

# THE POET'S CORNER



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POETRY IS one of the most time-effective ways to build teamwork skills in our students while allowing each person to preserve and present his or her individual work. In one day's time, students can make a short anthology, expressing their own tastes by choosing a couple of favorite published poems and copying them by hand on pages that are assembled into a book. In one hour's time, students can collaborate on a single poem, each contributing lines that are linked together. The end goal: unifying diverse voices.

### Collaborative Poetry Creates Community Among Writers

Collaborative poetry projects can also bring a playful element of surprise to language arts. In fact, hundreds of years ago, poets in Japan wrote the linked verse forms of renga and haikai as parlor games to entertain themselves. In 2012 poet Irene Latham brought collaborative poetry to the world of children's poetry in a new way, celebrating National Poetry Month and Poetry Friday with the "Kidlitosphere Progressive Poem." As described by Latham, "a progressive poem is written by more than one author in which each contributor adds a line (or couplet or stanza) to the poem before passing the poem to the next contributor. This form of poetry is a fun, easy way to facilitate a sense of community among writers. It also serves as an example of art in which many individual parts, when joined together, create a beautiful whole piece." The Kidlitosphere Progressive Poem continues

as an annual tradition; you can read the poems at Irene Latham's blog. [See References.]

"At the Po E. Tree Ranch" is a progressive poem written especially for this issue of *The Dragon Lode* by eight children's poets who are Poetry Friday bloggers: Jeannine Atkins, Doraine Bennett, Robyn Hood Black, Julie Larrios, Irene Latham, Amy Ludwig VanDerwater, Charles Waters, and April Halprin Wayland. Before we look at the progressive poem, though, let's first get to know the poets who participated.



**Jeannine Atkins**

*Because I love words, I never like to waste one. Poetry lets me say big things in small ways. I look and read about the world, then seek or wait for language that seems to hold what's most important. I've loved reading about strong girls and women since I was a child, and that became my favorite subject for poems, too. Lives are complicated and big, but it's a fun challenge to offer a glimpse!*

**Nursing Math**  
by Jeannine Atkins

Florence Nightingale measured medicine and bandaged arms and legs. She drew charts showing who got strong and which soldiers stayed sick too long. She saw that hospitals must be made cleaner and make other reforms.

How could she make this clear to Queen Victoria, whose eyes glazed at numbers and words? She'd calculate! The good nurse studied statistics, then drew columns and charts, with lines curvy and straight.

At the castle, she curtsied, then showed a circle divided by lines and with labels. The queen found it easy as pie to see why change must come, and it would, from a mathematical nurse and a woman wearing a crown.

© 2014 Jeannine Atkins from *The Poetry of Science* by Sylvia Vardell and Janet Wong



**Doraine Bennett**

*The ability to capture a thought or an idea in a concrete image is the essence of poetry. Images speak deeply to us, because pictures are the language of the heart. The process of creating an image involves both serious thought and play. Word play. I grew up loving word games, so writing in poetic forms is the ultimate word game for me. Writing in form forces one to find an exact fit, whether it be a word with the right rhythm or rhyme or a series of syllables that keep a certain count. This kind of play often allows jewels of thought to surface. Sometimes these jewels are pleasing within the form. Sometimes we throw out the form and keep the gems, finding our image in a free form, finding great joy in the game. The poem below is from an unpublished collection of seafaring poems.*

**Storm at Sea**  
by Doraine Bennett

Tsunami, maelstrom, hurricane, gale.  
Pitch and yaw. Snap of sail.

All hands! All hands!  
To pumps and bail.

Typhoon, monsoon, williwaw, squall.  
Towers of water forty feet tall.

Winds slash, waves crash.  
Strike sails and haul.

Tempest, nor'easter, cries of alarm.  
Sailors astride a lurching yardarm.

Tiller steady, crew ready.  
Ride out the storm.

© 2016 Doraine Bennett



**Robyn Hood Black**

*I've loved poetry since I was a child—the play of sound and language, the way a world exists in a grain of sand (Blake), or a fleeting life in a dewdrop (Issa). I've always loved poetry for children, specifically, and continue to be entranced by its clarity and magic. A few years ago I fell under the spell of haiku and regularly read it, write it, blog about it, and share it during school visits. This summer, I'll take over as the Southeast Regional Coordinator for the Haiku Society of America.*

**Sincerely**  
by Robyn Hood Black

Dear Friend,

I see the thoughtful things you do.  
Your words are always cheerful, too.

I noticed!  
And I'm thanking you.

