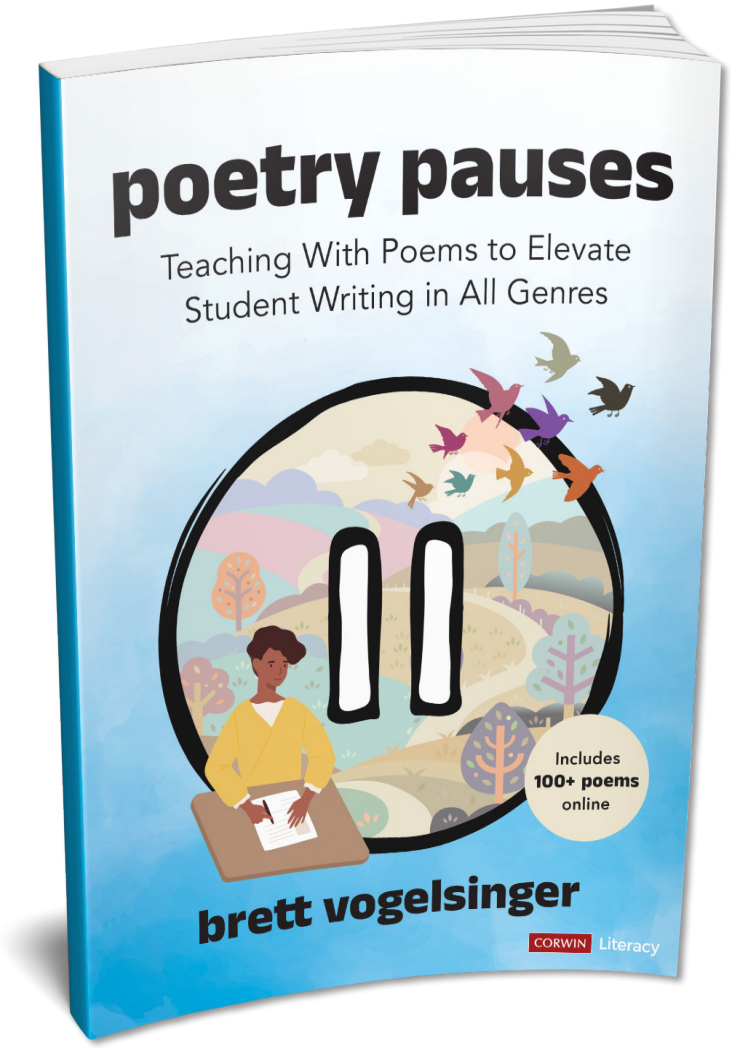

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Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from Poetry Pauses.

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INTRODUCTION

Purposeful Poetry Pauses

This is not a book about writing poems but a book to help students grow as practiced and accomplished writers, first in little poetic steps, and afterward in longer pieces in any genre.

When I announce to my classes of ninth graders each September that we are going to begin every class period with a poem, I am usually greeted with wide eyes and a few reluctant groans. The word *poetry*, for students and adults alike, often conjures past experiences that were uncomfortable, unpleasant, or uninviting.

On one hand, we have students, and many teachers, who have been cornered by a Longfellow poem and forced to dissect it frog-style, pulling out each organ of metaphor, each ligament of allusion, pinning them all with labels. The smell of formaldehyde practically filled the room, and students were left with the impression that poems are complicated, dead things designed by the poet to puzzle readers. These are the students with too much practice in "groan-filled packets of figurative language overkill" (Bernabei & Van Prooyen, 2020, p. xii).

On the other hand, some students are asked to bare their soul in a poem, to tap into their inner Sylvia Plath within a forty-five-minute class period, sharing their depth and vulnerability with a randomly assigned partner for feedback. They perceive poetry as threatening in an entirely different way. These students believe that poetry requires some self-revelation that feels deeply uncomfortable in the classroom and may cling to the damaging myth that writing poetry is a spiritual gift that the universe bestows upon some and not others. If a student is not yet comfortable being as candid or exposed as Rachel Wiley or

Rudy Francisco in their beautiful spoken word pieces, can they still be a poet?

