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“WHO NEEDS POETRY?”

SEAN FITZPATRICK

I. FIRST THINGS FIRST

*The world is so full of a number of things,
I'm sure we should all be as happy as kings.*

CONSIDERING HOW MUCH UNHAPPINESS there is in the world today, there might be a temptation to dismiss this poem as an optimistic delusion—which is part of the cause of unhappiness. There is a sad tendency prevalent to view the world as a wasteland rather than a wonderland. This is, perhaps, one of the deepest errors of our time, the error of cynicism. What the world needs, what people need, what Catholics need is a psychological and spiritual renewal: a renewal of politics, parenthood, peacekeeping... and poetry. Of all these things the world stands in need of, however, poetry is a priority.

Without doubt, the Church needs pragmatists like scientists and soldiers in the cultural and spiritual war zones to defend the Faith. But, in as much as civilization needs professionals, so too does it need poets—and that for a very simple reason. Scientists without poetry are slaves to systems. Soldiers without poetry are barbarians devoid of chivalry. A people without poetry cannot be missionaries, because faith is impossible without poetry. Without knowledge or love of Goodness, Truth, and Beauty there cannot be any hope of attaining the glorious End of martyrdom—whether through war, in wedlock, at work, or on any given Wednesday.

Continued on page i



IHM

Homeschool and Parent Conferences

For the length of this season, the *IHM Insider* will cover all of the Catholic homeschooling conferences, not just the IHM ones. You can check for constant updates about the 10K Strong Campaign and the conferences as the season progresses.



2013 Conference Schedule

- March 8 ☼ Tennessee
- March 15 ☼ Jacksonville
- April 12-13 ☼ Georgia
- April 19-20 ☼ Houston
- April 26 ☼ Pittsburgh
- May 3 ☼ Buffalo
- May 10 ☼ Lafayette
- May 17-18 ☼ Maryland
- May 24-25 ☼ Carolina
- June 7-8 ☼ Cleveland
- June 21-22 ☼ NATIONAL**
- June 28-29 ☼ North Texas
- July 12-13 ☼ Dayton
- July 18-19 ☼ Tampa
- July 26-27 ☼ Chicago
- August 2-3 ☼ New York
- August 9 ☼ New England

www.IHMConference.org



Visit our website to watch our conference video!

From the Editor...

Dear Readers,

April is National Poetry month, so it's the perfect time to release our spring issue devoted to poetry. We have included quite a variety of views on poetry, and I'm sure you'll find all of it intriguing, and, well, poetical.

Here is a quote by Hillaire Belloc to think about as you begin to muse about poetry:

Verse is a slow thing to create; nay, it is not really created: it is a secretion of the mind, it is a pearl that gathers round some irritant and slowly expresses the very essence of beauty and desire that has lain long, potential and unexpressed in the mind of man who secretes it. (*On Nothing and Kindred Subjects*)

I have to admit that I write poetry. It's probably not good poetry by the world's standards, but it's *my* pearl, my gatherings around the irritants of my inner most mind and heart. I probably haven't outgrown that adolescent stage of poetry writing that Sean Fitzpatrick talks about in the cover article, but it's still important to me.

I encourage you to write some poems this month, and get your children to write poetry as well. Here is a simple idea I read about a few years ago: Get some postcards, and once a week, write a poem that would fit on a postcard and mail it to someone. What a delightful way to celebrate National Poetry Month! What a nice surprise for a friend! Here is one of my poems about poetry, which I bravely share (a little risky here) in hopes you'll see that you don't have to be a stellar poet to be creative and share a bit of your pearls with others.

*A poem is
the taste
of flower nectar
and the molten chocolate
center
of warm lava cake;
A surprise that satisfies.*

In Christ
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continued from cover

*Can anyone strive for heaven that has
no idea what heaven is?
And heaven, a mystery of beauty, is
a poem.*

To begin at the beginning, this article will open with an un-poetic definition, put forward as a first principle that all can agree with: Man, as Aristotle says, is a rational animal. It should be generally accepted that man, as a knower, has knowledge of the truth as his purpose. It should also be generally admitted that before man can fulfill this end, he must have some inkling of the truth before he can rest in it. In other words, he must have some obscure experience or indirect knowledge of his end before he can do anything appropriate in selecting the means to arrive there.

This first knowledge, or pre-knowledge—this knowledge that is prerequisite to any scientific or ultimate knowledge—is often called poetic knowledge. Poetry is the knowledge of experience, standing outside the categories of scientific knowledge that comprehends truths in an absolute way through their causes. Poetic knowledge, on the other hand, comprehends truth in a vague way: truths such as love, fear, and joy. Everyone knows these things very well, but only as mysteries.

The art of poetry is the attempt to create an expression of the knowledge of such experiences, to capture a moment of them and share this ordinary yet extraordinary knowledge. In many ways, the poetic mode can be understood as a cultivation of intellectual darkness, but where the darkness is actually a thing known in a distant yet delightful way—in a profound way, in the half-light of deep truths.

Following a clear and distinct mathematical paradigm will not divulge the truth of everything. There are truths that science cannot demonstrate nor rhetoric persuade the validity of—and those truths belong to poetry. And poetry itself, being pre-rational, cannot even explain what it is exactly that it does, or how, or why. It is itself the mystery of mysteries.

.....
II. ALAS AND ALACK
.....

Knowledge is a habit of mind, and habits that are unpracticed are lost. Sadly, no one reads poetry anymore. Thus society has largely lost its poetic sensibilities in how we come to know things, and this is a large part of the overall crisis of society. To be sure, the root of the problem is a loss of faith. But, as poetry is the expression of things held as true but not understood, poetry is a cause of faith, giving credence to conviction in things that are not fully comprehensible.

No one reads poetry anymore—and so will the Faith remain un-nurtured by it. The only way to restore the lost habit of poetry is to initiate small ventures and simple inclusions of it in our lives and the lives of our children.

*Little drops of water,
Little grains of sand,
Make the mighty ocean
And the pleasant land.*

*So the little moments,
Humble though they be,
Make the mighty ages
Of Eternity.*

How many of you skipped over that? No one reads poetry anymore. Part of the reason for this is an opinion, whether conscious or unconscious, that poetry is unimportant and unnecessary. One way

to approach this criticism is by means of a poetic argument—one that seems right, but no one will be sure why—which shall here be assayed.

If poetry is unimportant and unnecessary, then beauty—whether in speech, sound, appearance, or what have you—is unimportant and unnecessary. But this is not the case. God made the world beautiful; He made women beautiful; He made stars beautiful; and He did not have to. It was not necessary. One conclusion is that beauty is important even if it is not necessary. Beauty is often superfluous—in fact, it is more beautiful when it is. Some of the most important things people can do are the ones that are not necessary—like recreation or the corporal works of mercy. Such things, unnecessary though they may be, bring out the beauty of existence. Poetry taps into things of precisely that nature, giving voice to the mystery and order and beauty that lies at the heart of things. Poetry helps people see beyond the surfaces to realities that defy dissection. Are such things unimportant? It seems unlikely. Are they valueless? Absolutely, but the best things in life are. Poetry rounds out a person, teaching them to know things with their heart as well as their head. There are some realities that defy being spoken of in any way besides poetry—and again, this is true of the best things in life. After St. Thomas wrote the *Summa Theologica* and was rewarded with a glimpse of the Beatific Vision, the only thing he ever wrote for the rest of his life was poetry. Was this madness? Is it possible that the “Song of Songs” strikes closer to the Divine Existence than the “Five Ways”? Such madness seems to get souls into heaven. And so should we all be thus mad—mad as lovers who speak in the

language of love: Poetry. There never was a man who could deny the importance and necessity of having a healthy love of things worth loving. Who could, then, not forgive such mad lovers for trying to share their own personal experiences with the Good, True, and Beautiful with a few verses? What more is poetry than an attempt to proclaim and share things worthy of our love? Beauty is diffusive, and therefore, we have poetry.

If you found that paragraph rambling, you would be correct; but such rambling is precisely the point. The poetic mode is rambling, having the freedom to act as though the goal was reached. The poetic mindset, therefore, participates in the end before it actually gets there. It is the poet who, on the perennial journey of life, stops at an inn, or sits under an apple tree, or smells the flowers. He does this because he senses the great Truth in the little truths along the way. Consequently, he acts like he is always arriving. He is always able to rest in whatever is at hand, and in whatever way any particular beauty reflects the Beauty that is being finally sought after. He participates in the end before he gets there. It is by virtue of this vision and participation that he will find his way more easily—guided by his heart.

By these qualities, poetic knowledge may be considered the opposite of scientific knowledge. Poetic knowledge is from the inside out rather than from the outside in. But, to go back to Aristotle, wisdom begins with wonder; and wonder is something men discover first in themselves as they experience to the mysteries around them. The dark knowledge of these mysteries and their bright expression is poetry. Not only should people be reading poetry, they should be writing

it as well. Unless people awaken their hearts to wonder, they will never know anything. No amount of reason, however sound, can move a heartless creature. So it is to the heart that poetry administers, even as it proceeds from it, and teaches that there are things worth loving and therefore worth knowing more intimately.

Have you ever been out on a starry night?

Have you ever understood something as you stood under them?

III. MOTHER GOOSE

The most important age for poetry is, thankfully, the age where it is comes most naturally. It is in the nursery that poetry fulfills its purpose of providing pre-knowledge most poignantly. Nursery rhymes (and by these are meant Mother Goose and little, if anything, else) introduce children to the world. They present little curious or commonplace vignettes of reality, constantly changing their shape, page by page, from one subject

to another. There is no attempt to present any idea of a whole because there is no need for an integration of things at this tender age. The child is happy to explore a vast multitude of goods without worrying about what they all amount to or tend towards. Mother Goose simply puzzles, proclaims, and plays with the parts, diving one at a time into the many worlds that make up our world.

If there is any focus at all, it is on the household and workaday life—the sorts of things that happen when people wake up in the morning, do their chores, eat meals, fuss with farm animals, play games, and go to bed at night. Mother Goose is not so concerned with mysteries since everyday existence is enough of a mystery to any child who is seeing it all for the first time.