Sincerely,  
Me

© 2015 Robyn Hood Black from *The Poetry Friday Anthology*  
for *Celebrations* by Sylvia Vardell and Janet Wong



**Julie Larios**

*Reflections on being a poet: I often like poems for children to sing their way from the playground (accompanied by a jump-rope rhythm) straight into our hearts/our heartbeats. I also think the act of naming things—that is, reminding kids how precise, strange, essential and wonderful language is—is part of what poetry does best. Maybe I can extend these thoughts best by directing you to a YouTube video based on one of my poems. It's titled "Names," and it first appeared in The Poetry Friday Anthology for Middle School, edited by Sylvia Vardell and Janet Wong. It was made by a woman named Priscilla Pineda, and it takes a look at a Mexican panaderia; my poem names all the bakery goods for sale there. [See References.] Singing, naming, inspiring wonder—in my opinion, those are poetry's domains.*

**Jump Rope Stew**  
by Julie Larios

Stew, stew, double-dutch stew,  
cook up a kettle of skip-a-rope stew,  
mulligatawny and mulligan, too,  
hot cocido and cold ragout.  
Into the broth goes this and that,  
spuds and turnips and bacon fat,  
dumplings to the dog, carrots to the cat,  
and peas to the lady with the porkpie hat.

© 2016 Julie Larios



**Irene Latham**

*My first poems were love poems—for my mother. I'm still writing love poems. Poetry, for me, is a way to love the world. I delight in each new discovery, and I particularly enjoy the challenge of offering the reader a surprise in every poem. This poem appeared in the earliest draft of my newest book, Fresh Delicious: Poems from the Farmers' Market. Even though it was cut, it's still one of my favorites—because it shows something I discovered about me. And this is what writing poetry offers everyone—an opportunity to know ourselves and our world a little bit better.*

**Strawberry Self-Portrait**  
by Irene Latham

Juicy, sweet, delectable:  
that's me.

But do you see?  
I'm also bumpy, grumpy.

My skin is pink in places  
it ought not be.

My cap is crooked  
and ants have chewed

a hunk out of me. See?  
My brothers are bigger,

my sisters sweeter.  
But it's fine, it's okay.

I'm the only me  
there will ever be.

© 2016 Irene Latham



### Amy Ludwig VanDerwater

*Poems are my friends, and poems are my teachers. When I read poetry, I learn more and care more about humankind, language, and my own soul. I adore both the power and the puzzle in a poem, and I like twiddling around with words, moving them in ways that will hopefully move readers. I am grateful for the poems I have read; they form much of who I am.*

#### Mom and Dad by Amy Ludwig VanDerwater

I keep a toothbrush  
here  
and  
there.

Just need to pack  
my teddy bear.

*Hello Mom.  
Goodbye Dad.*

One hug happy.  
One hug sad.

© 2012 Amy Ludwig VanDerwater from The Poem Farm blog



### Charles Waters

*I read, write and perform children's poetry because I feel in my bones that it's my destiny, my salvation, my reason for existence. I feel it's the best genre in all of Babylon because there's no other form that succinctly brings the universe into focus, making you feel less alone in the world. It's an art form that will never let you down.*

#### My Dog by Charles Waters

My dog controls  
The weather.

When Fido barks  
It hails,

When Fido's quiet  
It snows,

When Fido's angry  
It sleets,

When Fido's happy ...  
*R a i n b o w s.*

© 2012 Charles Waters from *The Poetry Friday Anthology* by Sylvia Vardell and Janet Wong



### April Halprin Wayland

*I admire poets who say in a few words what it takes me paragraphs to describe! One of my favorite poems, "Hollyhocks" by Valerie Worth, is from her brilliant collection All the Small Poems and Fourteen More. I love writing poems about nature, particularly about animals: free verse, rhyming, children's and adult poetry—all! Cats and dogs and their antics can serve as stand-ins for me or for those I observe. I chose this poem because I've been thinking about gratitude. My book More Than Enough ~ A Passover Story is about being aware of and grateful for the blessings in individual moments.*

#### Cat Communication by April Halprin Wayland

Old black cat, cranky queen  
 she hunts at night and she's mean—she's *mean*.

Late last night I coaxed her in  
 and after she ate, she licked her chin.

She stayed on the rug in the middle of the room.  
 We played on the rug in the middle of the room.

She left when she was through with a flick of her tail.  
 When I finally went to bed there were stars on the rail.

I was poaching an egg in the early afternoon.  
 I looked at the rug in the middle of the room:

there was a rat, dead as a goat.  
 This was my old cat's thank you note.

© 2016 April Halprin Wayland

Here now is a collaborative poem written by the eight poets  
 we've just met.

