

Exploring Quality Literature: The Essentials in a Classroom

This beautiful eclectic literature collection involved books I read as a young student and new books I read to my nieces and nephews. To me, books bring a sense of creativity and art to children that technology cannot. It is imperative we create lifelong learners in the classroom but also passionate readers for a lifetime! This small collection brings forth 15 books that each fall under a different genre of quality literature.

Moses Goes To School

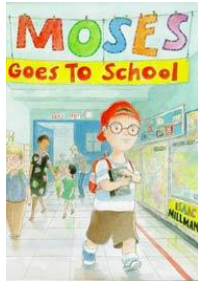
Author: Isaac Millman

Illustrator: N/A

Date: 2000

Grade Range: K-3

Category: Realistic Fiction



Summary: The story is of a young boy named Moses, who attends a school for the hearing impaired. The students come back to school from break and tell one another what they did. Moses interacts with his peers through sign language. This school displays how all staff knows sign language, although some do not have hearing loss. It also shows the technology used and different methods taught to the hearing impaired. The students use vibrations from the speakers of a boom box in a passage, in order to sign along to the song “Take Me Out to the Ballgame”. The book gave diagrams for the conversations signed, and even the song to help readers learn sign language. The story represents the social interaction in the learning environment. Their challenges were introduced, however, with teaching, learning methods and technology Moses was able to perform the same tasks just with different methods. When writing to pen pals the students used a special program to help them write a letter with a computer. The positive message is that everyone is different, but can accomplish the same things. Different methods and techniques can be used in order to reach the same goal.

Quality Literature: A truly engaging book for adults as well as children. This proves to be interdisciplinary in the classroom when elaborating on multicultural stories. I believe this would be quite enjoyable and educational.

Reader Response Activity: In order to have the students relate to the hearing impaired, as an activity we can have them experience barriers. For instance, a student can cup their hands over their ears while another person talks to them quietly. This will show them how difficult it is to have a conversation when you have no idea what the other person is saying. After reading this book to the students, we could go back and sign with the book and sign along while singing “Take Me Out to the Ballgame”.

Ain't Nobody a Stranger to Me

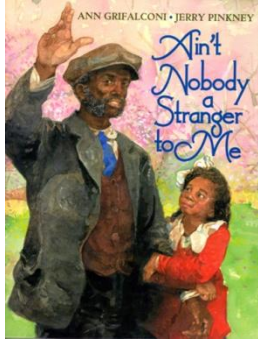
Author: Ann Grifalconi

Illustrator: Jerry Pinkney

Date: 2007

Grade Range: 5-6

Category: Historical Fiction



Summary: This book is about a granddaughter listening to her grandfather's experience as a slave. He explains the goal he had that kept him going. He also mentions the reason why no one is a stranger to him, even if he doesn't know their name. His goal was to plant his apple seeds in soil that he owned. No one is a stranger to him, because we are all here to help one another. This story represents positive portrayal so well because it exhibits the hardships and suffering of slavery. However, with all of the hard work, and pain, there is a silver lining. Freedom, love, perseverance, and aspiration are shown in this book. Her grandpa had a goal to have his own land to plant the apple seeds, and with hard work he achieved this goal. The apple seeds also resemble his history, and how he will never forget with every bloom. A positive message is remembrance of the African American history. Her grandfather demonstrates appreciation of freedom and explains his desperation to his accomplish goals. Hard work is essential to make your dreams come true.

Quality Literature: A story like this exudes timelessness, but the illustrations are so meaningful and can bring emotions to anyone who reads the book. The values behind this book, but also the goals set were inspiring.

Reader Response Activity: I would assign a project to have the students interview an older family member, and ask about their culture. They can then research the culture further and design a poster of her family's culture. Have them ask questions about their personal hardships and ask them if they any specific goals they made that they accomplished.

