Read a Poem to a Child!

September 24th – 29th, 2018

Poetry Compilation for Readers

with selections from
The John MacKay Shaw Childhood in Poetry Collection of Florida State University Special Collections
Dear Poetry Lover,

Thank you for agreeing to read a poem to a child this week, September 24th through September 29th, as part of 100 Thousand Poets for Change’s “Read a Poem to a Child” initiative. The mission is simple: expose as many children as possible to the medium of poetry. To help you on your way, I have compiled twenty-four selections from The John MacKay Shaw Childhood in Poetry Collection, housed in Florida State University Libraries Special Collections & Archives.

FSU Libraries’ Special Collections & Archives stewards the University’s more unique items, rare books and archival materials that help researchers and students understand the world from different perspectives. The John MacKay Shaw Childhood in Poetry Collection, with over 30,000 volumes, began with one man’s simple desire to read poetry to his children. John MacKay Shaw, former AT&T executive, began collecting books of poetry for his children in the 1920s and wrote a number of poems for their education and entertainment.

The first poem in this mini-collection, making the total twenty-five, is by FSU Libraries’ Poet-in-Residence Michael Rothenberg. Together with his partner Terri Carrion, Michael co-founded 100 Thousand Poets for Change, which promotes peace, justice, and sustainability through poetry readings that occur around the world each year. This year, Michael and Terri bring us this new initiative, asking people around the globe to stop and take a moment to share poetry with a child in the week leading up to the worldwide 100 Thousand Poets for Change events that take place on Saturday, September 29th.

The FSU Libraries are grateful for Michael’s partnership, particularly as we celebrate a Year of Poetry, from April 2018 – April 2019. During this year events across campus and across the community will celebrate poetry as an integral part of life. This “Read a Poem to a Child” initiative is an important way for poetry to connect people across generations and around the world.

FSU Libraries, our Year of Poetry Coordinating Committee, and 100 Thousand Poets for Change encourage you to read, recite, sing the poems that you love, or find a new one in this gathering. Thank you for participating in Read a Poem to a Child.

Best Regards,

Rachel Duke
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“Delightful Bird!” by Florida State University Libraries’ Poet-in-residence, Michael Rothenberg
From *Look at that Mountain!*

Once upon a mountain by a river in a tree
there lived a flittery bird

A fabulous, flittery bird
with an all-weather, feathery song

A flamboyantly flittery,
sweet singing twittery, feathery bird

A magical bird who sang and sang
throughout the day and all night long,

a melodiously fine, sweet floating kind
of divine birdsong

That bird never sang a note that was wrong!
That pink-feathered, blue-feathered,

green-feathered bird would sing and sing
and always be heard,

I hope you don't think that I am being absurd
but I wished I could be that always heard bird.

"Delightful Bird!"
“Dream Variation” by Langston Hughes
From Pass It On (1993)

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.
"The River of Rest" by Joaquin Miller
From *Sun Prints in Sky Tints* (1893)

A beautiful stream is the River of Rest;
    The still, wide waters sweep clear and cold,
A tall mast crosses a star in the west,
    A white sail gleams in the west world’s gold;
It leans to the shore of the River of Rest ---
The lily-lined shore of the River of Rest.

The boatman rises, he reaches a hand,
    He knows you well, he will steer you true,
And far, so far from all ills on land,
    From hates, from fates that pursue and pursue;
Far over the lily-lined River of Rest ---
Dear, mystical, magical River of Rest.

A storied, sweet stream is this River of Rest;
    The souls of all time keep its ultimate shore;
And journey you east, or journey you west,
    Unwilling or willing, sure-footed, or sore,
You surely will come to this River of Rest ---
This beautiful, beautiful River of Rest.
“I said it in the meadow path...” by Lucy Larcom
From Winter Crystals and other Marvels (1929)

I said it in the meadow path
I say it on the mountain stairs,
The best things any mortal hath,
Are those which every mortal shares.

The air we breathe, the sky, the breeze,
The light without us and within;
Life with its unlocked treasuries,
God’s riches --- are for all to win.
Far and high
The atoms fly
While the breezes blow
And the wind sweeps by.