To be clear, I do not oppose teaching poetry explication or writing poetry from our deepest personal experiences. I want my students to be able to wrangle with nineteenth-century poems that are not completely understandable on a first read, AND I want students to grow in their ability to express their deepest personal thoughts and feelings in a genre that invites the exploration of inner space. Too often though, when teachers read and write poems in a single, annual unit, we snowball so much into so little time that we intimidate students into disliking poetry. Sharing a Poem of the Day across an entire school year has opened up a variety of forms, voices, cultural perspectives, subgenres, and mentor texts that make poetry integral in my classroom.

Looking back as I begin my twentieth year of teaching English, my biggest regret is that I did not find a way to weave poetry more frequently into my practice during my early years. After a decade of doing this daily, it is hard to imagine any other way. But even if daily poetry exposure is not possible within the structure of the English curriculum where you teach, learning to slip and weave it into the fabric of our instruction through planned, regular poetry pauses can help our writers work with language in fresh, exciting ways that cultivate precision and patience as they craft their words.

POETRY PAUSES DEFINED

What is a poetry pause? Nothing complicated.

It is part of a class period, ranging from three minutes to an entire class period, when we learn in the presence of a poem. Sometimes it involves just giving ear to a beautiful combination of words and noticing something about how those words work. But often it is more. It likely involves some friendly discussion of a poem, some teasing out of its thinking, and a little bit of time writing alongside the poem in our writer's notebook, perhaps imitating one of the writer's craft moves. Many days it stirs some awakening for me, as my students notice facets of the poem that I overlooked. Poetry pauses allow for the frequent, gradual acquisition of skills that students can apply to their longer, more traditional academic writing.

Anyone can lead students to more skilled and precise writing with poetry pauses. I have neither an MFA nor a poetry chapbook to my name. I have always loved words, but that is a trait common among

English teachers. To invite poetry into your practice more often does not require you to be a reader or writer of poetry in your free time (though it may have that side effect), nor must you necessarily consider yourself a creative person. You do not need to be skilled in the surgical art of scansion or explication, though if you are, you can certainly draw upon that background. What it does require is setting aside your own preconceptions about poetry as an esoteric genre, perhaps borne of the same sorts of experiences as a student that I describe in the opening paragraphs of this book.

If we all have favorite songs that sing in our hearts and replay in our minds long after we listen to them with lyrics that stir us and echo through our daily experiences, then we are already poetry lovers, and primed to invite that same kind of heady delight into our classrooms. We simply need press pause now and then to give ourselves the room to do it.

Aside from the two common approaches to poetry described above, there is a third, valuable purpose for working with poems: to invite our students into writing. Interrupting our writing process with poetry pauses to read, explore, and write in our writer's notebooks can help students hone their own craft in all genres. We do not even need to expect that our students write particularly excellent poems to reap these rewards. And when we invite them to write in this genre more often, even if it cannot be daily exposure, their writing work more often crosses the line into excellence.

Ultimately, the writing process, we now acknowledge, is not quite as lockstep and linear as it was when my teachers first introduced it to me as a student in the early 1990s. Most writers do some revision while drafting. We might pause to reevaluate an outline as we revise. We brainstorm multiple ways to express or punctuate a thought as we edit. Neither are the modes of writing quite as clear-cut as we once taught them. Many excellent arguments include a thread of narrative, and an informative piece may include an infographic or other visual component at its core.

Writing requires nimbleness and pausing to write poetry or at least think poetically during assignments for academic classes can help students open new possibilities for their work and help that work to feel a bit more like play. In a 2018 commentary piece in *The Atlantic* called "Poetry Is Everywhere," Megan Garber points out that part of the resurgence of poetry comes from its uncanny ability to blur genre lines, like the "poetry meeting documentary" format of the PBS series *Poetry in America* or Rupi Kaur's enormously popular blend of artwork

and short verse on Instagram. Garber writes, "Poetry can't die any more than air or water can meet such an end, because poetry in the more expansive sense is not 'poetry' in the narrow. Poetry is permeative; it is currency; and it is, thankfully, too big to die" (para. 5). This big, permeative nature allows teachers to channel its energy into every type of student writing.

