

dream in color 

A resource guide for
elementary teachers



Dr. Maya Angelou



Dream in Color

Imagine a world where diversity is celebrated. A world where people of all complexions and cultures express themselves freely. If you imagine it, then you Dream In Color.

Target, in partnership with the Poetry Foundation, Furious Flower Poetry Center at James Madison University and Dr. Maya Angelou, invites you to celebrate Black History Month through the rich legacy of African-American poetry. Discover the work of poets past and present, whose voices move us all to continue to dream.

As part of our 2007 Black History Month celebration, Target is proud to provide a toolkit to inspire children of all ages to Dream In Color. Students will discover the works of important African-American poets, classroom activities designed to encourage them to develop their own poetic voices, discussion guides, bibliographies and links to engaging online poetry resources.

Dream In Color is just one of the ways that Target supports diversity and makes a real difference in the lives of children through the arts and education.



To the Teacher:

The exercises in each unit are meant to serve as guidelines to excite students about poetry. The exercises are not sequenced, so you may use as many or as few as you like, and in any order. You may want to do one exercise per class period, or you may want to stretch an exercise over a few days. The exercises should be fun for both you and the students, so just jump in and enjoy the results.

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1. Dreams and Possibilities

Snail

Little snail,
 Dreaming you go.
 Weather and rose
 Is all you know.

Weather and rose
 Is all you see,
 Drinking
 The dewdrop's
 Mystery.

Langston Hughes

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Background

Dreams of freedom, education, opportunity and equality have been central themes in the history of African-American poetry. Sometimes the dream theme is obvious, as in Langston Hughes' "Dream Deferred." Other times, it is more subtle and uses symbols or metaphors as messengers, as in "Snail." Though the snail might be a creature people want to overlook, Hughes considers this one carefully, noticing that the snail is aware of mysteries, beauty and possibly danger. Though dreamers might seem to be lost in other places, often they can also be well grounded in the actual world.

Discussion Questions

Use the questions below to draw out responses from your students. There are no right or wrong answers. Almost all poets are delighted to find that readers take ideas from their poems that they themselves never thought of.

1. Speculation

Have you ever watched a snail or a slug wiggle its way across a sidewalk or a leaf? What kinds of thoughts do you think are going through its squishy little head?

If the children don't respond, ask them about other insects. What about an ant? Have you ever watched an ant march across the sidewalk or a picnic table? What about a spider?

Write the children's responses to what the insects may be thinking on the blackboard, or engage the children by having one or two of them write.

2. Comparison

In the poem, "Snail," Langston Hughes tries to imagine the world of the snail. From a little snail's point of view, even a tiny dewdrop may be full of mystery. Can you guess what a dewdrop might look like to a snail?

If the children need help with responses, ask them how they feel when they look at the moon. Are they curious about the moon? Does it seem full of mystery? Is the moon something they would like to explore?

Perhaps some of the children have been on trips and encountered new sights, such as a waterfall, or a geyser. Because the difference in scale would be similar for the snail, this will help the children understand the question.



3. Rhyme

“Snail” uses both rhyme (“go” and “know”) and slant rhyme (“see” and “mystery”). Slant rhyme is the use of similar sounds that do not perfectly rhyme. Repeating similar sounds and rhyming are devices used by poets that make the reader hear emphasis on those words.

Ask the children what rhyme is. Do any of you have a favorite rhyme that you know by heart? Allow one or two children to recite a short rhyme.

You might want to use this excerpt from the Gwendolyn Brooks poem, “The Tiger Who Wore White Gloves, or, What You Are YOU ARE”:

The crocodile cried.
 The lion sighed.
 The leopard sneered.
 The jaguar jeered.
 The antelope shouted.
 The panther pouted.
 Everyone screamed
 “We never dreamed
 that ever could be
 in history
 a tiger who loves
 to wear white gloves.”

Gwendolyn Brooks

“The Tiger Who Wore White Gloves, or, What you are YOU ARE.”
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After reading or listening to the poem, ask the children to name the words they remember. After the animal names, they will remember the rhyming words most often. Ask the children why they remember the rhyming words.