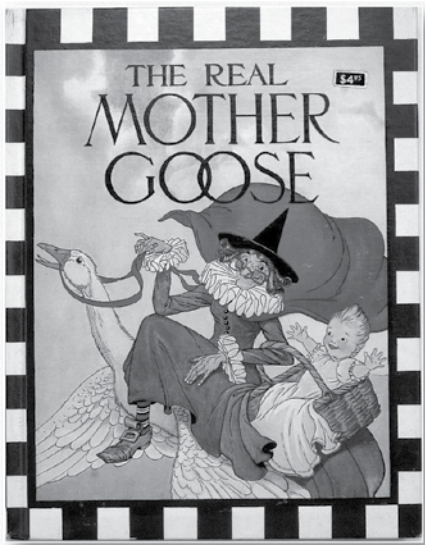
In fact, it is the simplicity of Mother Goose that allows her rhymes to portray plain, honest truths in a plain, honest fashion, whose profundity we have forgotten through custom. For children, this simplicity is not simply satisfying; it is soul stirring. For children, dogs are truly as exciting as dragons and puddles really as infinite as oceans. Mother Goose parades a whole host of such ordinary wonders before her little blossoms, and in this they are given a taste of reality—and a taste for it, as well.

*Little boy blue, come blow your horn,
The sheep's in the meadow, the cow's
in the corn.*

*What! Is this the way you mind your
sheep,*

Under the haycock fast asleep?

Why should the peaceful audacity of Little Boy Blue, with his beneficent defiance of the rhythms of a world of beasts and schedules, not enchant a newcomer?



Besides the fact that there are large truths about life, duty, and learning peering out from behind such little poems, it is first and foremost delightful. These delights are an introduction—nothing more—but introductions are often the most important part of coming to know anything. The genius of these rhymes as introductions to the way things are is that they are rhymes. They settle themselves comfortably into the hearts and minds and mouths of children, becoming part of their language and a ready measure for the things they experience—and a finer measuring stick there never was.

But it must be said, and with all emphasis, that the purpose of these rhymes is not to provide children with patterns or lessons or preparations on how to be moralistic, or imaginative, or well-behaved, or good readers, or any other practical thing. Fudge! (as Mother Goose still exclaims). They are simply good for their own sake. They are worth enjoying in and of themselves, giving children the all-important experience of resting in an end. Any utilitarian good that proceeds as a result of their having these rhymes written in their heart is purely accidental.

These little introductions to the wide world celebrate the commonplace in a common way. But Mother Goose well knows that they will be beheld as uncommon; and that the mysteries we have grown dull for are more than sufficient to satisfy the innocent. Mother Goose

serves as a principle awakener to the everyday wonders of the world for young children. Without her wise prattlings, children would run the risk of being forever babes in the woods, like Peter Pan's tragic Lost Boys, without the happy touchstone that helps to form the habit of knowledge. Without the habit of these

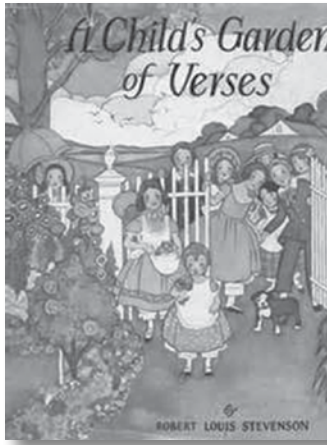
indispensable nursery rhymes, a child will never acquire appetite not aptitude for works that plumb the depths of reality. Without the poetry of the nursery, every other poetic mode and instinct will be lame and stale.

Mother Goose's melodies approach the world the same way children do—by playful imitation.

There is no need for any serious explanation of any kind. There is only need for engagement and enjoyment. That is the way children learn. That is the way they will become scientific knowers—by pretending to be first. And it is the former that is, believe it or not, more important because it is prior.

IV. THE CHILD'S GARDEN

Once children outgrow the nursery and take to the garden, so too should their poetry change. At this stage of childhood, there awakens an urge to explore. The infant is more than content to allow the world to simply parade itself before its passively wondering eyes. With childhood, however, comes an intrepid impulse—a desire to discover the secrets of gardens and trees and closets. So too



does the poetry for the child investigate these items of life with more curiosity and scrutiny, to meet the needs of the soul as it interacts more actively with the world. This poetry is more focused on detail, for now that Mother Goose has planted the garden, so now the sprouts must be tended with diligence and care.

R. L. Stevenson's *A Child's Garden of Verses* may very well be considered the canon of poetry for children beyond infancy. The main reason for this is that these poems present the right relation between reality and fancy—between the imagination and the intellect. Real things are imagined to be other real things insofar as they resemble each other, like a basket and a pirate ship. This is an age of relation and designation in the real world. There is no need to draw from faery or fantasy—the backyard is stuffed full of treasures that need digging up.

Thus Stevenson weaves his little rhymes with healthy and observant sentiments that children nowadays perhaps need more than ever. Sentiments that suggest that the house we live in is home; that our own creative will can create worlds; that meditation on grown-up life is worthwhile; that play is very real and very important.

A good number of these verses deal with the seasons and their weather, answering to the child's newfound experiences of playing outdoors. The earth and all its elements and rhythms are now being engaged actively as cosmic playthings by the mind and body—and the heart must not be left behind. This sense of play, the sense of living in the world, dominates these joyful and tender years; and the accompanying poetry for that age ought to reflect it and nurture it. It

is through poems, more than anything else, when wonder begins to tap at the door of philosophy.

*Happy hearts and happy faces,
Happy play in grassy places—
That was how, in ancient ages,
Children grew to kings and sages.*

A Child's Garden of Verses is more sophisticated than Mother Goose, but as it introduces a passage to higher planes of thought and experience, so is it less solid than Mother Goose. But though there is less of a down-to-earth virtue, there is more delicacy in art that more than compensates through a childlike contemplation of things. There is a refined literary expression of things here that children naturally turn over in their minds. These rhymes and songs invite children to unite their own hearts and souls to the poems, allowing them to become their own expressions or comprehensions of mysteries of delight. In this way poetry serves as a means for children to discover something inside of themselves, which is a great deal more than providing them with an articulation of some inner movement of the heart. They participate in human life through poetry—and music and games and as many good and true and beautiful things that are available.

Another aspect of these poems that must not be ignored, because it is very important in the formation of any child, is that many of them carry an air of sadness. Stevenson includes poems about sickness, loneliness, disappointment, and goodbyes. Every child must gradually come to know that the world, as Virgil wrote, is a world of tears, and that one of the powers of poetry is to represent the passing, precious nature of things—*“Each a glimpse and gone for ever!”*

V. STAR-CROSSED

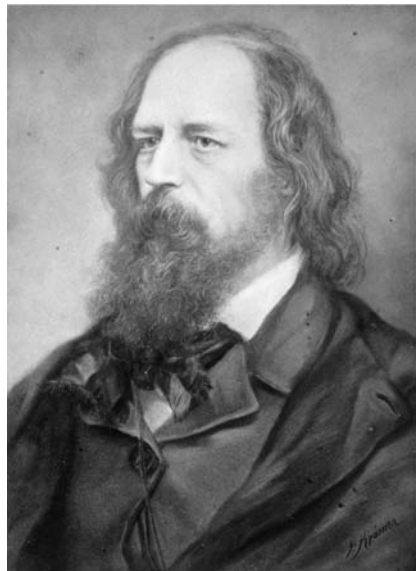
The shift to adolescence is, of course, dramatic. As childhood is shuffled off and the dark mantle of young adulthood is donned, the perception of things alters. There is, in fact, a kind of return to the mode of infancy. Adolescence is, after all, the infancy of adulthood. The infant lives an interior life as he takes in truth for the first time. Then the child, in his rejection of infancy, rejoices in the good things found with gangs and games. Then, the adolescent takes the stage, rejecting in his turn the political existence of the child, and moves back to realms of solitude, finding that truth has been somehow lost.

The adolescent feels suddenly estranged in the world, and filled with longings for that other world, the immortal world, that ultimate good that has not been reached. Beauty has become inaccessible, and the material of impossible dreams and desires. Thus, adolescence is a restless age—an age that burns like fire. Everyone knows it well, but no one understands it at all.

This is the age for the richest poetry because the age itself is so poetic. All adolescents are star-crossed, and their poetry is a way for them to cope with this inward condition and contradiction to help them comprehend the metaphysical mysteries they are drawn to contemplate. Poems that speculate on the nature of things speak to the speculative, adolescent soul. It may even be considered that the poetry of this age, which is often a dangerous age, assists in providing what T. S. Eliot called the objective correlative, to identify and objectify the experience of stirrings that may be too profound to bear. In this way, the poems suited for adolescents provide an Aristotelian

catharsis, giving form and meaning to things that are naturally grappled with. Poetry, especially romantic poetry, may very properly be called therapeutic to the adolescent heart.

Romantic poetry concentrates on the purest poetic elements: the sublimity of creation and the sympathy of emotion. It exalts the outward existence in order to enhance the inward experience. There arises in adolescents an added appetite for principles as well as for pleasures. They are consequently both turned in on themselves and observant of things. This double preoccupation is often an effort to discover who they are and how they fit into their surroundings. Poetry is potent food for such reflections if they are poems about lovers and fighters, virtue and vice, heaven and earth, man and God. But these things that adolescents seek through the lens of poetry are not simply dreamy ideas. They are real. Romance is real and it wrestles with realities.



*But our love it was stronger by far than
the love
Of those who were older than we—
Of many far wiser than we—
And neither the angels in heaven above,
Nor the demons down under the sea,
Can ever dissever my soul from the soul
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee.*

Adolescents are the quintessential romanticists—real people with real emotions who see that the only way to achieve the object is through real integrity. They are dreamers, without doubt, but their dreams are true. Make-believe is a thing of the past. Although the objects pursued are usually invisible and difficult to attain, they are spiritual realities; and adolescents are committed to the meditation on them and the quest for them. They are knights-errant, ever wandering, ever seeking, and poetry shows them the way. Poetry is their guide to find that one, elusive end that will hold their life together and be meaningful forever. Poetry will help find the girl, find the good, and find their God. Adulthood is dealing with the discovery. Adolescence is the search.

The question remains, however, what is this poetry that is to be given to adolescents? The answer is not as simple as it is with the youngsters. Adolescence is more complicated, and so are the things pertaining to it. As the world expands before their eyes and intellects, so too do the horizons of poetry broaden. The safest choice for adolescent passion

is, as has been said, the romantic poets because they are dangerously passionate. Blake, Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, and Tennyson are all irresistible and indispensable. But even these, masters of beauty though they are, should be creatively supplemented. Consider mixing in the psychological edginess of Poe, the sheer beauty of Shakespeare's Sonnets, the melancholy grit of Frost, and the liveliness of Scott. A tableau is always helpful to create variety, and a voice for every shade and mood of the teenage soul.