Annesley Anderson, a tutor in a college writing center who works with students across all disciplines, published an article about how helpful short, creative prompts can be to struggling writers. Brief creative writing can become "a tool to disrupt students' preconceived ideas about the writing process and boost writerly agency" (Anderson, 2020, para. 1). Poems provide the kind of healthy disruption a writer may need to filter out a main point from a flood of ideas or sharpen the language around a provocative claim. By shifting the angle from which we approach a writing task, we can help make success more attainable.

Creative pauses as catalysts for thought are not unique to the English classroom. Scientists value them, too. In a column titled "Writing Takes Work," from the journal *Nature*, British geomorphologist Eli Lazarus (2017) notes that "even technical writing is a creative process" and "everyone can benefit from a good writers' workshop" when navigating "the warrens of the writing process" (p. 291). In *Entangled Life*, his marvelously poetic book about fungi, Merlin Sheldrake (2020) affirms that "imagination forms part of the everyday business of inquiry . . . asking questions about a world that was never made to be catalogued and systematized" (p. 20). Expert in scientific communication Dr. Sam Illingworth (2022) suggests that scientific communication fails to reach some audiences because it alienates them up as "non-experts" and that poetry can "break down these barriers," becoming "a conduit between the science and a wider audience" (paras. 7–8). The ability to shift to an imaginative, creative perspective and back again, valued among top scientists, can be nurtured by English teachers who, on a regular basis, pause for a poem.

To understand the potential that poetry has to help our students grow as writers, we will start to examine how infusing poems into our lessons more often can help students learn to think with poetry, feel more comfortable reading and discussing a poem, and notice the craft choices that make writing shine. Then in each subsequent chapter, we will look at how poetry pauses can be helpful to student writers at each stage of the writing process and in various modes of writing.

Along the way, I will share lots of favorite poems and pauses, some longer workshop lessons that help students tap into their creative energy and propel their writing, and some potential pitfalls to avoid.

WHY POETRY?

Daily poetry in the classroom is not a new or revolutionary idea. I first discovered it as an undergraduate student hearing about Billy Collins's poet laureate project, *Poetry 180: A Poem a Day for American High Schools*. The project's concept was simple: read a poem daily with students to increase their exposure to the variety, the linguistic acrobatics, the beauty of poetry, and then do not kill it with commentary and analysis. Nancie Atwell says, "If ever I had to choose just one genre to teach in a middle school English program, it would be poetry. The lessons it teaches kids about good writing, about critical reading, about the kind of adults they wish to become and the kind of world they hope to inhabit, extend the best invitation I can imagine to grow up healthy and whole" (Atwell et al., 2013, n.p.). I am sure this idea was not new in the turn of the twenty-first century, and if I give Billy Collins or Nancie Atwell credit for creating the concept, I am certain a retired teacher from the 1970s will send me an e-mail about how they followed this same routine decades ago.

Teachers know that a simple routine can anchor a class. A close friend and math teacher uses a quote projected on the screen to discuss each day and build community before diving into algebra. Another friend uses a word of the day routine to build vocabulary. These simple brushstrokes can become a teacher's signature on a course, and Poem of the Day has become mine.

Starting this routine, I discovered there was something elemental about poetry. I discovered that nearly everything else I needed to impart about writing well could be tucked into a succinct lesson efficiently and intensely with the help of a poem. And it all started by just welcoming more of this genre into our space, gaining comfort with reading it, listening to it, watching it performed, and writing it.

At present, poetry is experiencing a renaissance and reinvention as poems go viral on Facebook and "Instapoets" blend imagery and brief verse in perfect shareable squares. Patrick Stewart shared Shakespeare sonnet read-alouds with the world during the COVID-19 pandemic and Brandon Leake stole America's heart as the first spoken-word poet to rise to fame on *America's Got Talent*; the *Ours Poetica* series on YouTube brings us famous people's favorite poetry while Terrence

Hayes showed up in an advertisement for Dove and Amanda Gorman made the cover of *Vogue*. There is, as poet Craig Morgan Teicher puts it, "a robust culture of sharing poetry online and young people have taken control of how they consume literature" (as cited in Lund, 2021, para. 15). It makes sense for our classrooms to embrace poetry right now. The world beyond our classrooms has already opened its arms.