Explain that rhyming helps us remember words because

rhyming puts emphasis on words. Younger children will benefit from visual reinforcement. Pass out copies of a simple rhyme and colored pencils or crayons. Ask the children to circle all of the words that rhyme with each other in the same color. A simple poem will probably require two to three colored pencils.

Activities

1. Read “Snail” aloud again and ask the children what Hughes imagines the snail dreams. Use animals the children know to expand the dream theme.

Have you ever watched your pet dog or cat while it is sleeping? Do you think dogs and cats dream? How do you know? What do they do that makes you think they are dreaming?

What do you think dogs and cats dream about?

If the children don’t respond, ask leading questions:

What is your dog’s favorite game? Fetch? Do you think your dog might dream of playing fetch with you? Do you think cats might dream of chasing rabbits or mice? What would you dream about if you were a cat?
 A dog?

Do you dream in color? Do you think your dogs and cats dream in color?

Write a poem about an animal’s dreams.

Spend some time talking about different animals and what they may dream. A horse may dream of galloping through a field. A snake may dream of sitting on a sunny rock, and so forth.

If the children are stuck or need more guidance, start

the poem for them. This is a common technique and any first line will do:

My dog, Milo, is sleeping on

Romeo, our guinea pig, is curled up in a

Our canary, Killer, is perching

For a tougher challenge, write the poem from the animal's point of view!

Remember the snail? From his point of view, the dewdrop is a mystery and an adventure. How would "Snail" be different if Hughes wrote the poem from the snail's point of view?

Little snail,	<i>Boy, I'm hungry,</i>
Dreaming you go.	<i>I sure wish I could find a big</i>
Weather and rose	<i>fat gooseberry for breakfast.</i>
Is all you know.	

This rose bush is prickly!

Weather and rose	
Is all you see,	<i>Oh, man, here come those</i>
Drinking	<i>silly caterpillars! All they do</i>
The dewdrop's	<i>is talk about butterflies.</i>
Mystery.	<i>Here's a juicy drink of dew!</i>

Ask the children to share their poems with the class. For poems written from the animal's point of view, try reading the poem aloud in the animal's voice. How would a guinea pig sound? The whole class can read the poem as a chorus of guinea pigs for maximum hilarity!

2. Write the word "go" on the board. Allow everyone in the class to take turns coming up with words that rhyme with "go." Add each word to the board. For older grades, start with one-syllable words, then move up to two-syllable words, or try coming up with words that could be used for slant rhyme.

Once you have a substantial list of words on the board, each student can make up a line with one of the rhyming words at the end. Collect everyone's lines and put them together to create a nonsense poem! Try reading the whole poem together as a class.

More poems about Dreams and Possibilities

Dawn Revisited

Imagine you wake up
with a second chance: The blue jay
hawks his pretty wares
and the oak still stands, spreading
glorious shade. If you don't look back,

the future never happens.

How good to rise in sunlight,
in the prodigal smell of biscuits —
eggs and sausage on the grill.

The whole sky is yours

to write on, blown open
to a blank page. Come on,
shake a leg! You'll never know
who's down there, frying those eggs,
if you don't get up and see.

Rita Dove

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written permission of the publisher.

Dream Dust

Gather out of star-dust
Earth-dust,
Cloud-dust,
Storm-dust,
And splinters of hail,
One handful of dream-dust
Not for sale.

Langston Hughes

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Dreams

Hold fast to dreams
For if dreams die
Life is a broken-winged bird
That cannot fly.

Hold fast to dreams
For when dreams go
Life is a barren field
Frozen with snow.

Langston Hughes

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If-ing

If I had some small change
I'd buy me a mule,
Get on that mule and
Ride like a fool.

If I had some greenbacks
I'd buy me a Packard,
Fill it up with gas and
Drive that baby backward.

If I had a million
I'd get me a plane
And everybody in America'd
Think I was insane.

But I ain't got a million,
Fact is, ain't got a dime —
So just by *if-ing*
I have a good time!

