*This week’s guest on “Poetry from Daily Life” is Marilyn Singer, who divides her time between Brooklyn, New York and Washington, Connecticut. Marilyn has been a writer for fifty years and enjoys many subjects, especially animals, both wild and domestic. She has written a number of books about dogs. She and her husband have been taking swing, ballroom, and Latin dance lessons for many years. Wherever they travel, they try to find a dance to go to. Two books that she loved writing are* Who Named Their Pony Macaroni?: Poems About White House Pets*, Little, Brown, 2019, (“because it was fun to research this aspect of American history”) and* Feel the Beat!: Dance Poems That Zing from Salsa to Swing*, Dial, 2017 (“because it was a challenge to write poems in the rhythms of social dances”). ~ David Harrison*

**Poetry from Daily Life: Marilyn Singer explains how to read a poem aloud**

*By Marilyn Singer*

Poetry began as an oral art and, with the exception perhaps of concrete poetry, it needs to be heard.  But, whether it’s poetry for adults or for kids, it’s not always so easy to read poetry well aloud. Here are some tips on how to do it.

1. Familiarize yourself with the poem. Read it silently and aloud to yourself several times. If it’s written in a particular form, such as a haiku, a cinquain, a triolet, a sonnet, etc., get to know that form. Remember the old joke: How do you get to Carnegie Hall? Answer: Practice, practice, practice!
2. Who’s the speaker of the poem? Is it the poet (or a version of the poet)? Is it a character? If so, what can you tell about this person, animal, creature? What kind of attitude and voice would he, she, or it have?
3. What does the poem mean? What does the title tell you? There may be shades and levels of meaning, but a poem isn’t open to any old interpretation you throw at it. However, don’t always expect to understand it immediately — take your time with it.
4. There may be unfamiliar words in the poem. Look them up. You can build your vocabulary at any age. Learn to pronounce unfamiliar (and occasionally familiar!) words properly: e.g. I had to find out how to say the word “equipage” from Wallace Stevens’s “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird.”
5. How is the poem punctuated? That can be difficult when there is no punctuation, so you have to figure out the pauses and the stops that make the poem make sense.
6. Study the line breaks, but don’t necessarily pause at the end of every line — including poems in rhyme! Go with the flow.
7. What words need to be punched? On *American Idol*, Steven Tyler gave a contestant great advice — when you sing, don’t sing everything on the same level. Figure out which words you want to emphasize and why.
8. Don’t read like a robot. What is the emotion behind the poem? How can you convey it?
9. Don’t overdo it either by declaiming or overacting.
10. It’s generally best to slow down when you read. You may think you’re already reading slowly, but you’re probably not. Occasionally, a humorous poem, such a list poem, may suggest speed and it might work to be more of a motormouth. But even then, you have to enunciate (listen to some Gilbert and Sullivan!). Remember to breathe!
11. When you’re reading any poem, timing is important, but perhaps especially in humorous poems. Don’t ever rush the punchline! And above all, have fun!

Want to try it? Here’s one of my poems from *Follow the Recipe: Poems About Imagination, Celebration & Cake* (Dial Books, 2020), illustrated by Marjorie Priceman.

**recipe for understanding**

Share bread,

share histories—

dense, chewy tales that take

time to rise. Crisp sketches as light

as air.

Share bread,

share histories—

loaves baked so long ago

or served up fresh from the oven

today.

Share bread:

bammy, brioche,

chapati or lavash…

Pass it around the table. Share

the world.

*Marilyn Singer is the author of more than 120 books, including many poetry collections. She won the National Council of Teachers of English award for Excellence in Poetry in 2015. You can find her on her web site:* [*www.marilynsinger.net*](http://www.marilynsinger.net)*.*