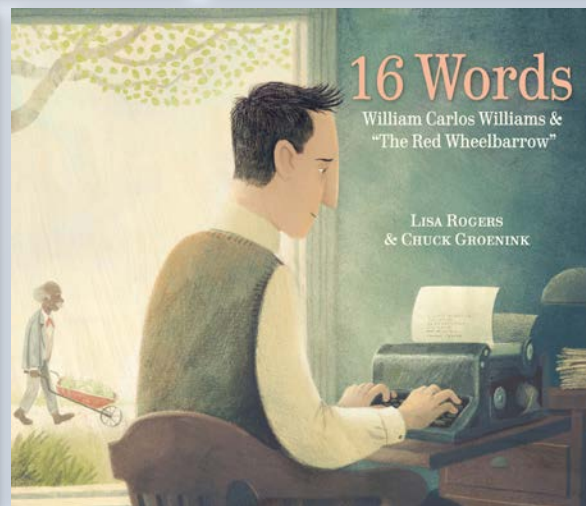
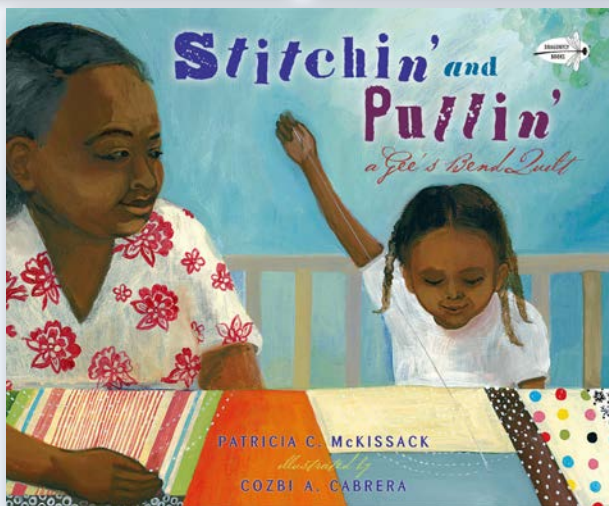
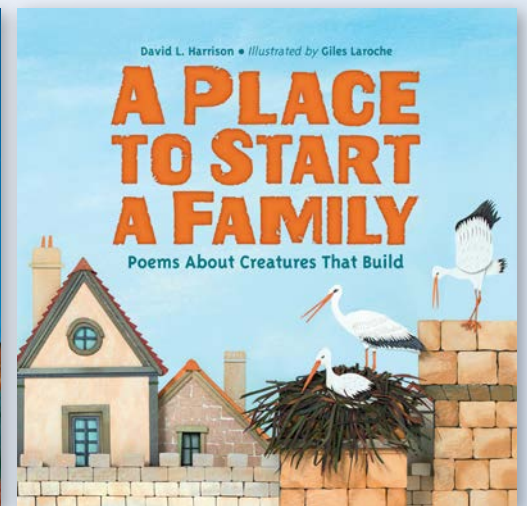


THEMATIC GUIDE

Teaching Poetry
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



CONTENTS

■ INTRODUCTION.....	<u>3</u>
■ ABOUT THE TITLES IN THIS COLLECTION.....	<u>4</u>
■ CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES.....	<u>5</u>
BUILDING KNOWLEDGE.....	<u>5</u>
Poet Tree.....	<u>5</u>
Anchor Charts.....	<u>5</u>
Rhythm Sticks.....	<u>6</u>
Golden Lines.....	<u>6</u>
ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES.....	<u>7</u>
Poetry Pad.....	<u>7</u>
Bio-Poem.....	<u>7</u>
Poetry Walk with Sidewalk Chalk.....	<u>8</u>
Choral Reading.....	<u>8</u>
See, Think, Wonder.....	<u>9</u>
What's the Big Idea?.....	<u>9</u>
Poetry in Place.....	<u>10</u>
Companion Texts.....	<u>10</u>
My Favorite Poem Project.....	<u>11</u>
■ RESOURCES.....	<u>11</u>
■ ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS GUIDE.....	<u>11</u>
■ MORE POETRY TITLES.....	<u>12</u>

■ INTRODUCTION

In her 2021 TED-Ed student talk, poet Amanda Gorman said, “Poetry has never been the language of barriers. It’s always been the language of bridges.” With the current emphasis on culturally responsive, student-centered education and social emotional learning in schools, the bridge-building power of poetry is especially important. Poetry plays a significant role in teaching elementary children to make meaning, express emotion, and connect to culture, all while appreciating the rhythm and rhyme of the written and spoken word.

