this column presents our favorite poetry titles published in 2013. We selected a total of 10 titles, and they focus on a range of topics, including animals, plants, fairy tales, imaginary creatures, and civil rights leaders. In addition to simply reading them for pleasure, teachers can share these books to introduce and/or supplement units of study across numerous disciplines. We anticipate that teachers and children will enjoy reading these poetry books and that some of the titles featured in this column will inspire them to begin writing their own poems.

Follow Follow: A Book of Reverso Poems
Written by Marilyn Singer
Illustrated by Josée Masse

“Once upon a time, Marilyn Singer wrote a poem that could be read up and down, so that it would have different meanings in each direction. She had invented a reverse poem! Then she challenged herself to write more poems like it.” This follow-up companion to her first book titled Mirror Mirror: A Book of Reverso Poems features 14 reversos referencing famous fairy tales such as The Emperor’s New Clothes, The Princess and the Pea, Puss in Boots, The Three Little Pigs, The Little Mermaid, and The Tortoise and the Hare. Each page features a reverso—which consists of two poems. This is different from other poetic forms like limericks, sonnets, and haikus that consist of only one poem. One of my favorite reversos is titled “The Little Mermaid’s Choice.” Look at the forward and “reverso” readings here:

For love, give up your voice.
Don’t think twice.
On the shore, be his shadow.
Don’t keep your home in the unruly sea.

You’ll never catch me playing “Catch him.”
You can’t be docile in the unruly sea.
Keep your home.

Be docile.
Don’t on the shore.
Think twice!

You can’t catch him.
Don’t playing give up your voice for love.

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Masse’s illustrations complement the story by depicting the differences in meanings between the reversos. The characters in each poem are depicted in the middle of the page with differences in the shading of each side. The image accompanying the poem “The Mermaid’s Choice” depicts two mermaids in the middle of the page with one leaning toward the ocean and the other stepping onto land toward her suitor. This splendid collection of poems deserves a place in all elementary school libraries. (JM)
“My little dark baby./My little earth-thing./My little love-one./What shall I sing/For your lullaby?”

So begins Hughes’s ephemeral poem detailing the depths of love between an African American mother and her baby. Enchanting endpapers of starry skies on a sky-blue backdrop envelop this book. Hughes’s lyrical, inspired language is beautifully mirrored through imaginative paint and collage illustrations that capture exuberance and tenderness. The mother is gentle, peaceful, and nurturing—in action and expression—as she seeks to soothe her baby through song. The baby is perceptive, secure, and joyful—responsive to his mother and his enticingly imaginative nighttime travels. He is swung through “A necklace of stars,” dances happily as the night glitters and music soars, and hovers in the sky with the “Great diamond moon,” cradled in his mother’s arms, before “Kissing the night” with her in silhouette. Gradually, imagination gives way to bedtime as the baby falls asleep on his mother’s lap, clearly secure in their home.

Creative landscapes with fanciful trees, curling collage grasses, and stylized birds give way to nighttime scenes with modern musical staffs interwoven through clouds. Qualls’s luscious nightscapes in blues and purples are accentuated by and seep into an alternating warm palette of the yellow, peach, and red tones that fill the earth-bound scenes. The rich dark-brown skin of mother and baby are accentuated by whitewashed newsprint and lace. An informative illustrator’s note, including a loving photo of Hughes with his mother and suggestions for additional reading, further heighten the value of this gem of a book.

(KM)
I hear a squeak, could be a mouse.
We get them sometimes in our house.
I hear a creak out in the hall.
Could just be my cat, Snowball.

Some readers may wish they had a daddy who was a vampire:

1. He’ll let you stay up late at night.
2. He’ll wrap you in his cape real tight.
3. You can fly with him in the full moonlight.
4. When someone picks on you, he’ll bite!”

These funny and frightening poems will thrill all readers. (DD)

For some time, Prelutsky has mixed animals imaginatively with vegetables, fruits, flowers, and other animals (Scranimals, 2002, Illus. P. Sís) and with inanimate objects (Behold the Bold Umbrellaphant, 2006, Illus. C. Berger). His newest fantastic animal collection is his second collaboration with Berger and includes humorous reference to Berger’s “considerable field operations in preparing Mr. Prelutsky’s specimens for exhibition and publication” (cover flap). The unique specimens range from “Stardines” that “swim high across the sky” and “twinkle” as “In silence, these nocturnal fish/Are set to grant the slightest wish” (p. 8) to “Fountain Lions, lithe and lean,” who “Add gaiety to any scene” (p. 17).