Malcolm X: A Fire Burning Brightly

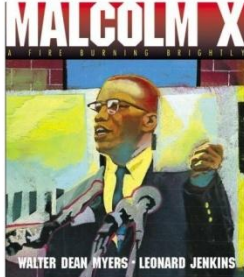
Author: Walter Dean Myers

Illustrator: Leonard Jenkins

Date: 2000

Grade Range: 4-6

Category: Biography



Summary: *A Fire Burning Brightly* described the rough childhood Malcolm Little, Malcolm “X” had grown up in. He grew up troubled, and even though his father died when he was young, he instilled in Malcolm that anything was possible with education and that he could make something of himself. Prison had changed this man; he wanted to start a revolution to stand up for freedom and equality. He originally thought the only way to achieve this was through violence. He later founded a religious organization in which he came to the realization that every race should be accepted and no violence is necessary. He was later killed. This is Malcolm Little’s or Malcolm “X”’s life. The book goes through his childhood, early adult life, and up to the day of his murder. The positive message is not only to believe in yourself no matter where you come from, but also that education is highly valuable. A main message was to respect everyone’s rights, everyone is equal. Violence is not necessary in order to influence others. Having heart, and truly believing in what you feel is right will influence others. In life, every human being changes, sometimes for the bad, and sometimes for the good. Malcolm “X” had courage because he knew what he was saying was upsetting others and that he could get hurt or killed in the process. The fact that he stood up for what he believed in was courageous.

Quality Literature: The illustrations in this book definitely told the story, but there is timelessness in this book with the historical figure presented. The values he had established a connection to the people, and now through this text.

Reader Response Activity: Asking the students to think of a time where they stood up for what they believed in. If not at all, is there a situation where they would have done something differently? Would they stand up for something they believed in, knowing there would be consequences?

Fly Away Home

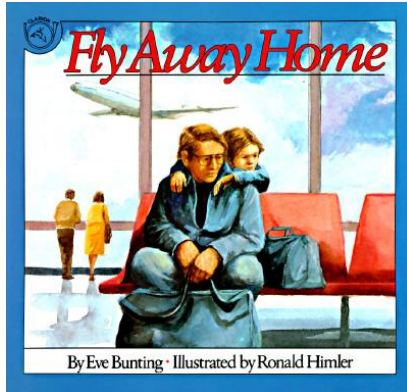
Author: Eve Bunting

Illustrator: Ronald Himler

Date: 1991

Grade Range: 3-6

Category: Drama



Summary: The book is about a father and son who live in an airport because they are unable to afford a place of their own. The boy may be young but he understands that he needs to do certain things in order to be unnoticed and to prevent security making them leave the airport. There are other families who are in the same situation in the book, and one in particular helped watch the boy when his father went off to work. The little boy sees a bird trapped in the airport and after a while he sees that the bird found a way out. He thought of his situation and how he wanted to be able to leave and fly away home. The story represents low socioeconomic situations because it is about a family who lives in poverty. After the little boy's mother died the father was not able to keep their home with only one income. His position as a janitor is not enough to provide for a home and he cannot find any more work. In order to have shelter they stay in the airport and have a mapped out schedule so they will not be suspicious or noticed. The positive message is that although there are obstacles in life, it is important to have hope. The little boy in this story had hope that he and his father would eventually have a home. This book also makes you appreciate what you have in your life, and to appreciate the roof over your head.

Quality Literature: This book brings out so many emotions and the illustrations cause the heart to break even more. The characterization is so realistic and perfect given the situation which makes it even more difficult to get through the book. The values carried by the father, but the sense of exploration yet being trapped with the son has quite an impact on a reader.

Reader Response Activity: A learning activity could be a class discussion of how we could help this family. What are some things we would donate to this family? How would you feel if you were in this situation? What do you think the bird symbolizes?

The Harry Potter Series

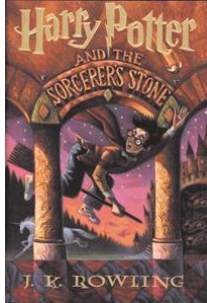
Author: J.K. Rowling

Illustrator: Different for all books

Date: 1996

Grade Range: 4th-12th

Category: Fantasy



Summary: This series is about a boy and his friends who have quite the journey through their magical endeavors and the dangers of their different world. The young boy is coping with the fact that his parents passed away; which there is a dark underlying of Harry Potter's childhood that haunts him. He lives with the only family members he knows and is treated with disrespectful and cruelty until he finds his new home at "Hogwarts", the school of magic. The series is full of action, friendship, family, loyalty, adventure, and magic of course.

Quality Literature: The entire series displays rich language and engages the reader the whole time. Although this is fantasy, the characters are relatable and the series humor is quite enjoyable.

Reader Response Activity: I would break my classroom up into groups just as they are in the series. My students would create their own spells and we would play a safer version of Quidditch.

