As a school library media specialist you hold the key to opening up new avenues of poetry readership, be it on the elementary, middle, or high school level. Supporting poetry activities improves literacy development and language skills. It provides practice in word recognition and pronunciation, and gives students the opportunity to make connections with themselves and others.

**VALUE OF POETRY IN THE SCHOOL’S CURRICULUM**

Poetry is a type of literature in which the sounds and meanings of words are combined to create ideas. Poetry is one of the first types of literature children experience in formats such as nursery rhymes, lullabies, riddles, or free verse. Poetry might contain patterns, rhyming, or nonsensical words. Poems often are brief and concise. Poetry can be read silently, but is meant to be read out loud. Even the most reluctant readers can gain confidence in their ability to read when they discover the world of poetry.

Involving students in poetry activities offers many rich language experiences. Additionally, the media specialist can provide the classroom teacher with poetry resources, such as picture and young adult books, ideas to integrate poetry in the classroom, poetry websites, and information about popular children’s poets.

**BUILDING YOUR POETRY COLLECTION**

When you begin a library media center poetry program, you should have several resources to select from:

- Poetry books on your shelves, readily accessible to students
- Anthology books which contain a variety of poems and information about poets
- Public library poetry books that you can share with your classes
- A poetry notebook organized into sections in which you store poetry clipped from newspapers, magazines, or printed from the Internet
- A binder that you keep on a counter or table, with poetry written by students for others to read
- A folder of your personal collection of poems you enjoyed during your childhood, as a young adult, and up to the present time
- College literature books that contain poetry
- A notebook with poems about the seasons and holidays

**PRESENTING POETRY IN THE LIBRARY MEDIA CENTER**

Be ready to share a poem with the students at the beginning of each library session. Select poetry that is brief, makes sense, and would appeal to the age level of your group. Do not have students analyze the poem; just simply let them sit back and enjoy the selection. Read poems that keep students interested in poetry that has a strong rhythm or beat, humorous verse, descriptive words, phrases, images, or colorful characters, or poems with a strong emotional appeal. Hearing a poem during each library visit may convince students that poetry is enjoyable, understandable, and something they can relate to. Introduce the poem by giving the title as well as the poet’s name. You might make an introductory comment about the topic or theme of the poem, or provide information about the poet before you read the poem.
POETRY IS MEANT TO BE READ OUT LOUD
A poem will either live or die, depending on how you present it to your students. Some of the following tips will enhance your poetry sessions:
- Practice reading the poem several times out loud before you read it to students.
- Find out the meaning and pronunciation of any unfamiliar words.
- Pause when you see punctuation marks like commas, periods, dashes, colons, and semi-colons.
- Read slower than you normally do.
- Speak clearly so students can hear each word.
- Keep your tone of voice relaxed and normal.

STRATEGIES TO INVOLVE THE CLASS
Project the poem on a screen or give each student a handout. Recite the poem together (choral reading).
1. Students say a line that is repeated or part of the chorus.
2. Two groups of students, like boys and girls, say alternating lines.
3. Students read the poem out loud by themselves.
4. Several groups read the poem, with one group starting ahead of the other. When the first group reaches a certain point, the second group begins.
5. Students sing the poem to a song that is popular. The poem should have a similar beat as the song.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE POETRY READING IN THE MEDIA CENTER
- Be sure to connect your poetry with the students' age level, interests, concerns, and background experiences.
- Use a prop that relates to the poem.
- Have a classroom teacher read the poem on tape; let students guess who the teacher is.
- Provide background music as you read the poem.
- Invite guest speakers such as the principal, guidance counselor, nurse, or a staff member.
- Reveal how you feel about the poem and how it relates to you. Then let the students reveal their feelings about the poem.
- Select students who want to share a poem. Students should recite the poems to you ahead of time.
- Make a connection to another poem or song that is similar to the poem you read. Read the second poem or play the song for the group of students.
- Invite a local poet or English college professor to share poetry.