### At the Po E. Tree Ranch by Jeannine Atkins, Doraine Bennett, Robyn Hood Black, Julie Larios, Irene Latham, Amy Ludwig VanDerwater, Charles Waters, and April Halprin Wayland

Words gallop and graze  
 untamed pastures

until a rope slices the air,  
 lassos one word,

then another. These slip  
 through and turn to swans.

They flap, trumpet,  
 gather, and glide  
 on a skylake whisperblue.

Wordswan poets write to you.

They dip their necks in swirling light.  
 Shade your eyes—what do they write?

*Excavate this universe, report on what you see  
 When you're finished, write it down, that is poetry.*

Words gallop and glide, they slip, they slice,  
 they sigh and—oh, when words sing—we fly!

© 2016 Jeannine Atkins, Doraine Bennett, Robyn Hood Black, Julie Larios, Irene Latham,  
 Amy Ludwig VanDerwater, Charles Waters, and April Halprin Wayland

## Using Any Poem as a Prompt for Progressive Poetry

Here are some ideas for sharing this poem—or for using any poem as a writing prompt for a progressive poem exercise. This five-part exercise draws inspiration from the *Take 5!* approach pioneered by Sylvia Vardell in *The Poetry Friday Anthology* series.

1. Read the title and ask students to describe what they might see.
2. Read the first stanza of the poem and have small teams of students make their own 2-3 stanza progressive poems to follow that first stanza.
3. Read the whole poem aloud.
4. Read the poem a second time and invite students to act the poem out with movement; in the case of “At the Po E. Tree Ranch,” have students pretend to gallop, lasso, flap, and/or fly.
5. Finally, have students read their progressive poems aloud and celebrate the diversity in your voices.

For some students, especially reluctant writers and dual language learners, the idea of writing “a whole story” or “a whole poem” can be daunting. Writing one or two lines of a poem, on the other hand, is a much less-intimidating task, especially when we point out that poems contain lines of varying length, with some lines as short as a word or two. Perhaps this is the most powerful thing about a progressive poem: it reinforces the idea of poetry as a genre for everyone, poetry as a community where everyone can take part. •

*Note: Curious about which poets wrote which stanzas? Visit Irene Latham's blog for the answer!*

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**Janet Wong** (janetwong.com) is the author of 30 books for young people, including *You Have to Write* and *The Poetry Friday Anthology* series (PomeloBooks.com). She is a member of the Children's Literature Assembly board.

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Jeannine Atkins** is the author of *Borrowed Names: Poems about Laura Ingalls Wilder, Madam C.J. Walker, Marie Curie and Their Daughters* and *Finding Wonders: Three Girls Who Changed Science* (coming in Fall 2016). She teaches children's literature at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. She can be reached at jeannineatkins.com.

**Doraine Bennett** writes poetry and nonfiction for children. She is a contributor to *The Poetry Friday Anthology for Celebrations*. She blogs at *Dori Reads* and can be reached at dorainebennett.com.

**Robyn Hood Black** writes and makes art in the South Carolina Lowcountry. Her poetry appears in *The Poetry Friday Anthology* series, *The Arrow Finds Its Mark*, and *Lullaby and Kisses Sweet* as well as in magazines and leading haiku journals. She can be reached at robynhoodblack.com or artsyletters.com.

**Julie Larios** writes poetry for both children and adults. She lives in Seattle with her husband and one very cuckoo cockatiel. You can read her blog, *The Drift Record*, at julielarios.blogspot.com.

**Irene Latham** facilitates an annual Kidlitosphere Progressive Poem during National Poetry Month (April). Her latest poetry books for children are *When the Sun Shines on Antarctica* and *Fresh Delicious: Poems from the Farmers' Market*. You can reach her and find her blog at irenelatham.com.

**Amy Ludwig VanDerwater** is author of *Forest Has a Song* and *Every Day Birds*. She blogs about poetry and shares writing lessons at poemfarm.amylv.com.

**Charles Waters** is a children's poet, actor, and educator. His first book, *It's Not Black and White* (co-written with Irene Latham), will be published in Fall 2017. He can be reached, and his blog can be read, at charleswaterspoetry.com.

**April Halprin Wayland's** latest book is *More Than Enough—A Passover Story*. She's published six other picture books and an award-winning verse novel, *Girl Coming In for a Landing*. Her poems appear on the Poetry Foundation website and in more than 30 anthologies. She's been an instructor in UCLA Extension's Writers' Program for over 15 years and blogs at teachingauthors.com. April can be reached at aprilwayland.com.

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