

Somewhere along the way, poetry got a reputation for being exclusive and intimidating. But instead, poetry can make reading more approachable to reluctant or struggling readers, while improving phonetic awareness, fluency and reading comprehension along the way. Forget the rhymes of years past and check out these kid-friendly options to put a little pep in your poetry storytime!

“The Proper Way to Meet A Hedgehog And Other How-to Poems” by Paul B. Janeczko (ed.) and Richard Jones (2019)

Advice, from practical to preposterous, instructs readers on the art of how to tell one type of camel from another, how to toast a marshmallow, and how to be a tree in winter. Lavishly illustrated, this playful collection of short works from an assortment of talented writers should convince any skeptics that poetry isn’t so bad after all.

“Mirror, Mirror: A Book of Reverso Poems” by Marilyn Singer (2010)

Your kids might be familiar with a few poetic forms, like a haiku, an acrostic, or a limerick. But have you ever heard of a reverso? This author invented a new type of poetry that turns the form on its head: First you read her poems forward, then you read them in reverse—a reverso—the same words in backwards order, changing only the punctuation but completely altering the story in the process. This collection offers a fresh look at fairy tale classics.

“¡Pío Peep! Traditional Spanish Nursery Rhymes” by Alma Flor Ada, et al. (2019)

A beloved collection by luminary authors of nearly 30 rhymes presented in both English and Spanish for younger readers. The English translations are poetic interpretations that honor the essence of the original historic Hispanic rhymes.

“Out of Wonder: Poems Celebrating Poets” by Kwame Alexander and Ekua Holmes (2017)

A book by a poet, about POETS! You may know Kwame Alexander from his award-winning middle grade novels in verse. Here, Alexander collaborated with friends to create a cross-cultural collection of poems that honors legendary poets who span centuries of work. Rich collaged illustrations by Ekua Holmes, an award-winner herself—plus biographies and a timeline—make this collection a must-have for budding poets and kiddos interested in studying the craft.

“Random Body Parts: Gross Anatomy Riddles in Verse” by Leslie Bulion and Mike Lowery (2015)

Puzzling clues written in Shakespearean verse educate readers on anatomy as much as poetic form in this slightly gross and giggle-inducing illustrated collection.

“Where the Sidewalk Ends: Poems and Drawings” by Shel Silverstein (1974)

A treasure that grown-ups might remember from way back when, this collection of heartfelt, hilarious, oddball poems are short and spot-on, with scratchy line illustrations that range from relatable to absurd. This is a timeless assortment of poems from an author with a deep appreciation for childhood.

“Other Words for Home” by Jasmine Warga (2019)

Once your younger reader has the hang of short form poems, stretch their skills with a novel in verse, a book where the story is told through poetry rather than through prose. You’ll find the same dialogue, plot, action and description your child is used to from chapter books, but not as wordy. (Fewer words per page might also offer a boost to struggling readers!) In this thoughtful middle grade novel, a Syrian girl adjusts to life in Cincinnati, Ohio, while worrying about the family she’s left behind.

After you’ve introduced a poetry storytime to your reader, circle back on the topic with one of these poetry-inspired family activities:

- Pour yourselves each a cup of tea and take turns reading poems aloud. Try silly accents and a raised pinky if you’re feeling awkward—no one says a pirate can’t recite poetry!
- Take a crack at writing a poem yourselves. ABCB is a common scheme for rhyming quartets, but an acrostic, haiku or free verse might get young readers started.
- Kids adept with scissors—or at least with glue sticks—might enjoy creating “collage poems.” Trim words of all types from discarded magazines or newspapers and shuffle them together in a bowl. Reach in to retrieve a few words at a time and see what sort of poem you can come up with.