



# Poetry Resource Guide for Teachers

This guide provides tips and strategies from renowned poet, educator, and literacy advocate **Pat Mora** about how to use poetry with students in various educational settings and creative ways to make poetry fun and engaging for young people.

## READING POETRY WITH STUDENTS

The best way to get students interested in writing poetry is first to spend time reading poetry together and helping students become familiar with poetry as a way of expressing feelings and ideas.

1. Make the reading of poetry part of your classroom routine and try reading a different poem a day or the same poem every day for a week or two. Read your favorite poems or students' favorite poems. Read poems about different subjects and celebrations. After hearing a variety of poems, students will begin to recognize what different kinds of poetry sound like and they will begin to understand what makes a poem a poem.
2. Invite students to talk freely about what they experienced during the poetry readings. You may guide students with questions such as these:
  - **How did the poem(s) make you feel? What parts of the poem(s) made you feel that way?**
  - **How do you show what you are feeling or thinking about?**
  - **Discuss features of the poem(s)—repetition, rhythm, sound, rhyme (if it is a rhyming poem), imagery, humor, ambiguity, unusual words, unusual use of words, and so on.**
  - **What do you think makes a poem a poem?**
  - **How are poems different from stories?**
  - **Do you think poems are easier or harder to understand than stories? Why?**
3. Invite students to look through poetry anthologies with you. Browse through several anthologies, holding up various pages so students can see that poems vary in length and physical shape and contain poems by many different writers. Once students have started writing their own poems, they can create a class anthology, complete with illustrations and bound into book format.
4. Organize a poetry center in the classroom, which is available for students to use throughout the year. Place your favorite books of poetry in the center and encourage students to bring in their favorite poetry books too. Add books borrowed from the school library, rotating the selections on a regular basis. Try to include some books of poetry written by children and be sure to include many books with free verse, non-rhyming poetry, because this kind of poetry will be much easier for students to write on their own.

## HELPING STUDENTS WRITE POETRY

1. Talk with students to find out what they know and think about poetry. You might brainstorm with students and record on the chalkboard or chart paper their thoughts about what they like and do not like about writing poetry.
2. Discuss what was recorded. The number one dislike most students will probably have is that poetry is hard to write because the words have to rhyme. However, point out to students that most poems written and published are free-verse poems without definite rhyme or rhythmic patterns, so students should feel free to write non-



rhyming poems as well as rhyming ones. Released from the constraints of rhyme, many students find it easier to focus on content and language and have fun with form.

3. Tell students they can write poems about anything they want, and it is often easiest to begin by writing about something they feel strongly about or with which they are very familiar. Poems can be about a person, a place, an action, a feeling, a thing, an experience, or anything students care about. Their poems can tell about things exactly as they were or are, or they can write from their imaginations.
4. A poem cannot begin to take shape until students start putting words on paper, so encourage them to begin writing even though they may not have the entire poem worked out in their minds. Have students write down a first word, phrase, thought, or sentence and then build on that by writing more words, phrases, thoughts, or sentences. Tell students to write their ideas as fast as they come, and soon they will have the beginnings of a first draft.
5. If students need more structured help getting started, you might suggest they try writing biopoems. They can begin with their names and then go on to describe themselves, their families, where they live, what they like to do, how they feel, where they would like to go, and so on.

**Here is an example:**

**Kim**  
Tall and hungry  
Lives in Cloverdale  
Wants to eat lunch  
Made by Mom  
Soon!

Another way for students to write biopoems is to answer the following questions. Students' responses may be words, phrases, complete sentences, or a combination. It's the expression of thoughts, ideas, and feelings in written form that will form the basis of their poems.

**For example:** **Who? (the subject of the poem)**  
**What? (what happened)**  
**Where? (where it happened)**  
**When? (when it happened)**  
**Why? (why it happened)**

Biopoems are fun to write, but students should then be encouraged to write poems about other topics—about anything at all, really, that appeals to them.

