

The cover features several stylized, light green leaf motifs scattered across a pale yellow background. Each motif consists of a short stem with two leaves pointing in opposite directions.

USING POETRY ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Learning to Love Language

BARBARA CHATTON

 *Greenwood*
PUBLISHING GROUP

Using Poetry Across the Curriculum

Using Poetry Across the Curriculum

Learning to Love Language

Second Edition

Barbara Chatton

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For My Teachers

Milton John Chatton 1916–1992

Mildred Vick Chatton 1916–1994

Charlotte S. Huck 1923–2005

and Leah Griffin 1942–2009

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Preface

Using Poetry Across the Curriculum: Learning to Love Language offers elementary and middle school librarians and teachers ideas for integrating poetry into all areas of study. Just as aspects of language usage (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) overlap, each of the major disciplines overlaps and interconnects with others. It is difficult, for example, to teach science without thinking about its links to mathematics, reading, writing, and social studies. Any one of the curricular areas can be a starting point for studies that interconnect several or all of the other curriculum areas.

POETRY ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Generally, poetry study is an aspect of the language arts, but for purposes of this book, it will be considered broadly. *Using Poetry Across the Curriculum: Learning to Love Language* focuses on reading and sharing poetry to communicate and interrelate all areas of study. Poetry is regarded as part of everyday classroom life, rather than a topic or unit to be covered on a special week or month. Ideas for sharing poems and for reading and writing poems are included throughout the book when relevant to the subject matter. Poetry writing ideas are offered as optional activities but never required. Students should be invited to see the many forms of poems as different ways of expressing what they now. This book is not designed to help teach specific methods of reading, discussing, or writing poetry. The References section in Chapter One lists materials about how to teach poetry to young people.

Units are included in the book when poems seem to cluster around one subject or theme. These units are deliberately kept very open, with lists of materials and suggestions for activities, but without clear blueprints for what should occur in the study. The material in the poetry and prose will evoke responses from teachers and students. Depending upon one's curriculum, studies of these subjects can go in a number of different directions. The unit on Jazz, for instance, is included in the Fine Arts chapter under Music. Certainly, listening and responding to this music is critical to any jazz study. But the poetic and prose materials include other possible connections. These include biography of jazz musicians and singers, study of the poetic elements of rhythm (meter) and onomatopoeia, poetic

writing, performance poetry, the history of jazz, and the role of African American musical roots in its creation. Other topics may arise as students and teachers reflect on the poetic works they read.

Rather than teach poetry out of context as part of a poetry unit, these units encourage teachers and librarians to put together poetic materials in an open way so that a variety of responses across a number of curriculum areas can result.

DIVERSITY AND MULTICULTURALISM

As educators have become more aware of diversity and seek to honor the backgrounds and beliefs of all students, more and better poetry has become available for enriching school collections. Poems in other languages and dialects are included in Chapter Two: Language Arts. Poetry about various cultures around the world and in the United States is included in Chapter Five: Social Studies. Poems about the music, art, and dance traditions of various cultural groups are included in Chapter Six: Fine Arts. A successful approach to treating diversity in the classroom or library is to regard it as part of everyday life, rather than as a subject addressed only during special weeks. Poetry by and about members of many cultural groups is included in all of the standards to encourage this approach.

CHAPTER ORGANIZATION BY SUBJECT

Chapter One provides a broad overview of the standards, poetry and language. Each succeeding chapter focuses on the standards in one or two subject areas. The standards appear in bold type with discussion and lists of poems following them. Some standards don't have direct links to poetry, but for purposes of continuity, they are included in the text, immediately followed by the next standards. If material is useful in two standards but has been placed in one area, a **See** reference will lead readers to that location. Cross-references used in catalogs are used throughout the book. **See also** references will take the reader to the standards under which useful material can be located. For example, because some aspect of problem solving or critical thinking is included in each set of standards, see also references will take the reader to the mathematics standard where poems relating to this subject are located. These references will also help librarians and teachers to locate poems listed in other curriculum areas that might be helpful. When units of study are included in a chapter, they will be preceded by **Links with** references to show which standards are being covered.

SOURCES FOR AND CITATION OF POETRY

The suggested poems in each chapter are discussed and then listed following the discussion. If the poem is available in the poet's own works, that edition of the work is cited. If not, another source is cited. If another common source for the poem is available it appears by title in parentheses after the first citation. Most of these poems can be found in other sources as well. An effort has been made to cite books that are still in print and readily available. The poems selected here comprise only a sampling of possible choices in each curriculum area. As librarians and teachers develop classroom, library, and personal poetry collections, they and their students will find other poems appropriate for their studies.