An Undone Fairy Tale

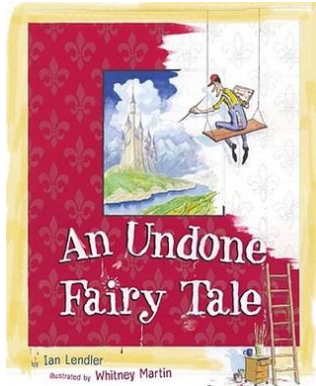
Author: Ian Lendler

Illustrator: Whitney Martin

Date: 2005

Grade Range: 2nd-5th

Category: Fairy Tale/Humor



Summary: This is a fun fairy tale that is hilarious because it involves the illustrator and the reader. There is not one moment where you are not engaged. It starts off as a typical fairy tale would start but is more comical. Then the book becomes more exciting and daring for the reader. This book is almost a parody of classic fairy tales but is quite creative with text and illustrations. The illustrator, according to the book, is “trying” to keep up with the reader but they are reading too fast and so the illustrations are ever changing in style.

Quality Literature: Humor is a main ingredient of this book and characterization plays a big part in this strategically because the reader feels involved so much to the point where the author is talking to the reader on most pages. The reader connects from page one and remains engaged to the end.

Reader Response Activity: I would have my students create their own illustrations for what they thought could have been a good substitute, but also to write a goofy letter to the illustrator apologizing for reading so quickly.

The Goosebumps Series

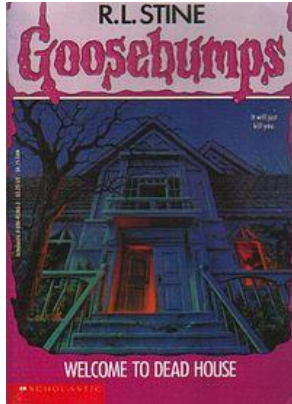
Author: R.L. Stine

Illustrator: Multiple Artists

Date: 1992

Grade Range: 3rd-6th

Category: Horror/Science Fiction



Summary: Each book had main characters that were confronted by a scary situation or sometimes even a monster of some kind. The children face their fears in the end and they realize what is important in their life such as friends and family. Normally in the beginning they are ungrateful or unhappy with themselves or their lives and as you read further they begin to appreciate their life more and especially the people close to them.

Quality Literature: The characterization is wonderful because it is relatable for most young readers. The children in the books want to explore something that is considered “creepy”. The readers connect to the characters and view their values at the end of each book. The text is quite descriptive and any cover can give you chills or “goose bumps”.

Reader Activity Response: I would have the students create their own horror story (school appropriate) and have them write a short essay which will later be published in their portfolio or work collection from the school year.

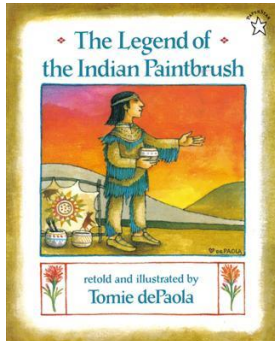
The Legend of the Indian Paintbrush

Author: Tomie dePaola

Illustrator: Tomie dePaola

Genre: Multicultural Legend

Grade Range: 3rd-5th



Summary: This is a Native American folktale of Little Gopher who was a young boy who did not fit in with the boys his age in his tribe. He had a gift, he loved to paint and making warrior dolls for his people. One day he had a “Dream Vision” which told him to no longer be sad and that his purpose was to paint and to tell the stories of his tribe through his paintings. He was told to construct a painting of the sunset, he tried all he could, but could not paint it just right. One night a voice told him to go to the hill with his canvas, there were brushes waiting for him. Leaving the magical brushes after he painted his magnificent sunset, Little Gopher’s magic brushes bloomed into radiant flowers on the hillside. He became a legend in his tribe and was called “He-Who-Brought-the-Sunset-to-the-Earth”. He was finally accepted.

Quality Literature: This book establishes a connection for the reader in terms of finding your place in the world and making friends.

Reader Response Activity: After reading this I would have my students reflect on times they ever felt as if they were not accepted. They can write this in a journal, they do not have to share this with anyone since it is so personal. I also would have them paint the Arizona sky to express their creativity and to use art as an outlet.

