

WORDPLAY
— for Kids —

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WORDPLAY
for Kids

A Sourcebook of Poems, Rhymes, *and* Read-Alouds

TIM WADHAM



An imprint of the American Library Association
CHICAGO 2015

www.alastore.ala.org

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ISBN: 978-0-8389-1266-9 (paper)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Wadham, Tim.

Wordplay for kids : a sourcebook of poems, rhymes, and read-alouds / Tim Wadham.
pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-8389-1266-9 (print : alk. paper) 1. Children's libraries—Activity programs—United States. 2. Poetry—Study and teaching (Elementary)—Activity programs. 3. Children's literature—Study and teaching (Elementary)—Activity programs. 4. Language arts (Elementary)—Activity programs. 5. Children's poetry—Bibliography. 6. Children's literature—Bibliography. I. Title.

Z718.3W33 2015

027.625—dc23

2014025358

Book design by Kimberly Thornton in the Charis SIL and Adelle typefaces.

© This paper meets the requirements of ANSI/NISO Z39.48–1992 (Permanence of Paper).

Printed in the United States of America

19 18 17 16 15 5 4 3 2 1

*To Katie Blake and Cynthia Daniels.
Also to Bonnie Anderson and Carol Hopkins
who developed several of the after-school
programs in this book.*

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FOREWORD

THE IDEA FOR THIS BOOK BEGAN IN 1985. I HAD JUST COMPLETED MY master's degree in library science. While I was looking for a full-time, professional position, I spent a year working as a part-time public library clerk and a part-time school library aide. It was in the school library, under the tutelage of an outstanding school librarian named Katie Blake that I experienced a program that has influenced, to this day, my approach to literature-based programs and activities in public libraries.

One benefit of working in a school library setting is the potential of having a captive audience you can impact on a regular, usually weekly basis. Katie Blake took advantage of this opportunity and created a program she originally called Childread—in her words, “an attempt to organize that gigantic subject, children’s literature, so that it may be introduced in a systematic way during weekly ‘library’ time.” As her aide, I was able to spend a year implementing this program, which is really quite elegant in its simplicity. As classes came in for their scheduled time, they would sit down on steps in a sunken kiva-like area, and we would start with choral poetry reading. The poems were written on a large easel pad so that the kids could read along together out loud. We would follow up with a few books with the younger grades or a chapter from a book for the upper grades. Then there would be an activity based on the book. Being involved with this program for almost an entire school year allowed me to see the impact of the program over time. What I saw happening that year was really quite remarkable. Of course, the children memorized the poems, but as they did so, I could see a progression in their literacy skills over the year. The improvement in their vocabulary and verbal skills was visible.

Knowing that I was going into public librarianship, I began to wonder how I could achieve the same results in a public library setting, where I did not have the benefit of a captive audience. The answer came in the form of another wonderful school librarian, Cynthia Daniels, who approached me after I began work at the Dallas West branch of the Dallas Public Library in Texas. She had just received a grant and asked if I would be willing to create an after-school program to which she and another school librarian could bring children two days a week. My thoughts immediately went to adapting Katie Blake's program for a public library setting. The kids began coming twice a week. I began the program just as I had done in the school library, with choral poetry reading. Since these kids were mid- to upper-elementary age, I would read a chapter of a book each time they came. Most memorably, we made it through *The Whipping Boy*, by Sid Fleischman. When I suggested the book, Cynthia and her coworker were skeptical. West Dallas was the most economically disadvantaged community in the entire city, and I was working with minority students who lived in a massive government-housing project. The librarians weren't sure that a book about a prince in an inferred eighteenth-century setting would have any relevance for their kids. *The Whipping Boy* turned out to be one of the favorites of all the books we read over the three years I ran the program in West Dallas. I believe it was because although the setting of the book was admittedly far removed from the daily reality of these kids from the projects, it resonated with them on a more universal level because of the idea of the whipping boy himself: every kid can relate to the trauma of being punished for something you didn't do.

I did not see the real impact of this program until fourteen years later, when one of the kids from the after-school group came into the branch library where I was then working in Dallas and remembered that I used to read books to him. He was now an adult, using the library and reading to his own children.

During my years in Dallas, from there to Arizona, and now in Washington State, I have continued to successfully use variations of this program, even when there were not school librarians with a grant to transport their students twice a week. This has become my go-to style of programming, and I have done entire sessions on one book, the work of a specific author, or different activities each week connected by a common theme, such as fantasy or mysteries.

