

Book Links

UNPACKING A STANDARD:
POETRY AND THE
COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS
BY JULIE GREEN

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Though some students shy away from poetry, many children are easily drawn into the creative, colorful, sometimes silly language found in the best poetry titles for youth. A good poetry book will get checked out of the library over and over again until the pages begin to fall out. Poetry provides an excellent opportunity to investigate word choices and to think about the specifics of a writer's craft: both subjects with direct ties to the Common Core State Standards. Implement standards RL.1.4—RL.6.4 with the poetry titles suggested below. For more about the Common Core State Standards, visit www.corestandards.org.

RL.1.4. Identify words and phrases in stories or poems that suggest feelings or appeal to the senses.

In the Wild. By David Elliott. Illus. by Holly Meade. 2010. 32p. Candlewick, \$16.99 (9780763644970). PreS—Gr. 2.

Each of the poems from this book describes a different wild animal. Read through the poems and have students create a different anchor chart for each of the five senses. Then, as they read the poems, they can record words associated with sight, touch, smell, and so on. For example, *hairy* from the poem "The Sloth," might be a touch word, and *sniffs* from "The Wolf" might go on the smell anchor chart.

Peaceful Pieces: Poems and Quilts about Peace. By Anna Grossnickle Hines. Illus. by the author. 2011. 32p. Holt, \$16.99 (9780805089967). Gr. 2–5.

In this beautiful title, each poem about peace is accompanied by an illustration depicting a quilt. As teachers read the poems aloud to the class, they can also create a list of words from the selections that describe different feelings. Each student can then choose a word, write it on colored card stock, and illustrate it. After the students are finished, the class can tape or attach their work together to create their own quilt.

Swirl by Swirl. By Joyce Sidman. Illus. by Beth Krommes. 2011. 32p. Houghton, \$16.99 (9780547315836). PreS—Gr. 3.

This book is one long poem that describes different spirals found in nature. The lines are filled with evocative words:

clever, graceful, spinning and sparkling, snuggling. Have students list their favorite words and then reorder them into a spiral shape, creating their own poems.

RL.4.4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including those that allude to significant characters found in mythology.

Dark Emperor and Other Poems of the Night. By Joyce Sidman. Illus. by Rick Allen. 2010. 32p. Houghton, \$16.99 (9780547152288). 811. Gr. 3–6.

Each poem in this collection is accompanied by extra information about the nocturnal animals featured in the verse, and an appended glossary defines some of the scientific terms that appear within the text. Using the glossary as a model, have students create their own glossaries for interesting or unfamiliar words found in the poems. Divide students into groups, and ask each group to look for a different type of word: exciting nouns, exciting adjectives, and so on. At the end of the book study, combine the glossaries into a classroom reference source.

A Foot in the Mouth: Poems to Speak, Sing, and Shout. Ed. by Paul B. Janeczko. Illus. by Chris Raschka. 2009. 61p. Candlewick, \$17.99 (9780763606633). 811. Gr. 4–7.

As the introduction states, the poems in this anthology are meant to be read aloud, so begin by sharing several selections with the class, or have students read a few poems to each other. Divide up the students, assign one poem to each group, and appoint one student volunteer to be the narrator who will read the poem aloud. Then, have each student research the definition of a word in the group's poem and illustrate its meaning in any format they choose. Then, as the narrator reads the poem to the class, have the students raise their pictures when the narrator reaches their particular words. Students could do this exercise live, in front of the class, or use a technology tool, such as Photostory 3, to create their presentations.

A Mirror to Nature: Poems about Reflection. By Jane Yolen. Illus. by Jason Stemple. 2009. 31p. Boyds Mills/Wordsong, \$17.95 (9781590786246). Gr. 2–5.

In the introductory author's note, Yolen explains that water is nature's first mirror and that it invites viewers to look again, and more closely, at the world around us. What a great message to extend to poetry! Remind students that reading a poem once is usually just not enough. Have students choose a poem from Yolen's title and look up any unfamiliar words. Then, have students replace Yolen's words with synonyms. Have them make the argument to a partner about why their words, or the author's words, make the poem stronger.

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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.

Lemonade and Other Poems Squeezed from a Single Word.

By Bob Raczka. Illus. by Nancy Doniger. 2011. 48p. Roaring Brook, \$16.99 (9781596435414). 811. Gr. 2–5.

Each poem in this book uses only the letters in the title of the poem to create stanzas. Because of this tight structure, the poems are very succinct. Have students read the poems and share with a partner whether or not they agree with the author's poetic descriptions of a word. Do students agree that breakfast is a time to eat "fast like a beast," as the author writes? Or would students describe breakfast in a different way? Ask for specific examples.

Under the Mambo Moon. By Julia Durango. Illus. by Fabricio VandenBroeck. 2011. 48p. Charlesbridge, \$12.95 (9781570917233). 811. Gr. 3–5.

Young Marisol details a typical day with her dad at the music store he owns. In each of her poems, she describes the diverse customers, and both the characters and the verse embody the spirit of various types of Latin American music or dance. Ask students to choose a poem from the book to analyze. Have each student record three different lists. First, play music for the students that corresponds to the types of music referenced in the poems and ask students to record any words that describe their feelings as they listen. Next, have students look only at the pictures that accompany the poem (not the poem itself) and write down any words that come to mind. Finally, have students read each poem and list words that appear in the lines that they feel truly captures the spirit of the poem. Have the student look at all three lists and see if any words are repeated. Next, ask students to share their observations with a partner and discuss their thoughts about why the author made the word choices that she did.

Sweethearts of Rhythm: The Story of the Greatest All-Girl Swing Band in the World. By Marilyn Nelson. Illus. by Jerry Pinkney. 2009. 80p. Dial, \$21.99 (9780803731875). 811. Gr. 5–8.

This book is based on the real-life, all-female band, The Sweethearts of Rhythm, who played during WWII. Nelson writes the verse text from the point of view of the instruments that were played. Have students read the author's and illustrator's notes, first, to acquire some background knowledge. Then, read the poems aloud and have students keep a list of any interesting or difficult words that they hear, along with the titles of the poems in which they appear. After finishing the book, students can choose a poem that they'd like to study more closely, define the unknown words in it from their lists, and research historical and cultural details in the poem.

Students can then choose one or two words from the poem that they feel best describe its emotional and historical content. Then, students can justify (formally or informally) their choices, using their word definitions and research for support.

Julie Green is a school librarian at Pembroke Elementary School in Birmingham, Michigan.