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No one writes a book alone. Sharon Coatney and the staff of Libraries Unlimited made it possible for me to create this second edition. The faculty of the College of Education at the University of Wyoming granted me a sabbatical so that I could write it. Dean Kay Persichitte, department chair Alan Buss and Office Associate Dorie Gallegos protected, encouraged, and supported me throughout the process. Colleague Kate Muir Welsh (Dr. Science) shared materials with me and answered standards questions. Deb Parkinson cheerfully took over my advising. Judy Ellsworth stepped in for committee work. Librarians Anita Trout and Mary Henning taught my courses in Children's Literature. Without their willingness to help me out, I could not have accomplished this project.

The helpful staffs of the Albany County Public Library and the University of Wyoming, particularly Cathy Dodgson and the student workers at the University libraries, kept the process of interlibrary loans and check-outs cordial and orderly.

On the home front, my husband Andy provided gourmet meals and roaring fires to sit by. Cats Guy Noir and Dolly popped in and out, around, and over the computer station, letting me know I was never alone with this work.

Two teachers deserve my special thanks. Leah Griffin and her daughter Shari provided tea and brownies, stories, laughter, and wonderful ideas in our visits. Shari's students in Highlands Ranch, Colorado, took to poetry with enthusiasm, and I thank them for their efforts. They became poets because their own "Miss Stretchberry" created a classroom in which words, critical thought, and supporting one another were daily graces.

Introduction

Much has changed since *Using Poetry Across the Curriculum: A Whole Language Approach* was published in 1994. Curriculum has changed. Although the range of subject areas to be covered in elementary and middle schools is still broad, the focus has changed to creating curriculum to meet standards. The previous edition featured chapters on major discipline areas. In this edition, those areas remain in place, but within each chapter the poems are organized under the major headings of the national standards. As I did in the first edition, I emphasize that including all areas of study in the curriculum is vital to educating the young.

Poetry for children and young adults has changed. About one-third of the materials featured in the earlier edition of this book have gone out of print. Some of these are losses to the field, including volumes by award-winning poets Eve Merriam, Myra Cohn Livingston, and X. J. Kennedy. There have been remarkable gains in other areas of poetry. More collections of poems are designed for use across the curriculum, particularly collections selected by Lee Bennett Hopkins, Avis Harley, Paul Janeczko, and J. Patrick Lewis, among others, have provided readers with lively collections featuring an impressive array of poetic forms. New young poets speak directly to the concerns of upper elementary and middle school students. Beautifully illustrated poetry books enhance the meanings of the poems and invite readers. The image of poetry for young people has in the past been one of sweetness and innocence, but this is no longer true. The range of subjects and variety of forms of poems for the young has never been greater. Poetry is a strong and lively presence that deserves to be highlighted in schools and libraries.

When I wrote the first edition of the book, I struggled to find poetry that represented the experiences of diverse groups within the United States and around the world. Since that time, poetry about people of differing cultural backgrounds and poems about the contributions of girls and women has proliferated. Many more collections of poems are bilingual in English and Spanish. Anthologies of poems from around the world are appearing more frequently. While there are still gaps, with some languages and ethnicities represented by only one or two poets, the increase in numbers of poetry books that represent the diversity of human experience is heartening.

Definitions and genres of poetry have increasingly blurred. In 1994, novels in verse were almost exclusively a small subcategory of adult fiction, but are now a flourishing literary form for young

people. Poets are creating biographies and histories in verse. Concrete poetry, combining visual and sound qualities, is widely available. Poets are writing free verse texts for picture books and nonfiction. Poetry collections in response to art and photography have increased in number. All of these have enriched poetry for young people.

Since the first edition of this book, oral presentation of poetry has become very popular. Rap music, poetry jams, poetry slams, and open mike nights for poetry reading at clubs have encouraged young people to write and share their poems with others. Programs such as Poetry Out Loud are attracting young poets. The National Poets Laureate have become more visible in their efforts to popularize poetry. The National Poetry Society has created a position of Poet Laureate for Children, and these Poets Laureate have also worked to make poetry more visible including public performances of poems.

While books of poetry can quickly go out of print, changes in technology have made it easier to access them in a variety of ways. Some on-line booksellers carry used editions for sale. Some books will be reprinted on demand. New publishers who specialize in reprints are offering many collections. Some poets have reclaimed copyrights for out of print books and self-publishing them with self-publishing services. Hard-to-find poems can sometimes be found on websites.