Perhaps the most important part of the puzzle of adolescence and poetry is this: encourage them to write poetry themselves. Every adolescent does; they cannot help it. What is important is that their poetry should (if they should choose to share it!) be taken seriously—as a true and meaningful outlet and outpouring of real struggles with themselves and the world. There are few things as conducive to peaceful resolution as this exercise, and its efficaciousness will only increase if they are given sober appreciation (not extravagant, effusive praise) by their parents. It is even through their children's own poetry that parents may grow to better know and understand them.



VI. THE CHILD IS FATHER OF THE MAN

Perhaps the most significant obstacle to providing today's children with the

experience of poetry is that Mother Goose has not brought up many of today's parents. (Fear not. It is never too late to mend.) Poetry—that is, beauty, rest, perfection, and participation in the good—is actually good for grown-ups too. No matter how old you are, or how busy you are, it is always important to be reminded of the end that all our distracting means are for the sake of.

If you never thought about the importance of poetry in education, do not, by any means, let this article convince you. By all means, *go to the source*. Take the time. Read the Psalms. Read Homer, Virgil, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Coleridge, and Hopkins. Write your own book inscriptions and Christmas cards to your loved ones *in verse*.

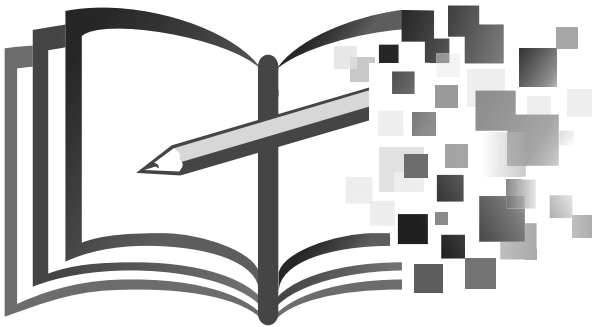
Immerse yourself.
Engage the material.
And, above all else, enjoy it.
Take the time.

You will have to, if this article has persuaded you that poetry is an important element in the education of children. No parent can give their child what they do not have. No child will take to heart what is brushed off by their parents. If parents want their children to pray, they must pray first. If parents want their children to be good, they must be good before them. If parents do not read and savor the poetic works, neither will their children.

The first step to giving your children the gift of poetry is to love it yourself.

*So was it when my life began;
So is it now I am a man;
So be it when I shall grow old,
Or let me die!* ♡

Sean is a high school humanities teacher and homeschooling dad living in northeast Pennsylvania. He also writes for Crisis and Catholic Insight.



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A Birdwatcher's Guide to Fitting Poetry into Your Days

By Lisa Salinas

*"My hummingbird-hearted schedule beats its shiny frenzy, day into year."
– Molly Peacock from the poem Little Miracle*

IF YOUR HOMESCHOOLING HOUSEHOLD IS LIKE MINE, your days are filled with a joyful busy-ness. Very often I find that the tea I've brewed has cooled by the time I sit down to drink it. Over the years I've found that little restorative moments in the middle of a day can refresh me and bring me peace. One of my favorite ways to spend those few moments is in the reading and writing poetry.

Like bird-watching, fitting poetry into your life does not have to be a huge commitment. Reading a novel – now that's more like pet-sitting a dog for the weekend. Once you start you know you've dedicated yourself to the task for the next few days. Fitting in the reading and writing of poetry is more like backyard bird-watching. The birds will come and go as they please. You can enjoy them for a few moments and then go back to your daily tasks. They bring beauty into your life, but ask very little in return.

Here are few tips from a birdwatcher and lover of poetry for bringing beautiful words into your days:

Prepare a welcoming environment. The first step in attracting birds into your yard is to make your garden conducive to them. Add the right vegetation, running water, some feeders filled with bird seed, and maybe a birdhouse or two. Making them feel at home ensures that

they will find their way again and again into your yard. Just as you would prepare your garden for feathered visitors, take steps to prepare your home and your life for poetry reading and writing.





Place books of poetry and print-outs of favorite poems in places where you can reach them easily throughout the day. Books of classic poetry are wonderful. There are also many modern active poets that are worth reading. Try the Poetry Foundation’s Mobile App (<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/mobile/>) to explore new poems. Put a Magnetic Poetry set (<http://magneticpoetry.com/>) on your refrigerator and play around with writing a Haiku when you have a lull during dinner preparation. I like to take a notepad and pencils with me when I go places so that I can write down ideas for poetry when I have a few moments to spare.

Set aside short time periods of time for observation. Enjoying birds is all about observation – putting aside your busy day for a few moments to watch their behavior, get to know their habits, and enjoy their company. Our family has enjoyed participating in Cornell University Lab of Ornithology’s Project FeederWatch (<http://www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw/>), identifying and tallying the birds we’ve seen each week. The more consistently we’ve observed the birds, the more we’ve enjoyed them. The reading and writing of poetry is the same. Setting aside regular time for enjoying poetry within the midst of your days will increase your enjoyment of it. Try fitting in teatime with poetry on some afternoons with your children. Do it by yourself if they are busy with something else. Setting aside a regular time for reading will ensure that it happens more often. Also, as birds need cover – an easy access hiding place where they can take quick refuge when needed – you might, too. Find yourself some cover in your home: a quiet place to take a quick few minutes to read by yourself. It may rejuvenate you to take some fresh poetic ideas along to face the rest of the day’s demands.

Use a field guide. A field guide is essential for new birdwatchers. How else would you tell a warbler from a nuthatch? It is lots of fun to identify

a bird you've just sighted for the first time, confirming its call and flight pattern with the description in your book or an online guide to birds. As you start reading more poetry, you'll find that handbooks to the reading and writing of poetry and guides to poetic forms are fascinating reading. Poems can take many shapes – some familiar (like the Haiku and Shakespearean Sonnet); others not so familiar (like the Haibun, the Pantoum, and the Rondelet). Becoming acquainted with various poetic forms may help you to further appreciate the work of poets who have stretched themselves to fit their thoughts into prescribed line lengths and formats, and will help you understand why other poets have chosen free

verse to accompany their poetic ideas. *A Book of Forms: A Handbook of Poetics* by Lewis Turco and *The Making of a Poem: A Norton Anthology of Poetic Forms* by Mark Strand and Eavan Boland are good places to start.

Enjoy the birdsong. A big part of the enjoyment of birding is appreciating the songs of the birds and learning to identify them by their calls and songs even before you see them. Poetry is also known for its song: the rhythm and meter with which the words sing when read aloud. Have fun experimenting with reading poetry to see what you like to hear the most. Bringing voice to your favorite poems is also a great way to store them in your memory for retrieval at a later time when you don't have the printed version handy. If you are interested in writing and would like to use rhyme in your poetry, I highly recommend Write Express® Rhymer® software (<http://www.writeexpress.com/rhyming-dictionary.html>) or its free online version (<http://www.rhymer.com/>).

Use binoculars. If you would like to fully appreciate many kinds of birds, binoculars are essential for zooming in to view details when birds remain elusive, whether they fly above the reach of your sight or choose to hide within the cover of your yard. Poetry is known for allowing its readers to see the world more clearly by viewing it in new ways – like a pair of binoculars – particularly through the use of poetic devices such as imagery, simile and metaphor. As you read and write more poetry, you may find that you see with new eyes: through the viewfinder of the writings of others and by looking at the world in new ways as you put your own pencil to paper.

Create a life list. Serious birders



keep a life list: a record of the species they’ve observed during their lifetime of bird-watching. Once you begin to fit the reading of more poetry into your life, compile a poetry life list – your favorite poems, poets, and books of poetry – and return to them again and again. Just as you would get to know a species of bird after seeing it over and over again, the poems that you revisit will often reveal themselves to you in new ways and become a part of your life. You may find yourself turning to them over and over for entertainment, solace and inspiration.

Get together with other birders. Alan Pistorius writes in his book *Everything You Need to Know about Birding & Backyard Bird Attraction*: “Birders learn, of course, in the company of better birders.” The same is true for poets and avid readers of poetry. Finding a local poetry society encouraged me to write poetry after many years of being away from it. If you enjoy poetry, find like-minded friends and meet for readings and discussions. Visit the website of the National Federation of State Poetry Societies (<http://www.nfsps.com/>) for help in finding a state or local group near you.

Like many activities in life, bird-watching has its seasons. Migrating birds come and go; the birdwatcher gets busy with life and puts aside the hobby for a time, then gets inspired by a new feathered visitor and returns to watching. The reading and writing of poetry has its seasons, too. You may find that you enjoy reading poetry tied into the liturgical seasons of the year. I like Bishop Robert Morneau’s Advent and Lenten meditation books, entitled *Fathoming Bethlehem* and *Ashes to Easter* (<http://www.new-catholics.org/pg/spiritualityBookList.tpl>).

They each feature portions of poetry by excellent modern Catholic poets. You may find that the less busy times of the year or the quieter seasons of life are the best for fitting in more reading and writing (like nursing and nap times after the birth of a new child). You may turn to poetry in times of trial and as Victor Hugo put it, “Be like the bird who pausing in her flight awhile on boughs too slight, feels them give way beneath her yet sings, knowing that she hath wings.”

If you would like to become a regular reader of poetry or maybe a poet yourself, but are concerned that you cannot fit it into your busy family life, I encourage you to take small steps to give it a try. Anne Lamott, in her book *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*, tells the story of the struggle of her then 10-year-old brother to complete a report on birds that he had put off writing until the weekend before it was due. Encouraging him in his distress, his father told him, “Bird by bird, buddy. Just take it bird by bird.” I encourage you to do the same. Read a poem during a quiet moment as your kids are playing. Print a copy of a poem and tack it onto the refrigerator to read as you go about your kitchen chores. Read a poem aloud to your children during breakfast, lunch or teatime. As John Ruskin wrote, “make a nest of pleasant thoughts” and fill your home – your nest – with poetry.

Although she enjoys many hobbies, including backyard bird-watching, Lisa Salinas’ passion is poetry. She uses various poetic forms to write about travel, history, the natural world, faith, and life with children. Lisa’s work has received top honors from the National Federation of State Poetry Societies.



POETRY FOR BUSY MOMS

EFFORTLESSLY (*well, almost*) INCORPORATING POETRY
MEMORIZATION INTO THE HOMESCHOOL

BY LINDA MILLIKEN



IT WAS PROBABLY INEVITABLE THAT POETRY WOULD BE an important part of my children's education, as I was already reading the delightful poems from my own tattered childhood copy of *The Tall Book of Make-Believe*

to my firstborn when he was three days old. I admit that I am a poetry enthusiast, and I also admit that I have precious little (read "no") special formal education in it beyond the offerings of the standard English class. Poems can be studied in great detail, compared and contrasted, analyzed, and categorized — and while these are all wonderful and worthwhile activities at the right place and time, there is great benefit in simply enjoying poetry with your children.