Langston Hughes

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Testimonial

Back when the earth was new
and heaven just a whisper,
back when the names of things
hadn't had time to stick;

back when the smallest breezes
melted summer into autumn,
when all the poplars quivered
sweetly in rank and file . . .

the world called, and I answered.
Each glance ignited to a gaze.
I caught my breath and called that life,
swooned between spoonfuls of lemon sorbet.

I was pirouette and flourish,
I was filigree and flame.
How could I count my blessings
when I didn't know their names?

Back when everything was still to come,
luck leaked out everywhere.
I gave my promise to the world,
and the world followed me here.

Rita Dove

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To You

To sit and dream, to sit and read,
To sit and learn about the world
Outside our world of here and now—
 Our problem world—
To dream of vast horizons of the soul
Through dreams made whole,
Unfettered, free—help me!
All you who are dreamers too,
 Help me to make our world anew.
I reach out my dreams to you.

Langston Hughes

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2. Food

I Love the Look of Words

Popcorn leaps, popping from the floor
of a hot black skillet
and into my mouth.

Black words leap,
snapping from the white
page. Rushing into my eyes. Sliding
into my brain which gobbles them
the way my tongue and teeth
chomp the buttered popcorn.

When I have stopped reading,
ideas from the words stay stuck
in my mind, like the sweet
smell of butter perfuming my
fingers long after the popcorn
is finished.

I love the book and the look of words
the weight of ideas that popped into
my mind

I love the tracks
of new thinking in my mind.

Maya Angelou

From *Soul Looks Back in Wonder*. Ed. Tom Feelings. Puffin,
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permission of the author.

Chocolate

Velvet fruit, exquisite square
I hold up to sniff
between finger and thumb —

how you numb me
With your rich attentions!
If I don't eat you quickly,

you'll melt in my palm.
Pleasure seeker, if I let you
you'd liquefy everywhere.

Knotted smoke, dark punch
of earth and night and leaf,
for a taste of you

any woman would gladly
crumble to ruin.
Enough chatter: I am ready

to fall in love!

Rita Dove

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POETRY



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Background

Something within the human spirit craves ritual. We order our lives into familiar and comforting patterns that become traditions: a turkey at Thanksgiving or a menorah in the window at Hanukkah. These rituals give us identity. They make us feel like we have a community. African-American food tradition is at the heart of African-American culture. Soul food connects African-Americans to their ancestry. African foods came to America with the slaves: melon, yams, okra, lima beans and sorghum came from home. Slaves incorporated the foods of Africa into European cooking favored on the plantation and fashioned meals out of cast-offs, including collard greens and ham hocks. Preserving culinary tradition and history is an important ingredient in establishing an ancestral connection, providing sustenance and creating a reason for celebration.

Discussion Questions

1. Metaphor and Simile

Maya Angelou uses poetic devices called metaphor and simile to describe how popcorn is like writing. Metaphor says one thing is another thing. Simile uses “like” or “as” to equate two things. Give the children examples of metaphor and simile:

Metaphor

All the world’s a stage.
Life’s a beach!
She’s a ball of fire!
Our team was a fighting machine!

Simile

He’s as bold as brass.
She’s as bright as a penny.
That teacher is as hard as nails!
I wish it would rain – it’s as dry as a bone.
Her skin was like sandpaper.

Give the children an opportunity to explore metaphor and simile using common classroom objects.

Let the children invent metaphors and similes of their own.

An effective metaphor exercise is a simple fill-in-the-blank activity. Ask the children to come up with as many examples as they can think of to fill in the blanks. Direct them to think of descriptive words for the second blank. Almost without fail, you will find that they are writing acceptable metaphors.

My _____

is a _____.

Maya Angelou uses metaphor and simile to describe how popcorn is like reading. When you look at a page, the words don’t really “leap” or “snap,” and if you actually tried eating your favorite book, it probably wouldn’t taste too good!

Ask the children how the words in Angelou’s poem are like popcorn:

Do the words leap? Snap? Pop?
Can you think of other words that Angelou could have used to compare words to popcorn?
What about explode? Burst? Crack? Fly?