I continue to believe in the power of poetry to change the world one person at a time. Students who are allowed to explore the intricacies of language, to play with words and their sounds, and to think and make sense of the world through poems of all kinds will see that world differently. Words can give them power. Poets for the young have led the way in suggesting that students can handle the big, tough ideas. Poetry about war and peace, about how we treat our environment, and about how we treat one another invites us to ponder these hard issues with our students. Poetry that allows them to think like scientists, like historians, and like artists will enrich their lives. Their thoughts, words and poems can create a better future.

CHAPTER 1

Poetry and The National Standards for Education

THE STANDARDS

During the 1990s, under considerable pressure from the U.S. Department of Education, professional organizations began developing national standards for education in their disciplines. The standards were intended to encourage education of all students to high levels of content knowledge, conceptual understanding, and skills in the disciplines taught in school. The process of creating these standards was neither simple nor clear, enmeshed in politics both from outside the disciplines and from splits within them. The number of disciplines for which standards were created began to grow. National Standards were created for Civics, Foreign Language, Geography, History, Language Arts, Mathematics, Music, Physical Education, Science, Social Studies, Technology, and the Visual and Performing Arts (Including Drama, Art, and Dance). Additional standards emerged for specialized areas such as American Indian Education, Business Education, ESL, and Gifted Programs, among others. Not surprisingly, the national standards were quite broad and inclusive. States and then school districts took these sets of standards and translated them to fit local needs, adding more layers of meaning.

Every discipline naturally views knowledge through its own lens. Each set of standards uses the language of the discipline, in some cases, as a teacher friend told me, so oblique as to require a translator. A web search of the standards with the accompanying books, state and commercial websites, and other published materials needed to translate these standards into classroom use is revealing. So much is asked in each content area that no one teacher, classroom, or child could reasonably expect to accomplish these goals. Instead they tend to represent the philosophies of the organizations charged with producing them. Standards repeat themselves, overlap, and seem to omit some areas of fundamental knowledge. When faced with the lists of standards for all of the disciplines, elementary and middle school teachers and librarians, who strive to educate students in all of these areas, can feel overwhelmed. What began with the expectation that all students should have access to similar content and process knowledge has become a nightmare of regulations, interpretations, and accountability.

An odd outcome of the Standards movement is schools where Standards and Objectives must be posted in classrooms so that administrators and visitors can enter at any time and be assured that

teachers (and students) can point to a standard on which they are working. I can't help wondering what kind of language students develop when they are surrounded by the jargon of many disciplines rather than rich natural language with which they live. Another outcome, far more disturbing, is that in most cases the standards contain nothing that speaks to finding joy in new ideas or in linking together the areas of the curriculum into a larger conceptual framework that is essential to being a lively and interesting and educated human being.

A Path through the Standards

There is nothing wrong with having standards. The difficulty for teachers and librarians comes because the education standards are hardly standardized. It is difficult to wade through all the materials because of the sheer number of standards, differences in discipline language, and their overlapping nature. The purpose of this book is to provide a poetic path through the disciplines that are taught by elementary and middle school teachers and librarians.

Some processes cross the curriculum areas covered by this book, although they are called by different names. One crossover is the ability to use content knowledge for critical thinking and problem solving. Another is to be able to communicate what one knows and understands about a subject. Language is a critical link across the standards. Poetry gives students and teachers a means of communicating what they understand and enjoy about each discipline and a means of linking the disciplines together.

This commonality is acknowledged by the standards themselves. Each set of standards includes one or more that encourage students to make links across the curriculum but does not necessarily discuss how this is to be accomplished. Poets generally "live" in the Language Arts, but in fact they come from and write about every subject area. Some are trained scientists or historians. Some love mathematics or art. Because of the range of topics of poetry, poems move freely across the discipline areas.

In an attempt to make teaching to the standards easier, writers and educators have created lessons and units that incorporate one or more standards. Typically, these describe an activity and cite the standard or standards that activity would address. This volume begins with the standards to show the ways that poetry moves around and across the curriculum. The standards appear in bold type, followed by poems and collections that can be used to support that standard. Some standards are quite technical and focus on material that seems designed for students majoring in a subject area. When there does not seem to be a poetry connection for a standard, standards are clumped together. For sheer lack of space and time, some standards will not be considered in this volume. The broader *Curriculum Standards for Social Studies* encompasses the major ideas of history, geography, and economics, so the specific content standards for these disciplines are not included. The standards for technology, and specific areas of instruction for specific populations are not included.

Using Poetry Across the Curriculum: Learning to Love Language is designed to use poetry and poetic language as a means of translating the numerous standards into creative, engaging, and stimulating activities. Poetry can act as a bridge across and a path between the many areas of required study in elementary and middle schools.