6. After students have a first draft of their poems, they need to decide whether or not they are satisfied with their poems as they are, or if they want to build, change, or otherwise revise their work. Students can try reading their poems aloud at this stage, to see where more (or less) is needed. Students may need to be reminded that they don't always have to include everything—sometimes the words might say too much. Encourage students to edit their poems so that only the words that relate directly to the feeling, subject, or mood of the poem remain.
7. After the editing process, encourage students to share their work. A folder can be used to keep copies of students' poems, and near the end of the year, each student may select her or his best poem to include in an illustrated class anthology. You might also work with students to plan a poetry party to celebrate students' work. Invite other classes or parents and caregivers, and have students read their poems to the group.

# Lee & Low Books of Poetry

Lee & Low Books offers an award-winning selection of diverse poetry for children. Be sure to share these books with your students as you embark on a journey of poetic discovery. The titles are grouped in categories but can be used to address a variety of themes and units in the classroom, library, or other relevant setting.

The full collection of Lee & Low poetry books can be viewed online at [leeandlow.com/collections/lee-low-poetry-collection](https://leeandlow.com/collections/lee-low-poetry-collection). Or contact [sales@leeandlow.com](mailto:sales@leeandlow.com) for a customized list of poetry for your classroom or library.

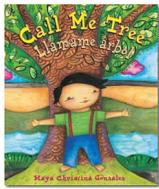
## IDENTITY, INDIVIDUALITY, AND BELONGING



### Amazing Faces

compiled by Lee Bennett Hopkins, illustrated by Chris Soentpiet

An anthology of universal poems focusing on the human experience—emotions, perceptions, and understandings—as expressed by poets of diverse heritage and reflected in illustrations featuring people of all ages and backgrounds.



### Call Me Tree/Llámame Árbol

written and illustrated by Maya Christina Gonzalez

A pronoun- and gender-free tale of self-discovery told by a child who grows, learns about the natural world, embraces others, and is free to become who they are meant to be—a child as unique as a tree.



### Chess Rumble

written by G. Neri, illustrated by Jesse Joshua Watson

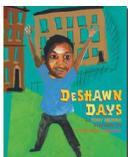
A story in free verse about a troubled boy who learns to use his mind instead of his fists through the guidance of an unconventional mentor who teaches the boy the game of chess.



### Confetti: Poems for Children (also available in Spanish)

written by Pat Mora, illustrated by Enrique O. Sanchez

The culture and landscape of the Southwest is celebrated in poetry through the eyes of a Mexican American girl.



### DeShawn Days

written by Tony Medina, illustrated by R. Gregory Christie

A story in verse about the hopes, fears, and dreams of a young boy living in the inner-city projects.



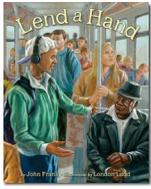
### I Remember: Poems and Pictures of Heritage

compiled by Lee Bennett Hopkins

A celebration of diversity and family: fourteen poets and sixteen illustrators of diverse backgrounds share memorable childhood experiences and reflect upon their different heritages, traditions, and beliefs.

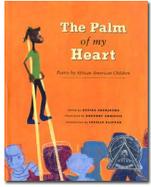
Find us online at [leeandlow.com](https://leeandlow.com) • Open Book Blog [blog.leeandlow.com](https://blog.leeandlow.com) • [@leeandlow](https://twitter.com/leeandlow)

Educator Resources copyright © 2020 LEE & LOW BOOKS. All rights reserved. Permission is granted to share and adapt for personal and educational use. For questions, comments, and/or more information, please contact us at [general@leeandlow.com](mailto:general@leeandlow.com). Visit us online at [leeandlow.com](https://leeandlow.com). Titles and prices subject to change.

**Lend a Hand: Poems About Giving**

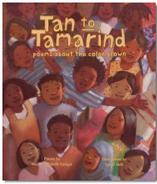
written by John Frank, illustrated by London Ladd

A collection of original poems centered on giving and spontaneous acts of kindness, which also incorporate larger themes of community, intergenerational relationships, young mentors, and care for the environment.

