



Ten Essential Poetry Books for Children

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Article Author:

[Valerie Bloom](#) [1]

[Poetry Special](#) [2]

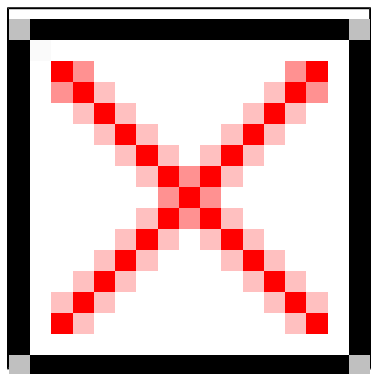
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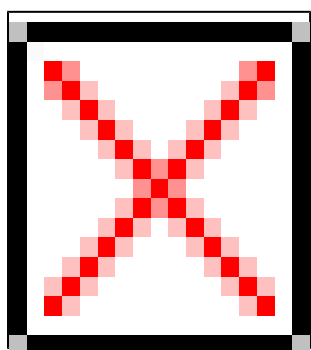
Poet **Valerie Bloom** chooses ten 'essential' poetry books for children.

We asked poet **Valerie Bloom** to pick out ten of the best poetry books for children, books that will start a lifelong love of poetry.



Ten of the Best! That's easy, I thought. How wrong I was! Looking in dismay at the mountain of books I'd pulled from my bookcases, I wondered how on earth I was going to whittle them down to ten. It is very probable that I have chosen the ten books now that I would not have chosen another day. Was this one the best from Roger McGough or Michael Rosen? Where were some of my very favourite books by Charles Causley, Jack Prelutsky, Shel Silverstein, Jackie Kay?? But a choice had to be made. Inevitably there are collections from classic writers, but you don't become a classic unless you're among the best so I make no apologies for that. Inevitably too, that meant many new and younger writers were overlooked - this time.

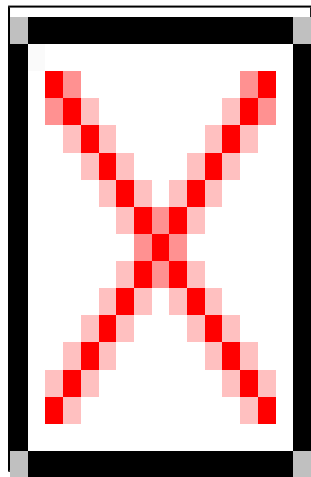
A Great Big Cuddle: Poems for the Very Young



Michael Rosen, illus Chris Riddell, Walker Books, 978-1406343199, £14.99 hbk

Reading this book made me wish my children were still toddlers. Every poem just fizzes with fun, and Chris Riddell's illustrations are a joy as always. This pairing of these two former Children's Laureates is a winning formula if ever there was one. Kids will giggle with the *Wiggly Wiggly Pigs*, bounce to the rhythm of *Tippy-Tappy* and have a great time imitating the animal noises in *We Can*. There's no need for added instructions. Even the most unadventurous adult will know how to read these poems to young ones because the poems tell how they want or rather need to be read. It takes the genius of Michael Rosen to write poems like these.

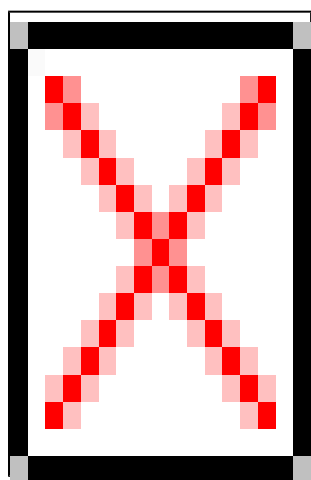
Poetry Pie



Roger McGough, Puffin, 978-0141356860, £6.99 pbk

As usual, Roger McGough's poems dance off the page with word play, wit and wisdom. His trademark humorous observations are sure to enchant children and the child in all of us. Some of these are laugh out loud pieces, like the hilarious *Elephants and Peas*, but there is also enough to meditate on. The message of hope and encouragement in *Tomorrow has your name on it* any child will cherish. And any adult will identify with the sentiments, especially in the last line of the penultimate verse. He has included his own unique line drawings and children are sure to keep coming back for another slice of this poetry pie!