What makes poetry so valuable in helping us to teach writers? A few things.

1. **Poems are (often) short.** This means they can demonstrate a key writing skill we want students to apply more efficiently than longer genres. No one feels like they have extra time lying around to try a new strategy, but employing poetry pauses asks for only a few precious minutes of class time with the promise of exponential returns in our students' writing.
2. **Poems are rich.** This means each word counts for more. As Rita Dove puts it, "poetry is language at its most distilled and powerful." Reading and writing poems regularly helps our students tune in to the nuance of individual words. Distilled, powerful language strengthens any piece of writing, not just poetry.
3. **Poems connect to our other reading.** We can often find in poems thematic echoes of the longer works we study in class. This gives us the chance to look at how more than one text handles a topic and perceive varied approaches as we enter "a vast conversation spanning thousands of years" (Teicher, quoted in Lund, 2021, para. 17). It also helps us dovetail reading, writing, speaking, and listening standards in our curriculum.
4. **Poems contain patterns.** Like music, poems rely on rhythm, repetition, and sound to convey ideas. Writing in all sorts of genres is described as "poetic" when a reviewer wants to commend the sound and texture of a writer's work. Working with patterns can help students quickly improve their writing with sound effects to heighten a reader's attention and underscore main ideas and turning points in their work.
5. **Poems engage our neurology in exciting ways.** Researchers now know that after reading poems with metaphors that require particularly bold leaps of the imagination, high school students demonstrate improved fluency and flexibility, important measures of creativity (Osowiecka & Kolanczyk, 2018). We know that poetry can elicit chills and goosebumps, and when these are measured via neuroimaging, they touch our brain's reward centers in ways

that are akin to, but different from, listening to music. Even test subjects unaccustomed to reading poetry experienced these neurological outcomes (Wassiliwizky et al., 2017).

6. **Poems invite diverse voices.** Because of poems' brevity, reading poetry frequently and using poems as mentors make it easy to introduce a wide array of cultures from all around the world over the course of an academic term. For many of my students, Poem of the Day marks their first time reading a piece of literature from South America, Africa, or North America's First Peoples. It embeds work that has been published days or weeks ago. This improves our students' opportunities to learn from some writers who have lived experiences different from their own.

For seven years, I have been writing and publishing brief pieces about the value that frequent work with poetry adds to an English class. In 2016, I started an annual blogging project for National Poetry Month in the United States called *Go Poems* and invited teachers from throughout North America to join me. The project highlights how short poetry pauses can provide portals to deeper thinking and writing with secondary students from any grade level. Curating posts from colleagues gave me the opportunity to learn what poetry pauses can look like in schools in Newark (NJ) and Edmond (OK), Dallas and Ontario, in urban schools, rural schools, and in each region of the continent with students from diverse backgrounds. It has been heartening to notice the common threads listed earlier and the ease and enthusiasm with which teachers are introducing this simple practice into their classrooms.

Scan this QR code to check out my Go Poems project that ran from 2016–2022.

We are all busy, working through overstuffed curriculum, demanding standards, and inflexible schedules for standardized tests which have, in some cases, removed poetry from the eligible content. But when something offers us an influence that radiates through *everything* students write, not just an impactful lesson for an assignment or a particular genre, it is worth the relatively narrow investment of time.

Try opening little nooks of space for poetry, daily if possible. For the first week or two share a different poem each day. Choose poems so short that you can read them or listen to them out loud twice in five minutes. Many potent poems are so short that two readings take less time than five minutes! I am thrilled to share and exemplify the impact that pausing for poems has had on my classroom and my student writers, and I hope you will find many ideas to apply within these pages.

GETTING STARTED WITH POETRY PAUSES

Typically, my first Poem of the Day each year is "Invitation," the opening poem from Shel Silverstein's *Where the Sidewalk Ends* (1974). I choose this poem for a few reasons. Both my ninth-grade students and I have some positive childhood interactions with Silverstein's poetry. This memorable book reminds us that poems can be whimsical and fun, dark-but-light all at once, and that poetry books can be page-turners. I share with my students that I do not remember this particular poem from childhood, but approaching it as an older reader, I notice some things that I would never have found interesting in third grade when I first encountered this book.

