



LOW HANGING FRUIT

Listen My Children and You Shall Hear...

By Jeannie Standal

Did you have to memorize poetry in school? I still remember most of *The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere*, which I was required to memorize and recite in 4th grade. Thanks to Ms. Wright, the 18th of April in '75 will always belong to Paul Revere. But what good did it do? Well, it turns out, quite a lot.

A study at The University of Exeter has found that poetry has an effect on the brain as powerful as music. Poetry, like music, stimulates the reward and emotion areas of the brain, and can cause a physical response, like a shiver down the spine.¹ What's more, the regions of the brain linked to memory showed more activity when volunteers in the study were reading both easy and difficult sonnets than when they were reading technical text or passages from novels. It was noted that this was especially true with the subjects' favorite poems. Maybe that's why Paul's midnight ride is sticking with me.

The parts of the brain linked with introspection were stimulated when subjects were reading poetry, too, which has led researchers to the tentative finding that reading poetry inspires self-reflection, a rare commodity in our fast-paced, frenzied lives.

So, that's nice, but why should teachers make room in already packed school days for poetry? Because:

- (1) Nothing teaches concise writing like poetry. "The fog comes/on little cat feet" (Carl Sandburg) enough said.²
- (2) Poetry allows rule breaking. The rules for grammar and punctuation are really just suggestions in poetry. Just ask e.e. cummings.
- (3) For younger students, poetry's rhythm and rhyme pave the way for language development, early literacy skills, and reading.³
- (4) Poems can include rich, rare vocabulary that students may not hear in their day-to-day activities, setting them up for success later when they are learning to read, write, and spell.³
- (5) Poetry introduces ripe opportunities for the listening and speaking aspects of the ELA Idaho Core Standards. Poetry slam, anyone?

Celebrate National Poetry Month this April by giving your students a healthy dose of poetry and brain health! And thanks Ms. Wright.

¹Bergado, Gabe. *Science Shows Something Surprising About What Reading Poetry Does to Your Brain*. Arts.Mic. Nov. 6, 2014. Viewed 4/6/16 at <http://mic.com/articles/103490/why-we-should-all-be-reading-more-poetry#wghwcf17i>.

²Simmons, Andrew. *Why Teaching Poetry is So Important*. The Atlantic. April 8, 2014. Viewed 3/31/16 at <http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2014/04/why-teaching-poetry-is-so-important/360346/>.

³Hewitt, Cindy. *Poetry Benefits Early Literacy*. Examiner.com. April 5, 2012. Viewed 3/31/16 at <http://www.examiner.com/article/poetry-benefits-early-literacy>.

LINKS TO MORE LEARNING



Poetry Foundation: The organization that publishes Poetry Magazine, Poetry Foundation "exists to discover & celebrate the best poetry and to place it before the largest possible audience. Resources for [Poetry for Children](#) and a cool [Poetry Mobile App](#) are great for students.

How to Read a Poem: one more section on the Poetry Foundation website, this is a primer on how to read a poem.

national poetry month

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS



Book Spine Poetry:

Book Spine Poetry is a fun way for students of any age to compose poems. The best way to get started is to partner with your school librarian who can help students find their poems on the shelves of the library. The idea is to stack books so that the titles become lines in a poem. No more writers block! For more info on this fun and easy poetry activity, visit <http://www.poetry4kids.com/blog/news/how-to-create-book-spine-poetry/> and then take your poets to the school library!

DIGITAL TOOLS



LiLi.Tools for Poetry Month: www.lili.org

Literary Reference Center

Find literary criticism of poetry, author biographies, and browse for specific works.

Contemporary Poets

Includes concise discussion of the lives and principal works of poets from around the world.

Novelist Plus K-8

A quick search for "poetry" will provide Lists & Articles with recommended reading for various age groups.