2. Onomatopoeia

To make a really vivid image, Angelou chooses words carefully, using verbs that make the sound they describe. This is called onomatopoeia. When we read “leaps,” “popping,” “snapping,” “rushing” and “gobbles,” we can hear the actions as well as we can see them.

Ask the children to think of words that make the sound they describe. If they need prompting, ask them:

What sound does a horse make when it walks?
What would make a “zing!” sound?

Have you ever been in a car when your mom or dad had to slam on the brakes really hard? What does that sound like?

Has dripping water ever kept you awake at night?
What does water dripping in the sink sound like?

Car	convertible
Toy	Roboraptor
Shoes	work boots
Dog	pug

Poets are like magicians; when you read their words, you can see, smell, hear, taste and touch something that is not even in the room with you. When Rita Dove writes about chocolate, she writes with all five of her senses.

3. Imagery

Angelou combines these strong action words with specific adjectives and nouns to create a poem full of imagery. An image is a vivid description of something that you can almost see, hear, smell, touch or taste. “Black skillet” is far more specific than “pan.” These images bring the poem to life in our imaginations, and allow us to see, hear and even taste what the poet has imagined.

Ask the children to name the five senses and write them on the board.

Have the children identify each sense within the poem: sight, smell, sound, touch and taste.

Ask the children how connecting words to their senses helps them remember descriptions. If they hesitate, ask them if they’ve ever smelled something that transported them to another place or to a memory of a somewhere they have been.

Reinforce how sensory language creates lively imagery by giving the children a list of general nouns and asking them to come up with a more specific word for each of these general terms. The specific word will help them and others to see a picture of the item in their heads. Be sure that they are not just adding adjectives, as in “blue car” or “leather shoes.” For example:

Explain how the five senses in life and in poetry “mark” our memories. Poets use sensory words so that they will have a very strong and familiar impact on us.

Activities

1. Angelou comes up with a metaphor for reading. Ask the children to think of a metaphor for writing that is food related.

When you compose a poem, is it more like following a recipe or throwing everything into a big stew pot?

Ask the children to use a cooking metaphor in a poem about writing poetry. Let them talk about cooking for a few minutes to get the creative juices flowing. Ask them to give you cooking verbs: stirring, frying, mixing, beating, baking, kneading.

How is writing like cooking? Do you do any of the same activities in cooking and writing? Do you have to knead your words, or let your ideas “rise”?

Once the children have grasped the idea of a cooking metaphor for writing, ask them to review imagery and onomatopoeia. Writing all of these still-unfamiliar words on the blackboard will help the children keep their thoughts organized.

Ask the children to tell you what picture they get when they write:

My words sizzle in my brain
Ideas scrambled across the page like eggs
I stirred and stirred a porridge of pronouns

When the poems are complete, try acting them out in front of the class. Ask the children to describe what they could taste, hear or smell in the cooking poems!

2. Rita Dove's poem about chocolate sounds like a love poem. The speaker's tone allows us to sense how much she loves the square of chocolate.

Ask the children to write a love letter to their favorite food. Raise enthusiasm by asking children to tell what foods they love and why they are their favorites. Ask the children to use descriptive terms and similes (It tastes like...).

Have the children read their poems to the class.

Explain that a love poem is a type of ode – a poem that expresses exalted emotion. Write one of the odes on the board and read it in different voices as a class. Try the following tones of voice: ecstatic, hopeful, shy, bold, tired. Allow members of the class to come up with other voices. This exercise will help children to discover the ways we communicate not only through words, but through our presentation and performance.

Optional Activity

For this activity, you'll need a bag of wrapped chocolates. (Or, substitute popcorn for a healthier snack.) Distribute the chocolates to each student in the class, but tell them not to eat them! Have them follow these steps to writing their own poems about chocolate. Be sure they are writing their observations during each step.

Examine the chocolate in its wrapper. Write down adjectives that describe what they see.

Pick up the piece of chocolate and bring it to your nose. What does it smell like? Try to think of metaphors. For Dove, it smells like “knotted smoke” or “dark punch of earth and night and leaf.” Does the smell bring any memories to your mind?

