

THE POET'S CORNER

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PLAY IT AGAIN: “EXTREME” RE-READING OF POETRY

In the category of research-that-tells-us-what-we-already-know-to-be-true, last year the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research released a study that shared the following: people enjoy replaying a favorite song many times. About a third of the study’s 204 participants confessed to listening to their favorite song at least three times daily. The study’s authors called this “extreme re-listening” and suggested that there has been an increase in the intensity in this behavior “due to the availability of digital music through streaming services and YouTube [making] it easier than ever for people to listen to virtually any song any time.” The mean in the sample was listening to a song “more than 300 times.”

Anyone who has had read a favorite picture book with a toddler understands that the same phenomenon applies to books. I remember dreading the last pages of my two-year-old son’s favorite books, knowing that I would hear the immediate command, “Read it again!” I also remember playing his favorite Richard Scarry video over and over, at least a hundred times. This was twenty-four years ago, in the days of VHS tapes. Now this Richard Scarry video can be summoned on a smartphone by simply typing in “Richard Scarry Mother Goose”; if he were two years old today, would I need to hear it a hundred times a week?

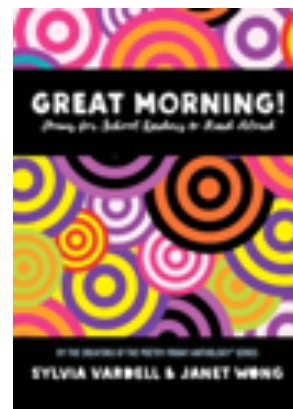
MEMORIZING VERSUS “EXTREME RE-READING”

It used to be that memorizing poems was a staple of the school curriculum. This requirement was a disaster for me. I remember an embarrassing moment in front of my 4th grade class where I forgot the poem I supposedly had memorized. I decided, right then, that I hated poetry—a dislike so strong that it persisted until I heard the master poet Myra Cohn Livingston speak twenty years later. So while I understand the reasons for memorization, I can support it only as an optional exercise. A better choice: “extreme re-reading.” Share a poem multiple times and you’ll give students the gift of being able to replay the poem in their own heads anytime, anywhere. But maybe we should read poems in a dozen different ways, in a dozen different contexts. Let me give you an example.

“LOOK FOR THE HELPERS”

In my Spring 2019 column for The Poet’s Corner, I highlighted several poems that, in my opinion, help to make us brave. One of those poems was “Look for the Helpers” by Michelle Heidenrich Barnes. This poem first appeared in 2015 in *The Poetry Friday Anthology for Celebrations*, accompanied by a “Take 5!” mini-lesson that provides strategies for sharing the poem, such as involving students in discussing the experience of needing help in an emergency. The *Take 5!* mini-lesson for this poem suggests (as each mini-lesson for each of the 156 poems in that book suggest), that you read this poem twice—first by yourself, and then inviting students to participate. You can find the poem and its *Take 5!* Mini-Lesson on Pinterest and can also hear it on SoundCloud (see Internet Resources).

The popularity of this poem seems to be growing, especially as traumatic incidents and the need to comfort students become increasingly common; in fact, I’ve heard teachers say that they consider it one of their “go-to” poems. For this reason, Sylvia Vardell and I decided to include it in *GREAT Morning! Poems for School Leaders to Read Aloud*—but this time, with a different approach. In this book, poems are sandwiched between a “Did You Know?” introduction and a “Follow Up” paragraph that can be read aloud during morning announcements. Here is the poem along with the introduction and follow up.



DID YOU KNOW?

When she was a little girl, Clara Barton took care of her brother when he was sick. Many years later, she worked as a nurse during the Civil War, and then established the American Red Cross in 1881 to help people in times of need. This next poem is about helping others like the Red Cross does all over the world.

FOLLOW UP

The next time you read about an emergency on the news or see a friend in need nearby—even right here at our school—think about how you can be a helper too, a person who cares.

CONNECT

If you're not sure about when and where to help, this linked poem, "If You See Something, Say Something" by Janet Wong (page 130), provides good advice.

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Topic 3: Community

POETRY PLUS
Also share this poem during times of crisis and emergency in the community.