Atoms the dinosaurs
Breathed long ago
Breath of kings
And of men I know,

Blown, blown,
Far over the sky
And around the world
As the wind sweeps by.

Breath of heroes
Aeons old,
Breath from the Aztec
Lands of gold,

Blown near and far,
Blown low and high,
Blown through time
In the ring of the sky.

Oh run with me
Through the captive air
Flowing around us
Everywhere ---

Run with me,
The wind is high,
And time's in the wind,
Sweeping by.
“Nancy Hanks” by Harriet Monroe

From The Mothers of the World (1937)

Prairie child,
Brief as dew,
What winds of wonder
Nourished you?

Rolling plains
Of billowy green;
Far horizons,
Blue, serene;

Lofty skies
The slow clouds climb,
Where burning stars
Beat out the time:

These, and the dreams
Of fathers bold ---
Baffled longings,
Hopes untold ---

Gate to you
A heart of fire,
Love like deep waters,
Brave desire.

Ah, when youth’s rapture
Went out in pain,
And all seemed over,
Was all in vain?

O soul obscure,
Whose wings life bound,
And soft death folded
Under the ground.

Wilding lady,
Still and true,
Who gave us Lincoln
And never knew:

To you at last
Our praise, our tears,
Love and a song
Through the nation’s years.

Mother of Lincoln,
Our tears, our praise;
A battle-flag
And the victor’s bays!
“My Mother Says I’m Sickening” by Jack Prelutsky
From *Kids Pick the Funniest Poems* (1991)

My mother says I’m sickening,
my mother says I’m crude,
she says this when she sees me
playing Ping-Pong with my food,
she doesn’t seem to like it
when I slurp my bowl of stew,
and now she’s got a list of things
she says I mustn’t do ---

DO NOT CATAPULT THE CARROTS!
DO NOT JUGGLE GOBS OF FAT!
DO NOT DROP THE MASHED POTATOES
ON THE GERBIL OR THE CAT!
NEVER PUNCH THE PUMPKIN PUDDING!
NEVER TUNNEL THROUGH THE BREAD!
PUT NO PEAS INTO YOUR POCKET!
PLACE NO NOODLES ON YOUR HEAD!
DO NOT SQUEEZE THE STEAMED ZUCCHINI!
DO NOT MAKE THE MELON Ooze!
NEVER STUFF VANILLA YOGURT
IN YOUR LITTLE SISTER’S SHOES!
DRAW NO FACES IN THE KETCHUP!
MAKE NO LITTLE GRAVY POOLS!

I wish my mother wouldn’t make
so many useless rules.
“Extremely Naughty Children” by Elizabeth Godley
From Beastly Boys and Ghastly Girls (1964)

By far
The naughtiest
Children
I know
Are Jasper
Geranium
James
And Jo.

Are tired
Of scoldings
And sendings
To bed;
Now
The grown-ups
Shall be
Punished instead.”

They live
In a house
On the Hill
Of Kidd,
And what
In the world
Do you think
They did?

They said:
“Auntie Em,
You didn’t
Say ‘Thank you!’ “
They said:
“Uncle Robert,
We’re going
To spank you!”

They asked
Their Uncles
And Aunts
To tea,
And shouted
In loud,
Rude voices
“We

They pulled
The beard
Of Sir Henry
Dorner
And put him
To stand
In disgrace
In the corner.
They scolded Aunt B.
They punished Aunt Jane;
They slapped Aunt Louisa
Again
And again.

They said “Naughty boy!”
To their Uncle Fred,
And boxed His ears
And sent him To bed.

Do you think Aunts Em
And Loo
And B.,
And Sir Henry Dorner (K.C.B.)*

And the elderly Uncles
And kind Aunt Jane
Will go To tea
With the children Again?

