Beyond Silverstein: Poetry for Middle Schoolers

Mention the word poetry in middle school classrooms and the likely response is one of dismay. Once students graduate from the comic verses of Silverstein and Prelutsky, poetry sometimes loses its appeal. The following selections may just lure those dismayed readers back to a love of poetry.

Behind the Wheel: Poems about Driving. Janet S. Wong. Margaret K. McElderry, 1999. 46 pp. Thirty-five poems reflect teenagers’ fascination with automobiles and driving. “My parents are like seat belts./They’re always around me—/But I guess/they help keep me safe.”


Light-Gathering Poems. Liz Rosenberg (ed.). Henry Holt, 2000. 146 pp. Turning toward the light, these poems from many peoples and many traditions include both classic poetry, such as “Follow the Drinking Gourd” and “She Walks in Beauty,” and more recent poetry by Gary Soto and Allen Ginsberg.

Movin’: Teen Poets Take Voice. Dave Johnson (ed.) (pictures by Chris Raschka). Orchard, 2000. 52 pp. Real teen poets who were discovered through workshops sponsored by the New York Public Library and Poets House projects share their feelings in a wide range of titles, such as “Ode to Eyebrows” and “If Peaches Had Arms.”

My Own True Name. Pat Mora. Arte Publico, 2000. 81 pp. Most of the 62 poems divided into Blooms, Thorns, and Roots are directed at teens and directly reflect a Spanish experience while others have universal appeal.


Pierced by a Ray of Sun: Poems about the Times We Feel Alone. Selected by Ruth Gordon. HarperCollins, 1995. 105 pp. Gordon assembled this collection with the universal thought that everyone feels alone at some time no matter the time in history or the age of the person.

The Place My Words Are Looking For. Selected by Paul B. Janeczko. Bradbury, 1990. 150 pp. Thirty-nine poets share their poetry, thoughts on writing poetry, and their photographs. The result is the opportunity to have friendly conversations with leading modern poets.

Slow Dance Heart Break Blues. Arnold Adoff (artwork by William Cotton). Lothrop, Lee & Shepard, 1995. 80 pp. Adoff speculates about the lives of adolescents through words that dance across the pages in his signature style. Love, braces, death, chips, rain, sports are some of the topics featured in these brief poems.


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Middle Level Section Steering Committee Appoints Chair

Katherine Ramsey, River Oaks Baptist School, Houston, Texas, has been appointed chair of the NCTE Middle Level Section Steering Committee. Her two-year term will begin during the Annual Convention in Baltimore.

Ramsey was recently chair of the Middle Level Advisory Committee and was instrumental in the formation of the NCTE Middle Level Section. She has also served as associate chair of the NCTE Secondary Section Steering and Nominating Committees.

In 1998, the Junior High/Middle School Assembly of NCTE presented Ramsey with its Richard W. Halle Award, which is given to a junior high/middle school educator who has worked to promote understanding of the developmental needs and characteristics of young adolescents, especially in the English language arts. Ramsey was chair of the assembly in 1994 and 1995.

Other Appointments

Recently appointed as co-assistant chairs of the NCTE Middle Level Section were Roxanne Henkin, National-Louis University, Wheaton, Illinois, and Teri Lesesne, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, Texas. Their two-year terms will also begin during the NCTE Annual Convention in Baltimore.