Developed as a companion program to Childread, Shared Warmth was a program that Katie Blake developed as a way to extend the program beyond the school library to a child's parents or caregiver, and as a way to encourage parents to read out loud to their children. Chapter 1 of *Wordplay for Kids* describes a new take on implementing the Shared Warmth concept in a public library setting.

The original Childread program was arranged sequentially by grade level. Since it would be difficult to create public library programs restricted to grade

levels, this book is divided into two basic sections with suggested poems, books, and programs for five- to seven-year-olds and eight- to twelve-year-olds.

The emphasis of chapter 2 of *Wordplay for Kids*, for ages five to seven, is to help children develop a “literary ear”: artful language patterns, correct and interesting language usage (grammar), and a large and rich vocabulary. *Wordplay for Kids* features almost 100 nursery rhymes and a great deal of poetry designed to share orally. Because of copyright issues, the texts of most poems not in the public domain are not included. However, I have included multiple ways to find sources for the text of as many of these poems as possible, both online and in books and anthologies. As in traditional storytimes for preschool children, a major focus for younger students is to listen to books read out loud. Children of this age are ready to move on from simple picture books and can be challenged with more complex stories, including folklore and fables. I include lists of recommended picture books, easy fiction, and fiction that can be shared. My experience with this age group is that we should never underestimate the ability of children to understand and respond to literature that we might think is too difficult. I was introduced to Greek mythology in the second grade through the Sullivan Programmed Reading curriculum, which made a huge impact on me at the time. Suggestions for introducing Greek mythology are included here, along with some recommended collections. I have also included one sample program for this age group, based on the fourteen Oz books by L. Frank Baum, as an example of a way to use longer, chapter-length books with five- to seven-year-olds. Reading out loud should always be followed by a chance for children to participate in activities, such as creative dramatization, visual art, or music activities, directly based on the books just shared. A central goal of *Wordplay* is to help children lose their video-game passivity and turn them into active participants.

Chapter 3 of *Wordplay for Kids*, for ages eight to twelve, features poems, most of which are short, many humorous, and all selected with kid appeal in mind. The poems are divided into categories, including classic, longer narrative poems. Although it might seem at first glance that some of these longer poems might not be appropriate for this age group, I would note as above never to underestimate a child’s ability to understand. Also, since the purpose of the *Wordplay* program is to make children familiar with unfamiliar words and more complex and rich language, challenging children with longer narrative poetry can make a huge impact on their vocabulary and literacy skills. Book lists that introduce children to more advanced fairy-tale adaptations and folktales are included in addition to a recommended fiction book list. The primary way of presenting these books is through reading them aloud in a *Wordplay for Kids* session. Titles can also be presented using booktalks and media. Finally, a series of sample after-school program ideas are presented, all of which have been successfully used in the field.

This book is not just for public librarians working with children. It is for school librarians, who I hope will begin utilizing this program as it was presented in its original setting. It is for homeschoolers and their parents and teachers as well, and it can easily be adapted as a way of creating a literature curriculum for homeschool support groups. I believe in this program. I believe that it can make a real and lasting difference in the lives of children. It will help create a love of poetry and the sound and rhythm of language. As children's facility with oral language improves, their vocabulary as well as their writing skills will also be strengthened. The books and stories to which they are exposed will provide an essential element of cultural literacy that will serve them all their life. *Word-play for Kids* is presented with the purpose of helping children want to read; to encourage them to be lifelong readers; and, by being familiar with literature's wide range of experiences, to be sensitive, informed, and loving human beings.

Katie Blake passed away on November 26, 2012. Although she is not able to see this project come to fruition, she did give full permission for me to use her original Childread materials and expressed great enthusiasm when I let her know that this book was under contract. A statement in her obituary reads: "Of particular delight to her was her students' mastery of nursery rhymes and tongue twisters. She called it setting their ear to the language." It will be a fitting tribute if those who use this program can develop a similar love and mastery of the language with the students who participate.



Shared Warmth

A Parent-Child Reading Program



AS PART OF LIBRARIAN KATIE BLAKE'S CHILDREAD program, introducing children to literature, she also implemented a reading program that involved parents that she called Shared Warmth. The Shared Warmth program encourages families to read together. The success of Shared Warmth caused the program to be implemented in other schools and to be included as a recommended program in M. Ellen Jay and Hilda L. Jay's *Ready-to-Go Reading Incentive Programs for Schools and Libraries* (New York: Neal-Schuman, 1998).