The activities in this guide are adaptable for kindergarten through fifth grade and focus on the following line of inquiry: *Why do poets write poems? How can poetry help us understand ourselves and the world around us?* Teachers can choose one or any combination of titles and strategies in the guide for whole-class instruction, small groups, or independent practice as they work to build a classroom culture where children are inspired to read, write, and reflect on the power of poetry.



Interior art from *16 Words*, by Lisa Rogers;
Illustrated by Chuck Groenink



Interior art from *Blue Sky White Stars*, by Sarvinder Naberhaus;
Illustrated by Kadir Nelson



Interior art from *Stitchin' And Pullin'*, by Patricia McKissack;
Illustrated by Cozbi A. Cabrera

Styles to try

Once you've started writing poems of your own, you might want to experiment with different styles. Here are some to try out.

List poem
A simple list of things that go together can make a poem, with an opening and closing to complete it. A list poem does not usually rhyme, and it sometimes ends with a surprise!
(See "How to Love Your Little Corner of the World" by Eileen Spinelli on page 51.)

Haiku
This traditional Japanese poem has three lines and is usually about the natural world. The first and third lines each have five syllables and the second line has seven.
(See "Traveling Together" by Laura Purdie Sulas on page 93.)

Question poem
This style of poem asks a question or includes a question in each line. The questions are usually connected in some way, and it also has opening and closing lines to tie it all together.
(See "Map of Fun" by Naomi Shihab Nye on page 78.)

Sijo
This Korean type of poem has three lines with 14 to 16 syllables in each line, making a total of 42 to 48 syllables.
(See "Breakfast" by Linda Sue Park on page 158.)

Shape poem
If you're clever, you can arrange the words and lines of your poem so that they make a shape that matches the topic.
(See "What Can You Do with a Football?" by James Carter on page 101.)

Written a poem?
There are many ways to share a poem with friends—by mail, phone, text, email, or video, as well as face-to-face.

Now share it!

Interior art from *A World Full of Poems*, Selected by Sylvia Vardell

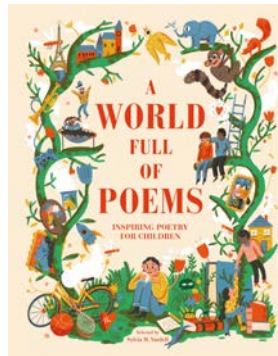
■ ABOUT THE TITLES IN THIS COLLECTION

Listed below are brief summaries of the books in this guide:



Stitchin' And Pullin'
A Gee's Bend Quilt
PATRICIA MCKISSACK
Illustrated by COZBI A. CABRERA
978-0-39-954950-2
Paperback | Dragonfly Books
48 pages | \$8.99 | Lexile: 820L
Also available: E-BOOK

Stitchin' and Pullin': A Gee's Bend Quilt, written by Patricia McKissack and illustrated by Cozbi A. Cabrera, is a collection of quilting vignettes that highlight the collective heritage of both quilting and poetry.



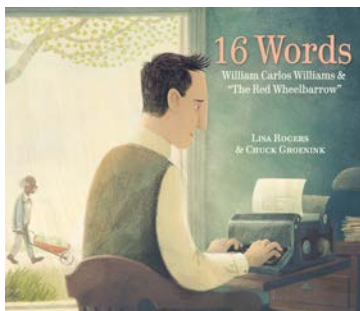
A World Full of Poems
Selected by SYLVIA VARDELL
978-1-46-549229-6
Hardcover | DK
204 pages | \$19.99 | Lexile: NP
Also available: E-BOOK, AUDIO DOWNLOAD

The poems and activities in *A World Full of Poems* explore why poets write and inspire students to see themselves as writers and their world as poetry.