LOOK FOR THE HELPERS
by Michelle Heidenrich Barnes

Look for the helpers
The healers
The givers

The arms-open
Hand-holding
Everyday heroes

The ones who bring food
Extra clothes
And first aid

Who offer safe shelter
A roof
And a bed

Follow their lead
Be a hugger
A helper

A friend who will listen
A person
Who cares

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CROSSING GENRES AND EXPLORING MULTIPLE FORMATS

Another way to share a poem is to pair it with a picture book that extends the theme. Cross-genre analysis and the exploration of multiple formats have become standard requirements in the curriculum; we often find these elements in standardized tests, such as where students are asked to compare ideas presented in an essay or article with similar ideas from a poem. Why not introduce this concept with our youngest thinkers—by pairing poems and picture books? In *The Poetry Friday Anthology for Celebrations*, Sylvia Vardell invites students not just to make a text-to-text connection with another poem in the book, but she also recommends a picture book pairing for each of the 156 poems. “Look for the Helpers” is paired with *Clara and Davie* by Patricia Polacco, and can be used as part of a social studies lesson about Clara Barton, the founder of the American Red Cross. Additionally, you can “read” the poem in yet another fresh way by presenting it in a video. Show the one-minute “poem movie” created by Michelle Heidenrich Barnes and found on her Today’s Little Ditty blog (see Internet Resources).

FIND ADDITIONAL POEMS BY STARTING WITH PICTURE BOOKS OR VIDEOS

In fact, you might want to approach poetry “backwards” by first finding poem movies or favorite picture books—and then looking for the related poem texts. A great source for videos of poets reading their work is Renée M. LaTulippe’s No Water River website. Or, find picture books that have poem pairings by using a three-page resource found in the back matter of *The Poetry Friday Anthology for Celebrations*.

Quickly scan this list for picture books that you are already using as part of your teaching, and then pair them with the recommended poems. For instance, if you are using the popular picture book *Children Make Terrible Pets* by Peter Brown, you can flip to its paired poem, “Pet Week Show-and-Tell” by Eric Ode, and read it in the two ways suggested by the Take 5! mini-lesson.

Then, for a third or fourth reading, you can play Eric Ode’s poem movie and sing the poem: “Pet Week! Pet Week! / Frogs croak, mice squeak.”

After you hear the poem read in two ways, and then paired with a picture book, and then sung as a simple song, you will be able to summon it in your own mind anytime, anywhere—and it will bring you joy forever.