*Knight Commander of the Bath
“Good Morning” by Langston Hughes
From My Black Me (1974)

Good morning, daddy!
I was born here, he said,
watched Harlem grow
until colored folk spread
from river to river
across the middle of Manhattan
out of Penn Station
dark tenth of a nation,
planes from Puerto Rico,
and holds of boats, chico,
up from Cuba Haiti Jamaica,
in buses marked New York
from Georgia Florida Louisiana
to Harlem Brooklyn the Bronx
but most of all to Harlem
dusky sash across Manhattan
I’ve seen them come dark
  wondering
  wide-eyed
  dreaming
out of Penn Station ---
but the trains are late.
The gates are open ---
but there’re bars
At each gate.

  What happens
  to a dream deferred?

Daddy, ain’t you heard?
“The Light of Home” by Sarah Hale
from *The Home Affections by the Poets* (1858)

My boy, thou wilt dream the world is fair,
   And thy spirit will sigh to roam,
And thou must go, but never when there
   Forget the light of Home.

Though pleasure may smile with a ray more bright,
   It dazzles to lead astray;
Like the meteor’s flash ‘twill deepen the night,
   When thou tredest the lonely way.

But the hearth of Home has a constant flame,
   And pure as vestal fire;
‘Twill burn, ‘t will burn for ever the same,
   For nature feeds the pyre.

The sea of ambition is tempest-tost,
   And thy hopes may vanish like foam;
But when sails are shivered, and rudder lost,
   Then look to the light of Home:---

And then like a star through the midnight cloud,
   Thou shalt see the beacon bright,
For never, till shining on thy shroud,
   Can be quenched its holy light.

The sun of fame? --- ‘twill gild the name,
   But the heart ne’er felt its ray;
And fashion’s smiles that rich ones claim,
   Are but beams of a wintry day.

And how cold and dim these beams must be,
   Should life’s wretched wanderer come!
But my boy, when the world is dark to thee,
   Then turn to the light of Home.
“The Ladder to Learning” (1851-52?)
By Miss Lovechild

A stands for Ape, for Arthur, and Air.
B stands for Bullock, for Bird, and for Bear.
C stands for Cat, for Charles, and for cry.
D stands for Dog, for Daniel, and Dry.
E stands for Eagle, for Edward, and Eel.
F stands for Fish, for Francis, and Feel.
G stands for Goat, for Great, and for Good.
H stands for Hog, for Harry, and Hood.
J stands for Judge, for Jack, and for Jill.
K stands for King, for Kate, and for Kill.
L stands for Lion, for Lawyer, and Land.
M stands for Magpie, for Martha, and Mend.
N stands for Nag, for Nanny, and Notes.
O stands for Owl, for Orchard, and Oats.
P stands for Peacock, for Prince, and for Pay.
Q stands for Queen, for Quick, and for Quay.
R stands for Robbin, for Reason, and Rhyme.
S stands for Squirrel, for Sweet and Sublime.
T stands for Top, for Tea, and for Towel.
V stands for Vine, for Virtue, and Vowel.
W stands for Whale, for Waggon, and Wing.
X stands for Xerxes, the great Persian King.
Y stands for Yew Tree, for Youth, and for Yellow.
Z stands for Zany, a foolish Young Fellow.
“Harriet Tubman” by Eloise Greenfield
From Pass It On (1993)

Harriet Tubman didn’t take no stuff
Wasn’t scared of nothing neither
Didn’t come in this world to be no slave
And wasn’t going to stay one either

“Farewell!” she sang to her friends one night
She was mighty sad to leave ‘em
But she ran away that dark, hot night
Ran looking for her freedom

She ran to the woods and she ran through the woods
With the slave catchers right behind her
And she kept on going till she got to the North
Where those mean men couldn’t find her

Nineteen times she went back South
To get three hundred others
She ran for her freedom nineteen times
To save Black sisters and brothers
Harriet Tubman didn’t take no stuff
Wasn’t scared of nothing neither
Didn’t come in this world to be no slave
And didn’t stay one either

And didn’t stay one either
“Short Instructions to Direct a Young Scholar”
by unknown author
From An Essay for Instructing Children (1743)

Sape rogare, Rogata tenere, Retenta docere;
Haec Tria Discipulum facient superare Magistrum.

