**Poetry from Daily Life: Fresh out of ideas? Ask yourself, 'What if?'**

By Matt Forrest Esenwine

*This week’s guest on “Poetry from Daily Life” is Matt Forrest Esenwine, who lives in Warner, New Hampshire. Matt is an award-winning children’s author and poet who began writing poems when he was 9 years old. He says he loves writing for children about nature, families, and our connectedness. Two picture books Matt especially enjoyed working on were "Flashlight Night" (Astra Young Readers, 2017), which began as a poem, and "I Am Today," which recently received the New Hampshire State Literary Award for Outstanding Work of Children's Literature. In addition to his writing, Matt Spent twenty-five years on-air in radio doing morning shows, hosting concerts, and interviewing people as diverse as Bernie Sanders, Alice Cooper, and Jeff Foxworthy. ~ David Harrison*

**What if?**

It’s a question author/futurist Arthur C. Clarke, civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr., and Apple co-founder Steve Jobs probably asked themselves at one point or another.

It’s a question subconsciously uttered in the mind of a 2-year-old, discovering their world.

And it’s a question Marvel even turned into a comic book series back in the ‘70s and ‘80s and is now a TV series.

It’s a mere two words. Two words that might steel our resolve, or completely change our perspective.

**What if?**

How many times have you tried to get your smartphone or laptop to stop doing that annoying "thing?" You experiment, you troubleshoot. You think, “What if … I press Shift-Alt-Ctrl-Tab-Insert?” And when that doesn’t work, you think, “What if … I just walk away and act like this never happened?” We ask ourselves, “What if?” day in and day out.

*“What if the game lasts too long?”*

*“What if I take the road less traveled?”*

*“What if we run out of hamburger pickles?”*

But when was the last time you used these two words to help you *create*?

**What if … you changed your story?**

Certainly, this question can be used in any environment, whether you are an inventor, politician, or salesperson. For me, it’s in the realm of creative writing. Asking this question — either when brainstorming ideas or when stuck on a character, rhyme, or plot detail — opens up worlds of possibilities:

*“What if … my main character was the opposite sex?”*

*“What if … this story was set in another time?”*

*“What if … I juxtaposed these two lines/stanzas/paragraphs?”*

Several years ago I asked myself, “What if … a frost occurred in the middle of summer?” The poem I wrote answered that question.

**“What if … I could see things from a different viewpoint?”**

Come to think of it, the world would probably be a much better place if more of us asked that particular question.

But really, ask yourself all kinds of "what if" questions and write the answers down! Putting a few lines or paragraphs on paper (or computer) can help you see things from a different perspective, and that’s what you want. Asking "what if" can help you critique, inspire, or edit yourself!

Even if you have no intention of turning Lucinda — your novel’s half-human, half-lizard hybrid heroine — into a half-alien, half-nematode super villain, play it out and see where it goes! It may go nowhere, but there’s a good chance you’ll learn.

Perhaps you’ll come up with a better character.

Perhaps you’ll come up with an idea for an entirely different project!

But without questioning, you’ll never know.

**Final question:**

*“What if … I gave everyone a second chance?”*

Hmmm … I’ll let you think about that one on your own.

*Matt Forrest Esenwine’s picture books include the Kirkus-starred "Flashlight Night" (Astra Young Readers, Sept. 2017) and "Once Upon Another Time" (Beaming Books, 2021), which ALA’s Booklist called “a necessary addition to picture book collections.” His poetry can be found in numerous anthologies like "The National Geographic Book of Nature Poetry" (National Geographic Kids, 2015) and "Except for Love: New England Poets Inspired by Donald Hall" (Encircle, 2019). See more at* [*MattForrest.com*](http://mattforrest.com/).