

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."

The Block. Langston Hughes (illus. Romare Bearden). The Metropolitan Museum of Art and Viking, 1995. 32 pp. This large format picture book features poems by Langston Hughes and throbs with the energy of Harlem. Bearden's collage illustrations boldly depict life on city streets.

Buried Alive: The Elements of Love. Ralph Fletcher. Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 1996. 46 pp. Under a universal umbrella of romantic love, teens express their views of love and their brief encounters with love in 36 free verse poems.

Cool Salsa: Bilingual Poems on Growing Up Latino in the United States. Lori M. Carlson (ed.). Henry Holt, 1994. 123 pp. Thirty poems in both English and Spanish celebrate unique experiences of Latinos in the United States. Another six poems are primarily English with some Spanish for flavor.

Earth Always Endures: Native American Poems. Selected by Neil Philipp (photographs by Edward S. Curtis). Viking, 1996. 93 pp. Duotone photographs enhance Native American chants, prayers, and songs filled with wisdom, joy, and sadness. Apache, Kiowa, Chippewa, and other tribes from across the United States are represented.

Harlem. Walter Dean Myers (pictures by Christopher Myers). Scholastic, 1997. 32 pp. One simple but elegant poem presents a tribute to Harlem and the people who moved there. Accompanying bold collage illustrations depict neighborhood scenes focused on men, women, and children.

I, Too, Sing America: Three Centuries of African American Poetry. Catherine Clinton (ed.) (illus. Stephen Alcorn). Houghton Mifflin, 1998. 128 pp. The voices of 25 African American poets resonate with both hope and despair across three centuries. Brief biographies of the poets and Alcorn's mixed media illustrations are bonuses.

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.

A Lion's Hunger: Poems of First Love. Ann Turner (illus. Maria Jimenez). Marshall Cavendish, 1998. 47 pp. In brief diary form, this free verse story chronicles a bittersweet, innocent love story between an unnamed boy and girl as they experience the joys and sorrows of young love.

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.

Opening Days: Sports Poems. Selected by Lee Bennett Hopkins (illus. Scott Medlock). Harcourt Brace, 1996. 37 pp. This collection of brief poems covers a broad range of sports from karate to swimming to tennis. Contributing poets include Gary Soto, Jane Yolen, Lillian Morrison, Walt Whitman, Lee Bennett Hopkins, and others.

The Pain Tree and Other Teenage Angst-Ridden Poetry. Collected and illustrated by Esther Pearl Watson and Mark Todd. Houghton Mifflin, 2000. 64 pp. Teens ages 13 through 18 express raw emotions in 25 poems, each accompanied by a full-page primitive illustration.

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.

Soul Looks Back in Wonder. Maya Angelou (ed.) (illus. Tom Feelings). Dial, 1993. 32 pp. Richly illustrated poems by Lucille Clifton, Walter Dean Myers, Langston Hughes, and others show the beauty and strength of African Americans. Be sure to read "I Love the Look of Words" by Maya Angelou.

Split Image: A Story in Poems. Mel Glenn. HarperCollins, 2000. 159 pp. A portrait of smart, popular, but unhappy Laura Li emerges through a series of free verse poems expressing the thoughts and feelings of students and school personnel after Laura Li's suicide. Other books by Glenn told in poems include: *Foreign Exchange: A Mystery in Poems*, *The Taking of Room 114*, *Jump Ball*, and *Who Killed Mr. Chippendale?*

Step Lightly: Poems for the Journey. Collected by Nancy Willard. Harcourt Brace, 1997. 99 pp. Classic and contemporary poems offer a wide range of topics from slugs to cows to blizzards to hips. The collection contains sad and lighthearted poems, beautiful images, and interesting stories.



Things I Have to Tell You: Poems and Writing by Teenage Girls. Betsy Franco (ed.) (photographs by Nina Nickles). Candlewick, 2001. 63 pp. Words of wisdom from girls ages 14 through 19 include “A Bad Hair Day,” “Secrets,” and “Apricot Bath.” A few poems have raw language.

What Have You Lost? Selected by Naomi Shihab Nye (photographs by Michael Nye). Greenwillow, 2001. 205 pp. Nye intersperses sepia photographs of people among nostalgic poems describing memories of items lost and times past. Her question can prompt students to examine their own losses, both large and small.

You Hear Me? Poems and Writing by Teenage Boys. Betsy Franco (ed.). Candlewick, 2000. 107 pp. Frankness, honesty, and sensitivity show in these poems written by boys ages 12 through 18. Franco presents “the uncensored accounts of teenage boys without the filter of adult sensibility.”

Words with Wings: A Treasury of African-American Poetry and Art. Selected by Belinda Rochelle. HarperCollins, 2001. 48 pp. Rochelle pairs 20 poems by well-known African American poets, such as Alice Walker, Paul Laurence Dunbar, and Gwendolyn Brooks, with 20 stunning works of art also by African Americans.

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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.