Poetry is one of the first types of literature children experience in formats such as nursery rhymes, lullabies, riddles, or free verse.
Poems can describe an experience, situation, or event in fewer words than any other type of literature.

POETRY THAT CHILDREN CAN WRITE
The media specialist and classroom teacher can collaborate by providing students ways to create and develop poetry writing. If the teacher, for example, requires students to keep entries in a writing journal, students can write a short poem in the media center on a monthly basis, then rewrite the poem in their class journal. The media specialist can review some of the more common forms of traditional verse before students write their poems. Several of the following poetic formulas exist that are ideally suited for students in any grade level:

1. **Couplet**: 2 lines that rhyme
2. **Quatrain**: 4 lines with line 2 and 4 rhyming
3. **Triplet**: 3 lines that end in the same rhyming sound
4. **Cinquain**: unrhymed 5-line poem containing 2-4-6-8-2 syllables
5. **Haiku**: 3 lines containing 5-7-5 syllables
6. **Tanka**: 5 lines containing 3-5-7-5-7 syllables
7. **Limerick**: 5 lines with line 1, 2, and 5 rhyming and line 3 and 4 rhyming
8. **Acrostic**: Select a topic, write letters vertically, then write characteristics of the topic starting with each letter of the word.

ACTIVITIES TO PROMOTE POETRY IN THE SCHOOL
The school media specialist can make a big difference in bringing about poetry awareness on a schoolwide basis. The following suggestions may be used on conducting poetry activities in the school:

- Ask the principal if one of the students’ poems can be read when announcements are made. Pick the same time each week, like Friday afternoon. The media specialist will select the poem to be read and help the student practice the poem.
- Have students print or write a seasonal or holiday poem and mount the poems on poster board. Students can decorate around the poems using markers, crayons, or colored pencils. Post these outside the classrooms or in the hallways, lunchroom, or media center. An ideal time to display the students’ poetry is during Open House night or teacher/parent conference day.
- Celebrate National Poetry Month every April:
  1. Select thirty short poems to be read each school day on the PA system by a student or guest reader during morning announcements.
  2. Students compose or copy a poem on a postcard. Mail these out to a local nursing home to be distributed to residents.
  3. Each class composes a poem together to give to their classroom or homeroom teacher, or some students may want to write poems in a group or individually.
  4. Provide a time capsule for students so they can submit a poem they wrote or one of their favorite poems. Store the time capsule in the media center. Open it up the following April and share it with students the next school year.

BENEFITS OF POETRY
Poetry is powerful and an excellent tool to improve literacy and oral language skills. Engaging students in poetry has so many benefits:

1. **Expands vocabulary development which includes figurative language usage.**
2. **Enhances critical thinking skills.** In 2002, a study conducted by the California Poets in Schools found that poetry increases students’ critical analysis skills.
3. **Provides practice in oral language development and increases listening skills.** (Research has shown that students with good oral language skills usually have higher achievement levels in reading and writing.)
4. **Reinforces rhythms, beats, patterns, and sounds.**
5. **Includes language that is rich in imagery and encourages creativity.**
6. **Reaches across all areas of the curriculum.**
7. **Enables students to relate to their own experiences and make connections with others.**
8. **Contributes to our literary heritage.**
9. **Provides emotional benefits to the reader.**
10. **Facilitates reading.** Poems can describe an experience, situation, or event in fewer words than any other type of literature.

In today’s literary world, poetry is becoming a powerful genre in which students are able to immerse themselves in poetic verse. The library media specialist plays an integral role in promoting poetry in the school’s curriculum. Not only does teaching poetry support the core standards of literacy, but it offers students the chance to engage in listening to, participating in, and writing poetry. As you develop your poetry collection and work on poetic activities that can be used in your media center and school, keep in mind all the benefits your students will derive from this rich language.

**Works Cited**


Julie Harris is the librarian at Raceland-Worthington High School in Raceland, Kentucky. She may be reached at harris.julie@raceland.kyschools.us.
Copyright of Library Media Connection is the property of ABC-Clio - Library Media Connection and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.