Those object-animal mixes are interspersed with action-animal creations, such as “Plandas,”

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who “sit around all day,/Planning what to do,”
but whose “plans amount to nothing,/For they
never see them through” (p. 21). There are also
“Bluffaloes,” “bulky beasts” who “appear to be
in charge,” when in actuality they are “neither
fierce nor tough” and “just run away/If you should
call their bluff” (p. 11). The eternal misery of
“The Sobcat” (p. 23) offers rich vocabulary (e.g.,
“morose,” “lachrymose,” “copious”) as does the
wily “Tattlesnake,” who is “venomous, vile” and
due for a “comeuppance” (p. 27). The adjective-
animal “Jollyfish” are “Ebullient blobs of mirth,/
With merry dispositions/From the moment of their
birth” whose “humor is infectious” as they drift
with “buoyant effervescence” (p. 22). Inclusion
of delightful word play with strong, engaging
vocabulary continues across descriptions of other
unusual animals.

Berger shifts from the cut-print and textured-
paper illustrations she created for Behold the Bold
Umbrellaphant to detailed miniature, multimedia
dioramas with humorous elements. Her tools
and materials are spread invitingly across the
endpapers. Interestingly, of “two dozen” new
species “discovered and recorded” (cover flap),
only 16 were included. Hopefully, discoveries not
yet revealed indicate the possibility of another
engrossing Prelutsky/Berger book! (KM)

Pug: And Other Animal Poems
Written by
Valerie Worth
Illustrated by
Steve Jenkins
Farrar Straus Giroux,

In the expertly
composed
collection of 18 animal poems, Valerie Worth
ponders the unique behaviors and characteristics
of a wide range of animals. From the stumpy noses
of pugs to the thunder-like rage of the Bengal
tiger, Worth arranges small bursts of free verse for
each of the creatures featured. The artistry of her
poetry is elegant, and brings new appreciations
to the lives of the most unexpected of beasts, big
and small alike. Each poem is displayed across
a two-page spread with illustrations by Steve
Jenkins. Jenkins’s sophisticated cut-paper collage
style complements the importance of the animal
moment or behavior highlighted in Worth’s poetry.
Within the poem “Cicada,” for example, Jenkins’s
detailed image illustrates the metamorphosis of the
insect visually and positions the reader to consider
both the free verse and art together in order to fully
understand the metaphorical and literal content
presented.

As a follow-up to Animal Poems, Pug: And
Other Animal Poems, Worth introduces some more
advanced scientific concepts to readers, but the
prose and images should elicit wonder and awe in
audiences of all ages. Paired with informational
poetry like that of Joyce Sidman, students would
enjoy reading a collection of books that explore the
ways real-world phenomena can be presented in
prose and image. (AZ)

Seeds, Bees,
Butterflies, and
More!: Poems
for Two Voices
Written by
Carole Gerber
Illustrated by
Eugene Yelchin
Henry Holt, 2013,
unpaged, ISBN 978-0-
8050-9211-0

A honeybee and a bumblebee have a chat. A
rose offers a worm a bit of its compost. A mouse
assures a root of its importance. So begins the
book jacket description of Seeds, Bees, Butterflies,
and More: Poems for Two Voices. This collection
of informational poetry can be approached as an
invitation for a pair or group of readers to consider
the world from the perspective of everyday plants
and animals. The playful rhymes and unique points
of view focus on up-close inspections of nature,
including how dandelion seeds fly, cocklebur
travel, and pansies propagate. Gerber’s uses of
personification and language embody the ways living things—green and colorful—are renewed throughout the year. Gerber’s prose is grounded in scientific fact, inviting readers to inquire more deeply into the experiences of particular creatures in their own backyard. Yelchin’s vivid graphite and gauche artwork on watercolor paper accompanies the informational poetry for two voices and draws readers’ eyes and minds more deeply into the exchanges and transformations described. When paired with Helen Frost’s *Step Gently Out* (2012), teachers can guide students to read the scientific world with their senses and engage in the true work of observation—the real work of seeing.