After the first read-aloud and before our second reading, I invite students to notice anything that jumps out at them as an older reader in ninth grade that they think they would have overlooked as a younger reader. What do they see now that they could not really "see" before? Since it is the first day, some classes start slowly. But if needed, I start to ask some follow-up questions like "What words are most interesting here? Do you notice any punctuation you would not have noticed as a younger reader? What does this line about 'magic bean buyers' or this one about 'flax-golden tales to spin' refer to?" Noticing these allusions to Jack and the Beanstalk and Rumpelstiltskin in the poem opens their eyes to what they may have missed at a younger age, even though we do not use the word *allusion* in this opening lesson.

Within the first several weeks, I have students wondering about the line in Mary Oliver's "At Blackwater Pond" that says water "tastes/ like stone, leaves, fire." We discuss, "Which of those words is most interesting and why?" We get talking about our childhood reactions to thunder after reading Jean Toomer's "Storm Ending," which begins with the lines "Thunder blossoms gorgeously above our heads/ Great, hollow, bell-like flowers." We talk about how poets find the magical in the mundane in the poem "What the Window Washers Did" by Margaret Hasse and pick out words that make the act of washing a window sound like an act of magic in that poem.

The early part of the year is about setting the tone and learning to think with poetry. There is no secret recipe for what poems to share or what to tease out of them.

The critical skill to develop early in the year is comfort and intrigue with what poems have to say and how they say it. Carol Jago (2019)

describes the necessary balance we bring to poetry beautifully in *The Book in Question*:

> Too much teaching and students are intimidated; too little and they are lost. I want students to hold a poem in their hands the way they [hold a] precious object, to feel a poem's beauty before worrying about what it means. I don't want them putting gold frames around poems with the label "Great Art" but rather to see for themselves by looking closely, carefully, lovingly at what is there to behold. (p. 83)

When students develop the skill of seeing poems for themselves and approaching poetry in the manner Jago describes, they are not just developing as readers but as writers, too. I might even extend Jago's metaphor. Student writers can learn to handle poems like beautiful objects made of clay that have not yet been in the kiln, that are published, but not fixed, still malleable in their hands to play with and learn from in their notebooks by pinching and reshaping and reimagining the poems with their own artistic touches.

Now, a caveat: my students right now are the oldest students in their Grades 7–9 building. They have had some exposure to poetry earlier in their academic lives in this school and have kept writer's notebooks before. In general, a reading and writing workshop format is comfortable to them. They come to class with a measure of confidence, even though their experience with reading and writing poetry will be much deeper and vaster by June. So if these examples sound a little pie-in-the-sky for your students as you first meet them, alter the ideas in this book in a way that works for you, and that will open room for comfortable poetry writing later in the year.

You might try quick visualization exercises: "Close your eyes while I read this poem. What images stand out to you after hearing it?" Then the following day, "After our second reading of this poem, turn it into a two-minute sketch in your writer's notebook. Talk about your sketching decisions with a partner. What details did you decide to include?" In a 1-to-1 environment, use a quick, collaborative mood board on Pear Deck for each day of that first week, asking, "How does this poem leave you feeling?" Our goal at the start of the year is to help students hold the clay in their hands and get comfortable with it so that they can later mold it into something of their own.

When it feels right, or when an inquisitive student raises a hand to ask a question, start inviting students to share more and more of what they notice. Pause and ask yourself this, too (what do *you* notice?), and tune in to how much more you are able to notice over the course of just a short two-week period. Likely, when visiting an art museum, you do not notice

much in the first few paintings. Your mind is still racing from the world outside. The silence inside the museum has not yet seized you. But a gallery or two later, your eyes are opening, and the details become more inviting and intriguing. The same thing happens with poems.

Reading and writing poetry regularly as a class strips away some of our teacher fears. The habit allows us to discover poets we were not taught in high school or college, living poets from around the world whose playfulness and inventiveness with language is totally different than anything we have read before. It introduces us to ideas and perspectives well outside the field of canonical English literature: works in translation, marginalized voices. Poetry pushes us as teachers, and it beckons us to write more, too.