Do not despair, dear Busy Homeschooling Mom, you who have little time and perhaps little expertise in this area! I am in the same boat, and I'm happy to report that it is easy to incorporate poetry into your homeschool. You do not have to be an expert, or feel competent to analyze metrical patterns or deep underlying themes. Have you heard of the book *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*? Well, I haven't read it, but all I really need to know about poetry memorization and appreciation, I learned in the books of Laura Berquist and Karen Andreola (*The Harp and Laurel Wreath* and *A Charlotte Mason Companion*, respectively). These are wonderful resources

that I highly recommend, but if you do nothing more than just take a book of good poetry out of the library, and regularly read that with your children, they (and you) will benefit.

Why is poetry so beneficial and why, specifically, should poetry *memorization* be included in the day? Besides being just plain fun, poetry introduces children to beautiful, complex patterns of language, and shows how words can both communicate thoughts and also move the emotions. Exposure to poetry at an early age will greatly facilitate the older student's ability to appreciate and understand more complex language patterns. Morals can be imparted, history lessons re-enforced, and literary allusions explored, all with the grace and subtlety that only a beautifully written poem can offer.

Memorization offers wonderful long-term benefits as well, so memorizing poetry is an unbeatable combination! If children regularly memorize when they are young, it will be much easier for them later. Having a family that enjoys acting in Shakespeare plays, I have seen the truth of this when witnessing the amazing ability of my own teens and pre-teens

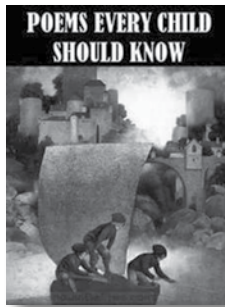
to memorize huge chunks of Shakespeare relatively easily. Let this thought inspire you when you feel you just don't have time for poetry: There will never be a time when it will be this easy to fill your students' minds with beautiful, heroic images, elegantly worded phrases, and all the good that poetry has to impart.

There is also a deep satisfaction that comes from wrestling with something and then succeeding, particularly something that is a bit of a stretch and requires effort one isn't quite sure one can muster. The memorization of the whole poem, with the concentrated effort and attention to detail required, really is an accomplishment. Just the plugging away day by day, one little bit at a time, and eventually mastering *the whole thing* is a lesson in itself. I would strongly urge you to follow Mrs. Berquist's suggestion of having your child illustrate his completed poem, and compiling poems and illustrations in a personalized poetry book for each child. They really are a treasure to look back on!

Poetry is such an enjoyable and profitable part of the school day that I would include it even if you are doing little else that day (or that year, in the case of very young children.) For the little ones in your homeschool who aren't yet ready for formal lessons, memorizing and illustrating short, lovely poems that appeal to them can be a wonderful introduction to "school".

For the last dozen years, we have been spending little chunks of time on most school days memorizing poetry, and I can honestly say that no other subject has yielded so great a return in proportion to the

amount of time allotted to it. Following is our simple method for enjoying poetry. Step One (the most essential step): If you want to keep it really easy, here's my very simple poetry appreciation program in one step: Read some good poems with your children! Have fun with them. Discuss what you like and what you don't like. Re-read everyone's favorites multiple times, as desired. If you are able to find beautifully illustrated poems, so



much the better, but plain old black and white text will do. Sit on the couch together by the fire, or out in a green field if it isn't February in Maine, relax, and enjoy. (See the end of this article for some suggestions on poetry books to get you started.) I hope, though, that you will be inspired to take your

poetry appreciation a step further, and commit some poems to memory. If you're ready to take the plunge, read on.

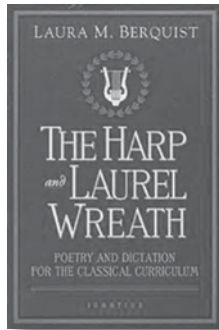
STEP TWO: Select a poem for memorization. I suggest making this a combined effort between mom and memorizer. What I do is spend a bit of time previewing poems, selecting 3-5 for each student to choose from. I keep in mind that particular child's interests, abilities, and the last poems he's worked on. I then read my picks to him for his consideration, and let him make the selection of the poem he is most drawn to. I really want my children to love poetry time, and giving them a say in selecting poems helps to facilitate that. Sometimes a student will come up with his own suggestion, and while I generally weigh his preferences quite heavily, I have been known to gently urge a child to vary his repertoire a bit from time to time.

STEP THREE: Work on memorizing the poem a little at a time. I like the method of my reading first and having my student repeat after me because I really enjoy being directly involved in poetry time, but there are other options. You can turn your child loose to memorize on his own, have him listen to a recording of the poem every day and/or write it for handwriting practice, or have siblings work with each other. Just keep moving ahead with the process of learning a little more and re-viewing what's already learned until the whole thing is committed to memory.

STEP FOUR: Show time! Now it's time for the official recitation. We like to make a bit of an event of this, so when someone has a poem all memorized, we save the final presentation for a night when Dad isn't working late. The recitation is held after dinner, and all who desire enjoy a cup of tea while the presenter takes his place. To add to the atmosphere, anyone presenting a finished poem has the distinction of being allowed to deliver his piece from atop a small stool or chair (not something I normally encourage at the dinner table). The accompanying illustration is also proudly displayed. It's a simple little ceremony that only takes a few minutes, but I think we have all enjoyed it.

EXTRA CREDIT: There are so many extra activities you can do with the poems you are enjoying together; here are just a few ideas to get you started.

• Schedule poetry recitations to coincide with a visit from grandparents, other relatives, or friends, and include them in the "audience".



As an added bonus, you have just introduced public speaking into your curriculum!

• Prepare a special poem to recite at Thanksgiving, Christmas, a birthday celebration, or another family get-together.

• Host a Poetry Recitation Tea with other homeschooling families. We have done this, and it was very successful. We welcomed other artistic endeavors as well, such as performing a piece of music or displaying artwork, but we still had quite a few students recite poems.

• Divide a longer poem up and have siblings memorize different parts, reciting the finished piece together. We've done this with "How the Leaves Came Down" by Susan Coolidge and "Christmas Bells" by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and it worked out very well.

• Write a favorite poem in lovely handwriting or calligraphy, perhaps with some illustrations in the margin, and frame it for display or give it as a gift.

• Check the wonderful suggestions in the poetry chapter of *A Charlotte Mason Companion* for other creative ideas, such as coordinating your poetry selections with the seasons.

• Get Mom and Dad in on the act! I admit I took great delight in reciting Stephen Vincent Benet's "Captain Kidd" at the end of a poetry recitation tea (after all of the kids were finished presenting, and almost everyone had gone home), and my kids assure me they weren't embarrassed. I have to add that they are truly thrilled with a silly poem my husband wrote when he was studying German in college, "Mein Kuegelschreiber Ist Verloren" (which sounds a whole lot more impressive than the English, "My Ballpoint Pen Is Lost").

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☽ Of course, writing your own poetry is a splendid thing to do! It can be totally original or modeled on a favorite poem.

☽ If you haven't done it already, I hope that you're inspired to give poetry a try. Just a tiny bit of time and effort invested will handsomely reward you with a return of multiple benefits and a lot of fun!

☽ Some of Our Favorite Sources of Poems:

☽ It's worth mentioning that several out of print books on the list have been easy to find in the library system, so I would recommend checking there first. Keep your eyes open in thrift shops and at yard sales also. Sometimes great poems turn up in unlikely places! I have a couple of my English books from 3rd and 4th grade, and we've found a few hidden treasures in there.

☽ *The Harp and Laurel Wreath*, a lovely collection of poems compiled by Laura Berquist, is a wonderful "all purpose" poetry book. It contains selections for all ages and tastes. There is also information directed to the teaching parent, selections for dictation or copywork, and a section with some poetry analysis and discussion questions for the older student. If you only have room for one poetry resource on your shelf, you can't go wrong with this.

☽ *Poems Every Child Should Know* by Mary Burt is a delightful anthology, first published in 1904. It is available online for free in a number of places, and can be purchased in a paperback edition from yesterdayclassics.com. We were fortunate enough to get an original hardcover copy many years ago that was free for the taking from a school library that didn't want it! *A Child's Garden of Verse* by Robert Louis Stevenson and the traditional *Mother Goose* are, of course, children's poetry classics, and widely available.

☽ *My Little Book of Poems* (a First Little Golden Book) is a nice introduction to poetry for the

very young. It appears to be out of print, but a recent check revealed numerous inexpensive used copies available.

☽ *A Pocketful of Poems* by Marie Louise Allen is another book geared towards the littlest members of the family. The poems are charming, as are the accompanying simple black and white illustrations. "Five Years Old" would make a wonderful poem for a little girl or boy to memorize for a 5th birthday recitation. This is another that is widely available in the used market.

☽ *A Great Big Ugly Man Came Up and Tied His Horse to Me: A Book of Nonsense Verse* by Wallace Tripp is a great one to introduce to a child who somehow has decided he doesn't like poetry (if such a thing could happen!) We found the hilarious illustrations irresistible. This is another gem that is currently out of print, but we found several copies in the library system. Used copies are out there, but some are pricey, so you may have to keep watch until you find one that fits your budget (which is how I acquired our copy).

☽ *The Tall Book of Make-Believe* (Harper & Row Publishers, Illustrated by Garth Williams). Sadly, this is out of print, and copies available online seem to be exorbitantly priced at the moment, but it is worth hunting for. There are a couple of short stories in it that we didn't care for, but it is chock full of charming poetry and enchanting drawings, including my favorite ever illustration of Robert Louis Stevenson's "The Land of Counterpane." I really wish someone would re-print this! ♡

Homeschooling mother Linda Milliken lives in Maine with her husband Jim and their five great kids. Linda also serves on the board of directors of the Maine Right to Life Committee and is a part-time consultant to other homeschooling moms. She can be reached at lindamilliken@rocketmail.com.



THE GRANDEUR OF GOD: POETRY BROUGHT TO LIFE BY “DAD”

BY ANA BRAGA-HENEERY

May have written my masters thesis on translating poetry, but my husband Geoff, the scientist, is the poetry man of the house.