Remove the wrapper. What sound does it make? Is it a high, crispy crinkle, or is it more of a low swoosh? Write down the sounds and any metaphors that they bring to mind.

Hold the chocolate and examine it. Write down your observations about the texture, the shape, the temperature. What does the chocolate feel like?

Place the chocolate in your mouth – don't chew yet! Concentrate on how it feels on your tongue. Write down your observations of the taste. Then chew and add any additional observations. Swallow.

Ask the children to take their observations and turn them into a chocolate poem to share with the class!

More poems about Food

The Bean Eaters

They eat beans mostly, this old yellow pair.
Dinner is a casual affair.
Plain chipware on a plain and creaking wood,
Tin flatware.

Two who are Mostly Good.
Two who have lived their day,
But keep on putting on their clothes
And putting things away.

And remembering ...
Remembering, with twinklings and twinges,
As they lean over the beans in their rented back room
that is full of beads and receipts and dolls and
cloths, tobacco
 crumbs, vases and fringes.

Gwendolyn Brooks
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Butter

My mother loves butter more than I do,
more than anyone. She pulls chunks off
the stick and eats it plain, explaining
cream spun around into butter! Growing up
we ate turkey cutlets sautéed in lemon
and butter, butter and cheese on green noodles,
butter melting in small pools in the hearts
of Yorkshire puddings, butter better
than gravy staining white rice yellow,
butter glazing corn in slipping squares,
butter the lava in white volcanoes
of hominy grits, butter softening
in a white bowl to be creamed with white
sugar, butter disappearing into
whipped sweet potatoes, with pineapple,
butter melted and curdy to pour
over pancakes, butter licked off the plate
with warm Alaga syrup. When I picture
the good old days I am grinning greasy
with my brother, having watched the tiger
chase his tail and turn to butter. We are
Mumbo and Jumbo's children despite
historical revision, despite
our parent's efforts, glowing from the inside
out, one hundred megawatts of butter.

Elizabeth Alexander
From *Body of Life*. Tia Chucha Press, Chicago. Copyright ©1996
by Elizabeth Alexander. Used by permission of the author.

Danitra's Family Reunion

On the Fourth of July,
my cousins and I
ran sack races,
played kickball
and tug-of-war
before
we heard
our stomachs
growl.

We stopped for
deviled eggs,
battered corn,
coleslaw,
fried chicken,
potato salad, and
Strawberry Pie Jubilee.

We sipped lemonade
and listened to
Grandma Brown's stories
of when our folks were little.
Then Uncle Joe
handed out prizes
for this year's graduates
and for the best all-round student,
which I won.

By the time
the day was done,
I was full of fun
and food
and warm feelings,
knowing that I am more

than just me.
I am part
of a family.

Nikki Grimes

First appeared in *Danitra Brown Leaves Town*, published by HarperCollins. Copyright ©2002 by Nikki Grimes. Used by permission of Curtis Brown, Ltd.

Knoxville, Tennessee

I always like summer
best
you can eat fresh corn
from daddy's garden
and okra
and greens
and cabbage
and lots of
barbecue
and buttermilk
and homemade ice cream
at the church picnic
and listen to
gospel music
outside
at the church
homecoming
and go to the mountains with
your grandmother
and go barefooted
and be warm
all the time
not only when you go to bed
and sleep

Nikki Giovanni

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3. Music and Dance

The Blues

When the shoe strings break

On *both* your shoes

And you're in a hurry—

That's the blues.

When you go to buy a candy bar

And you've lost the dime you had—

Slipped through a hole in your pocket
somewhere—

That's the blues, too, *and bad!*

Langston Hughes

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Background

The musical style known as the blues developed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in the American South and was passed through generations as a musical description of daily life. As the 20th century progressed, the style migrated North, changing and growing as the experiences of its performers and audiences changed. One of the earliest forms of the blues was called the “field holler,” used between slaves to communicate with one another across the fields—a far cry from the electrified blues we can hear at concerts today. These oral compositions were picked up by musicians such as W.C. Handy, Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, Leadbelly, and Blind Lemon Jefferson. They recorded the music and helped spread the news about the blues. There are many types of the blues, including folk blues, country blues, Memphis blues—and electric blues with differing meters

and patterns, and today you still hear echoes of the form in rock, R&B and hip-hop. African-American poets have taken both thematic and style elements of the blues and fashioned them into blues poetry.