DEFINING POETRY

When I ask students what a poem is, most tell me that it is something that rhymes. Given that children's introduction to poetry is through nursery rhymes, rhyming songs, and playground chants, this answer is not surprising. Some students have told me that it is not rhyme that makes a poem; it is the way

the words are arranged on the page. Poems sit in the middle of a page and don't go all of the way to the edges. Some students think that poetry is only about certain subjects, about nature and love and other subjects they don't care for. Ralph Fletcher answers the concern that poems are only about "sweet" things with his "Squished Squirrel Poem" in which the writer quarrels with his teacher that it is a good subject for a poem. Others see poetry as a certain way of using words or as using certain devices such as metaphor and meter when one writes. Poetry does not define easily. Melissa, who has been thinking a lot about poetry, gave these definitions:

Poetry is like a small page, a small word, a big difference.

Poetry is like a page full of memories hidden in words of black.

Poetry is like opening a hundred year old box of feelings.

Melissa

Grade 5

Melissa shows in her definitions that one has to define poetry by talking about what it does, rather than what it is. Poets have written many poems about poetry. They try to capture what a poem is through imagery or comparison. They might write about how it makes them feel when they read it, speak it, or hear it spoken. Eleanor Farjeon's classic poem "Poetry" suggests that poetry is not the actual rose, but the image or sense of the rose. In *A Poet's Bird Garden*, Laura Nyman Montenegro uses the metaphor of "capturing" the bird to show the complexities of explaining poetry. Poet William Stafford has written, "A poem is anything said in such a way as to invite from the hearer or reader a certain kind of attention." (Stafford, 1978)

Stafford's idea of paying attention is significant. Poems ask us to notice the small things, natural acts, and kindnesses we tend to pass by. Poems ask us to pay attention to love, to grief, and to events around us. Ralph Fletcher speaks for the power of poetry to tell important truths in his poem "Poetry Stands." In her "Forward" to Arnold Adoff's collection, *I Am the Darker Brother*, Nikki Giovanni speaks of African Americans turning to poetry to give them a voice, to give them hope, to raise their spirits, and to tell the truth, "And poetry did not let them down."

The following list of books and poems includes works about many aspects of poetry. Each of the poems speaks to the power of poetic language. Bobbye S. Goldstein has selected some of her favorite poems on poetry for *Inner Chimes: Poems on Poetry*. Ralph Fletcher's *A Writing Kind of Day* includes a number of poems on poetry, as does Eloise Greenfield's *In the Land of Words*.

Afif, Kaissar. "The Bridge." In Nye, Naomi Shihab. *The Space Between Our Footsteps*. S & S, 1998. (Also in *The Flag of Childhood*)

Appelt, Kathi. "Homeroom." *Poems from Homeroom*. Holt, 2002.

Bogart, Sandra. "Poems Can Give You." In Booth, David. *'Til All the Stars Have Fallen*. Illus. by Kady MacDonald Denton. Viking, 1990.

Clarke, John Henrik. "The Poet Speaks." In Slier, Deborah. *Make a Joyful Sound*. Illus. by Cornelius Van Wright & Ying-Hwa Hu. Checkerboard, 1991.

Colby, Joan. "Processes." In Nye, Naomi Shihab. *What Have You Lost?* Greenwillow, 1999.

Collins, Billy. "Introduction to Poetry." In Hopkins Lee Bennett. *Days to Celebrate*. Illus. by Stephen Alcorn. HarperCollins, 2005.

Dakos, Kalli. "I Gotcha." *Don't Read This Book, Whatever You Do*. Illus. by G. Brian Karas. S & S, 1993.

Esbensen, Barbara Juster. "Homework" & "Pencils." *Who Shrank My Grandmother's House?* Illus. by Eric Beddows. HarperCollins, 1992.

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Poetic Language

The sheer number of poems and essays about what poetry is and what makes it good indicates its complexity and power. Some would like a narrow definition of poetry that adheres precisely to form. Others would like students to be steeped in the classics rather than in contemporary poems. Some think that verse is frivolous and only serious poems should be addressed. Others feel most comfortable with light and humorous works, fearing they don’t understand deeper poetry.

Students in Shari Griffin’s fourth and fifth grade classroom struggled to understand what made a poem. When she shared Kristine O’Connell George’s *Hummingbird Nest: A Journal of Poems* with them, they were surprised that this could be both a journal and poetry. They also thought it read like a story. They wondered if when someone really pays attention, the words come out as poems. One commented on “the shell poem” and feeling all “curled up” when it was read. One child said, “I’ve never heard of raisin black . . . That’s a cool way to describe a bird color.” Another observed that if you read out just the titles they would make their own poem. When Shari asked the students if they thought there was a poem in everything we do, some students were fairly sure there was. What Shari’s students were beginning to notice was that George uses imagery and careful descriptions that are both scientific and poetic. As the year went on, students tried writing their own poems as they responded to the science they were learning.