**The Palm of My Heart: Poetry by African American Children**

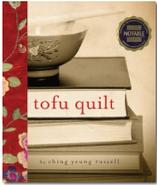
edited by Davida Adedjouma, illustrated by R. Gregory Christie

African American children celebrate the beauty of their lives and culture through poetry.

**Tan to Tamarind: Poems About the Color Brown**

written by Malathi Iyengar, illustrated by Jamel Akib

A poetry collection that helps young readers discover that no matter what your skin tone, every shade is beautiful.

**Tofu Quilt**

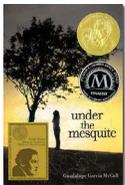
written by Ching Yeung Russell

A collection of poems telling the story of Yeung Ying, a young girl in Hong Kong in the 1960s who, against the conventions of society and the wishes of some family members, aspires to become a writer. Middle grade.

**Under My Hijab**

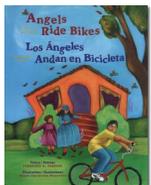
written by Hena Khan, illustrated by Aaliya Jaleel

A collection of verses that invites readers to understand and appreciate the hijab and the Muslim women who decide to wear it.

**Under the Mesquite**

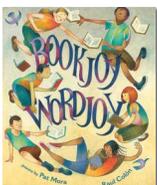
written by Guadalupe García McCall

Lupita, a budding actor and poet in a close-knit Mexican American immigrant family, comes of age as she struggles with adult responsibilities during her mother's long illness. Young adult.

**FAMILY, CULTURE & TRADITION****Angels Ride Bikes and Other Fall Poems/Los Angeles Andan en Bicicleta y otros poemas de otoño**

written by Francisco X. Alarcón, illustrated by Maya Christina Gonzalez

Bilingual poems invite us to experience the fall season in Los Angeles, the City of Angels, where dreams can come true.

**Bookjoy Wordjoy**

written by Pat Mora, illustrated by Raul Colón

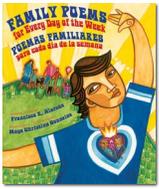
A collection of poems celebrating a love of words and all the ways we use and interact with them: reading, speaking, writing, and singing.



**Every Month is a New Year: Celebrations Around the World**

written by Marilyn Singer, illustrated by Susan L. Roth

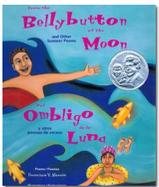
A collection of original poems about New Year celebrations throughout the year and around the world focusing on a diversity of cultural, regional, and religious traditions.



**Family Poems for Every Day of the Week/Poemas familiares para cada día de la semana**

written by Francisco X. Alarcón, illustrated by Maya Christina Gonzalez

A collection of bilingual poetry celebrating the days of the week, family, and everyday childhood experiences.



**From the Bellybutton of the Moon and Other Summer Poems/Del ombligo de la luna y otros poemas de verano**

written by Francisco X. Alarcón, illustrated by Maya Christina Gonzalez

Bilingual poems in which poet Francisco X. Alarcón shares his recollections of childhood summers spent in Mexico.



**Gracias~Thanks**

written by Pat Mora, illustrated by John Parra

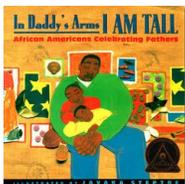
In a series of poetic sentences, a young biracial boy tells about some of the everyday things for which he is thankful.



**Iguanas in the Snow and Other Winter Poems/Iguanas en la nieve y otros poemas de invierno**

written by Francisco X. Alarcón, illustrated by Maya Christina Gonzalez

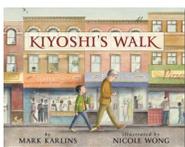
Bilingual poems invite us to celebrate winter—by the seashore, in the magic city of San Francisco, and in the ancient redwood forests of the Sierras.



**In Daddy's Arms I Am Tall: African Americans Celebrating Fathers**

written by various poets, illustrated by Javaka Steptoe

Twelve African American poets give testimony to the powerful bond between fathers, children, and grandchildren.