The chart below outlines some noble goals that we might seek to achieve within the first six weeks of school to help us deploy the power of poetry in our writing process later in the year. These goals help us establish poetry as a foundation for our thinking in class rather than as a decoration. The methods and timing you choose to meet these goals may vary depending on your students' level of enthusiasm for learning and apprehension about poetry. The chart is not meant to be in any way prescriptive, because the best work with poetry will always be the product of the community and curiosity you build with the students before you.

Week	Goal	Possible Methods	Possible Questions and Prompts
1-2	Getting comfortable listening to poetry	1. Listening to poems 2. Watching videos of spoken-word poems 3. Talking about broad impressions of poems 4. Noticing what fascinates or affects us in poems	What do you like about this poem? What bugs you about it? What is the most interesting line here? What would you ask the writer of this poem? How does this poem leave you feeling?
3-4	Noticing details in poems	1. Listening for sound effects in poems 2. Noticing delivery style in spoken-word poems 3. Talking about our taste in poems 4. Noticing shifts and changes in poems	What word combinations sound cool together in this poem? What does the poet do in performing this poem to add power? What is your favorite word or phrase in this poem? How does this poem move or change from the beginning to the end of it?

Week	Goal	Possible Methods	Possible Questions and Prompts
5	Noticing the poet's choices in a poem	**1.** Listening for artful word choice **2.** Noticing punctuation, line breaks, stanzas, pauses **3.** Talking about the power of words **4.** Noticing how our understanding changes with a second reading	What is special about this word or phrase in the poem? What does it make you think about? What is the most important pause or break in this poem? Which line is still ringing in your head when the poem ends? What do you notice on a second reading that you missed the first time? What questions does that provoke?
6	Using poems as mentors for our own expression	**1.** Listening for things you would like to learn to do as a writer **2.** Noticing patterns we can try to replicate **3.** Talking about specific devices and diction the writer is using and possible reasons for those devices **4.** Noticing what the writer is choosing NOT to do, say, or explain	Which parts of this poem make you jealous as a writer: "I want to write like that!" What is happening here in the poem? Let's try a line (or stanza) like that in our notebooks. Why is this metaphor fitting for this topic? What are the connotations of this word? Why did the writer choose to do X, not Y? What makes this choice the best possible for this poem?

For poetry to be useful to students as writers of a wide array of genres, it must be approachable to them as readers. They must develop an ear for it, an eye for it, and a comfort with it. Investing a little time in lots of poetic exposure early in the year allows students to make lots of their own poetry in fairly little time later in the year—poetry that contributes to the successful writing process of all different genres, modes, and forms.

Like any teacher, I cannot say that every lesson or unit successfully tugs at the wonder of every student's heart. But I can say with confidence by the end of the year, I have won over even the naysayers and eye-rollers of September with Poem of the Day. Every student leaves with some poems that are lasting, bonded memories. Students look forward to this signature element, this few-minutes-long-and-sometimes-longer routine that propels us into each day's lesson and allows us to welcome viewpoints from across the continents and the

centuries into our little space to learn together. The small, gemlike quality of poems makes this possible. The conversations they spark, the "tune-ups" of our noticing skills, and the introductions to longer lessons these poems provide are invaluable.

Do not let the perception that "my students just are not into poetry" stop you from trying a more frequent integration of the genre. Remember that they have likely been conditioned through tightly controlled, once-a-year experiences to feel this way. When we have narrow exposure to something, it is hard to fall in love with it. So if you struggle with this perception, or a class who is bold about vocalizing their disdain for the genre, assure them that what you are doing is different than their past experiences with poems. The poems will be varied, and so will the purposes for reading them.

Increasing exposure to poetry helps students feel more comfortable and fluent in all sorts of writing. Crafting a poem no longer scares them and is no longer synonymous with having to drum up a Seussian rhythm and rhyme, as they may have grown accustomed to doing in elementary school. Taking time to think through poetry helps us to see poetry as a fertile garden for thinking, and soon those writer's notebook poems we tinker with are helping us craft better essays, reviews, and research papers. As we wander through the lines, we wonder in our minds. This habit of mind not only cultivates close and insightful reading but also facilitates the nimble, poetic writing that can help us quickly practice and apply key writing skills that transfer to any genre.