Geoff's love for poetry showed itself to me very early in our relationship. Our graduate school dates, limited by lack of money to public spaces, were made up for the most part of walking and sitting on park benches or lawns and talking. He splurged sometimes and took me to the neighborhood Chinese joint. Oooh! I felt like a queen and we somehow made those

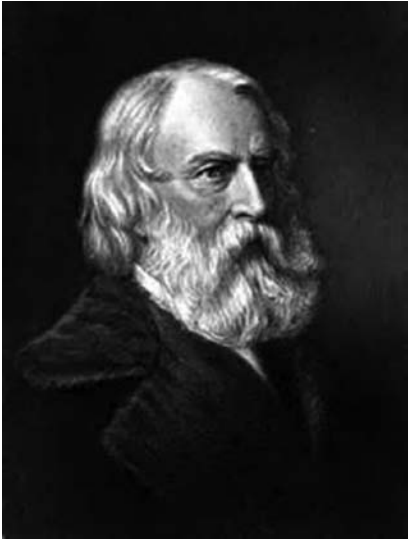
dinners last hours, what with choosing between rice and lo-mein and sipping slowly the two Tsingtaos.

He wasn't then Catholic. But he asked me if I knew the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins. I looked at him blankly. A Jesuit, Catholic, British poet? (Even since then there has been very little of Hopkins translated or talked about in my native country.) No, I hadn't heard of it. Geoff went to tell me about the great, suffering poet whose work he so admired. If someone would have asked me then, I would have certainly answered: "Yes, this guy will read poems to our numerous children one day. He is the one I have been looking for!" I am glad no one did ask me that. Perhaps Geoff would have run away as fast as he could, had he known my castles in the air.

Fast forward a few years: we may not have had "numerous" children yet, but he was already reading poetry to



the oldest of our children. Our oldest son remembers dad's English classes at home to the children of family friends: he can still recite William Blake's "Tyger, Tyger, Burning Bright . . ." But it was our second child who showed early literary and poetic tendencies, and from early on



she greatly enjoyed when her dad read aloud a Robert Service poem.

It wasn't planned, or weekly. It was sporadic as sporadic can be. Depending on the climate, the overall state of things inside the home, and the conversation topic over coffee, my good husband

would spring up from the chair and go to the exact location on our wall-to-wall bookshelf and retrieve the very volume he sought. And he would read aloud, slowly and clearly, not only from Robert Service but also Shakespeare, Tennyson, Longfellow, Robert Browning, Edgar Allan Poe, Christina Rossetti, William Blake, John Donne, and even some fun nonsense from Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear. The colorful, multi-sized volumes, some old and in poor condition, would join the lights and smells of kitchen and hearth room held in the hands of a good father. Once in a while he would grab a volume of his favorite poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins. Reading Hopkins isn't easy. He certainly doesn't do it perfectly. But he reads it with a heart of admiration and love, and it shows through his recitations. And, of course, Hopkins' rhythm and amazing language speaks for itself:

Was it way over the heads of the kids? Certainly. Such is life: our road is

.....
 GOD'S GRANDEUR

Gerard Manley Hopkins

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
 It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
 It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
 Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?
 Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
 And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
 And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
 Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.
 And for all this, nature is never spent;
 There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
 And though the last lights off the black West went
 Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs —
 Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
 World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

towards the unreachable Perfection, and yet we trod, everyday. They may not understand, but children are somehow awed and inspired by greatness. It gives them a longing for greater things. Read them great poetry when they are very young, and they will not settle for poetic mediocrity later in life: they will know there is better elsewhere!

In our third son's high school years my husband offered a one-year course in Poetry to our homeschool group and several of their friends enjoyed the opportunity to study poetry together. I wrote a course description:

Poetry in the English Language

Poetry has been a lifelong passion of Dr. Henebry!

In this course we will explore the riches of poetry in the English language.

The text will be *Immortal Poems of the English Language*, a splendid anthology by Oscar Williams of 150 British and American poets spanning 600 years. Emphasis will be on understanding the poems, how they work, how they sound, and what they say.

During that course, my teen son would say that “Dad should have been a Literature professor, not a scientist!” He greatly enjoyed that weekly hour dedicated to the study of poetry, around a round table in a library classroom. My husband attended a Great Books program college, but during graduate school he did not take a single Humanities course. His passion for poetry comes from his love for literature and art, and from his high school days.

I find poetry at once beautiful and difficult. The meaning-laden verses, especially in English, seem obscure to me often times. Even under this disadvantage

I have been enormously thankful, as a wife and mother, for this role my husband has played in our home. It wasn't done perfectly. Little if anything is done perfectly in our home, most probably like anyone else's home. But as Chesterton so famously opined: “If a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing badly.” ♡

Ana is a homeschooling mom living in South Dakota. She blogs at <http://lanabragahenebryjournal.blogspot.com/> and writes reviews for love2learn.net.



FROM SHAKESPEARE:

Lovers and madmen have such seething
brains,

Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
More than cool reason ever comprehends.

The lunatic, the lover, and the poet
Are of imagination all compact.

One sees more devils than vast hell can
hold—

That is the madman. The lover, all
as frantic,

Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt.
The poet's eye, in fine frenzy rolling,

Doth glance from heaven to Earth, from
Earth to heaven.

And as imagination bodies forth

The forms of things unknown, the poet's
pen

Turns them to shapes and gives to airy
nothing

A local habitation and a name.

Such tricks hath strong imagination,

That if it would but apprehend some joy,
It comprehends some bringer of that joy.

Or in the night, imagining some fear,
How easy is a bush supposed a bear!

—*Midsummer Night's Dream*



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From Pastime to Passion:

MY JOURNEY TO APPRECIATING AND LOVING POETRY

By Jacinta Mooney

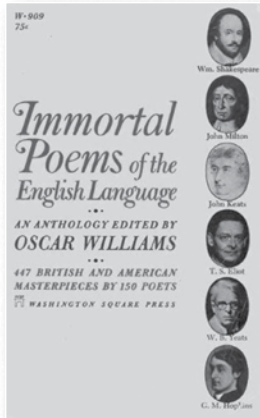
MY JOURNEY TO THE APPRECIATION AND LOVE OF poetry was not an overnight one. At first, my love of poetry was confined to the little verses I learned in kindergarten and 1st grade, from Robert Louis Stevenson's *A Child's Garden of Verses*. This solidly laid the groundwork for my future appreciation and love of poetry. When I was 7 years old, (2nd grade), my mom bought *The Harp and the Laurel Wreath* by Laura Berquist for me and my siblings. When she first introduced me to that book, I could not imagine how important it would become. I memorized most of the verses

in the first section, and proceeded up through the levels as the years passed by. Another book I find very engrossing is an old family treasure entitled *Immortal Poems of the English Language; an Anthology edited by Oscar Williams*, which contains numerous works from a wide variety of the most famous poets.

My memorization of poetry slowed somewhat in high school mainly because of the number of subjects I was trying to master. Nevertheless, I continued to read and appreciate poetry, especially Emily Dickenson, and even write some of my own. My appreciation and writing of poetry was greatly facilitated by one of our subjects, Writing

Workshop, created by my mom. For at least an hour every day we sit in a circle in our den/homeschooling area, learn about and practice creative writing. Over this school year, we have written poetry and short stories, and have read poetry for analysis and appreciation. In addition to these, we used *Lingua Mater* by Mrs. Margot Davidson (writing our thoughts about the beautiful pictures) and a very old book entitled *Writing Creatively* by Joan Berberich.

This writing time proved very beneficial to our whole writing experience. I have personally written over 40 poems and began several short stories because of this daily, structured time. This past Christmas, I compiled 30 or so of these



poems into a book of poetry, *Reflections*, which I published and gave as gifts to my family and closest friends. I have also developed an appreciation for a wider variety of poetry styles. Now, not only do I enjoy simple, rhyming verse, but also Haiku, Free Verse, the Hebrew poetry of the Psalms and many other styles. Writing Workshop has also given me more familiarity and confidence with writing essays, opinion papers, and short stories than I ever thought was possible. I also invented my own description of poetry: “The art of poetry is the ability to express the essence of your subject as you see it, at the same time retaining clarity and conciseness.”

Below is a sample of my poetry for your enjoyment.

.....
POETRY
.....

By Jacinta Mooney

A golden haze of
Some light-hearted fancy
Or glorious ode-
Far beyond face value-
It touches to the quick
With cold, frosty blade of steel
Or glowing embers of warmth.

Not of man,
But angels-
With these we raise
The perfect verse-
Now fly, wings outstretched,
Like eagles soaring
Heavenward.

Copyright 2013 by Jacinta Mooney

Jacinta Mooney is 15 and homeschools in Texas. She may be reached at jmmwolflower@yahoo.com.

.....
SOME FUN IDEAS FOR POETRY
WITH YOUR CHILDREN
.....

Small Children

Take a nature walk and collect artifacts of your walk (a leaf, an acorn, a shiny rock). Make a list of words to describe each thing found.

Write a How-to poem. (How to wake up your mom; How to catch a bug; How to be a friend, etc)

Middle Grade

Any of the above, plus:

Write a praise poem (read the Psalms for good example). These can be serious or silly: Ode to the Peanut Butter & Jelly Sandwich or To my Savior on the Cross.

Visit an art Museum (or study art prints). Each child picks a painting and writes a poem to go with the painting. Paint with words the idea the artist created with paint. This is called Ekphrastic poetry (inspired by art) and you can read a nice example on page 40 of this magazine.

Write Haiku poetry about nature. Tie-dye 10 x 10 pieces of muslin or white cotton and when completely dry, print the poems on the fabric. Hang in a window.

High School

Any of the above, plus:

Instead of writing a thesis paper on a piece of literature, write a substantial poem that includes thoughts on the poem's theme.

Write a long series of couplets that retells a classic story. (Couplets are two-line poems that rhyme.) Use fairy tales, fables, Shakespeare's stories, etc.

Create a poem by "copy change." Take a poem you like and write your own imitating the exact rhythm and rhyme pattern of the chosen poem.

—MD

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10K Strong

COMMUNITY-BUILDING AT ITS BEST

By Mary C. Gildersleeve

YEARS AGO, I WENT TO MY FIRST CATHOLIC HOMESCHOOLING conference. It was a regional conference in Denver and my husband was giving a few talks for the “teen track.” I had been homeschooling for a few years but, since we weren’t living in the Denver area, I didn’t know too many of the participants. Further, having never been to a conference, I didn’t know what to expect.

What did I find?

I found a community of like-minded folks who were willing, anxiously willing, to share their experiences, their knowledge with everyone (even those who didn’t homeschool yet or didn’t know them). The conference speakers were all excellent and candidly shared their stories. But the biggest bonus of attending the conference was the chance to chat with experienced Catholics parents who homeschool their children. It was the chance to build community with each of the participants, some of whom I still correspond with, sharing what works and doesn’t work in our own homes.

