



Online Lesson

Weaving Poetry & Art: Connections between Verse & Image

Why is Poetry Good for You?

It helps develop oral language in young children:

Poetry is a distinct literary form. Rhythm, alliteration, and rhyme give it a particular charm and predictability. It allows children to “play” with words. This wordplay—developing an “ear” for language—contributes to their oral language development. Strong oral language capabilities are essential to develop the ability to read and write. These capabilities include:

- a) Vocabulary and concept development – semantics (word meanings) and phonemics (word pronunciation)
- b) Understanding the ways that language conveys meaning – syntax (structure of language, such as word order and subject-verb agreement)

According to a three-year study of 64 students by a University of Oxford research team, “[t]here is a strong relation between early knowledge of nursery rhymes and success in reading and spelling over the next three years even after differences in social background, I.Q., and the children’s phonological skills at the start of the project are taken into account.” (Bryant et. al., 1989) Nursery rhymes are very simple poetry. Researchers used “Humpty Dumpty,” “Baa-baa Black Sheep,” “Hickory Dickory Dock,” “Jack and Jill,” and “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star” as test rhymes. Bryant et. al. theorize that “. . . nursery rhymes enhance phonological sensitivity (rhyme and phoneme detection) in general, which in turn enhance reading.”

Rhyming allows students to apply what they know about spelling one word to another word that sounds like it (for example, knowing how to spell “light” helps in spelling words with the same sound such as “flight,” “right,” and “sight”). Furthermore, children with reading problems can make better progress in spelling if they can rhyme. Nursery rhymes are economical poetry that conveys how to use language.

It promotes acquisition of a foreign language:

One way to try and understand these points is to think about the process of learning a foreign language as an adolescent or an adult. Why do the French say, *Je préfère la robe rouge* (“I prefer the dress red”)? Why is “you” *tu* or *vous*? Verbal communication is a very complex process. Acquiring additional languages later in life can benefit from the same techniques as developing a native language. Focusing discussion on poetry engages students and distracts them from getting discouraged about what they do not yet know about the language itself. Poetry is uniquely equipped to foster learning another language because:

- a) Poetry is meant to be read aloud, facilitating pronunciation and promoting fluency
- b) Poetry’s brevity and short lines are manageable and not intimidating to beginning or struggling readers



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- c) Beginning or struggling readers more easily decipher the meaning of poetry because rhythm, repetition, and rhyme put the accent on meaningful words

Oral language capabilities allow for understanding of conventional and culturally-specific ways to communicate with others, and foster the desire to use speech for a variety of purposes, contributing to the social nature of language.

(Source: Hadaway, Nancy L., Sylvia M. Vardell, and Terrell A. Young. "Scaffolding Oral Language Development through Poetry for Students Learning English." *The Reading Teacher*. May 01, 2001.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/20204994.pdf?acceptTC=true&acceptTC=true&jpdConfirm=true>)

Ekphrastic Poetry

The most direct link between poetry and art is ekphrasis. This term comes from the Greek *ek* ("out") and *phrasis* ("speak")—to call an object by name—and describes one art form that is concerned with another medium. Ekphrasis dates from the Classical Era, resurging with the Romantic poets such as Keats, Shelley, and Byron, and more in this online lesson.

For more information, please see the Related Resources titled "Ekphrastic Poetry lesson from the Smithsonian American Art Museum" and "Background on Ekphrastic Poetry from Poets.org."