( AZ )

**When Thunder Comes: Poems for Civil Rights Leaders**

Written by J. Patrick Lewis
Illustrated by Jim Burke, R. Gregory Christie, Tonya Engel, John Parra, and Meilo So

Lewis’s outstanding collection of 15 poems highlighting national and international civil rights leaders is sobering and inspiring. Opening with a thoughtfully crafted Shakespearean-style sonnet, he notes: “When thunder comes/The civil righteous are finished being meek . . . .” Lewis’s decisions on who and what to include make this volume exceptional. For example, he focuses on Coretta Scott King’s plea to King’s followers to “Embrace the boys that Hate employs” the morning after her husband’s assassination, and later on Mamie Carthan Till’s act of rebellion in forcing witness of the grotesque acts committed by racist Whites on her son. Lewis also includes Harvey Milk, the first openly gay person elected to US public office—a first for a middle-grades collective biography. He has James Chaney narrate Milk’s and fellow Congress of Racial Equality (C.O.R.E) volunteers’ deaths in a first-person, free-verse, block paragraph, shaped almost like a grave, using starkly beautiful phrasing: “Freedom Summer is Forlorn Winter at the tag end of living.”

For each poem, an illustrated spread is well-matched to both subject and poetic style. Burke’s strongly contemplative Nelson Mandela and reserved Josh Gibson are balanced by the muted innocence of his C.O.R.E. volunteers as well as the gentleness of Parra’s Muhammad Yunus and Sylvia Mendez and the serene righteousness of his Mitsuye Endo. Engel offers more of a historic feel for each of her subjects, while the angular expressionistic action of Christie’s Jackie Robinson and the good-natured humor infused in his Mohandas Ghandi and Ellison Onizuka is perfection. So’s watercolors embody the passion of Helen Zia, and her mix of color and grey tones captures the political irony in Aung San Sui Kyi’s poem and the blend of hope and despair in Harvey Milk’s story. The range of media (e.g., watercolor, acrylic, and oil) as well as of styles (e.g., folk art, expressionism, and realism) add incredible depth to this rich volume. (KM)

**What the Heart Knows: Chants, Charms, & Blessings**

Written by Joyce Sidman
Illustrated by Pamela Zagarenski

This charming book of poetry is sure to remind readers of the beauty and healing power of words.

Newbery Honor-winning poet Joyce Sidman crafts an inspiring collection of prose focused on chants, charms, and blessings. Written to be read aloud with hopes the words serve a real influence on life, Sidman’s array of verses and wordplay evokes healing, comfort, valor, and comedy and meets
the demands of many real-life moments. Loss, friendships, difference, gratitude, celebration, and forgiveness are among the universal occasions addressed in What the Heart Knows. The elegance and accessibility of Sidman’s poetry invite writing notebooks to be filled with personal reflections and promises—seeds for readers’ own songs, lyrics, and hopes for a better world. Caldecott Honor-winning Pamela Zagarenski’s whimsical illustrations extend the subtleties of emotion and symbolism in the book without disrupting Sidman’s messages. Like the work of Cynthia Rylant in The Stars Will Shine (2005), the gentle language and playful tone make this a must-have for children exploring the tenderness, strength, and peace of poetry. (AZ)

**Words with Wings**

Written by Nikki Grimes


Gabriella, named after an angel in the Bible, is a daydreamer who loves words. One poem (p. 11) titled the same as the novel goes like this:

Some words
sit still on the page
holding a story steady.

Those words
never get me into trouble.

But other words have wings
that wake my daydreams.

They fly in,
silent as sunrise,
tickle my imagination,
and carry my thoughts away.

I can’t help
but buckle up
for the ride!

Gabriella uses writing and words to set her free from the pain of her parents’ divorce, the challenges of moving to a new school, and the loneliness of missing her best friend. Words such as “concert,” “sled,” “snowflake,” or “waterfall” take Gabriella to somewhere else. Gabriella’s mother and new teacher are worried about her daydreaming, reminding her to pay attention. She tries to pack her “word-journeys” into a dark corner so that no one notices her escapes, yet she becomes depressed and bored. Her teacher says, “The best thinkers/writers, inventors in the world/allow their thoughts/to carry them away,/now and then” (p. 45). He explains that sometimes she may need to slide her daydreams into a drawer and let them wait until later, when he is done teaching a lesson. Finally, Gabriella meets David, who sits in the back of the classroom drawing. Together this dreaming and drawing duet drive Mr. Spicer delirious. The close of the book shares an unexpected twist from both Gabriella’s teacher and mom, validating her dream-making. This beautiful novel celebrates writing and the power of imagination and creativity. (DD)

**Jonda C. McNair** is an associate professor of Literacy Education at Clemson University in South Carolina. **Deanna Day** is an associate professor of Literacy and Children’s Literature at Washington State University in Vancouver, Washington. **Karla J. Möller** is an associate professor in the Curriculum and Instruction Department at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. **Angie Zapata** is an assistant professor of Literacy Education at the University of Missouri-Columbia.

Please contact Jonda C. McNair at jmcnair@clemson.edu for questions related to submitting review materials.

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