And we all had the same goal—to open-wide the doors of our Faith, our Church, to our children through all the subjects, activities, read-alouds and field trips we could devise. Yes, we were all homeschoolers (or soon-to-be’s), but we were more than that—we were Catholic parents.

My experience, repeated many times in the years since that first conference attendance, has critically impacted the way



I teach my children. This community of Catholic homeschoolers, a community which seeks to nurture and grow the faith in our children (and ourselves), is proving most crucial in our current secularly-driven society.

This acknowledgement of a secular-focused, culture-of-death-world is what compelled Pope Benedict XVI to call for a Year of Faith. In addition, this understanding of our world today brought a group of homeschool conference sponsors and vendors to band together for the 10K Strong campaign.

Have you heard about the 10K Strong campaign?

Sponsored by IHM conference organizers, regional conference organizers and a myriad of vendors including Seton Homeschool and Sacred Heart Books and Gifts, the goal of this campaign is to increase the community of Catholic homeschoolers by encouraging attendance at the local, regional and national conferences. The goal is to show other Catholic parents (whether homeschoolers or not) that teaching the Faith is important and that homeschooling is a great way to achieve that goal.

As Draper Warren, coordinator of the IHM conferences and this grassroots effort puts it:


“One thing that seems to be missing (from all these conferences) is a sense of the importance such events represent. Conferences are not merely an annual ‘trip to the mall’ ... Attending conferences is a way to show support for Catholic homeschooling. Catholic homeschooling conferences are about passing on the most precious thing each of us has, the Catholic Faith, to our children. It is a way to tell other parents that educating children in the Catholic Faith is important and that homeschooling is a great way to do that.”

The name comes from the idea that over the past five years, the total attendees at Catholic homeschooling conferences across the nation has averaged about 7000 participants. The goal of the 10K is to increase that number to 10,000; 10,000 Catholics who will come out this year, the Year of Faith, to hear speakers, to shop vendors, and, most importantly, to build a community of faith-believers, sharing ideas and methods of educating our children in the Faith.

The goal is to let parents know that their presence at Catholic homeschool conferences, whether large or small, makes a difference; a difference not just in their own home or co-op environments, but to other Catholic parents and the Church as a whole. Attendance at these conferences is about encouraging and building up our Catholic identity.

I really love the idea of 10K Strong: I love the idea that I can impact my little piece of the world through attending conferences. That I can give back what has been given to me—the encouragement necessary to go out on a limb, to home educate my children while embracing my Faith and sharing it with them in all that we do.

After prayerfully discerning that we should homeschool our children some 11 years ago, the idea that I can encourage others through my attendance at local conferences, my talking about the upcoming conference opportunities, my looking at the conference season as a chance to evangelize ... WOW!

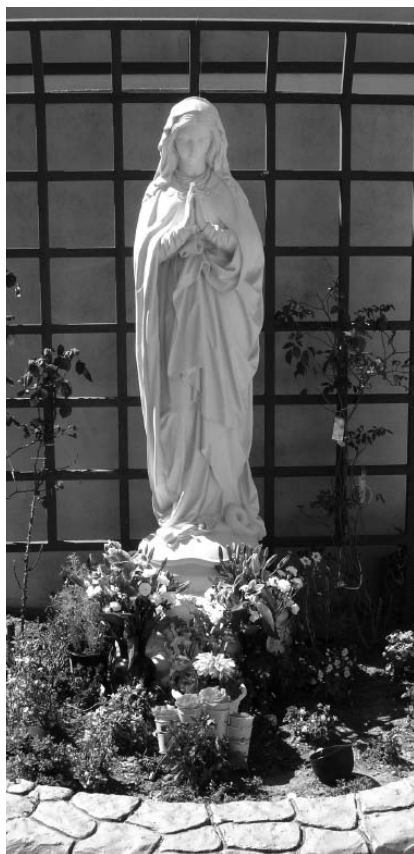
For more information about the 10K campaign, please see the website: www.10kstrong.org. For a listing of the Catholic homeschooling conferences across the nation, check out: www.homeschoolingcatholic.com/conferences ... the “season” starts in March so definitely don’t miss any. And, finally, here’s a list of the partners behind the 10K Strong Campaign: www.10kstrong.org/partners. 

Mary C. Gildersleeve's main vocation is living, loving and learning in the heart of her home with her younger three children (ages 10-14) and husband. She is the author of In His Image: Nurturing Creativity in the Heart of Your Home and Great Yarns for the Close-Knit Family. For more about Mary and her family, check out her site: www.marygildersleeve.com.

“All generations will call me blessed”

by Lara Pennell

WASN'T RAISED TO LOVE MARY. THERE WAS A TIME IN my life when I didn't understand why the Church honored her so—and I happened to be in Lourdes during that time. My one prayer as I worked in the baths and the hospitals, went to the processions and prayed in the Grotto was that I would come to understand and love Mary. Nothing. My prayer seemed unanswered.



On the last day of my stay in Lourdes, I was scheduled to meet a friend for the Stations of the Cross that go up the face of the mountain overlooking Lourdes. As God would have it, my friend was sick and I decided to pray the Stations alone. As the sun rose, I prayed Station I, Station II, Station III and Station IV. At Station IV, Jesus meets His mother. It was then, after two weeks of dryness that my prayer was answered. One look at this larger-than-life Station and it finally registered with me why we love Mary so. We love Mary because Christ did. Their relationship was so perfect, full of love, respect, holiness, support, tenderness, direction, sorrow and ultimate triumph. Now that I am a mother this image of Christ with His mother often comes back to me and it makes even more sense. How can I love Mary too much?

We should always strive in our homes to nurture a relationship between Our Blessed Mother and our children. We want it to be second nature to them

to love their Mother and to turn to her in need.

If one were to observe every Marian feast day and holy day of local, regional, national and international importance we would celebrate every single day of the year. Obviously we aren't called to feast on a daily basis, but during the Eastertide, there are two Marian feasts that we may choose to observe in our homes: Our Lady, Queen of Heaven (May 1) and Our Lady of Fatima (May 13).

After Lent and Easter your family may not be up to honoring Our Lady with special dishes and desserts. But why not honor Our Lady with a Marian Garden that will act as a year-long remembrance? It is the perfect time of year

to plan a perennial garden with flowers named in honor of Our Blessed Mother. The flowers will fill the house on all the Marian feasts between now and the first frost. What child won't enjoy digging in the soil and watching for new sprouts in the spring?

You may choose to start small with a few plants around an outdoor Mary statue. Maybe a new Marian plant can be added on baptismal days, namesdays, sacramental days and other holy days. There are many flowers, herbs, bulbs and bushes to consider when planning your garden. Some of these plants bear new names (listed first) but we can help our children learn their original medieval Marian names:

RESOURCES

☪ *Mary's Flowers: Gardens, Legends, and Meditations* by Vincenzina Krymow

☪ *Mondays with Mary* by Meredith Henning

☪ *Catholic Traditions in the Garden* by Ann Ball

☪ *Mystical Flora* by St. Francis deSales

☪ <http://campus.udayton.edu/mary/resources/flowers.html>

☪ <http://wf-f.org/MaryFlowers.html>

☪ <http://www.fisheaters.com/marygardens.html>

☪ <http://www.faithandflowers.com/FirstMaryGarden.asp>

☪ Boxwood—Candlemas Greens, Purification Plant

☪ Chive—Our Lady's Garleek

☪ White or Blue Clematis—Virgin's Bower

☪ Daphne—Lady Laurel

☪ Columbine—Our Lady's Shoes

☪ Chamomile—Mary's Plant

☪ Chrysanthemum Daisy—Mary's Star

☪ Foxglove—Our Lady's Thimble

☪ Fennel—Our Lady's Fennel

☪ Grape Hyacinth—Church Steeple

☪ Strawberry—Fruitful Virgin

☪ Geranium—Madonna's Pins

☪ Gladiolus—Ladder to Heaven

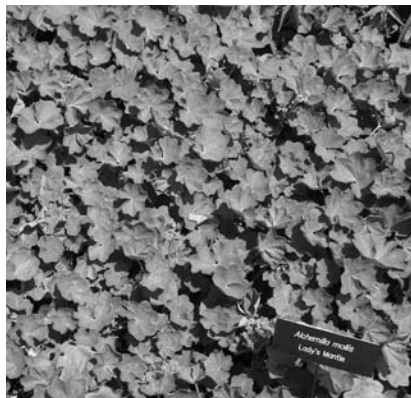
☪ Iris—Madonna Iris or Mary's Sword of Sorrows

☪ Lady's Mantle—Mary's Mantle

- ☞ Lambs' Ears—Our Lady's Fingers
- ☞ Lavender—Mary's Drying Plant
- ☞ Lily—Easter Lily
- ☞ Marigold—Mary's Gold
- ☞ Narcissus—Mary's Star
- ☞ Parsley—Our Lady's Lace
- ☞ Periwinkle—The Virgin's Flower
- ☞ Different varieties of Roses—Mary's Sorrows, Mary's Joy or Mystic Rose
- ☞ Rosemary—Mary's Tree
- ☞ Rue—Herb of Grace
- ☞ Sage—Mary's Shawl
- ☞ Snowdrop—Candlemas Bells
- ☞ Star of Bethlehem—Mary's Tears
- ☞ Sweet Alyssum—Blessed by Mary
- ☞ Tansy—Our Lady's Plant
- ☞ Thrift—Our Lady's Cushion
- ☞ Thyme—The Virgin's Humility
- ☞ Violet—Lady's Delight
- ☞ Wormwood—Our Lady's Needle

Pick from the list above or do a little research to find out all the other plants that were once named in Our Lady's honor. See the sidebar on the previous page for a few book suggestions. No matter what you plant, if it is planted as an act of love for Mary she will be truly pleased.

“Let us pray, O Almighty everlasting God, who did raise up to David a just branch, we beseech Thee to bless these flowers, which as a sign of joy at the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary, grieving for the death of her Son and now rejoicing at His new immortality, we weave into crown for her head, and dedicate to Thy Name; that there may be in them



goodness, virtue, tranquility, peace, victory, abundance of good things, the plenitude of blessing, thanksgiving to God the Father, and the Son and the Holy Ghost, and a most pleasing commemoration of the glorious Mother of God; and that they may receive such a blessing by the sign of the Holy cross, that in whatsoever place they shall have been humbly received, trustingly stored up, and reverently kept by Thy faithful, they may put forth an odor of virtue and sweetness; drive far from their houses disease, contagion, faults, all attacks; and cause the smell of a plentiful field which the Lord hath blessed. We pray that by the abundance of Thy blessing these flowers may be an odor of life for all, that they may be kept uninjured and made safe, and that all the faithful of Christ may be the good odor of Christ unto Thee the Almighty God and our Lord, here and everywhere, now and for endless ages. Amen.” ♡

(This prayer is said on Holy Saturday. From Behold Thy Mother; A Collection of Devotions Chiefly in Honor of Our Lady of Sorrows Compiled by the Servite Fathers, 6th Ed., 1959, USA (217-219))

Lara Pennell is a homeschooling mother living and gardening in South Carolina.

