it with children in ways that are varied, engaging, participatory, and skill-building.



Connect with Other Poems and Poetry Books

Finally, in this last step, we share other related poems and poetry books that connect well with the featured poem. Keep the poetry momentum going! Look for another poem by the same poet, another poem about the same subject, another poem in the same style, or a poem that contrasts with the focus poem in some distinctive way.

Once the students have been immersed in a dozen poems or more, they will be making those connections for you, noting how this poem reminds them of another. Follow their lead and encourage them to find and share those connected poems. Keep poetry books handy for easy reference, and revisit favorite poems as often as possible. A quick oral sharing of a popular poem can be a great way to start or end the day, a lesson, or a library program. You can use a poem to line students up, transition to the next activity, or capitalize on a brief wait. Students who spend five minutes with a good poem every Friday will surely find at least one poem that will stay with them for the rest of their lives!

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ROUGH AND TUMBLE

by Lesléa Newman

See them leap into the air,
See them jump upon a chair.
See them run and see them leap,
See them land into a heap.
See them roll and see them vault,
See them do a somersault.
See them slide and see them slip,
See them do a triple flip.
See them as they start the chase,
See them dash from place to place.
See them romp and see them rumble,
Full of grace, they never stumble.
Are they athletes? Acrobats?
No, my dear, they're just our cats.

From *The Poetry Friday Anthology* (2012), p.136. Used with permission; all rights reserved.



Lesléa Newman's poem "Rough and Tumble" is fun to read aloud and share with children, with its rhythmic and musical language, complete with a question and a surprise ending. It is designated for grade 2 in *The Poetry Friday Anthology*, but it is certainly appropriate for a wide range of grade levels. You may also be surprised to discover that the poet has provided additional layers of structure and meaning for young readers to discover. Children will quickly note that most of the poem's lines begin exactly the same way (with the words "See them"), a repetitive device designed to appeal to young listeners and readers. This poem qualifies as both a "What Am I?" poem and a list poem, two favorite types among children. Newman also manages to incorporate alliteration along the way (e.g., "See them slide and see them slip"). Finally, this poem is also a sonnet, a 14-line poem with, in this case, a rhyme scheme of *aa, bb, cc* arranged in rhyming couplets. All the lines have seven syllables until the traditional "turn" of the sonnet in lines 11 and 12, which contain eight syllables each, followed by the final couplet, with seven syllables in each line.

Below are possible "Take Five" activities for sharing this poem with children:

1. As you read the poem aloud, incorporate motions for some of the action words in this poem (choose from *leap, jump, run, land, roll, somersault, slide, slip, flip, chase, dash, romp, rumble*).
2. The first 11 lines of the poem all begin with the words "See them." Invite students to say those words while you repeat your pantomime performance and read the rest of the poem aloud.
3. For discussion: If this poem describes cat behavior, how would you describe dog behavior?
4. In this poem, the poet also uses alliteration to repeat the same sound in the beginning of several words for greater emphasis. Help students locate examples of this (for example, *see, slide, slip; romp, rumble*).
5. Revisit a previous poem about cat antics with "All Worn Out," by Kristy Dempsey (grade 2, week 5, in *The Poetry Friday Anthology*), or share another cat poem of your choice, such as those in Betsy Franco's *A Curious Collection of Cats* (2009).