Philosophy behind Shared Warmth

What makes the difference between a person who identifies him- or herself as someone who loves to read, someone who is a voracious reader, or someone who never chooses to read but reads only what is required? Why did that person become one type of reader instead of the other?

You will find, almost without exception, that people who love to read attribute that love to the home. Either their mother or their father or both read to them regularly. Parents who read a lot themselves typically provide books in the home for their children as well.

Teachers and librarians, though they have the power to be highly influential in creating readers, can never be as influential as parents. So what can a public library do? Public libraries face lots of challenges with children who come into the library as well as children who must be reached by going outside the walls of the physical building. Children have video-game and electronics-induced passivity. Often, one or both parents are working and have little time to interact with their children. What can the public library do to capture attention? This is where Shared Warmth comes in. Libraries need to develop a family/home/library reading program.

What Is Shared Warmth?

Shared Warmth’s family/home/library reading program is what *Wordplay for Kids* is reaching for—a climate where the love of reading is fostered by parents, children, and public librarians together. Shared Warmth is reading done at home, not only by the child, but also by the parent reading to the child or vice versa. That is the key. It is such a simple thing, but there is no question that one of the very best things that parents can do for their children from day one is to simply read to them out loud.

Requirements, Recognition, and Record Keeping

To kick off a library’s Shared Warmth program, parents are invited to attend a special “Back to School/Back to the Library” night. While children’s librarians provide a storytime that includes choral poetry reading and activities for the children in a separate location, the parents attend a session explaining the Shared Warmth program and detailing the importance of reading aloud to their children and of having books in the home. At such a program, librarians can also demonstrate booktalks for the parents. Librarians can make sure that everyone is registered for library cards. Next, the children come back into the room with their parents and, for example, perform a short poem that they learned in the storytime. At the end of the program, each child may receive a book of his or her own to take home, and each family receives a Shared Warmth calendar. Any calendar can be used, or even a printout of a month, so parents and kids can write on it.

On the calendar, the parent or guardian initials each day when one of the following is accomplished:

1. Parent reads to the child
2. Child reads to the parent
3. Child reads silently

Public libraries can set a specific length of time for the program and come up with the required reading time. Five- to seven-year-olds may only need to read or be read to fifteen minutes a night. Eight- to ten-year-olds might be challenged to read twenty to thirty minutes. Eleven- and twelve-year-olds could be reading thirty minutes or more per night.

Required reading nights are Mondays through Fridays, and if a night is missed, Saturday or Sunday can be used as makeup days. This means that children and parents should be participating in Shared Warmth twenty-one to twenty-two days per month.

The child or parents should return their Shared Warmth calendar to the library for the previous month on a designated day, such as the third working day of each month. Parents should initial each day the goal was met on the calendar. Children who return the calendar with the required days checked off could have their names (first name and last initial) displayed prominently in the children's area of the library.

There should be a reward each month for children who complete the required days. This reading incentive can take almost any form—coupons, a book or DVD, candy—whatever works for your community and your budget.

When Shared Warmth is conducted in a school setting, it takes place during the school year—from August or September to May or June. In a public library setting, it can also span the school year. Children who complete the required nine months can be honored at an end-of-the-year party at the library. They can receive specially designed T-shirts, have their names engraved on a plaque permanently placed in the library, and be featured in a group photo. This sort of program, done correctly, can challenge students and truly galvanize both the parents and the larger community.

The original Shared Warmth program had an incredible response. Parents were checking out books. Parents loved doing Shared Warmth and the new quiet reading time in the evening. Parents mentioned that some children would not go to bed without doing their reading time and having their calendars initialed. From a statistical standpoint, the local school's achievement tests showed significant increases, particularly with the ten- to twelve-year-olds.

Libraries doing Shared Warmth might also find other ways to provide positive reinforcement to children who are participating in the program. Children's librarians need to reach those children who might not have any encouragement to read at home and whose parents are not interested in Shared Warmth.

We can't expect our young people, in their most sensitive, formative years, to love what we do not love, or to value what we do not value. Facts go into our brain cells. Living examples go into our bone marrow. A child caught up in the joy of reading is marvelous; even better are the moments when young and

old share the joy together. There's no happier combination, and that indeed
may be the only magic formula. —*Lloyd Alexander*

To facilitate that magic combination between child and parent or adult is at its
heart the goal of Shared Warmth.