Discussion Questions

Use the questions below to draw out responses from your students. There are no right or wrong answers. Almost all poets are delighted to find that readers take ideas from their poems that they themselves never thought of.

1. Emotion

Guide the children through an understanding of the blues by asking the following:

Did the speaker in the poem have a good day or a bad day?

What happened to make it a bad day?

Do you think the speaker was happy or sad after his bad day?

Have you ever heard someone say, “I’m blue” or “I have the blues?”

What does it mean to “have the blues” or “to be blue”?

Based on the children’s answers, ask them:

Why do you think Langston Hughes named this poem “The Blues”?

2. Rhythm

The blues are both a feeling you have and a style of music. Langston Hughes is famous for his ability to integrate music into the written word. Even though his poem, “The Blues,” is on the page, it is easy to hear it as verses of a song or a rap.



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Write the first stanza of the poem on the board and underline the words that seem most important.

Read the poem aloud to class, and tap out the rhythm as you read.

When you get to the important words, slap that word instead of tapping it.

Ask the children to follow along, tapping and slapping to the rhythm. Can you find the “groove” of the stanza?

After mastering the first stanza, move to the second.

The first stanza has a slightly different rhythm than the second stanza. Blues players often experiment with rhythm and follow the singer’s lead, lengthening a measure of music so that it fits in with the vocal lines.

Write the second verse on the board. Ask the children to read the entire poem aloud.

Ask them if there is a difference in the rhythm between the first and second stanzas.

How can we read the second stanza so that it sounds musical?

Try reading it with different rhythms until you find the one that is the best fit.

A syncopated rhythm might be in order.

Tapping it out on your desk might help.

Hint: Think of a drum playing “trip-e-let trip-e-let trip-e-let” in the third line of the second stanza.

Ask one of the children if he or she can dance to the rhythm of the poem, or ask the children if one of them will rap to the rhythm of the poem.

Once you find the rhythm for the first stanza, try the second stanza.

If the children are having trouble with rhythm, ask them to sing the school song or another song they all know, such as “The Star Spangled Banner” in unison, clapping out the rhythm as they go.

Activities

1. The Blues

In “The Blues,” Hughes is not writing about big life-altering events, but about the little things that can give a person the blues.

Ask the children what kinds of things give them the blues.

Write their answers on the blackboard.

2. Quatrains and Rhyme

Now ask the children to come up with words that rhyme with “blues.”

The poetic form Hughes uses for this poem is a quatrain – it has four lines. The second line in each stanza of a quatrain rhymes with the last line.

Try writing a verse about your blues that follow this formula:

When _____

That’s the blues.

If the children can’t find words to rhyme with “blues,” show them how Hughes changed the rhyme in his second quatrain. His second line ends with “had,” so his fourth line reads, “That’s the blues, too, *and bad.*”

3. Refrain

A refrain is a regularly recurring phrase or verse especially at the end of each stanza or division of a poem. You may find it useful to explain that a refrain in a poem is like a chorus in a song.

Ask the children if they can name some songs that have refrains—“Bingo” is a perfect example. Have the children sing “Bingo” and clap during the chorus or refrain.

Guide the children toward writing a blues poem using another Langston Hughes poem, “Hope,” as the refrain:

Sometimes when I’m lonely,
Don’t know why,
Keep thinkin’ I won’t be lonely
By and by.

For inspiration, try playing blues songs while the children write.

Ask the children what they do to chase the blues away.

More poems about Music and Dance

Dream Boogie

Good morning, daddy!
Ain't you heard
The boogie-woogie rumble
Of a dream deferred?

Listen closely:
You'll hear their feet
Beating out and beating out a—

*You think
It's a happy beat?*

Listen to it closely:
Ain't you heard
something underneath
like a—

What did I say?

Sure,
I'm happy!
Take it away!

*Hey, pop!
Re-bop!
Mop!*

Y-e-a-h!