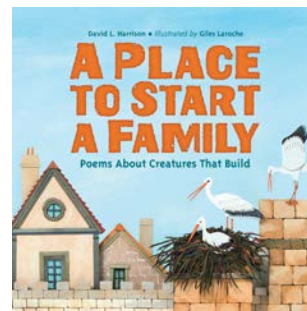
Blue Sky White Stars
SARVINDER NABERHAUS
Illustrated by KADIR NELSON
978-0-80-373700-6
Hardcover | Dial
40 pages | \$18.99 | Lexile: NP
Also available: E-BOOK

In *Blue Sky White Stars*, Sarvinder Naberhaus and Kadir Nelson combine evocative words and images to reflect on America's most prized symbols.



16 Words
William Carlos Williams and "The Red Wheelbarrow"
LISA ROGERS
Illustrated by CHUCK GROENINK
978-1-52-472016-2
Hardcover | Schwartz & Wade
40 pages | \$17.99 | Lexile: AD850L
Also available: E-BOOK

While suggesting context for the famous poem "The Red Wheelbarrow," Lisa Rogers's *16 Words* illustrates the poetry in everyday life and the connections it brings to us all.



A Place To Start A Family
Poems About Creatures That Build
DAVID L. HARRISON
Illustrated by GILES LAROCHE
978-1-62-354162-0
Paperback | Charlesbridge
32 pages | \$9.99
Also available: E-BOOK

David L. Harrison's *A Place to Start a Family: Poems About Creatures That Build* uses poetry to describe nature's creature architects and the amazing homes they build. Each poem is accompanied by the illustrations of Giles Laroche.

■ CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

BUILDING KNOWLEDGE

In order to provide an equitable environment where all students are prepared, the following activities build knowledge and provide access to the essential components of poetry.

Poet Tree

To begin a unit on poetry, and to help students see themselves as poets, create a class “Poet Tree.” Draw or cut out the shape of a large tree with many branches and post it on a classroom wall or bulletin board. Also draw and cut out multicolored leaves to be posted on the tree throughout the study of poetry. Ask students: “What poets do we already know?” Students might mention Amanda Gorman, Maya Angelou, Shel Silverstein, Naomi Shihab Nye, or Dr. Seuss. Write each poet’s name on a leaf and post it on one of the Poet Tree’s branches. Explain that throughout their study of poetry, the class will read many different authors who write for all different reasons, and the Poet Tree will “grow” when each poet’s name is attached to branches. Add that as soon as students finish their first poem, their names will go on the Poet Tree as well, because they, too, are poets!

Anchor Charts

Provide support and prepare a poetry-rich environment by creating a set of classroom anchor charts. Ask the class: “What do we know about poetry?” Student answers can be written on sticky notes and posted on a piece of poster paper, or the teacher can write answers directly on the chart. Explain that what students know will change throughout the study of poetry, so the charts are works in progress.

Next, ask students: “Why do people write poems?” To frame the discussion, place multiple pieces of chart paper throughout the classroom. Label the top of each poster with a different reason for writing poetry. For instance, headers might say “to express emotions,” “to connect to culture,” or “to explain the world.” Or use the table of contents categories in *A World Full of Poems*, which include “families and friends,” “feelings,” and “animals and nature,” among others. As the unit progresses, students can add titles or entire poems to each chart, including poems read in class and those written by students.

One final anchor chart might consist of two columns entitled “All Poems Have” and “Some Poems Have.” As the unit progresses, add bulleted descriptions such as “words,” “white space,” “punctuation,” “rhythm,” “rhyme,” or “repetition.” The idea is to build knowledge around the many forms poetry takes, and to encourage students to see themselves as poets.