Novels Made of Poetry

Margot Davidson



WESTERN CIVILIZATION HAS A RICH TRADITION OF storytelling using poetry: Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the *Aeneid*, *Song of Roland*, Dante’s trilogy, and *Ballad of the White Horse* to name a few.

While the picture book genre makes wide and lovely use of poetry to tell stories, there have been very few contemporary novelists using this genre, except those who write free verse novels on young

adult “problem” themes. And there seems to be a glut of them. Are these story-told-in-poetry novels any good? I went on a search recently to find out.

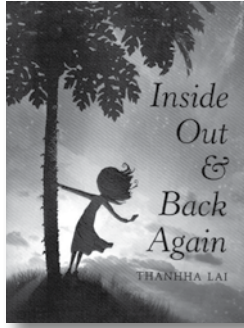
I had read *Locomotion* by Jacqueline Woodson for a class last year and was surprised by its artfulness and emotional appeal. Although it was set in an inner city with children unlike my own, they were children who needed love and were sorting out who they were, much like my children. So this led me to investigate the genre further. I found that most free verse novels are very depressing with unsatisfying postmodern endings—in other words with no true resolution or hope. I suppose their purpose is to engage the emotions just for the sake of experiencing them. I believe, however, that people who are really experiencing such trouble don’t really want to read about it and feel worse!

A few *did* have good endings, but I felt that I still couldn’t recommend them. For example, *Shark Girl* by Kelly Bingham, has some good poetry in it and an authentic portrayal of someone trying to deal with a life-changing traumatic

event, but it wasn’t *great* poetry and there were some swear words in it—not to mention the bikini clad girl in the cover image. My teen daughter liked it, but it was really “candy” reading for her.

In *The Braid* by Helen Frost, I found fantastic poetry and an incredibly creative narrative focus. The story is told in first-person narrative poetry by two sisters who alternate telling their stories, like a braid that holds them together. Their story is about the eviction of the tenants from the Hebrides islands and their forced emigration to Canada in the 19th century. Each line of the narrative has the same number of syllables as the girls’ ages, and in between their narratives are “praise poems” dealing with objects in the girls’ world. The last line of one praise poem is the first line of the next one. (I loved those poems.) But the theme of the book ultimately devolves into dealing with sex before marriage and a teen pregnancy. It resolves happily, though, as the girl’s family accepts the baby, and the father of the child returns to marry the girl.

I did find a few positive titles for middle graders. Newbery Honor winner, *Inside Out and Back Again* by Thanhha Lai, is set in war stricken Vietnam and subsequently southern United States. The author writes of her family's life in South Vietnam after the Americans had left and the North was taking over. She and her family escape on a Navy ship and are rescued by the Americans. She writes from a child's point of view what it was like to have her life stripped away and live in a truly foreign place where she is ridiculed mercilessly and loses all dignity. She says at one point that she would rather live in war-torn Vietnam than peaceful Alabama, and that no one could possibly understand that.



The book does read like a poem and parts of it are quite beautiful. It is at times hard to read of how these poor refugees were treated by the Americans who supposedly welcomed them. And there is aching sadness over the loss of family members in the war. As a whole it seems as honest reflection on the author's real experiences in poetic setting. Here is sample of some of the poetry:

ANOTHER SIGH
*It is more difficult here
 than I imagined.*

I thought so,
 despite her own rule
 Mother can't help
 yearning for Father
 any more than I can help

tasting ripe papaya
 in my sleep.

Heartbeat by Sharon Creech is a surprisingly pro-life story about a girl who lives with her mom and dad and aged grandfather. The mother is expecting a baby and the title takes its name from the heartbeat of the baby within the mother. It is also a kind of refrain in the book. The girl loves to run and the pounding of her feet as she runs *thump thump* forms the beat of the poetry. In one very sweet scene, the grandfather is asleep holding the sleeping baby and the girl checks to see that they are breathing and hears their hearts beating *thump-THUMP, thump-THUMP*.



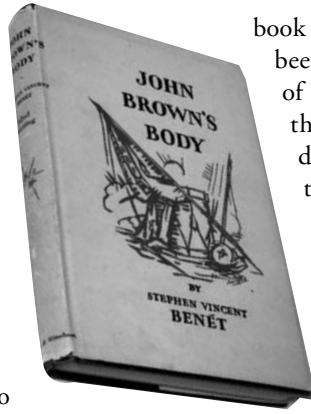
There are several really great things about this story. First, the main character is not from a dysfunctional family, like most middle grade fiction. She has a loving mother and father accepting new life into their family as they care—in their home—for an aged parent suffering from periods of dementia. The girl's best friend however, is an orphan boy who shares her passion for running. Her unconditional friendship with him and eventually the birth of the baby help to heal the friend's life-wounds. It's a very uplifting story. About the baby, she wonders:

He seems infinitely delicate
 and yet infinitely whole
 already a person

I stare at him for hours
wondering who he *is*
and what he will look like
as he grows
and what he will think and do.

The answers seem all bound up
in the small bundle of this baby
answers already there
waiting to unfold
like a bud on a tree.

For high school, in addition to the ancient classic poems, there are two to which I feel I can give recommendations: *The Lavinia* by Claudio Salvucci and *John Brown's Body* by Stephen Vincent Benet. Benet's classic Civil War poem won him the Pulitzer Prize and is a great book for a critical



book study. It has never been a wild favorite of literary critics, but there is much for discussion even in the less well written passages. It covers the war from the start to the finish, but sometimes Benet slips into the present and talks about monuments at

the battlefields or compares the way they look now to the way they must have looked in war. Sometimes the lines rhyme and sometimes they don't and the pattern of the poems shifts a lot. But it's a daring work and worth the read.

Look at that column well, as it passes by,
Remembering Bull Run and the cocksfeather hats,
The congressmen, the raw militia brigades
Who went to war with a flag and a haircloth trunk
In bright red pants and ideals and ignorance,
Ready to fight like picture-postcard boys
While fighting still had banners and a sword
And just as ready to run in blind mob-panic....
These men were once those men. These men are the soldiers,
Good thieves, good fighters, excellent foragers,
The grumbling men who dislike to be killed in war
And yet will hold when the raw militia break
And live where the raw militia needlessly die,
Having been schooled to that end.

The school is not
A pretty school. They wear no cocksfeather hats.
Some men march in their drawers and their stocking feet.
They have handkerchiefs round their heads, they are footsore
and chafed,
Their faces are sweaty leather.

Another great read, Claudio Salvucci's *Lavinia*, tells the story of what happened after the events in Virgil's *Aeneid*, picking up the story after the death of Aeneas. His son, Ascanius, assumes the leadership and almost immediately must deal with the threat of Italians still hostile to the Trojan presence. There are some pleasant similarities to the ancient epics, such as prophecies that are fulfilled in not quite the way the people expect, and



the descriptions of the deaths of the heroes. The Trojans prevail in the end and Lavinia, Aeneas's widow gives birth to his child, the true and final mix of the blood of the Latins and the Trojans. Hope is restored to a people wearied by years of war and loss of life.

The poem reads easily and naturally with the flow and flavor of the ancient epics.

For many dreary months had meandered by,
and even when watchmen walked the walls,
they minded more market-place prattle
with tired eyes and weary sighs for reprieve,
than did they survey the changeless plain.
All that solaced these old soldiers now,
the only dream that pleased them was peace.
They served conflicts in Ilium, and in Italy,
where their overworked ranks were thinning.
No champion there lived in Lavinium
who had not watched a luckless ally
succumb beside him to battle's bedlam.
So much unrest plagued unsettled Latium:
it seemed the soil could soak up no more.
Turnus himself, once stirrer of discord,
lay tranquil now below the earth's surface,
needing breath nor bread, relieved of revenge.
Still, wall-guarders walked the bulwarks,
watched hills where enemies might mill.

While it is not, strictly speaking, a sequel, a knowledge of the events of *the Aeneid* is helpful. However, a highschooler could appreciate the story whether or not he has read *the Aeneid*. Lovers of classic tales will really appreciate the poetry and the plot. I certainly appreciated it!

It was a great story told in poems—just what I was hoping to find! ♡

Margot is a homeschooling mom living in Pennsylvania. She recently finished her Masters in Education with an emphasis in Children's Literature and is the editor of mater et magistra.

Our United States of America

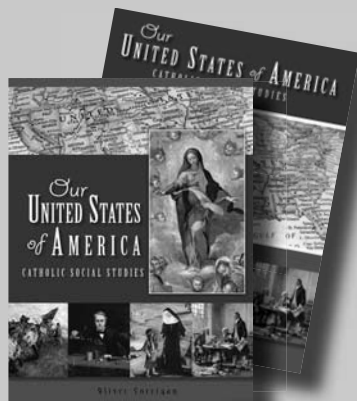
Catholic Social Studies

Oliver Corrigan

Full-color, Catholic, and current! The author's engaging text introduces students to the geography, history, economy, and culture of all fifty states, as well as Washington, D.C., and the U.S. territories. In addition, students will study in-depth the history, culture, and Catholic heritage of 20 featured states in the four regions of the United States.

Meanwhile, "Mysteries of History," "A Nation Built by Immigrants," and "Did You Know?" sidebars introduce students to people and topics such as the Bill of Rights, Haym Salomon, Ethan Allen and the Green Mountain Boys, and the Pony Express.

The Student Workbook provides exercises, enrichment activities, and tests to accompany the text. The Student Workbook concludes with a step-by-step, 40-page guide to exploring the history, geography, economy, and culture of the student's own state. By the end of this nine-week "State Study," the student will have put together a written and oral report on his state.



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The King's Gambit

BY JOHN MCNICHOL

ILLUSTRATIONS BY SEAN FITZPATRICK

Reviewed by Mary C. Gildersleeve

We had begun *The Story of the Trapp Family Singers* as our first family read-aloud of 2013. We were all greatly enjoying the story of Maria and the Von Trapps. But then fate intervened: I received a review copy of a book I figured was too good to keep to myself. I announced “we’re going to put Maria on hold and start reading this new book. It’s a great story.”