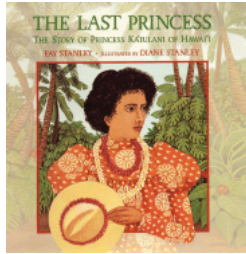
The Last Princess: The Story of Princess Kaiulani of Hawaii

Author: Fay Stanley

Illustrator: Diane Stanley

Genre: Multicultural Legend/Biography

Grade Range: 5th-6th



Summary: Princess Kaiulani of Hawaii was a royal who had a beautiful childhood till her mother passed away. She believed in being a positive role model for her people, no matter her sorrow that was carried with her. She was sent far away from her home to receive an education. She received news from her country being taken over by America. She had to go to Washington and speak to President Grover Cleveland. A revolution started with the Hawaiian citizens, taking matters into their own hands and trying to restore the throne for their queen. She tried her best to put on a tough but elegant exterior when she was struggling.

Quality Literature: This princess has strong values which are seen in the book with illustrations as well as text. Exploration was also a theme for this legend.

Reader Response Activity: The students will have two options after reading this book. They will construct a journal entry as Princess Kaiulani and what thoughts or emotions she possibly had. The second option is to write her a letter asking her questions. Asking questions about being the next in line to be queen at such a young age and asking what duties she has as a princess.

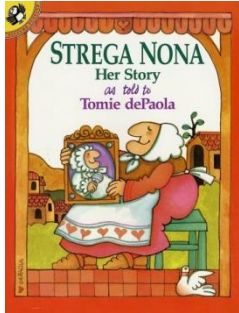
Strega Nona: Her Story

Author: Tomie dePaola

Illustrator: Tomie dePaola

Genre: Multicultural Folktale

Grade Range: 3nd-4th



Summary: Strega Nona: Her Story is the beginning of the Italian folktale and how she came to be a Strega or a “witch”. She is trained by her Grandmother who is considered the greatest Strega. However, Strega Nona’s best friend Amelia was going to school to become a Strega and work with magic. She feared not having a diploma would make her less desirable for business. Since her grandmother was her teacher, she became the second greatest Strega. Everyone loved her, and the story ends insinuating the beginning of the actual folktale.

Quality Literature: This book to me has a sense of timelessness but also displays values.

Reader Response Activity: The students will compose their own spells, what they would perform as witches and wizards. Also, they will need to focus on the family aspect of the story and how friends are important but sometimes we need to do what is best for us which isn’t always what our friends think is best.

Poetry

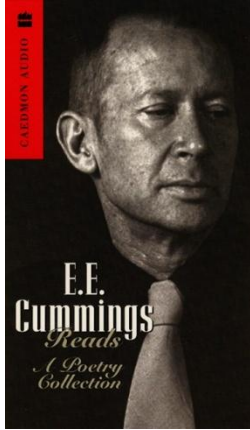
Author: E.E. Cummings

Illustrator: N/A

Date: 1894-1962

Grade Range: 9th-12th

Category: Poetry



Summary: The poems vary but for older students in high school would appreciate his work. Some poems are great for students to relate to on life, love, and happiness or sadness.

Quality Literature: The text paints a picture and has true timelessness. His poems are filled with values and are relatable for most people. Exploration in terms of poems with different meanings and subjects occur. The reader easily establishes a connection because of the text and the meaning behind the words.

Reader Response Activity: Have the students choose their own poem from his collection and write a modern day version of that poem. They would also have the option to write a poem they later present to the person they chose to write about and then they would write a reflective piece on that person's reaction.

The Invention of Hugo Cabret

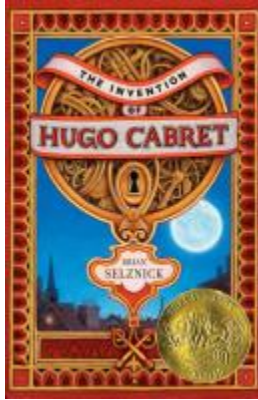
Author: Brian Selznick

Illustrator: Brian Selznick

Date: 2007

Grade Range: 4th-8th

Category: Mystery/Historical Fiction



Summary: A young boy tragically loses his father in a fire and he is forced to live with his only known family member, his drunk and cruel uncle. The young boy misses his father terribly and tries to build an automaton his father was working on before he passed away. He meets an old man who is full of bitterness and later realizes this man is a brilliant filmmaker his father adored. He makes a friend who helps him on his journey but in the end helps him find himself. The novel is a mystery in terms of his question that haunts him throughout the book. Later on, everything is answered and the young boy has grown into a young man thanks to his new family that decided to take him in and help him find his way.