Learn what you’re taught, ask Questions oft’.
Retain in Mind what Skill you’ve gain’d.

Then teach your Brother, or any other.
These Methods mount to rich Account.

Scholars grow wise by Exercise.
Thus they’ll outdo their Teachers too.
Cubes are swirling through my head,
π’s attack me in my bed.
I dream of numbers in my sleep,
How much to carry? How much to keep?
Circles everywhere, radii too
In my brain – a number zoo!
There’s some numbers, here comes more,
Fight me in a daily war.
“Sick” by Shel Silverstein
From *Kids Pick the Funniest Poems* (1991)

“I cannot go to school today,”
Said little Peggy Ann McKay.
“I have the measles and the mumps,
A gash, a rash and purple bumps.
My mouth is wet, my throat is dry,
I’m going blind in my right eye.
My tonsils are as big as rocks,
I’ve counted sixteen chicken pox
And there’s one more --- that’s seventeen,
And don’t you think my face looks green?
My leg is cut, my eyes are blue ---
It might be instamatic flu.
I cough and sneeze and gasp and choke,
I’m sure that my left leg is broke ---
My hip hurts when I move my chin,
My belly button’s caving in,
My back is wrenched, my ankle’s sprained,
My ‘pendix pains each time it rains.
My nose is cold, my toes are numb,
I have a sliver in my thumb.
My neck is stiff, my voice is weak,
I hardly whisper when I speak.
My tongue is filling up my mouth,
I think my hair is falling out.
My elbow’s bent, my spine ain’t straight,
My temperature is one-o-eight.
My brain is shrunk, I cannot hear,
There is a hole inside my ear.
I have a hangnail, and my heart is --- what?
What’s that? What’s that you say?
You say today is . . . Saturday?
G’bye, I’m going out to play!”
“Jabberwocky” by Lewis Carroll
From *Through the Looking Glass, and What Alice Found There* (1872)

’Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

“Beware the Jabberwock, my son!
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!
Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun
The frumious Bandersnatch!”

He took his vorpal sword in hand;
Long time the manxome foe he sought—
So rested he by the Tumtum tree
And stood awhile in thought.

And, as in uffish thought he stood,
The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,
Came whiffling through the tulgey wood,
And burbled as it came!

One, two! One, two! And through and through
The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!
He left it dead, and with its head
He went galumphing back.

“And hast thou slain the
Jabberwock?
Come to my arms, my beamish boy!
O frabjous day! Callooh! Callay!”
He chortled in his joy.

’Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.
“Pierrot” by Sara Teasdale
From *Mon ami Pierrot: Songs and Fantasies* (1917)

Pierrot stands in the garden,
   Beneath the waning moon,
And on his lute he fashions
   A little silver tune.

Pierrot plays in the garden,
   He thinks he plays to me.
But I am quite forgotten,
   Under the cherry tree.

Pierrot plays in the garden,
   And all the roses know,
That Pierrot loves his music,
   But I,---I love Pierrot.
Excerpt from *What Every Young Wizard Should Know* (1963)
By Cal Roy

In olden times
Men spoke in rhymes
And did everything quite slow;
But every man, woman, and child knew then
What every young wizard should know –

What every young wizard should know and more –
Such as magic spells and things,
So they had at the tips of their tongues the words
That can make you fly without wings.

In modern times
Such useful rhymes
Are forgotten by all but a few;
But every man, woman, and child today
Could do what a wizard can do –

Could do what a wizard can do and more –
Such as telling when storms are due,
Or taming a dragon or naming a beast
That you don’t often find in a zoo.

So Fingal the Fat
In the sorcerer’s hat
Will teach you a rhyme or so
That every man, woman, and child can learn
And every young wizard should know.
“Six O’Clock” from *The Wonder Clock* (1887)
By Howard Pyle

The *Door* is open,
   The *Dew* is bright;
Forgotten now
   Is the lonesome *Night*,
And the *Starling* whistles,
   “All is right.”

The *House-wife* moves
   With her briskest tread
The *Chairs* are set,
   And the *Table* spread
With *Honey* and *Eggs*
   And *Cream* and *Bread*.