Rhythm Sticks

Invite students to move and make noise as they discover the rhythm of poetry. Even students with language or word recognition barriers can appreciate the sounds of rhythm and rhyme, perhaps becoming inspired to learn their meaning and write poetry of their own. One familiar source for rhythm is popular music. Play a song students are likely to be familiar with, such as *Moana*'s "You're Welcome" or *The Greatest Showman*'s "This is Me." Consider showing a video version with onscreen lyrics. Invite students to use a pair of rhythm sticks or pencils and tap out the song's beat. Afterwards, discuss how the rhythm sticks activity brought the song to life and how feeling the beat helps us understand the meaning of a poem's words. Explain that songs are poems set to music, and that like songs, poems often have rhythm. When readers look for rhythm and read a poem aloud, they are more likely to connect to the poem's meaning and emotion. Now, lead students in a poetry read-aloud, demonstrating how to use the sticks or pencils to keep the poem's beat. Read one line at a time, tapping rhythm, syllables, or rhyming words, depending on the focus. Poems from this set that work well for rhythm lessons include "White-Spotted Puffer Fish" from *A Place to Start a Family*, and "Night Flight" from *A World Full of Poems* (p. 94).

Golden Lines

Teach students how to use the "golden line" method for accessing a poem. Finding "golden lines" of poetry provides students a low-stakes invitation to engage in reflection and analysis, and encourages them to make personal connections. To demonstrate, select a poem and conduct an initial read-aloud. Now, ask students to take a second look at the poem and select a "golden line" that captures their attention. Students select a phrase that interests them due to wording, personal connections, curiosity, or any other reason, and they share their choice and their reason aloud with a partner or the class. Often, students will end up focusing on significant diction, imagery, or thematic elements without the pressure to be "right." Students now have a tool they can use as a first step to analyze poetry on their own or in groups. Because its format is one line per page, younger elementary students will find *Blue Sky White Stars* an accessible poem for practicing the golden lines strategy. Upper elementary classes might select a poem such as "The Sewing Bee" from *Stitchin' and Pullin': A Gee's Bend Quilt*.

ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

The following classroom strategies provide engagement opportunities for students to read, write, think, and talk about poetry.

Poetry Pad

In *16 Words*, students learn how poet and doctor William Carlos Williams used his prescription pad throughout the day to record poetry ideas inspired by daily life. Invite students to create their own “poetry pads” during class and personalize the covers. Challenge students to carry the poetry pad in their pocket or in their backpack, recording images, sounds, and words from their daily life, just like Dr. Williams. Periodically provide class time for students to look through their poetry pads and practice writing poems inspired by their notes. For example, students might use their notes to write an imagist poem like Williams’s “The Red Wheelbarrow,” with line length or word count designed to suggest the shape of their subject. Students might use Williams’s “So much depends” as a starting point, then describe something unique from their personal poetry pad, such as a pair of green sneakers or a family pet. They can format their poem in a shape or add a hand-drawn or digital image. If students are willing, they can post their poems on a classroom bulletin board entitled “Class Poetry Pad” or on one of the anchor charts described above. One digital tool that helps students turn their poetry pad musings into shaped poems can be found here: <https://prhlink.com/readwritethinkpoems>.

Bio-Poem

In *Stitchin’ and Pullin’: A Gee’s Bend Quilt*, Baby Girl pieces together her poems and her first quilt using scraps and symbols significant to her family, her childhood, her culture, and the community of Gee’s Bend. Help students see the connection between poetry and identity by asking them to create a bio-poem. Bio-poems reflect elements that shape a person’s identity, such as experiences, relationships, skills, and interests. They provide reflection and expression opportunities for the writer, as well as social awareness and peer empathy development for classmates. The poems begin with the student’s first name and end with their last name. In between, lines depict what the student loves, feels, knows, hopes, and more.

Write on the board the question, “Who am I?” Tell the class they will be answering in the form of a poem. Show a sample bio-poem and invite students to use its format for sentence starters. Provide brainstorming and drafting time. When poems are complete, students might choose to recite their poems for an audience. Or, the group can create a class “quilt” of pieced-together bio-poems, each square representing the individual identities that, together, contribute to the class culture. As an alternative, students can create a bio-poem for a literary or historical figure. For more information and examples of bio-poems, see <https://prhlink.com/facinghistorybiopoem>.

Poetry Walk with Sidewalk Chalk

Inviting students to draw or doodle while listening to poetry encourages them to experience a poem's imagery and emotions. Read a poem aloud that sparks a visual and emotional response. Provide art supplies and let students draw what they see, hear, and feel. Explain to students that their drawing does not have to be something specific in the poem. Invite them to sketch whatever the poem makes them feel. In "City Rain" from *A World Full of Poems* (p. 85), students might draw raindrops on a cityscape, or toys in their bedroom. Next, invite students to choose their own poem from *A World Full of Poems* or another text. Ask them to draw again, and this time, invite them to replicate their picture on a school sidewalk block. Hold a class "poetry walk" where the class stops at each block and listens to the artist or teacher read the matching poem. Back in class, discuss how sketching a poem helps readers think about its meaning and impact.