How to Find Poems

My most frequently asked question when I start to share my enthusiasm for poetry in teacher workshops is "How? How do you find all the poems you share with your students?" So often in teaching we know that things are harder than they look. This is not the case with finding excellent, approachable poems. It is *easier* than it looks. Here are my suggestions:

1. **Sign up for daily poetry e-mails.** The *Writer's Almanac*, Poets.org, and *The Slowdown* podcast e-mails have provided me with the bulk of my favorite poems for class, in a daily, manageable drip.
2. **Follow #TeachLivingPoets on Twitter.** A devoted group of teachers will introduce you to an ever-expanding online library from living poets with an emphasis on social justice. Find new voices, professional connections, and chats about contemporary poems.

3. **Explore *Poetry 180*.** Though it is almost 20 years old, this compendium is still available for free on the Library of Congress website and provides a poem a day for the whole school year. Two poetry anthologies have been published under the Poetry 180 moniker as well, so if you need a cheat sheet, a few are waiting for you.

4. **Browse the stacks.** Visit your local bookstore or library and pull books from the poetry section. Flip through and find the poets who are accessible on the first reading and get even better on the second reading.

5. **Get involved in National Poetry Month projects.** The Geraldine Dodge Poetry Foundation, NCTE, and Poetry Foundation each have their own!

6. **Borrow and buy collections of children's poetry.** If you have young children in your family, read them aloud to them. If not, read them to yourself. These poems have the same beauty as poems written for an older audience and will give you the warm-up you need to come home to this genre. Get to know the work of Irene Latham and Charles Waters, Amy Ludwig VanDerwater, Georgia Heard, Lee Bennet Hopkins, Janet Wong, and Anna Grossnickle Hines.

7. **Visit this book's companion website.** It transforms all written lists from the print edition into link libraries to help you easily find poems listed in this book that are published online.

HOW TO CHOOSE POEMS

When choosing which poems to incorporate in my Poem of the Day routine, I try to keep a few things in mind. I am careful to diversify the voices from what my students come across in their standard curriculum. It is also an important opportunity to demonstrate how hospitable poetry can be, so I want poems that are at least somewhat accessible on a first reading. Like great movies, the best poems to choose will give me something else to notice on subsequent readings.

I try to choose poems that will not perpetuate the myth that poetry is esoteric, dark, and subtly condescending. Billy Collins once told me that he thinks part of the reason his poems speak so broadly to readers is that they are not "conveyor belts of misery," so I remember that poetry pauses can sometimes grant students a needed emotional break from the heavier themes we discuss in class. I want poems

that feel fresh and vivid and are economical with words. The poems I choose should strike me as interesting and inspiring, because I know my enthusiasm and wonder have the potential to be contagious.

None of this is a result of any special gift of mine. These facets of poetry that I embrace and share are gifts of the genre itself. When we carve out time for poetry pauses, we interrupt the flow of our day in a good way and often a way that moves us to write. For me, that pause works in the beginning of class each day. This book reveals that poetry pauses can provide intentional interruption to our writing process, new lenses to our writing modes, and fresh energy to our competency as writers.

Do not feel that you need to have a daily routine or a 180-slide PowerPoint presentation in place to start using poetry for the purposes described in this book. You might choose to go there, and you might not. You might include a Poetry Friday routine (Wong & Vardell, 2017), or you might work with colleagues in a professional learning community to curate a collection of poems from contemporary voices that you wish to weave into your regularly scheduled units this year. What I can tell you with confidence is that a more integrated, regular routine of poetry reading and writing will open up doors for the young writers beside you. It will coax you into a bolder writing process as well. I feel comfortable guaranteeing that. It is your money-back guarantee on this book.

This book does not argue that increased exposure to poetry makes better writers, even though there is probably truth in that. It reveals that poetry can be the heartbeat of a class that keeps the lifeblood flowing through all of our students' compositions. It shakes us from the misconception that poetry should be confined to an annual unit of study and instead shows how it can bring life to *every* unit. This is not a book about writing poems, but a book to help students grow as practiced and accomplished writers, first in little poetic steps, and afterward in longer pieces in any genre.