**Kiyoshi's Walk**

written by Mark Karlins, illustrated by Nicole Wong

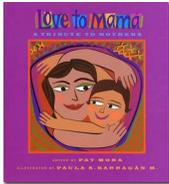
Where do poems come from? This beautiful picture book about a young aspiring poet and his grandfather shows that the answer lies all around us—if we take the time to look.



**Laughing Tomatoes and Other Spring Poems/Jitomates Risueños y otros poemas de primavera**

written by Francisco X. Alarcón, illustrated by Maya Christina Gonzalez

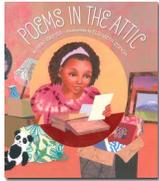
Bilingual poems honor the wonders of life and nature with joy and tenderness, delight and sadness.



**Love to Mamá: A Tribute to Mothers**

edited by Pat Mora, illustrated by Paula S. Barragán

Thirteen Latinx poets celebrate their bonds with their mothers and grandmothers.



**Poems in the Attic**

written by Nikki Grimes, illustrated by Elizabeth Zunon

A young girl grows closer to her mother after discovering a box of poems her mother wrote about living around the world and growing up as a child of an Air Force serviceperson. Told in alternating free verse and tanka poems.

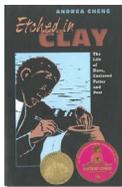


**Poems to Dream Together/Poemas para soñar juntos**

written by Francisco X. Alarcón, illustrated by Paula Barragán

A bilingual collection of poetry celebrating family, community, nature, and the positive power of dreams to shape our future.

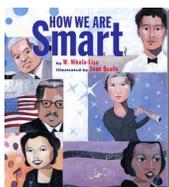
**BIOGRAPHY**



**Etched in Clay: The Life of Dave, Enslaved Potter and Poet**

written and illustrated by Andrea Cheng

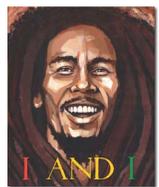
The story of the life and times of Dave, an enslaved potter who inscribed his works with sayings and short poems in spite of the slave anti-literacy sentiment in South Carolina in the years leading up to the Civil War. Middle grade/young adult.



**How We Are Smart**

written by W. Nikola-Lisa, illustrated by Sean Qualls

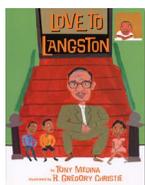
Biographies of twelve talented people that illustrate the eight ways people can be smart and the realization that intelligence is “not about how smart you are, but how you are smart.”



**I and I, Bob Marley**

written by Tony Medina, illustrated by Jesse Joshua Watson

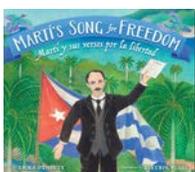
The life story of Bob Marley that explores the influences that shaped his life and music on his journey from rural Jamaican childhood to international superstardom.



**Love to Langston**

written by Tony Medina, illustrated by R. Gregory Christie

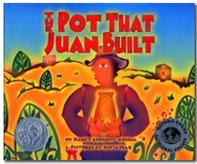
Fourteen original poems offer young readers a glimpse into the life of Langston Hughes, one of America’s most beloved poets and explore important themes in Hughes’s life.



**Martí's Song for Freedom/Martí y sus versos por la libertad**

written by Emma Otheguy, illustrated by Beatriz Vidal

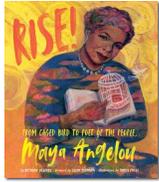
Bilingual poems explore the life of José Martí, who dedicated his life to the promotion of liberty, abolishment of slavery, political independence for Cuba, and intellectual independence from colonialism for all Latinxs. Contains excerpts from Martí’s seminal work, *Versos sencillos*.



**The Pot That Juan Built**

written by Nancy Andrews-Goebel, illustrated by David Diaz

The story of Juan Quezada and his journey from discovering ancient methods of making pottery to becoming the premier potter in Mexico.

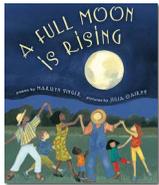


**Rise! From Caged Bird to Poet of the People, Maya Angelou**

written by Bethany Hegedus, illustrated by Tonya Engel

The life of Maya Angelou is explored in poems that describe how she rose above a childhood of trauma and emotional pain to become one of the most inspiring voices of the twentieth century.