Quality Literature: This book displays timelessness with its text and illustrations. The rich language and exploration take hold of the reader and you can't help but feel submerged into this magical world. The whole time your heart is pounding in suspense, happiness, and worry.

Reader Response Activity: My students can act out a skit, create an illustration, or perform a magic trick to help influence the arts in the classroom. They will write about what means the most to them and how thankful they are in life.

Fablehaven Book Series

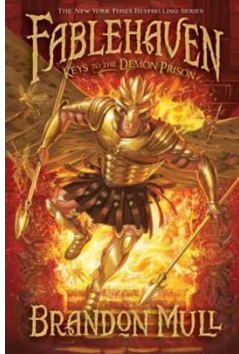
Author: Brandon Mull

Illustrator: Brandon Dorman

Date: 2006

Grade Range: 4th-7th

Category: Fable/Mythology



Summary: This series involves two main characters, young children, who were on their way to see their grandparents who have apparently gone missing. There lies a glass of milk that is magical milk and once they drink it down they are sucked into this magical world with mythical figures. They undergo adventures that are exciting but dangerous to find their family members.

Quality Literature: This series displays rich language but also is special for the reader in terms of imagination. Exploration takes place throughout the entire series and you definitely establish a connection with the two young children. Characterization is essential in this series because it is a fable but also deals with mythology.

Reader Response Activity: I would have my students come up with their own short story adventure that must include mythical figures. For example, it could be the Olympics specifically for all of the Gods and Goddesses. This must include at least one illustration and the short story will include our vocabulary words.

The Tall Tale of Paul Bunyan

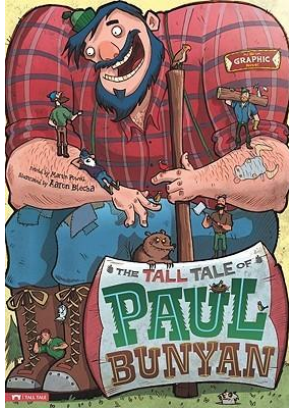
Author: Martin Powell

Illustrator: Aaron Blecha

Date: 2010

Grade Range: K-2nd

Category: Tall Tale



Summary: This tall tale is about a man who was much bigger than any other man. He was so big compared to everyone else, but one day he found himself a friend. An ox was ill and frozen in the snow and Paul helps him and he returns to health. They go on an adventure together, so friendship is a big part of this novel.

Quality Literature: Timelessness is a key element because this story has been around for ages. The illustrations are fun for young children and values of friendship and kindness are apparent throughout the book.

Reader Response Activity: My students would perform a fun song about Paul Bunyan and we would watch the short cartoon film of his story.

The Joey Pigza Series

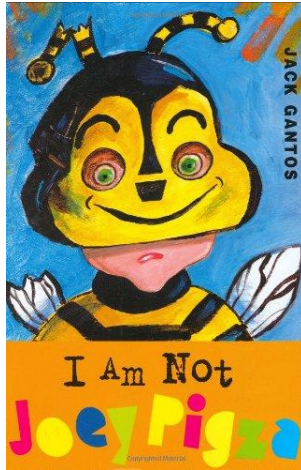
Author: Jack Gantos

Illustrator: N/A

Date: 2011

Grade Range: 3rd-6th

Category: Realistic Fiction



Summary: This series is about a boy with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and everything he goes through. He has a dysfunctional family which later becomes a single-mother household. His peers and school faculty treat him as if he is the worst and is incapable of being a good kid. He has to take medication but he doesn't like the way it makes him feel. He has several big accidents or mistakes and later ends up going to an institute to help his case. He feels better and performs better in his old school. His relationship is somewhat better with his peers and the school faculty and his mother is happier towards the end. He realizes he can control his actions after all.

Quality Literature: This is a great book for students to relate to or connect with. The characterization is fantastic because the characters are so realistic as well as their reactions in the books.

Reader Response Activity: My students will write a letter to Joey Pigza telling him whatever they want as well as asking him questions about his learning disability.

Literary Genres

Fiction Genres:

Fairy Tales

Definition: Literary genre that is a story, usually for children, about elves, hobgoblins, dragons, fairies, or other magical creatures.

Examples: Hansel and Gretel; Jack and the Beanstalk; The Ugly Duckling; The Shoemaker and the Elves; Goldilocks and the Three Bears.

Fantasy

Definition: Literary genre that is an imaginative or fanciful work, esp. one dealing with supernatural or unnatural events or characters.

