

Poetry Writing for Home Schoolers

By Janelle McDonald

Poetry writing lessons can be a daunting task for home schooling families. Getting your children to write poetry does not need to be a laborious task, in fact it can be a rewarding experience for all the family. There is no right or wrong way to teach poetry. Lessons do not need to be elaborate or formal, they can be done at any time of the day, even in the car.

By introducing poetry slowly, and in non-threatening ways, poetry writing can become a natural part of your children's schooling.

Make poetry part of your life. Poetry writing cannot be done in isolation, children need to be submerged in poems from an early age. Introduce nursery rhymes, chants and clapping games while they are young. Nonsense poems are a great place to start even for older children, as are children's picture books and songs. Do not just use poetry written for children, but introduce them to all styles of poetry from classical and contemporary poets.

Poetry is meant to be heard. Reading poems aloud helps children understand the rhythm, rhyme and metre of poetry. Read poetry aloud to your children, and get them to read aloud to you. Encourage them to memorise and perform plays, or set plays to music. Listen to audio readings of poetry in the car.

Play with words. Develop a love of language by playing word and rhyming games. Not only does this increase their enjoyment of words, it introduces poetry concepts without the formal lesson of poetry. Tongue twisters are a great way of teaching alliteration. Cartoons can be a fun way of using onomatopoeia. Either use existing cartoons, or create your own cartoons and add the effects using onomatopoeia. Magnetic or felt words can be used to make up silly sentences. A shallow baking dish with felt grip on the inside, and chalk board paint on the back, makes a good board for using the words in the car. Another fun game is to choose letters from a scrabble bag (or make magnetic letters) and make up sentences with words starting with each of those letters.

Create an anthology of poems. Encourage children to create their own poetry anthology. Initially they can write out poems they enjoy and illustrate the poems with pictures cut from magazines, or their own illustrations. This lets the child feel the rhythm and rhyme of the poem, as well as ticking the handwriting box for school. As children begin to write their own poetry this can be added to the anthology.

Use technology. Technology has given us access to a plethora of poems. One example is the Poet's Pantry Tour, http://www.tramline.com/tours/lit/poet_tourlaunch1.htm, which has examples of various styles of poetry. There are many interactive tools to help children with writing poetry, both in the form of software and online. ABC education has shows on poems and poets, and there are many lectures online when it is time to get more formal with the study of poetry.

Invest in a good dictionary, thesaurus and rhyming dictionary. Teach your children how to use them, and use them yourself. While online dictionaries are good, hard copies allow the child to explore the wonder of words by looking at words/meaning apart from the specific words they are looking for.

Write poetry. After immersing children in poetry and poetry concepts in an informal manner, it is time to start writing. Do not expect children to write about something they have not experienced personally. Use everyday objects, pictures and excursions as prompts for writing poems. Attempt poetry writing yourself and share the attempts with your children. Brainstorm a topic and then each write a poem to share. Let the child explore poetry writing using different concepts, topics and types of poems. Encourage children to enter poetry competitions, either using the theme provided by the competition, or with their own theme.

Use poetry in other subjects. Do not keep poetry just for English. Children find poetry easy to remember, so it is useful in many other subjects. Websites like Inkpotamus <http://www.inkpotamus.com/content/> have some good examples of poems on a variety of subjects. Listen to poems on science, mathematics or history and encourage your child to write one of their own.

Do not be afraid of poetry. Read poetry aloud with expression, without being scared of how you look or sound. Do not think at the end of the year, that you 'need' to 'do' poetry to tick a box, this puts pressure on poetry writing and makes it less enjoyable. Do not expect perfection. Make poetry writing pressure free for you and the children.

Allow time to write. Make free creative writing time in your schedule regularly, the more frequent the better. Do not set tasks but allow the child to write what they want.

Develop a love of words and language into your child and poetry will be an enjoyable and necessary part of their life. The poet W.H. Auden said "A poet is, before anything else, a person who is passionately in love with language."