

Library Lines by Chloe Ford , CCS '2016.

When I was a child, one of my favorite books was *A Family of Poems*, a collection of poetry for children compiled by Caroline Kennedy. This book includes work by Emily Dickinson, Langston Hughes, William Carlos Williams, and Edna St. Vincent Millay, just to name a few wonderful poets. I used to sit with it for hours, tracing my finger across the rhymes and rhythms, closely examining the beautiful paintings by Jon J Muth that accompany each poem. Some of the poems in the book were written specifically for children while others are expansive enough to move young people even if the poet did not necessarily have a young audience in mind. This National Poetry Month, I am rediscovering the beauty of this book; at twenty-one, I am just as delighted by it as ever. What follows is an exploration of three of my favorite poems from the collection. I recommend these specifically for children, but I do believe their adults will be touched by them as well.

The first poem that struck me as I read through the book was “Today Is Very Boring” by Jack Prelutsky. This is a wonderful poem for poetry novices, as its steady rhyme scheme and silly nature draws readers in quickly. The poem’s narrator is presumably a child who is feeling *so bored* despite the shocking scenes happening all around her. Prelutsky writes, “I see giants riding rhinos, / and an ogre with a sword, / there’s a dragon blowing smoke rings, / I am positively bored.” This poem might speak to many young people who are feeling a bit stuck now that they can’t go to school or engage with friends and family in the same ways they used to.

This is a rainy month, and it’s easy to get tired of the same rainy weather day after day. In “April Rain Song,” Langston Hughes encourages us to *notice* the rain again. He encourages us to think about the feel of it, the sound of it, the way it collects. I recommend reading this poem on a rainy day with your young one(s); then encourage them to go outside and notice the rain with all five senses. What does it smell like? Can you catch some and taste it? What does it look like as it falls and when it collects in puddles? These questions can spur both poetic and scientific thinking. It’s always wonderful to reacquaint ourselves with phenomena with which we’ve grown all too familiar.

“maggie and milly and molly and may” by e.e. cummings is a sweet and complicated poem--one of my all-time favorites. The poem begins, “maggie and milly and molly and may / went down to the beach(to play one day)”; the rest of the poem details the discoveries and activities of each child at the beach, and it culminates in a beautiful couplet about the ultimate discovery of *ourselves* that can occur when we spend time by the sea. At a time when so many of us are stuck in one place, it is a treat to inhabit this poem for a short period and feel close to a very different (warm!) landscape. This poem is full of rich imagery, and I suggest that children try to draw or paint some of the images within: “a shell that sang,” “a stranded star,” one of the children as she is “chased by a horrible thing / which raced sideways while blowing bubbles.” Artistic activities--drawing, painting, even dancing--are wonderful ways for young people to engage more deeply with poetry.

These poems are all easy to find online. Happy reading!