Langston Hughes
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Lady's Boogie

See that lady
Dressed so fine?
She ain't got boogie-woogie
On her mind—

But if she was to listen
I bet she'd hear,
Way up in the treble
The tingle of a tear.

Be-Bach!

Langston Hughes
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Dream Variations

To fling my arms wide
In some place of the sun,
To whirl and to dance
Till the white day is done.
Then rest at cool evening
Beneath a tall tree
While night comes on gently,
 Dark like me—

That is my dream!
To fling my arms wide
In the face of the sun,
Dance! Whirl! Whirl!
Till the quick day is done.
Rest at pale evening ...
A tall, slim tree ...
Night coming tenderly
 Black like me.

Langston Hughes

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Duke Ellington

The man is forever.

Blue savoir-faire.

We loved that. We loved
that dukehood. We loved royalty and riff
because we could not reach them for ourselves.

We loved. We love.

He built a fuzzy blanket all around us.
He fed us, in such Ways! He
could educate us toward fulfillment,
reduce our torrents, maim our hurricanes.

We listened to that music:
our caterpillars instantly
were butterflies. Our sorrows
sank, in sweet submission.

He provided philanthropy
of profound clouds, provided
shredded silver and red, provided
steel and feathers.

We have him!

The man is forever.

We have forever

his sass, his electric Commitment,

his royalty, his Love.

Gwendolyn Brooks

From *In Montgomery and Other Poems* by Gwendolyn Brooks. Third World Press, Chicago. Copyright ©1967 by Gwendolyn Brooks. Reprinted by consent of Brooks Permissions.

Banjo

And after 3 days rain
the frog song stops

— which had womped
& bumped loud like a distant

chained-up dog—
and the birds

begin— mockingbird,
wren. O Susanna

don't you cry fo me—
an unthumbed string

of days, dis-
cord, a few toads lie

splat in the road & find
I am counting blessings I

never before spoke.
Down the sky comes

grows the grass up—

I plead with you
— the nerve! — to start

again your whispered
name — let

them frogs gossip on
all night — if they want —

Kevin Young

From *jelly roll: a blues* by Kevin Young. Copyright ©2003 by Kevin Young. Reprinted by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, a division of Random House, Inc.

Block Party

Dear Danitra,

Tomorrow you're going to miss
those giant speakers
hissing and blasting
loud, fast music
into the crowded street.

There'll be no sense in my
trying to keep still.

You know how
that hot, hot dance beat
sizzles up through the concrete,
grabbing hold of my feet.

In a blink I become

A hip-swinging,
head-bobbing,

foot-stomping,
fancy-dancing

fool.

Nikki Grimes

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Parent/Child Activities

Activity 1: Poetry Highway

Passing time while stuck in traffic or on the highway is fun when children and parents compose poetry together. One fun and educational activity is to create poems for the states whose license plates pass you on the highway. Parents can share information about the state and help the child compose simple poems from memory.

Missouri

Missouri, Missouri
The "Show Me" state,
If you knew the answer
Would it be so great?

Kentucky

Race horses munching on grass that's blue,
Makes me ask if the sky turned green, too.

Idaho

Snow white russet gold
Sizzle roasted on a flame
Hot glorious spud.





Parent/Child Activities

Activity 2: Pass the Poetry, Please!

One of the best ways to engage children in poetry is to purchase poetry books as part of the child's reading collection. When children have access to poetry, it becomes much easier to include poetry in daily activities.

Your family might enjoy taking a new spin on the tradition of talking about the day. Instead of the predictable "share something good that happened to you today," ask children to bring a poem to the table that illustrates how they feel. This may be an original poem by the child or a published poem, such as Rita Dove's "Primer."

Primer

In the sixth grade I was chased home by
the Gatlin kids, three skinny sisters
in rolled-down bobby socks. Hissing
Brainiac! And Mrs. Stringbean!, they trod my heel.
I knew my body was no big deal
but never thought to retort: who's
calling who skinny? (Besides, I knew
they'd beat me up.) I survived
their shoves across the schoolyard
because my five-foot-zero mother drove up
in her Caddie to shake them down to size.
Nothing could get me into that car.
I took the long way home, swore
I'd show them all: I would grow up.