Choral Reading

In choral reading of poetry, students read aloud together in order to add interest and to aid with interpretation of poems. Just as with choral reading of other literature, the activity builds confidence, comprehension, and fluency. Select a poem to be performed, and read it aloud to the class, modeling fluency and appropriate expression. Demonstrate for students how to "mark my words," or how to annotate words or phrases that should be emphasized. Ask the class to "spot the difference," or determine how reading a line differently changes its meaning. Now, perform a second read, this time asking the class to join in at specific times such as the chorus or repeated phrases. Discuss with students: How does reading aloud add to our understanding of poems?

Blue Sky White Stars presents an excellent opportunity for elementary students to practice choral reading. Each set of facing pages contains a simple phrase that is written on one page and then repeated on the opposite page with a new image and extended meaning. One group of students can read the phrase aloud as the illustration from the first page is projected on the whiteboard. As the projected image shifts to the facing page, a different group of students can repeat the phrase with different inflection appropriate to the new illustration. For example, students might read "All American" with the emphasis on "American" as the baseball image is shown, but then shift to emphasizing "ALL" when the Black veteran appears. More information about choral reading can be found at <https://prhlink.com/readingrocketschoral>.

See, Think, Wonder

Teach students how to “deep dive” into a poem with the “see, think, wonder” strategy. In this thinking routine, students take a moment to reflect on words, images, white space, and anything else that catches their attention before attempting to make meaning of the entire poem. First, model the practice with an exemplar poem. For example, show students a large projected version of William Carlos Williams’s “The Red Wheelbarrow,” found in Lisa Rogers’s *16 Words*. Ask the class, “What do you see?” Students might answer, “Each stanza has three words then one word,” or “Long lines and short lines.” Others might notice the word “wheelbarrow” and how the long and short lines combine to form the shape of a wheelbarrow.

Next, ask the class, “What do you think about that?” Students might ask “Why did the poet repeat this stanza shape?” or “What depends on the wheelbarrow?” or “What does this mean?” Affirm student questions and explain that questions like these help us consider a poem’s big ideas. Finally, ask, “What does this make you wonder?” and “Why might the poet have written this poem?” Students can talk with a partner or answer directly to the large group. Answers might include, “I wonder if the wheelbarrow carries vegetables that people depend on for their supper,” or “I wonder if the wheelbarrow is really important on the farm?”

The see, think, wonder routine can also be used with images or artwork that accompany poems as a scaffold prior to analysis. The strategy provides a purpose for the reading. For example, in “Beaver” from *A Place to Start a Family*, students can study the beaver dam illustration, notice the beaver swimming with a log, and wonder if the beavers are working together to disguise their den. Then, when they read the poem, their observations and wonderings are explained or confirmed. In “Our Blended Family” from *A World Full of Poems* (p. 17), students might notice the sewing words (patchwork, stitched, threads), think that the portrait is like a quilt square, and wonder if the poet is saying families, like quilts, can be sewn together piece by piece. For more information on see, think, wonder, go to <https://prhlink.com/seethinkwonderharvard>.

What’s the Big Idea?

Kick-start a theme discussion of a complex poem by encouraging students to “vote with their feet.” In this activity, students are provided several possible themes or big ideas for a poem, all of which are possible interpretations. In *Blue Sky White Stars*, for example, big ideas might include civic pride, history, diversity, and natural beauty. In *16 Words*, big ideas could be nature, everyday life, and connections between poets and their poetry. Write these big ideas on chart paper and post them throughout the classroom.

Conduct an initial read-aloud of the poem and then provide time for students to read and annotate individually. Explain that students are looking for big ideas only, and that they will have the opportunity to discuss the details later. Now, ask students,

“What’s the big idea?” Explain there can be more than one. Students indicate their answers by moving to the poster closest to their thinking. If desired, allow students to pose their own big ideas on blank posters. Students who are unsure during the initial reads now have an opportunity to consider possible interpretations and themes without worrying about “right answers.”

