



Changing life stories

Poetry in the early years foundation stage

Why is poetry important?

Poetry is what in a poem makes you laugh, cry, prickle, be silent, makes your
toe nails twinkle, makes you want to do this or that or nothing...

Dylan Thomas

Poetry helps children to develop early language and literacy skills. It introduces new vocabulary, allows children to play with words, letters and sounds, helps with memory and teaches children about rhythm and rhyme. Poetry can also be funny and engaging, especially when it is brought to life by reciting out loud and adding claps or actions.

Through enjoying rhymes, poems and songs, and reciting poems or parts of
longer poems together as a class, teachers can build children's strong
emotional connection to language.

The reading framework: Teaching the foundations of literacy (July 2021)

What does the new framework say?

The new [statutory framework for the early years foundation stage](#) and the new [reading framework](#), both frequently refer to poetry and highlight the importance of saying and learning poems in the early years.

Poetry is mentioned in the educational programmes for communication and language, literacy and understanding the world;

Reading frequently to children, and engaging them actively in stories, non-fiction, rhymes and poems, and then providing them with extensive opportunities to use and embed new words in a range of contexts, will give children the opportunity to thrive.

Communication and Language educational programme, Statutory framework for the
early years foundation stage (March 2021)

Language comprehension (necessary for both reading and writing) starts from birth. It only develops when adults talk with children about the world around them and the books (stories and non-fiction) they read with them, and enjoy rhymes, poems and songs together.

Literacy educational programme, Statutory framework for the early years
foundation stage (March 2021)

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...listening to a broad selection of stories, non-fiction, rhymes and poems will foster their understanding of our culturally, socially, technologically and ecologically diverse world.

Understanding the World educational programme, Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage (March 2021)

This increased focus on poetry and the highlighting of the cross-curricula benefits of using it with early years children provides an exciting opportunity for you to explore different types of poetry.

Where can I find some support for my subject knowledge?

Before embarking on a journey of early years poetry exploration, it may be useful for you to refresh and renew your approach to the teaching of poetry. [A poetry lover's classroom](#) resource from the National Literacy Trust includes:

- A staff meeting presentation to help explore the benefits of creating classrooms full of poetry lovers, and support staff in reflecting on current practice and expertise
- A useful guide to poetic types, forms and language

Which poems should I use?

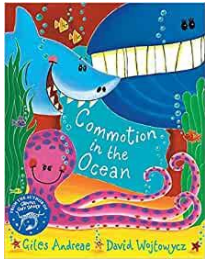
The reading framework: Teaching the foundations of literacy (July 2021) suggests that an audit should be carried out in your setting to ensure that daily poetry, rhyme and singing session are a priority and that a variety of poems are being shared.

The framework states that a core set of poems for the age group you are working with should be identified. These should include:

- rhyming poems
- poems where alliteration is a strong feature
- word games
- traditional songs and rhymes
- nonsense rhymes
- poems that are particularly rhythmical

Read more about poetry and rhyme on pages 36-37 of [The reading framework: Teaching the foundations of literacy](#). There is also a useful glossary in appendix 9 which defines terms such as cadence, alliteration, assonance and rhyme.

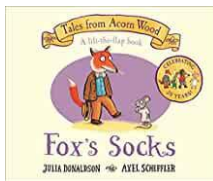
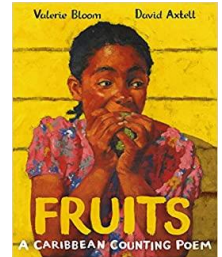
Poems can be selected to introduce new vocabulary and link to learning across all areas of the curriculum. For example, if you are exploring under the sea, you could read the book



Commotion in the Ocean by Giles Andreae, illustrated by David Wojtowycz, which is a collection of short poems about sea creatures. It introduces new vocabulary such as 'scamper', 'bulbous' and 'bellow'.

Books and poems with repeated rhymes can enable children to predict the next word and join in when they feel confident, for example, completing the rhymes describing *The Gruffalo* from the book by Julia Donaldson, illustrated by Axel Scheffler.

Counting rhymes such as *Fruits: A Caribbean Counting Poem* by Valerie Bloom will develop counting skills and also enable children to explore food from a different country and learn some Caribbean dialect.



Simple rhyming books like *Fox's Socks* by Julia Donaldson, illustrated by Axel Scheffler, can help children identify rhyming words and inspire word games such as creating rhyming strings.

Nonsense rhymes allow children to explore words, sounds rhymes in a fun way, free from any restrictions. Poems such as *Eletelephony* by Laura E. Richards and *My Name Is...* by Pauline Clarke provide a great introduction to nonsense rhymes.

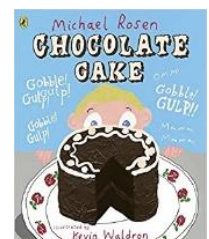
Poems and rhymes can also be used to help children learn routines such as what to do at the end of the day and to reinforce behaviour expectations. Traditional rhymes such as *Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush* can be adapted to incorporate daily routines such as putting on coats or washing hands before lunch.



As well as being fun to say, nursery rhymes can teach new vocabulary and can also develop early phonics skills such as developing an awareness of alliteration and rhyme. Popular rhymes such as *Hickory Dickory Dock*, *Little Jack Horner* and *Baa Baa Black Sheep* are mentioned in the reading strategy. You could ask children to share traditional family rhymes or poems in their home language. Websites such as [Mama Lisa](http://MamaLisa.com) enable you to explore songs and rhymes from around the world. Makaton and sign

language can also be added to nursery rhymes. Some examples can be found [here](#). A simple rhyme like *Incy Wincy Spider* can be used to play word games such as encouraging children to make up their own rhymes. They could complete a rhyme such as 'Incy Wincy Spider climbed up a wall, Incy Wincy Spider played with a', or make up their own versions.

Chocolate Cake by Michael Rosen is a great example of performance poetry to share with early years children. It is full of expression and silly noises and can inspire children to recite poems in an animated way.



There are so many ways to share poetry with early years children. When embedded across all areas of the curriculum and within daily routines, poetry will become part of the everyday life of your setting and the lives of the children that you work with.