[Rising Stars: New Young Voices in Poetry \[3\]](#)

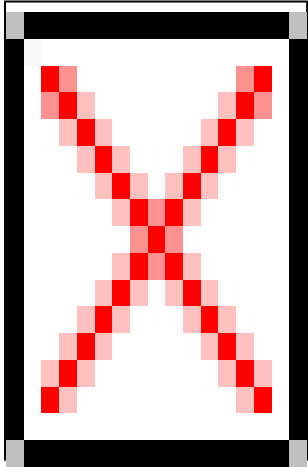


Ruth Awolola, Victoria Adukwei Bulley, Abigail Cook, Jay Hulme and Amina Jama, illus Riya Chowdhury, Elanor Chuah and Joe Manners, Otter-Barry Books, 978-1910959374, £6.99 pbk

This is a book of poems by five young poets, each with eight poems in the collection. It is an exciting and inspiring collection of talented voices and I'm sure we'll be hearing a lot more from them in the future. The poems are accessible without being overly simplistic, complex issues are dealt with in a way that encourages conversations and many young readers will find in these pieces, echoes of their own experiences. It's refreshing to see issues handled with such skill

and finesse and sensitivity as in Ruth Awolola's *Mainly About Aliens*, and in her beautiful poem *On Forgetting That I Am a Tree*.

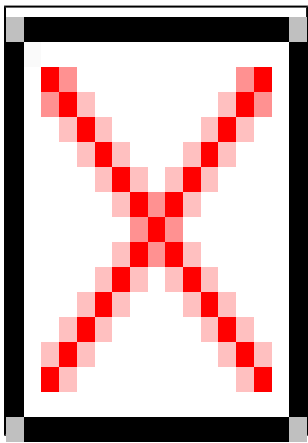
[Werewolf Club Rules and Other Poems \[4\]](#)



Joseph Coelho, illus John O'Leary, Francis Lincoln, 978-1847804525, £6.99 pbk

Containing 50 poems, *Werewolf Club Rules* is a beautiful collection from an inspired poet. He uses language like an enchanter, casting a spell around the reader with the vivid word pictures of places and people such as *Miss Flotsam* who's the kind of teacher every child would wish to have. One poem was just a little too close for comfort. *Dada's Stories* told how the poet's grandfather slept with his pets and squashed them in his sleep. I'm sure I'm not the only one who will find that these pieces have some resonance with personal experience as the truth of the poems rings loud and clear.

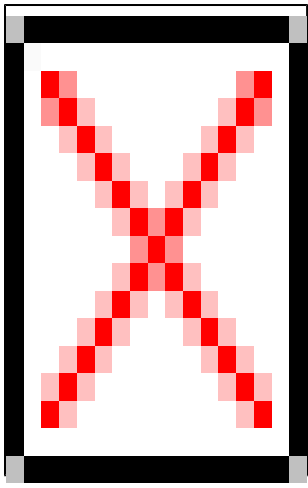
Give the Ball to the Poet



Ed. Georgie Horrel, Aisha Spencer and Morag Styles, illus Jane Ray, Commonwealth Education Trust, 978-1909931008

This anthology brings together many well-known and loved Caribbean voices like Derek Walcott, Olive Senior, Grace Nichols, Benjamin Zephaniah, John Agard and James Berry, and introduces some vibrant new voices, including the 2014 Forward Prize winner Kei Miller. The collection emphasises the music in the languages of the Caribbean and the range of poems include the light and lyrical, the thought-provoking, serious and moving. The human struggles, conflicts, and achievements are here celebrated through the theme of sport and includes some outstanding poetry that will delight older children, parents and teachers.

Poems to perform



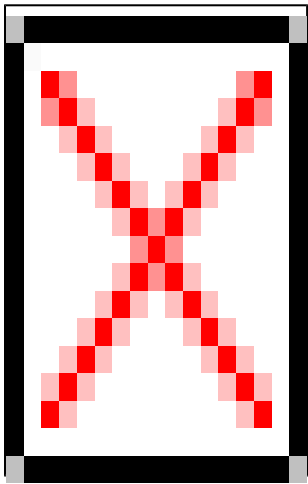
Julia Donaldson, illus Clare Melinsky, Macmillan Children's Books, 978-1447243397, £6.99 pbk

For a while, learning poetry by heart had been a largely lost art in this country, but the proliferation of performance poets and the Poetry Archive's Poetry By Heart initiative have gone some way to reviving this art and ensured that more and more children are being encouraged to learn and perform poems.

Poems to Perform,

collected by Julia Donaldson is a timely and welcome publication. There are classical entries by Edward Lear, W H Auden etc. but also work by contemporary writers including Julia herself, all of which provide ample material for memorisation and performance. Illustrated with exquisite lino-cuts by Clare Melinsky, this is a book not just for children, but anyone who loves great poetry.