Examples: The Book of Three, The Dark Is Rising, Five Children and It, Half Magic, The House with a Clock in Its Walls, A Wrinkle in Time

Folk Tales

Definition: Literary genre that is a tale or legend originating and traditional among a people or folk, especially forming part of the oral tradition of the common people. Any belief or story passed on traditionally, especially one considered to be false or based on superstition.

Examples: Cinderella; Little Red Riding Hood; Princess Furball; Why Mosquitos Buzz in People's Ear; How Many Spots Does a Leopard Have?

Tall Tales

Definition: Literary genre that is an extravagantly and humorously exaggerated story of the backwoods exploits of an American frontiersman.
Examples: Johnny Appleseed; Billy the Kid; Buffalo Bill; Paul Bunyan; Davy Crockett

Fable

Definition: Literary genre that is a brief allegorical narrative, in verse or prose, illustrating a moral thesis or satirizing human beings. The characters of a fable are usually animals who talk and act like people while retaining their animal traits.
Examples: The Boy Who Cried Wolf; The city Mouse and the Country Mouse; The Lion and the Mouse

Adventure

Definition: Literary genre pertaining to an exciting or very unusual experience, participation in

exciting undertakings or enterprises, a bold, usually risky undertaking, or hazardous action of uncertain outcome.

Examples: Wild Timothy; Tracks in the Snow; The Incredible Journey; Island of the Blue Dolphins; Hatchet; The Whipping Boy; The Princess Bride

Mystery

Definition: Literary genre whose plot involves a crime or other event that remains puzzlingly unsettled until the very end.

Examples: Flatfoot Fox and the Case of the Missing Eye; Nate the Great and the Stolen Base; The Case of the Hungry Stranger;; Danger in Tibet

Historical

Definition: Literary genre pertaining to, treating, or characteristic of history or past events, based on or reconstructed from an event, custom, or style, in the past, or having once existed or lived in the real world, as opposed to being part of legend or fiction or as distinguished from religious belief.

Examples: Separate But Not Equal; The Dream and the Struggle; The Girl on the Outside; Number the Stars; More Than Anything Else

Realistic

Definition: Literary genre interested in, concerned with, or based on what is real, practical, pertaining to, characterized by, or given to the representation in literature or art of things as they really are, or resembling or simulating life.

Examples: Drawing Lessons; Journey; Sarah, Plain and Tall; Just One Tear; A Summery Saturday Morning; The Tricksters; After the Rain; Babyface; Junebug; Newfound

Science

Definition: Literary genre in which a background of science or pseudoscience is an integral part of the story. Many of the events recounted in a science fiction story are within the realm of future possibility like robots, space travel, interplanetary war, or invasions from outer space.

Examples: The Postman; The Gathering; The Homecoming; The Giver; Aliens: Earth Hive; House of Stairs; Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea; The Time Machine

Nonfiction Genres:

Informational

Definition: Literary genre that is intended for teaching and related informational purposes primarily intended to educate rather than entertain.

Examples: The Reasons for Seasons; Lightening; Animals Eat the Weirdest Things; Elephants; Safari; Snowflakes

Biography

Definition: Literary genre that is a written account of another person's life or the reconstruction in print or on film, of the lives of real men and women.

Example: Making Headlines: A Biography of Nellie Bly; Elizabeth Barrett Browning; The Legend of Jesse Owens; Robert Kennedy; Nelson Mandela: A Biography; The Life and Many Deaths of Harry Houdini

Autobiography

Definition: Literary genre that is a history of a person's life written or told by that person or an individual's interpretation of his own life.

Examples: Within Reach: My Everest Story; An Enemy Among Friends; Sky, A True Story of Resistance During World War II; The Cage

Poetry Genres:

Definition: Literary work in metrical form or verse, the art of rhythmical composition, written or spoken, for exciting pleasure by beautiful, imaginative, or elevated thoughts.

Form: Many different forms of verse are included in traditional nursery rhymes, such as stories and riddles.

Examples: Hark! Hark! The Dogs do Bark!; Pease Porridge Hot; One, Two, Buckle My Shoe; Hush Little Baby; Pat-A-Cake

Free Verse

Definition: Literary work of poetry that is written without proper rules about form, rhyme, rhythm, or meter.

Form: Lacks rhyme and has less predictable rhythm.

Examples: Fog; Out of the Dust; Leaves