Here I share twenty of my all-time favorite poems to share with my ninth-grade students, many of them linked on this book's companion website. I hope you might find a few to enjoy and share with your class as well. But more than this, I hope you use the tools in this chapter to collect your own set of favorites and cultivate a classroom where thinking grows through poetry, to find poems that nourish the student writers before you and prepare them for the growth and community that await them in writing workshops throughout the year.

Twenty of My All-Time Favorite Poems to Share With Students

1. "Famous" by Naomi Shihab Nye
2. "Quilts" by Nikki Giovanni
3. "Revenge" by Taha Muhammad Ali
4. "Pass On" by Michael Lee (spoken word)
5. "Complainers" by Rudy Francisco (spoken word)
6. "Swift Things Are Beautiful" by Elizabeth Coatsworth
7. "Camaro" by Phil Kaye (spoken word)
8. "Absolute" by Jacqueline Woodson
9. "Dawn, Revisited" by Rita Dove
10. "The Arm" by Stephen Dunn
11. "At Blackwater Pond" by Mary Oliver
12. "Snow Day" by Billy Collins
13. "Poem Written in the Parking Lot of a Tattoo Shop While Waiting for an Appointment" by Ariel Francisco
14. "Turkey Vultures" by Michael Collier
15. "testify" by Eve L. Ewing
16. "We Wear the Mask" by Paul Laurence Dunbar
17. "Remember" by Joy Harjo
18. "Alley Violinist" by Robert Lax
19. "In Two Seconds" by Mark Doty
20. "The Human Family" by Maya Angelou

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK, THE APPENDICES, AND THE COMPANION WEBSITE

The seven chapters in this book cover a whole range of ideas pertaining to the writing process and writing products. It was my goal to organize this book so that no matter the project, genre, or step in the writing process your class is working on, it is possible to find a poetry pause that is helpful.

Each chapter has some subheadings that share research and rationale behind the ideas and some subheadings that begin with the words "Poetry Pause" followed by a quick, spotlighted overview of what an activity looks like in class before taking you on a deeper dive.

When you need to modify an idea in this book by either streamlining it or scaffolding it, refer to Appendix A, full of best practices you can use. Occasionally, sidebars will direct you to a particular streamlining or scaffolding method that I think is a good fit for a specific lesson.

Additionally, some lessons have reproducible handouts you may find useful. These can be photocopied from Appendix B or printed from the ancillary resources for this book on its companion website.

Scan this QR code to access the companion website and links to the poems that are listed in this book.

There are numerous lists of poems within this book. The book's companion website has these lists digitized by chapter, so with each list, you have a ready set of links! If you prefer, a quick search of the title and poet is often all it takes to have a poem mentioned in this book right beside you as you think through the suggested activities, and the QR codes you will find throughout this book further streamline this process. In fact, here is a QR code to take you right to the companion website!

The companion website also contains some additional ideas I have added to the book post-publication that you can share with colleagues to pique their interest in this method.

As you read this book, it is possible you will find ideas that feel inviting but also intimidating to use with your students. You know your students the best, and no two teachers deliver instruction in the same way. Teachers are expert craftspeople, not robots. As you unpack the full knapsack of ideas here in your class, I trust you completely. Modify what you find here and make it your own.

IT ALL COMES DOWN TO THIS

Writing can be enjoyable, and teaching writing can be difficult.

Poetry pauses can enhance our joy, and they can help make teaching writing a little easier.

I hope that you will find the practices in this book as nourishing to you and your students as I have found them for me and for mine. I hope your students' writer's notebooks light up with better words than ever before, and I hope they feel proud to transfer those skills from poems to all the other genres you explore.

Researcher Ismael Baroudy (2008) writes that "most successful student-writers are almost consciously or unconsciously process-writing fans." They are "multiple-drafters, recursive-thinkers, meaning-seekers, form-neglectors, quick-writers, feedback-anticipators" and "journal keepers" (para. 25). Poetry pauses draw out and celebrate this kind of realistic creative practice.

Poetry pauses keep me learning, engaged, and creating alongside my students. I hope they will do that for you, too. As you collect the poems and practices that work best in your world, I hope you will pass what you learn to others and back to me. Together, we will keep on growing.