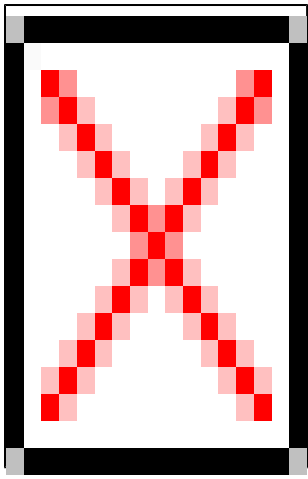
[The Language of Cat](#) [5]



Rachel Rooney, illus Ellie Jenkins, Francis Lincoln

This is a delicious collection of wonderfully inventive poems. There seems to be a surprise on every page and there's no predicting what will come next, each piece is sparkling and fresh and new. You'll not be able to resist turning the pages to find out what the next offering is. Enjoy the unexpected secret in the *Russian Doll*, the food for thought served up by *She Said* and the humorous ending of *Three Monkeys*. One of my favourite pieces, and there are quite a few, is the deceptively simple, but so clever shape poem, *O the Wonderful Shape of an O*. As Carol Ann Duffy says on the cover, 'A box of delights'.

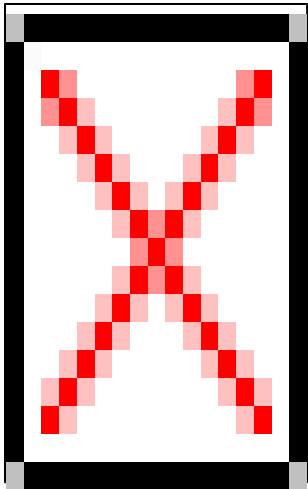
Under the Moon and Over the Sea



Ed John Agard and Grace Nichols, illus Catherine Felstead, Jane Ray, Christopher Corr, Satoshi Kitamura, Sara Fanelli, Walker Books, 978-1406334487, £6.99 pbk

Here is a book that pulsates with the rhythms and sounds of the Caribbean, invitingly show-casing the food, the songs, the language and proverbs, the flora and fauna, the music and games - the whole life of the Islands. The poems are divided into five sections, each unusually illustrated by a different artist, which could have resulted in a clash of styles, but somehow seems to work, appropriately underlining the diversity both in the region and in the poems themselves. This collection is not just for poetry lessons but can be a valuable addition to social, cultural and geography curriculums as well.

Plum

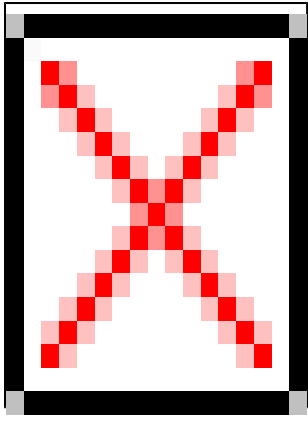


Tony Mitton, illustrator Peter Bailey, Scholastic Press, 978-1903015858, £5.99 pbk

Tony Mitton's debut collection has been an enduring favourite with children and has rightfully become a classic, in the tradition of English lyric children's poetry. Plum is composed of 49 heterogenous poems, narrative, lyrical, longer poems and snapshots, contemporary and traditional; poems to suit every mood - quirky, fantastical, thoughtful like *Child from the Future* or just joyfully silly such as *Mrs. Bhattacharya's Chapati Zap Machine*.

Tony Mitton's extraordinary use of language is captivating, skilfully drawing the reader into the book, so that if you don't heed the WARNING. KEEP OUT in *Forbidden Poem*, you'll find yourself, as in *Secret Passage*, trapped inside long after the book is shut.

I Like That Stuff



Morag Styles, illustrators Joanne Smith and Bernard Georges, Cambridge University Press, 978-0521276375

My copy of this book is well thumbed and though published so many years ago, still gives so much pleasure for the fact that it was such a trail-blazer. As well as the usual well-known names, there are less well known but equally brilliant poets. There are poems from many different cultures - Afro-Caribbean, Asian, African, European, American ? in different forms, from haiku to free verse, traditional and modern. In short there?s something here for everyone. Sadly, this little gem may no longer be in print but it?s one to treasure if you do own a copy.

Valerie Bloom began writing poetry in primary school. She trained as a teacher in Jamaica and came to England in the 1970s. She has written and edited a number of poetry books in English and Jamaican patois and published children?s novels [Surprising Joy](#) [6] and [The Tribe](#). Published poetry includes [The World is Sweet](#) (2002); [Hot Like Fire](#) [7] (2002); [Whoop an? Shout](#) (2003); [Let Me Touch the Sky](#) (2008); [Jaws and Claws and Things with Wings](#) (2013); [Mighty Mountains, Swirling Seas](#) (2015).

Page Number:

4

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[2] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/poetry-special>

[3] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/227/childrens-books/reviews/rising-stars-new-young-voices-in-poetry>

[4] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/207/childrens-books/reviews/werewolf-club-rules>

[5] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/189/childrens-books/reviews/the-language-of-cat-and-other-poems>

[6] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/143/childrens-books/reviews/surprising-joy>

[7] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/176/childrens-books/reviews/hot-like-fire-and-other-poems>