In this book poetry will be defined very broadly: Poetry is the act of paying thoughtful attention to language and using that language to carefully express thoughts, feelings, and observations. For purposes of this book examples will be included because they use poetic language rather than because they adhere to strict definitions of poetry. Two of America’s greatest orators were masters of poetic language. Abraham Lincoln’s *Gettysburg Address* captures the pain of war and the resoluteness needed to continue to act. Martin Luther King Jr.’s *I Have a Dream* speech is a litany filled with imagery and emotion. Each of these poetic writings has been published in picture book form, with the words carefully arranged so that the power of each line is expressed. “The Preamble to the

Constitution of the United States” is written poetically, with careful phrasing and rich language that indicate the serious intent of the document. David Catrow has used these powerful words as the text for his picture book *We the Kids*.

Poetic Language in Picture Books

Increasingly, the text of picture books is arranged in the form of free verse, with lines of text floating beside or inside illustrations, rather than in prose style, with the text at the top or bottom of the page. The brief lines of Ntozake Shange’s *Coretta Scott* are arranged in short bursts to give this poetic biography its power. The longer text of Robert Burleigh’s *One Giant Leap* is arranged in poetic lines. Even when lines are not arranged as poems, some authors write terse, carefully worded images that could be poems. The quiet rendering of the hard life of prairie settlers is arranged as free verse in Ann Turner’s *Dakota Dugout*. The strong images and repetition of Cynthia Rylant’s *Night in the Country* and *Snow* are poetry.

Many picture books use rhymed text, from the works of Dr. Seuss to contemporary works such as Kristine O’Connell George’s *One Mitten* and Nancy Shaw’s *Raccoon Tune*. Rhyme in picture books allows beginning readers to predict what will happen next. Rhymed picture books are included throughout this volume in the appropriate subject areas. Many others can be located under the Library of Congress heading “Stories in Rhyme” in catalogs.

Burleigh, Robert. *One Giant Leap*. Illus. by Mike Wimmer. Philomel, 2009.

Catrow, David. *We the Kids: The Preamble to the Constitution of the United States*. Dial, 2005

George, Kristine O’Connell. *One Mitten*. Illus. by Maggie Smith. Clarion, 2004.

King, Martin Luther, Jr. *I Have a Dream*. Illus. by 15 Coretta Scott King Award & Honor Book Artists. Scholastic, 1997.

Lincoln, Abraham. *The Gettysburg Address*. Illus. by Michael McCurdy. Houghton, 1995.

Rylant, Cynthia. *Night in the Country*. Illus. by Mary Szilagyi. Bradbury, 1986.

———. *Snow*. Illus. by Lauren Stringer. Harcourt, 2008.

Shange, Ntozake. *Coretta Scott*. Illus. by Kadir Nelson. HarperCollins, 2009.

Shaw, Nancy. *Raccoon Tune*. Illus. by Howard Fine. Holt, 2003.

Turner, Ann. *Dakota Dugout*. Illus. by Ronald Himler. Macmillan, 1985.

Novels in Verse

Authors and poets are blurring the genre lines and using poetic language in novels as well as picture books. The best novels in verse use carefully selected, evocative language to share powerful emotions with young readers. Karen Hesse’s *Out of the Dust*, for example, richly describes the bleakness of the Oklahoma Dust Bowl during the Depression, as well as a personal tragedy so great a father and daughter cannot articulate their pain to one another. The free verse allows readers to feel the horror of life that has turned to dust both literally and metaphorically, as the characters slowly make their way toward a new beginning.

Some of these novels are autobiographical, some historical, and some are contemporary. A number of novel-length collections of poems have a common thread and common characters. For purposes of space, not all of these are mentioned here, but they are included in appropriate subject areas of this book. When the subject of a novel listed here fits study in another curriculum area, the novel will also be included in that chapter. Sometimes poems in these novels are distinctive enough to stand alone, and these are included in the appropriate subject area. Other examples of novels in verse appear under the Library of Congress subject heading “Novels in Verse” in catalogs.

Appelt, Kathi. *My Father’s Summers: A Daughter’s Memoir*. Holt, 2004.

Applegate, Katherine. *Home of the Brave*. Feiwel & Friends, 2007.