(Sun and Moon symbols appear alongside stanzas in original text.)
“The New Moon” by Mrs. Follen  
From *Posies for Children* (1882)

Dear mother, how pretty  
The moon looks to-night!  
She was never so cunning before;  
The two little horns  
Are so sharp and so bright,  
I hope she’ll not grow any more.

If I were up there,  
With you and my friends,  
I’d rock in it nicely, you’d see;  
I’d sit in the middle  
And hold by both ends;  
O, what a bright cradle ‘twould be!

I would call to the stars  
To keep out of the way,  
Lest we should rock over their toes;  
And then I would rock  
Till the dawn of the day,  
And see where the pretty moon goes.
Two people live in Rosamund,
   And one is very nice;
The other is devoted
   To every kind of vice—

To walking where the puddles are,
   And eating far too quick,
And saying words she shouldn’t know,
   And wanting spoons to lick.

Two people live in Rosamund,
   And one (I say it twice)
Is very nice and very good:
   The other’s only nice.
“Just Imagine” by Lorraine Adel, Grade 5
From Young Voices (1971)

A dictionary is a man who tells about words,
Airplanes are big, metal kinds of birds.
A penguin is a fancy little man who wears a fancy suit,
A kitten with one odd paw is wearing a fur boot.
Trees are wooden monsters with color-changing hair,
A cloud is the top of a person you don’t know is there.
A light bulb is an eyeball staring at the floor,
A doorknob is an animal living on a door.

If you believe in these silly things, please
Call me up. My number is three dings.
Excerpt from *The Cat in the Hat Comes Back* (1958)
By Dr. Seuss

“To take spots off THIS bed
Will be hard,” said the cat.
“I can’t do it alone,”
Said the Cat in the Hat.

“It is good I have someone
To help me,” he said.
“Right here in my hat
On the top of my head!
It is good that I have him
Here with me today.
He helps me a lot.
This is Little Cat A.”

And then Little Cat A
Took the hat off HIS head.
“It is good I have some one
To help ME,” he said.
“This is Little Cat B.
And I keep him about,
And when I need help
Then I let him come out.”

And then B said,
“I think we need Little Cat C.
That spot is too much
For the A cat and me.
But now, have no fear!
We will clean it away!
The three of us! Little Cats B, C
and A!”

“Come on! Take it away!”
Yelled Little Cat A.

“I will hit that old spot
With this broom! Do you see?
It comes off the old bed!
It goes on the T.V.”

And then Little Cat B
Cleaned up the T.V.
He cleaned it with milk,
Put the spot in a pan!
And then C blew it out
Of the house with a fan!

“But look where it went!”
I said. “Look where it blew!
You blew the mess
Out of the house. That is true.
But now you made Snow Spots!
You can’t let THEM stay!”

“Let us think about that now,”
Said C, B and A.
“With some help, we can do it!”
Said Little Cat C.
Then POP! On his head
We saw Little Cat D!
Then, POP! POP! POP!
Little Cats E, F and G!

“We will clean up that snow
If it takes us all day!
If it takes us all night,
We will clean it away!”
Said Little Cats G, F, E, D, C, B, A.
“Laughing-Song” by Wm. Blake
From *Posies for Children* (1882)

When the green woods laugh with the voice of joy,
And the dimpling stream runs laughing by;
When the air does laugh with our merry wit,
And the green hill laughs with the noise of it;

When the meadows laugh with lively green,
And the grasshopper laughs in the merry scene;
When Mary and Susan and Emily,
With their sweet, round mouths, sing, “Ha, ha, he!”

When the painted birds laugh in the shade,
Where our table with cherries and nuts is spread, ---
Come live, and” be merry, and join with me
To sing the sweet chorus of “Ha, ha, he!”
“Where” by Ruth Krauss
From Somebody Spilled the Sky (1976)

Where does that river come from
It comes from the mountain
Where does the mountain come from
It comes out of the world
Where does the world come from
It comes from the sun
Where does that sun come from
It comes from
It comes