BOOKS CITED IN TAKE 5! PICTURE BOOK PAIRS

BOOK TITLE	PAGE(S)
<i>365 Penguins</i> by Jean-Luc Fromental (Abrams, 2006)	28-29
<i>A Couple of Boys Have the Best Week Ever</i> by Marla Frazee (HMH, 2008)	188-189
<i>A Dance Like Starlight</i> by Kristy Dempsey (Philomel, 2014)	122-123
<i>A Dollar, a Penny, How Much and How Many</i> by Brian P. Cleary (Millbrook, 2014)	214-215
<i>A Piñata in a Pine Tree</i> by Pat Mora (Clarion, 2009)	328-329
<i>A Sick Day for Amos Magee</i> by Philip C. Stead (Roaring Brook, 2010)	44-45
<i>A Sweet Passover</i> by Lesléa Newman (Abrams, 2012)	94-95
<i>All Different Now: Juneteenth</i> by Angela Johnson (Simon & Schuster, 2014)	172-173
<i>All in a Day</i> by Cynthia Rylant (Abrams, 2009)	334-335
<i>All in Just One Cookie</i> by Susan E. Goodman (Greenwillow, 2006)	314-315
<i>All of Baby, Nose to Toes</i> by Victoria Adler (Dial, 2009)	110-111
<i>All the Water in the World</i> by George Ella Lyon (Atheneum, 2011)	92-93
<i>An Egg Is Quiet</i> by Dianna Hutts Aston (Chronicle, 2006)	266-267
<i>And Then It's Spring</i> by Julie Fogliano (Roaring Brook, 2012)	90-91
<i>At the Same Moment Around the World</i> by Clotilde Perrin (Chronicle, 2014)	332-333
<i>Auntie Yang's Great Soybean Picnic</i> by Ginnie Lo (Lee & Low, 2012)	182-183
<i>Baby's First Laugh</i> by Jessie Eve Ruffenach (Salina Bookshelf, 2003)	100-101
<i>Bear Has a Story to Tell</i> by Philip C. Stead (Roaring Brook, 2012)	309
<i>Bella & Bean</i> by Rebecca Kai Dotlich (Atheneum, 2009)	102-103
<i>Biblioburro</i> by Jeanette Winter (Simon & Schuster, 2010)	286-287
<i>Big, Bigger, Biggest!</i> by Nancy Coffelt (Holt, 2009)	108-109
<i>Blackout</i> by John Rocco (Disney-Hyperion, 2011)	322-323
<i>Book Fiesta!: Celebrate Children's Day/Book Day</i> by Pat Mora (Rayo, 2009)	124-125
<i>Bringing Asha Home</i> by Uma Krishnaswami (Lee & Low, 2006)	74-75
<i>Brownie Groundhog and the February Fox</i> by Susan Blackaby (Sterling, 2011)	56-57
<i>Can We Save the Tiger</i> by Martin Jenkins (Candlewick, 2011)	316-317
<i>Carl's Summer Vacation</i> by Alexandra Day (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2008)	198-199
<i>Children Make Terrible Pets</i> by Peter Brown (Little, Brown, 2010)	136-137
<i>Christmas Tree!</i> By Florence Minor (HarperCollins, 2005)	326-327
<i>Clara and Davie</i> by Patricia Polacco (Scholastic, 2014)	142-143
<i>Count the Monkeys</i> by Mac Barnett (Disney-Hyperion, 2013)	38-39
<i>Dad and Pop: An Ode to Fathers & Stepfathers</i> by Kelly Bennett (Candlewick, 2010)	168-169
<i>Dale, Dale, Dale: Hit It, Hit It, Hit It</i> by René Saldaña, Jr. (Piñata Books, 2014)	256-257
<i>Dear Primo: A Letter to My Cousin</i> by Duncan Tonatiuh (Abrams, 2010)	238-239
<i>Desert Elephants</i> by Helen Cowcher (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2011)	218-219
<i>Dog Loves Books</i> by Louise Yates (Knopf, 2010)	144-145
<i>Drum Dream Girl</i> by Margarita Engle (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015)	192-193
<i>Duck for Turkey Day</i> by Jacqueline Jules (Albert Whitman, 2009)	306-307
<i>Duck! Rabbit!</i> by Amy Krouse Rosenthal and Tom Lichtenheld (Chronicle, 2009)	62-63
<i>Earth Day, Birthday</i> by Maureen Wright (Two Lions, 2012)	282-283
<i>Every Friday</i> by Dan Yaccarino (Holt, 2007)	228-229
<i>Everyone Can Learn to Ride a Bicycle</i> by Chris Raschka (Schwartz & Wade, 2013)	132-133
<i>Extra Yarn</i> by Mac Barnett (Balzer & Bray, 2012)	30-31
<i>Fireboy to the Rescue!</i> by Edward Miller (Holiday House, 2010)	264-265
<i>Flip, Float, Fly!: Seeds on the Move</i> by JoAnn Early Macken (Holiday House, 2008)	118-119
<i>Follow Me</i> by Tricia Tusa (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011)	254-255
<i>Ganesha's Sweet Tooth</i> by Sanjay Patel and Emily Haynes (Chronicle, 2012)	268-269
<i>Grandfather Counts</i> by Andrea Cheng (Lee & Low, 2000)	128-129
<i>Green</i> by Laura Vaccaro Seeger (Roaring Brook, 2012)	88-89
<i>H.O.R.S.E.: A Game of Basketball and Imagination</i> by Christopher Myers (Egmont, 2012)	212-213
<i>Hands around the Library</i> by Susan L. Roth and Karen Leggett Abouraya (Dial, 2012)	106-107
<i>Hanukkah Bear</i> by Eric Kimmel (Holiday House, 2013)	310-311

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Vardell, S. & Wong, J. (2018). *GREAT morning! Poems for school leaders to read aloud*. Princeton, NJ: Pomelo Books.

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INTERNET RESOURCES

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Bowles, D. Audio readings of "Look for the helpers" by M. H. Barnes and "Busca a los ayudantes". Soundcloud: <https://soundcloud.com/user-862117714/look-for-the-helpers?in=user-862117714/sets/bilingual-performances>

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