Next, direct students to talk with their group, synthesizing their thoughts and determining evidence from the poem that supports their big idea. Select spokespeople at each poster to share on behalf of the group. Invite students to consider their classmates’ thinking and “vote with their feet.” They can choose to stay with the big idea they originally picked, or they can move to a different poster. Discuss that poems can have multiple motivations and interpretations, and that there is rarely a “right answer” when it comes to theme, but that poets provide hints throughout their poems that support their meaning. Explain that when we discuss poetry in class, we continue to go back to the poem’s words to determine its big idea(s).

Poetry in Place

Each of the books in this set contains poetry inspired by specific places, whether it be a town, a grandparent’s house, the mountains, a nest, or a farm. Encourage students to find poetry in place, to be inspired by a place significant in their lives. Invite students to select a place poem with a format they would like to emulate, and challenge them to write a similar poem about their own special place. For instance, students might select “If Once You Have Slept on an Island” from *A World Full of Poems* (p. 80), and substitute the title and first line with “If once you have gone to mi abuelo’s.” The rest of the poem can be modeled on each line of the published piece, or students might use an original format. Place poems provide an opportunity for community building as students learn about their classmates and their classmates’ worlds.

Companion Texts

In *A Place to Start a Family*, poetry helps young readers build knowledge about science and nature. After reading one of the animal poems, upper elementary students will be better equipped to read the corresponding nonfiction sections at the end of the book and to write about the animal as well. Ask students to choose an animal from the book, reread its poem, and then write about it in a short, nonfiction paragraph. Conversely, students might read the prose sections at the end of the book and write their own poem based on what they learn. Another companion text idea is for students to choose an animal not discussed in *A Place to Start a Family*, conduct research, and write a poem using one of the book’s formats. For instance, students might choose to write about a groundhog using the “you” format from “Yellow Garden Spider.” Poems in *Stitchin’ and Pullin’: A Gee’s Bend Quilt* can be used as companion texts for complex nonfiction reading on history, equity, and culture. Poems such as “By and By,” “Pinky,” and “The Right to Vote” help open the door to further reading and discussion about serious topics.

My Favorite Poem Project

The My Favorite Poem project is a digital archive of Americans talking about and reciting their favorite poetry. Developed to publicize the many types of people who read poetry and the many forms poetry takes, the project is an excellent activity for upper elementary students. Recite a favorite poem to the class and explain your reasons for selecting it. Discuss how readers connect to poetry due to their interests, skills, dreams, history, and culture. Next, introduce students to the My Favorite Poem project by sharing some of the website videos, in which children, youth, and adults explain their connections to a chosen poem. For example, one eleven-year-old recites “Casey at the Bat” and explains that “baseball is my life.”

Invite students to look for their own favorite poems over the course of the poetry unit. Poems can come from those studied in class or those students find on their own. Encourage students to ask family and friends about their favorite poems. Once students have selected poems, ask them to create a short video reading or reciting the poem and explaining why it is their favorite. Create a class website or digital bulletin board where the videos can be accessed by students, families, and community members. Digital tools that work well for this project include Google Sites, Flip, Padlet, and Adobe Spark. As an extension, invite other classes, faculty, family, and community members to contribute to the project. For more information and sample videos of the My Favorite Poem Project, see <https://prhlink.com/favoritepoem>.

■ RESOURCES

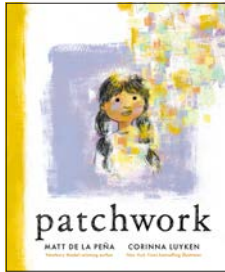
The following resources provide more information and ideas for teaching with poetry:

- “Five Reasons Why We Need Poetry in Schools” by Edutopia:
<https://prhlink.com/edutopiapoetry>
- “10 Ways to Use Poetry in Your Classroom” by Reading Rockets:
<https://prhlink.com/readingrockets10ways>
- “Kids’ Poems: How to Introduce Poetry to Elementary School Children” by Scholastic:
<https://prhlink.com/scholasticelempoetry>

■ ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS GUIDE

Laura Reis Mayer is an education coach and consultant from Asheville, NC. Laura develops content and leads professional learning for national education organizations. A twice-renewed National Board Certified Teacher, she taught middle, high school, and college English, speech, drama, and literacy. She has written more than thirty teacher guides for multiple publishers.

