

# THE POET'S CORNER

## Celebrating Sounds

Janet Wong



WHEN WE TALK About phonics and the science of reading, joy is not exactly the first thing that comes to mind. But when we infuse our language arts instruction with a lighthearted celebration of poetic techniques that center on sound, we can provide our students with phonics lessons brimming with silliness and delight.

### Alliteration, Consonance, and Assonance

Alliteration involves the repetition of the same sound (particularly consonants) as the initial sound in a string of words. Alliteration makes a poem fun to hear and to say. Every child enjoys the “Peter Piper” tongue twister, especially when it’s read very quickly and dramatically. Other sound devices that are similar to alliteration are “consonance,” the repetition of the same consonant sound within words, and “assonance,” the repetition of the same vowel sound within words. The poem “Behind the Hidden Door” by Darren Sardelli contains excellent examples of all three devices; see it on page 60 in the context of the full page where it appears in *Clara’s Kooky Compendium of Thimblethoughts and Wonderfuzz*.

### Take a Take 5! Approach

The first several books created by Sylvia Vardell and me together—titles such as *The Poetry Friday Anthology for Celebrations*—contained variations of “Take 5! mini-lessons” that provided guidance for every poem. The *Take 5!* mini-lesson allowed for a consistent approach to poetry that made it simple to teach poetry while also facilitating learning. The steps in our original *Take 5!* method consisted of the following:



**Step #1: Read the poem aloud (perform it with drama).**

**Step #2: Read the poem aloud again with students participating.**

**Step #3: Share a discussion question related to the poem (very briefly).**

**Step #4: Point out the language arts and/or poetry skill(s).**

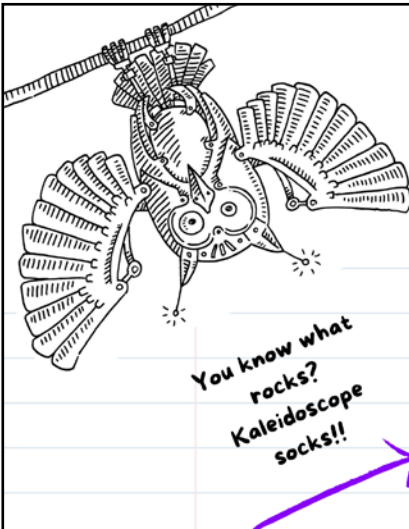
**Step #5: Provide a text-to-text connection.**

In *The Poetry Friday Anthology for Celebrations*, Step #4 suggests a picture book pairing on the same theme as each poem. In *The Poetry Friday Anthology for Science*, Step #4 highlights a science-related topic (usually tied to the Next Generation Science Standards). The key principle of the method remains consistent: let children “get hooked” on a poem before they are asked to look at it analytically. Enjoyment of a poem always comes first.


You could share “Behind the Hidden Door” with these steps:

**#1: Read aloud.** Pantomime or actually open a nearby door as if you’re stepping into a fantastic world where you see the things described in the poem, acting amazed at each line.

**#2: Read again — with your kids.** Read the poem aloud again, and this time have students chime in to say the last line together: “in this video game we were playing.”



You know what  
rocks?  
Kaleidoscope  
socks!!



## BEHIND THE HIDDEN DOOR

by Darren Sardelli

We opened a door to a magical world  
where pumpkins are silver and blue.  
The moon in the sky was a strawberry pie.  
Bananas were shaped like a Q.  
A monkey was wearing kaleidoscope socks.  
Pianos had candy cane keys.  
A mouse with a moustache was zooming around  
in a bright yellow car made of cheese.


Vanilla volcanoes had pudding-filled tops  
that bubbled in blueberry rain.  
We noticed a pig in pistachio pants.  
A hippo was flying a plane.  
Invisible bunnies left tracks in the snow.  
Identical horses were neighing.  
We all were amazed by these things that we saw  
in this video game we were playing.