Wordplay for Five- to Seven-Year-Olds

THIS CHAPTER OF *WORDPLAY FOR KIDS* PROVIDES resources for introducing younger children, ages five to seven, to literature in a public library or school library setting. The materials provide a great deal of flexibility for programmers to develop a variety of programs for a variety of audiences and settings, including homeschools. This style of programming is meant to be a next step after preschool storytimes. Although these programs may include some elements that will be familiar to storytime kids, they should also feel different. The resource sections are in the order in which they are most effectively used in programming. When introducing any of these types of literature, children should be given the context of the form that they are hearing. For example, they should know that fables are a type of story that includes a moral.

1. Poetry for Choral Reading

Programs should always begin with choral poetry reading. This activity is one of the most defining and unique features of this style of programming. It is also crucial to achieve the potential literacy benefits. The text of the poems should be either projected on a screen or written on a large notepad placed on

an easel. The text should be large enough for young children to be able to read from where they are sitting. An alternative could be to provide children with a printed handout with the text of the poems from which they can read.

II. Nursery Rhymes for Choral Reading

The inclusion of nursery rhymes serves another central purpose of this programming, which is to introduce children to classic literature, in whatever form. It is possible that many children might never hear these rhymes unless they are introduced to them in a library setting. *Wordplay for Kids* provides the opportunity for children to not only hear these rhymes, but also to say them out loud. The nursery rhymes are presented in three sets, with the idea that each set contains enough poems for children to master during a multiweek Wordplay program. When children have mastered one set, you can move on to the next. There are some rhymes that are repeated from one set to the next.

Hearing and saying these poems out loud will give children a greater appreciation for the fun of language: sound, rhyme, and rhythm.

III. Folktales and Fairy Stories

Children should be introduced to the original versions of the classic folktales and fairy stories. This prepares them not only with general cultural literacy, but also helps them better appreciate the many popular “fractured” fairy tales. Many children now become familiar with folktales and fairy stories through the postmodern versions, like *The Stinky Cheese Man* and *The Three Little Wolves and the Big Bad Pig*. The book list includes some of the most well-known tales. It includes a list of different versions of specific tales and a further list of individual folktales. The list also includes some of the classic versions and retellings in picture-book form.

IV. Fables

Fables are also an important part of folk literature to which children ought to be introduced. Because, as opposed to fairy tales and folktales, fables have such a distinctive form, they merit a separate program. Also, there are new fables to which children can be introduced along with the classic Aesop fables.

V. Greek Mythology

Learning Greek mythology is a crucial part of cultural literacy. This section gives an outline of myths and mythical characters from the Greeks and books that can be used to introduce this important legacy to children.

VI. Picture Books and Easy Fiction

The list of recommended picture books and easy fiction includes picture books and easy readers that can be shared in an after-school, home, or school library setting with the post-preschool storytime crowd.

VII. Fiction

As kids learn to read better, they are also prepared for more thematically complex stories, regardless of length. This list presents some recommended titles.

VIII. Sample Program: Discover the Oz Books

Books like *The Wizard of Oz* can be effectively introduced to children as early as age two or three as read-alouds. I was first introduced to Oz when I was five years old, and my mother purchased a set of all fourteen of L. Frank Baum's Oz books for Christmas. I still remember being downstairs and hearing her call, then running upstairs to find the box full of books. She began reading them out loud to me, and it is from them I taught myself to read. I also remember reading one of them to my baby sister and stopping in the middle of a sentence when I suddenly had the awareness that I was actually reading. Reading the Oz books aloud has great appeal for younger children.



I. Poetry for Choral Reading

Every session of choral poetry should begin with the following poem, by Beatrice Schenk de Regniers. This is a perfect poem to demonstrate the delight of poetry and the rhythm and the sound of the words. Make this the entry point for choral poetry reading.

“Keep a Poem in Your Pocket”

by Beatrice Schenk de Regniers

Keep a poem in your pocket
 And a picture in your head
 And you'll never feel lonely
 At night when you're in bed.

The little poem will sing to you
 The little picture bring to you
 A dozen dreams to dance to you
 At night when you're in bed.

So—
Keep a picture in your pocket
And a poem in your head
And you'll never feel lonely
At night when you're in bed.

This poem can be found in the following:

Austin, Mary C., and Queenie B. Mills. *The Sound of Poetry*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1963.