■ MORE POETRY TITLES



PATCHWORK

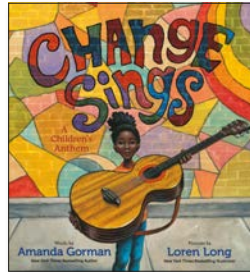
MATT DE LA PEÑA

Illustrated by
CORINNA LUYKEN

978-1-98-481396-1

Hardcover
G.P. Putnam's Sons Books
for Young Readers
48 pages | \$18.99 | Lexile: AD690L

Also available:
E-BOOK, AUDIO DOWNLOAD



CHANGE SINGS

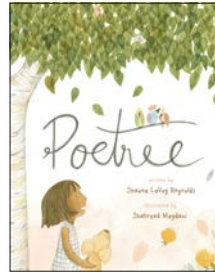
AMANDA GORMAN

Illustrated by
LOREN LONG

978-0-59-320322-4

Hardcover
Viking Books for Young Readers
32 pages | \$18.99 | Lexile: AD470L

Also available:
E-BOOK, AUDIO DOWNLOAD



POETREE

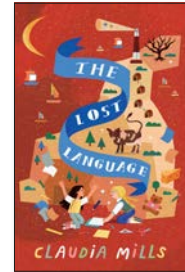
SHAUNA LAVOY REYNOLDS

Illustrated by
SHAHRZAD MAYDANI

978-0-39-953912-1

Hardcover | Dial Books
32 pages | \$17.99 | Lexile: 580L

Also available: E-BOOK

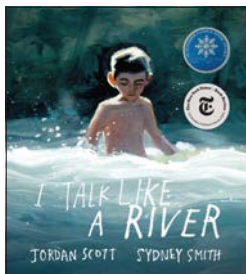


THE LOST LANGUAGE

CLAUDIA MILLS

978-0-82-345250-7
Paperback
Margaret Ferguson Books
304 pages | \$8.99

Also available: E-BOOK



I TALK LIKE A RIVER

JORDAN SCOTT

Illustrated by
SYDNEY SMITH

978-0-82-344559-2

Hardcover | Neal Porter Books
40 pages | \$18.99

Also available: E-BOOK



REMEMBER

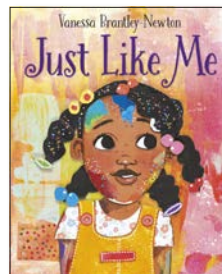
JOY HARJO

Illustrated by
MICHAELA GOADE

978-0-59-348484-5

Hardcover | Random House Studio
40 pages | \$18.99 | Lexile: AD480L

Also available:
E-BOOK, AUDIO DOWNLOAD



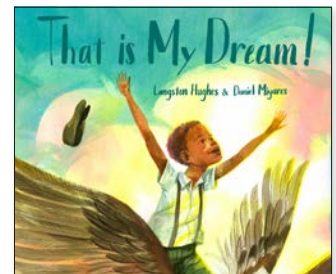
JUST LIKE ME

VANESSA
BRANTLEY-NEWTON

978-0-52-558209-0

Hardcover
Knopf Books for Young Readers
32 pages | \$17.99

Also available:
E-BOOK, AUDIO DOWNLOAD



THAT IS MY DREAM!

LANGSTON HUGHES

Illustrated by DANIEL MIYARES

978-0-39-955017-1

Hardcover | Anne Schwartz Books
32 pages | \$18.99 | Lexile: 250L

Also available: E-BOOK

Visit our website, [PenguinRandomHouseEducation.com](https://www.penguinrandomhouseeducation.com)

to browse more poetry collections.

Penguin
Random
House

Education

Penguin Random House Education
1745 Broadway, New York, NY 10019
[penguinrandomhouseeducation.com](https://www.penguinrandomhouseeducation.com)

Queries: k12education@penguinrandomhouse.com