Rita Dove

from *Mother Love*. Copyright ©1995 by Rita Dove. Used by permission of the author and W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. This selection may not be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means without the prior written permission of the publisher.

A wonderful place to include poetry is at the dinner table. Thankfulness poems such as Lucille Clifton's untitled poem are simple enough to be understood by children, but rich in complexity for discussion.

[untitled]

let there be new flowering
in the fields let the fields
turn mellow for the men
let the men keep tender
through the time let the time
be wrested from the war
let the war be won
let love be
at the end

Lucille Clifton

From *An Ordinary Woman: Poems by Lucille Clifton* by Lucille Clifton. Random House, New York. Copyright ©1974 by Lucille Clifton. Used by permission of the author.



Food plays an important role in African-American poetry and culture. For a special treat, you may want to experiment reading some of the food poems and making a simple soul food dish together. Since lots of children won't touch vegetables such as greens, we've included a traditional and simple sweet potato pie recipe.

Sweet Potato Pie

- 1 1/4 cups of granulated sugar
- 1/2 tablespoon of ground cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon of ground nutmeg
- 2 eggs
- 1 12-ounce can of evaporated milk
- 1 teaspoon of vanilla extract
- 1 1/2 cups mashed canned sweet potatoes
- 1 9-inch unbaked pie crust

Topping

- 1/3 cup of butter
- 1/3 cup of all-purpose flour
- 1/2 cup of brown sugar, packed
- 1/2 cup of shredded coconut
- 1/2 cup of chopped pecans

Place granulated sugar and spices in a mixing bowl. Beat eggs, add evaporated milk and vanilla. Combine with sugar mixture. Stir in potatoes and beat until smooth. Pour into the pie shell. Bake at 425° F for 15 minutes. Reduce heat to 350° F and bake for 30 minutes. Combine topping ingredients. Remove pie from the oven, sprinkle with topping. Bake 10–15 minutes or until topping is golden. Cool on rack. Refrigerate the unlikely leftovers.

While you cook the pie, you might try discussing your favorite family meals. Do you have a Thanksgiving or 4th of July tradition? Read the poem “Danitra’s Family Reunion” with your child, and write poetry about your family’s favorite meals or traditions.

Danitra’s Family Reunion

On the Fourth of July,
my cousins and I
ran sack races,
played kickball
and tug-of-war
before
we heard
our stomachs
growl.

We stopped for
deviled eggs,
battered corn,
coleslaw,
fried chicken,
potato salad, and
Strawberry Pie Jubilee.

We sipped lemonade
and listened to
Grandma Brown’s stories
of when our folks were little.
Then Uncle Joe
handed out prizes
for this year’s graduates
and for the best all-round student,
which I won.

By the time
the day was done,
I was full of fun
and food
and warm feelings,
knowing that I am more
than just me.
I am part
of a family.

Nikki Grimes

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Parent/Child Activities

Activity 3: Acrostic Poems

Write an acrostic poem with your child using his or her name. An acrostic poem is one where the first letters spell the name vertically, such as:

KeeP

Elephants

Near

Dark

Red

Apples

At bedtime

No one can find him

Doesn't he ever get tired?

Running through the house

Even Superman gets sleepy!

For more fun, write an acrostic poem describing each other on a paper lunch sack or craft bag using colored markers or stickers. Then leave each other short poems, notes or little gifts in the bags from time to time. Even older children love finding messages and presents in their bags.

Talkative

Happy

Energetic

Oh, I'm great!

Mom's best girl

One and only

Rules my heart

Grins make sunshine

Apple of my eye

No one will ever top you!

Acrostic poems do not have to be of childrens' names. This is an excellent example of acrostic poetry.

Baby Horizon

Here's a newborn sun

Orange and light

Reborn at East Hospital

Impossible to wake up at night

Zoos of colorful blankets in a crib like sky

Once up, then down

Nicknamed Dawn

Kyra

Age 11



POETRY



FOUNDATION