

Tips for Reading Poetry To and With Beginning Readers

by Dr. Allan A. De Fina
New Jersey City University



- ☺ Choose poems that are about familiar topics and universal interests. (Younger readers are most interested in poems about family, pets, food, and school.)
- ☺ Choose poems that you, yourself, genuinely like!
- ☺ Don't choose poetry that is overly abstract or filled with too much figurative language.
- ☺ Select poems that have lots of repetition and predictability.
- ☺ Select rhyming poems or poems that use common language naturally.
- ☺ Set up the poem by having a pre-reading discussion.
- ☺ Ask a guided listening/critical thinking question (or two), if appropriate.
- ☺ Discuss any words in the poem that the children might not know—but keep in mind that a poem with more than two or three unfamiliar words is probably not at an appropriate “reading” level.
- ☺ Copy the poem onto easel paper so children can clearly see it and “revisit” it at a later time.
- ☺ If copyright law permits, provide children with copies of the poem.
- ☺ Encourage children to keep a “Favorite Poetry” folder.
- ☺ If possible, illustrate poetry (or use clip art).
- ☺ Read a poem (or more) a day—and revisit favorite poems frequently.
- ☺ Allow students to choose familiar poems for rereading, dramatization, and illustration.
- ☺ Don't teach poems—experience them!
- ☺ Don't teach poetic forms!
- ☺ Don't follow a reading with an “assignment”—especially the dreaded “write a poem” assignment!
- ☺ Follow the reading of a poem with student-led discussions. (Have prompting questions ready, however!)
- ☺ Remember that a love of poetry comes from reading and enjoying poetry!