**Poetry from Daily Life: With rhythm and rhyme, poetry is a great introduction to reading**

By Timothy Rasinski

*My guest this week on Poetry from Daily Life is Timothy Rasinski, who lives in Stow, Ohio. Tim was told he was a good writer during his master’s degree program. However, his writing is not poetry, but more about how to teach children to read. He enjoys writing to explain things and particularly likes translating scientific research into actual practice for teachers. Tim and I have worked together on a number of projects related to using poetry to teach reading, including "Partner Poems and Word Ladders, K-2" and "1-3" (with Mary Jo Fresch as the third author). In a Stanford University study in 2023, Dr. Rasinski was identified as being in the top 2% of scientists in the world. ~ David L. Harrison*

“The longer I live, the more I see there’s something about reciting rhythmical words aloud — it’s almost biological — the comforts and enlivens human beings.”

*Robert Pinsky, Poet Laureate of the United States, 1997-2000*

I am not a poet; but I like to hang around poets. My own professional work as a college professor and researcher has focused on how best to teach children how to read, especially those children who find learning to read difficult. I’ve been on this journey for over 40 years and one of the most important insights I have to share with teachers, school principals, and parents is that children’s poetry is one of the best texts for teaching children to read. Poetry is usually short, and the rhythm and rhyme embedded in poetry for children make poems easy to learn to read. Even children who struggle in learning to read can achieve success in learning to read and perform a poem.

In the award-winning Kent State University summer reading clinic for struggling readers which I directed for over two decades, one of our goals was for students to be reading stars every single day. The way they became stars was to learn to read a new poem every day and then perform it for a parent volunteer sitting out in the hallway. Once students had learned and performed their poem, we would engage them studying individual words from the poem to build their phonics skills and enlarge their vocabularies. They would then be invited to perform the poem they had learned at home for parents and other family members. In the six weeks of our reading clinic our students made significant progress in their reading — in some cases making nearly a year’s growth in reading.

Poetry allowed this to happen. The joyous and humorous nature of so much poetry for children made learning to read and perform poetry fun and engaging. One of the greatest features of learning and performing poetry is the authentic nature of such an approach. It is not unusual to find a poetry slam or festival on or near many college campuses on weekends. Indeed, every year we ended our reading clinic with a reading festival in which students, alone and in groups, performed poems and scripts they had learned during the summer. Because of the patterned nature of poetry for children it is not difficult for kids to write their poems (which we then included in a book of poetry that was presented to each student at the end of our reading festival).

One of my favorite memories of our reading clinic was a student who had just finished second grade but came to our clinic because he was still at the beginning stages of reading. I still recall Ryan holding on to his mother’s leg on the first day of Camp Read-A-Lot. Given that he struggled in reading he had no interest in six more weeks of reading instruction over the summer. Well, every day Ryan and the other kids learned a daily poem that they took home to perform for their moms and dads. Eventually the students began writing their own poetry, usually based on poems they had already learned. Ryan wrote a poem that was a parody of the “Diddle diddle dumpling, my son John” that he had learned and performed earlier. It was entitled “Diddle diddle dumpling, my son Fred” and it went like this:

Diddle Diddle Dumpling my son Fred,

Slept all day on his bed.

Woke up at midnight,

Screamed “there’s a monster under my bed.”

Diddle Diddle Dumpling, my son Fred.

This was the poem Ryan chose to perform at our end of the clinic reading festival. Of course, he performed with confidence and fluency, and received a standing ovation from his parents and grandparents who were in attendance. Later, during a cookies and punch reception, Ryan came over to me while I was chatting with some parents. He pulled at my sleeve and whispered my name insistently until I was able to ask him what he wanted. Here’s what he said: “Mr. Rasinski, could we keep doing Camp Read-a-Lot?” This was the same kid who six weeks earlier wanted nothing to do with more reading over the summer. Now he couldn’t get enough of it. This is what poetry can do — change lives!

*You can find out more about Tim Rasinski and have access to free instructional resources for teaching reading at his website:*[*https://timrasinski.com*](https://timrasinski.com/).