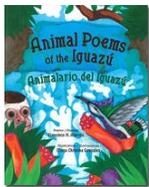
**STEM AND GEOGRAPHY**



**A Full Moon Is Rising**

written by Marilyn Singer, illustrated by Julia Cairns

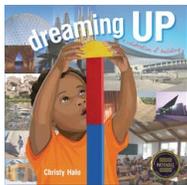
A collection of original poems about full moon events, phenomena, celebrations, and beliefs from around the world.



**Animal Poems of the Iguazú/Animalario del Iguazú**

written by Francisco X. Alarcón, illustrated by Maya Christina Gonzalez

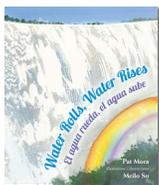
Spanning three countries—Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay—the thundering waterfalls and lush green rainforests of the Iguazú are explored in the soaring, roaring, and fluttering voices of the animals of the region.



**Dreaming Up: A Celebration of Building**

written and illustrated by Christy Hale

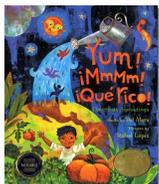
Illustrations, concrete poetry, and photographs show how young children’s constructions, created as they play, are reflected in notable works of architecture from around the world.



**Water Rolls, Water Rises/ El agua rueda, el agua sube**

written by Pat Mora, illustrated by Meilo So

In a collection of bilingual poems, readers learn about the movement and moods of water around the world and the ways in which water affects varied landscapes and cultures.



**Yum! MmMm! ¡Qué rico! Americas’ Sproutings (also available in Spanish)**

written by Pat Mora, illustrated by Rafael Lopez

A collection of haiku focusing on fourteen foods native to the Americas, celebrating the fun of the foods as well as their origins.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR TEACHING POETRY

- **Children's Day/Book Day (El día de los niños/El día de los libros)**  
[dia.ala.org](http://dia.ala.org)
- **The Children's Poetry Archive**  
[childrens.poetryarchive.org](http://childrens.poetryarchive.org)
- **Edsitement**  
[edsitement.neh.gov](http://edsitement.neh.gov)
- **Lee & Low Books**  
[www.leeandlow.com/educators](http://www.leeandlow.com/educators)
- **Pat Mora's website**  
[www.patmora.com](http://www.patmora.com)
- **Poets.org**  
[poets.org/materials-teachers](http://poets.org/materials-teachers)
- **Reading Rockets**  
[www.readingrockets.org](http://www.readingrockets.org)
- **ReadWriteThink**  
[www.readwritethink.org](http://www.readwritethink.org)
- **ShareMyLesson**  
[sharemylesson.com](http://sharemylesson.com)

ORDER INFORMATION Learn more about Lee & Low Books at: [www.leeandlow.com](http://www.leeandlow.com)

### order toll-free

-  **by phone** (9:30-5:30 EST):  
1-800-320-3190 x3
-  **by fax** (all times):  
1-212-683-1894
-  **by email:**  
orders@leeandlow.com
-  **by web:**  
leeandlow.com

### educational sales

¡Hablamos español!

- Abe Barretto**  
*Vice President of Educational Sales*
-  **by phone:**  
1-212-779-4400 x123
-  **by fax** (all times):  
1-212-683-1894
-  **by email:**  
abarretto@leeandlow.com

### stay in touch with us on social media!

**Website**  
leeandlow.com

**Open Book Blog**  
blog.leeandlow.com

     
**@leeandlow**

Find us online at [leeandlow.com](http://leeandlow.com) • Open Book Blog [blog.leeandlow.com](http://blog.leeandlow.com) • [@leeandlow](https://twitter.com/leeandlow)

Educator Resources copyright © 2020 LEE & LOW BOOKS. All rights reserved. Permission is granted to share and adapt for personal and educational use. For questions, comments, and/or more information, please contact us at [general@leeandlow.com](mailto:general@leeandlow.com). Visit us online at [leeandlow.com](http://leeandlow.com). Titles and prices subject to change.