This poem is full of **alliteration** with repeated consonant sounds at the beginning of many words. Some examples of adjacent alliterative words include: **candy cane, vanilla volcanoes, pistachio pants.**


Other alliterative words that are simply near each other include: **mouse/ moustache, bubbled/blueberry, pig/pistachio.**

# GAME OVER

**THIMBLE THOUGHT**  
The best-selling video game of all time is Minecraft.



**WONDER FUZZ**  
How do you design and make a video game?



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**The Weekend Worked!**  
by Your Energized Teacher

The weekend worked wonders.  
Despite the thunder,  
I'm refreshed, refueled,  
and newly bejeweled  
(thanks to a trip to the mall).  
How about y'all?

**SALE**

## CELEBRATING SOUNDS!



**ALLITERATION**  
**W** sounds: weekend worked wonders  
**T** sounds: the, thunder; to, trip  
**R** sounds: refreshed, refueled

**ASSONANCE**  
 Short **U** sounds: wonders, thunder  
**EW** sounds: refueled, newly, bejeweled

**CONSONANCE**  
**D** sounds: wonders, despite, refreshed, refueled, bejeweled  
**L** sounds: refueled, newly, bejeweled, mall, y'all

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**ALLITERATION EXERCISE**  
 Take a poem – and REMOVE alliteration by inserting substitute words. Here's an example where the alliteration from "The Weekend Worked!" is eliminated (new words in blue).

**The Weekend Succeeded**  
by Your Energized Teacher

The weekend succeeded marvelously.  
Despite the storm,  
I'm energized, refueled,  
and newly bejeweled  
(thanks to a visit at a mall).  
How about y'all?

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**#3: Discuss.** Make a list of the images or items that children remember from the poem. See if they can suggest similar (or even sillier) images that a game designer could put into a video game.

**#4: Point out the skill.** Alliteration only requires that words with the same beginning sounds be near each other, not necessarily adjacent. Some examples of adjacent alliterative words: *candy cane*, *vanilla volcanoes*, *pistachio pants*. Other examples have alliterative words simply near each other (*mouse/moustache*, *bubbled/blueberry*, *pig/pistachio*).

**#5: Make a text-to-text connection.** Other examples of alliteration can be found in many poems in the same Clara book. See page 61 for a poem that I wrote in the voice of the teacher character Mrs. Booker, “The Weekend Worked! by Your Energized Teacher.”

You can follow “The Weekend Worked!” with a writing exercise that challenges students to take the poem and remove all alliteration. (Revision is often easier when it involves playing with *other* people’s words.) Also shown is an example written by me in the voice of “Your Energized Teacher” that you can present to your students after they do the exercise on their own.

### Poetry Fits How We Learn

In a podcast for the Arizona K12 Center, cognitive psychology experts Dr. Megan Sumeracki and Dr. Cindy Nebel, also known as The Learning Scientists, suggest that students need cognitive breaks, interleaving, and spacing to create optimal learning conditions. Hopefully the examples in this short essay have shown you that poems are ideal for this purpose. As Peter Piper would say, “Poems play a perfect part in providing pupil pleasure!” •

**Janet Wong** is the author of dozens of books for children and the cocreator (with Sylvia Vardell) of *The Poetry Friday Anthology* series, the *Poetry Friday Power Book* series, the *Things We...* series, and the *What Is...* series, all published by Pomelo Books. Her most recent anthology, with Sylvia Vardell and 70+ poets, is a story in poems called *Clara’s Kooky Compendium of Thimblethoughts and Wonderfuzz*. Email: [janet@janetwong.com](mailto:janet@janetwong.com)

### RESOURCES

Nebel, C. and Sumeracki, M. (2023). The learning scientists part 2: The curse of knowledge (or thinking like your students). *Arizona K12 Center: 3 Ps in a Pod*. <https://www.azk12.org/podcast/detail/the-learning-scientists-part-2-the-curse-of-knowledge-or-thinking-like-your-students/d18c8682-4aeb-4bfd-8503-c89cf5527f04>

### CHILDREN’S LITERATURE CITED

- Sardelli, D. (2024). “Behind the Hidden Door”. In S. Vardell & J. Wong, *Clara’s kooky compendium of thimblethoughts and wonderfuzz*, 43. Pomelo Books.
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- Vardell, S., & Wong, J. (2015). *The poetry Friday anthology for celebrations*. Pomelo Books.
- Vardell, S., & Wong, J. (2014). *The poetry Friday anthology for science*. Pomelo Books.
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