The skepticism was writ large on the face of my children. They’d seen this happen before and didn’t trust the “honest, it’s a great story.” Knowing I was outnumbered, I offered a compromise: we would give it 10 pages and then decide.

After 30 minutes of reading, and 25 pages, I had to move on to our next subject. The kids wanted to keep going and really balked at doing anything else until they found out why Edward has FBI agents greeting him, why things keep exploding around Edward and generally, what the heck is going on in this story titled, *The King's Gambit*. They were hooked (and, truth be told, so was I).

The King's Gambit, by author and middle-school teacher, John McNichol, is a fabulous read-aloud, filled with action, humor and an amazingly unique plot with lots of twists and turns and chapter-ending cliff-hangers. From the eerie prologue to the exploding library to the

street-scene brawls, this book kept us turning the pages and asking for more. The final chapter or two are a thrilling read of family love and sacrifice.

I’d love to tell you more about the story, but you just need to read it yourself. Suffice to say that this book kept a 10-year old boy, an almost 13-year old girl and a 14-year old boy amused and entranced from the first to the last page. There is a bit of a chess theme—but you certainly don’t have to like chess to enjoy this book: I don’t like chess but I loved the book.

I highly recommend this for upper primary and middle-school readers as well as for family read-alouds—you’ll love it!

Published by Hillside Education



Into Deep Eternity: An introduction to Emily Dickinson

BY MARTHA O'KEEFE

Reviewed by Alicia Van Hecke

This volume contains two books “Emily’s Book” and “Mary’s Book” —both written for relatives of the author who were interested in learning more about Emily Dickinson. Martha O’Keefe has been studying Emily Dickinson and learning to love her and her works for sixty years. She has also written a 400 page work comparing Emily Dickinson with St. John of the Cross.

The first, “Emily’s Book,” was written for the author’s niece as a gift for her 13th birthday. Naturally, this is an excellent place for young people to start understanding Emily Dickinson and perhaps get their first taste of “real poetry.” Even as an adult poetry neophyte, I found this book both helpful and enjoyable. It consists mostly of examples of Dickinson’s poetry along with the author’s paraphrases of what they mean. The introduction provides some helpful general hints for understanding poetry.

Why study Emily Dickinson? The author explains in the Introduction: “One of the first traits that these poems reveal is the great love the poet had for God’s creation. Many people in Emily Dickinson’s time ... thought that it might be more noble to ‘turn away from the world.’ She wouldn’t do it. She loved

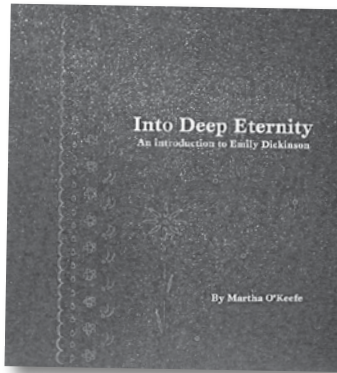
what God had made. I think the love was a great part of the strength and holiness of this poet. She loved life and she loved beauty, but she also knew a great deal of sadness, both in her own life and in the lives of the people who were all around her. She doesn’t turn away from the problem. It is a part of many of her poems. She faced the sadness and also the many mysteries of life with courage. The

world is full of mystery and wonder, and she pondered it all.” (*Emily’s Book*, pg. 1)

The second half, “Mary’s Book,” was written for the author’s sister-in-law and other relatives who had asked her to share her love of Emily Dickinson.

Because it was written for a mature audience, it is, naturally, more complex than “Emily’s Book.” In addition to sampling her poetry with helpful explanations and paraphrasings, Martha O’Keefe provides many insights into Emily Dickinson’s life, faith, intellect and influences upon her work. It is really lovely to read these passages from an author who at one point describes Emily Dickinson as *my poet*. Here is one sample of the poetry:

A poor - torn heart - a tattered heart
That sat it down to rest
Nor noticed that the Ebbing Day
Flowed silver to the West
Nor noticed Night did soft descend
Nor Constellation burn



Intent upon the vision
Of latitudes unknown.

The angels - happening that way
This dusty heart espied
Tenderly took it up from toil
And carried it to God
There - sandals for the Barefoot

There - gathered from the gales
Do the blue havens by the hand
Lead the wandering Sails.
(Emily Dickinson, P78)

Published by www.hedgeschool.com

This review originally appeared on love2learn.net and is reprinted here by permission.

If Not for the Cat

BY JACK PRELUTSKY, ILLUSTRATED BY TED RAND

Reviewed by Melanie Betanelli

This is what a picture book should be: A perfect pairing of beautiful text and beautiful illustrations.

I love haiku and Jack Prelutsky's verses are beautiful examples of the form. I love poems that linger, that take up residence in your heart and resonate long after the book is closed. The title poem has made a nest in my ear and sings to me while I'm doing the dishes:

If not for the cat,
And the scarcity of cheese,
I could be content.

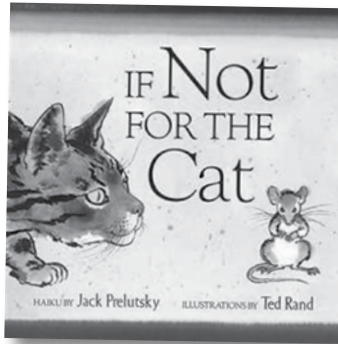
It has something of the simplicity and weight that I find so pleasing in William Carlos Williams. And several others are beginning to work their way in as well. Like this one about the kangaroo:

Safe inside my pouch
Sleeps the future of my kind—
Delicate and frail.

Nor am I the only one. After only two or three readings my three-year old remembers and recites quite a few lines herself. I have found her picking up the book on her own, flipping through the pages, and reciting what she remembers.

Each poem is in the voice of a different animal and Prelutsky's genius is in the personality of the different voices, hard to convey in a so short a form as haiku. I love the way he captures the slow sloth, the hive mind of the ants, (humorously followed immediately by the ant eater), and the threatening presence of the snake and the skunk.

Especially memorable are the rounded polysyllables of the jellyfish:



Boneless, translucent,
We undulate, undulate,
Gelatinously.

Ted Rand's paintings are a lovely match, each one has a very different tone, well suited to the paired poem. My favorite is definitely the dark, moody one

of the moth drawing close to a candle. Though the bright hummingbird hovering near festive orange nasturtiums is also right up there.


Published by Harper Collins

This review originally appeared on love2learn.net and is reprinted here by permission.

Brief Light: Sonnets and Other Small Poems

BY SALLY THOMAS

Reviewed by Margot Davidson

ally is a homeschooling mom and my hero. She once told me that for Lent one year, she resolved to write one sonnet a day—and she did! Sometimes they were good, sometimes they weren't, but she wrote every day. For those of you who like to write, like me, that is inspirational! Just finding time to sit down is usually a challenge.

This book is a small collection of her poems, some of which I imagine had their beginnings in that Lent. But all of them touched me in some way or another. Sally writes about motherhood, teaching, the death of loved ones, and the beauty and poignancy of the world. Some of them hit so close to home, I had to put the book down. One in particular about losing a baby haunted me for days. A good poet doesn't use a lot of words or try to make things sound thought provoking by being obscure; a good poet finds the *right* words and fits them together beautifully, musically. And Sally definitely does that. Here is a sample of the first stanza of a poem entitled "Frost":

Sun-struck at noon, the stiffened grass
Stands blades-up, hilts-down, like
buried knives
Which from this window-distance
simply glitter:
Fool's gold, fool's silver, fool's snow.

And here is the simple, yet beautiful end to a poem called "Anniversary":

I'm tucking in the corners while you pin
Your black socks together for the wash.
They won't be separated. It's a small
Thing. Still, this morning I'm so grateful
You're pinned your socks together for
the wash,
I'd dress up now and marry you again.

Other poems include titles such as "Afternoon in the Museum," "Examination of Conscience," "Sonnet for Ash Wednesday," "To My Absent Daughter," "Exercise" (my favorite—though it's not about exercising, but about the cycle of life). As I read these poems, I felt a kinship with Sally—as mothers and souls on a pilgrimage in this world, we have a lot in common. And she expressed it so well. ♡

Published by Lancelot Books

A Lesson in Trust at the Feet of Millet

AN EKPHRASTIC POEM IN THE GLOSS FORM

“These children and the mother and a bowl –
here is the scene which circumscribes my soul.
Fledglings of peace whose need is their defense –
these are my insights into innocence.”

— Jessica Powers, from her poem

MILLET’S “FEEDING HER BIRDS”*

These children and the mother and a bowl –
their father labors nearby in the field,
while mother worked before dawn turning
yield
into a breakfast. Their young stomachs growl
as they sit feasting there among the fowl,
these children and the mother and a bowl.

Here is the scene that circumscribes my soul.
How patiently their mother must have toiled
to turn to sustenance these gifts of soil.
How eagerly her children, like young birds,
beg for their share without the use of words –
here is the scene that circumscribes my soul.

Fledglings of peace whose need is their
defense –
these little ones depend on Mother’s care.
She hears the cupboard’s warning – it is bare;
knows every dance of weather that can steal
the promised crop. She’s thankful for this meal.
Fledglings of peace whose need is their
defense –

These are my insights into innocence.
With hungry eyes, the trusting little flock,
expects each ample meal around the clock.
These naïve little hatchlings cannot guess
the fragile tree beneath the family nest.
These are my insights into innocence.

© Lisa Salinas



La Becquée (literally “Beakful”), the name of the 1860 painting by Jean-François Millet, has been translated into English in various ways. Jessica Powers chose to refer to it as “Feeding Her Birds”. The painting is located at Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille in Lille, France.

Grateful acknowledgement is made to the editors of the National Federation of State Poetry Societies’ *Encore 2011 awards anthology* in which this poem previously appeared as winner of the Connecticut Poetry Society Award.

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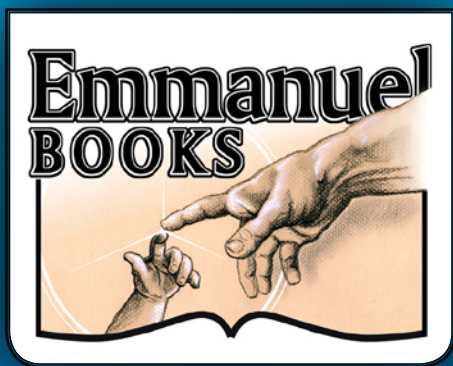
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