Larrick, Nancy. *Piping down the Valleys Wild: Poetry for the Young of All Ages*. Illus. by Ellen Raskin. New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Books for Young Readers, 1999.

Prelutsky, Jack, ed. *The Random House Book of Poetry for Children*. Illus. by Arnold Lobel. New York: Random House, 1983.

“Calling All Readers”

by Laura Purdie Salas

First lines: “I’ll tell you a story. / I’ll spin you a rhyme”

This poem can be found in the following:

Salas, Laura Purdie. *Bookspeak! Poems About Books*. Illus. by Josée Bisailon. Boston: Clarion/Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011.

Topic: Nature and Seasons

“Mud”

by Polly Chase Boyden

First line: “Mud is very nice to feel”

This poem can be found in the following:

Arbuthnot, May Hill, and Shelton L. Root, eds. *Time for Poetry: A Representative Collection of Poetry for Children, to Be Used in the Classroom, Home, or Camp; Especially Planned for College Classes in Children’s Literature*. Illus. by Arthur Paul. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1967.

Austin, Mary C., and Queenie B. Mills. *The Sound of Poetry*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1963.

Cole, Joanna. *A New Treasury of Children’s Poetry: Old Favorites and New Discoveries*. Illus. by Judith Gwyn Brown. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984.

Gannett, Lewis. *The Family Book of Verse*. New York: Harper, 1961.

Prelutsky, Jack, ed. *The Random House Book of Poetry for Children*. Illus. by Arnold Lobel. New York: Random House, 1983.

Prelutsky, Jack, ed. *Read-Aloud Rhymes for the Very Young*. Illus. by Marc Brown. New York: Knopf, 1986.

“The Swing”

by Robert Louis Stevenson

How do you like to go up in a swing,
Up in the air so blue?
Oh, I do think it the pleasantest thing
Ever a child can do!

Up in the air and over the wall,
Till I can see so wide,
Rivers and trees and cattle and all
Over the countryside—

Till I look down on the garden green,
Down on the roof so brown—
Up in the air I go flying again,
Up in the air and down!

This poem can be found in the following:

Stevenson, Robert Louis. *A Child’s Garden of Verses*. Illus. by Michael Foreman. New York: Delacorte, 1985.

“I’m Glad the Sky Is Painted Blue”

—Anon.

I’m glad the sky is painted blue
And the earth is painted green,
And such a lot of nice fresh air
All sandwiched in-between.

“Winter Clothes”

by Karla Kuskin

First line: “Under my hood I have a hat”

This poem can be found in the following:

Prelutsky, Jack, ed. *The Random House Book of Poetry for Children*. Illus. by Arnold Lobel. New York: Random House, 1983.

“The More It Snows”

by A. A. Milne

First lines: “The more it / SNOWS-tiddely-pom”

This poem can be found in the following:

Cole, Joanna. *A New Treasury of Children’s Poetry: Old Favorites and New Discoveries*. Illus. by Judith Gwyn Brown. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984.

de Regniers, Beatrice Schenk, ed. *Sing a Song of Popcorn: Every Child’s Book of Poems*. Illus. by Marcia Brown. New York: Scholastic, 1988.

Milne, A. A. *The House at Pooh Corner*. Illus. by Ernest H. Shepard. New York: Dutton, 1961.

Prelutsky, Jack, ed. *The Random House Book of Poetry for Children*. Illus. by Arnold Lobel. New York: Random House, 1983.

Prelutsky, Jack, ed. *Read-Aloud Rhymes for the Very Young*. Illus. by Marc Brown. New York: Knopf, 1986.

Royds, Caroline. *Poems for Young Children*. Illus. by Inga Moore. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1986.

“Maytime Magic”

by Mabel Watts

First lines: “A little seed / for me to sow?”

This poem can be found in the following:

Prelutsky, Jack, ed. *The Random House Book of Poetry for Children*. Illus. by Arnold Lobel. New York: Random House, 1983.

“Yellow”

by David McCord

First lines: “Green is go / and red is stop”

This poem can be found in the following:

Prelutsky, Jack, ed. *The Random House Book of Poetry for Children*. Illus. by Arnold Lobel. New York: Random House, 1983.

Topic: People and Things

“Antigonish”

by Hughes Mearns

Yesterday upon the stair
I met a man who wasn’t there
He wasn’t there again today
I wish, I wish he’d go away

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Titles of books are shown in italic. *f* denotes figures.

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