ANALYSIS OF CONTENT AND METHODS OF TEACHING

POETRY TO CHILDREN

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

Poetry for children is a special kind of poetry, as distinctive as pastorals, as sonnets, as humorous verse. It is neither higher nor lower than other forms of poetry. It is merely different.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the history and development of children's poetry, and to present helpful suggestions in subject matter and activities for teaching poetry to children.

Plan

The plan of this study begins with the Introduction, in which the purpose, the plan, and sources of data are outlined. In Chapter II the early and later history of children's poetry is studied. In Chapter III a suggested list of books and materials is given. In Chapter IV a variety of teaching activities is presented and discussed. In Chapter V conclusions of the findings of this study and a summary are reported.
Sources of Data

The data for this study were obtained by extensive reading of educational materials found in magazine articles and books, and from observation in the classroom, and by conferences with other primary teachers regarding the teaching of poetry.
CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF CHILDREN’S POETRY

Early History

Didactic poetry with moral and religious emphasis (1600-1800). -- The chief purposes to be served by teaching poetry in school are to give individual personal enjoyment, to furnish a common pleasure to the group, and to aid in deepening experiences.

According to Porter Lander MacClintock, there are certain results in literary training that can be served only by the teaching of poetry. It is verse that gives the child the most experience in the musical side of literature. The rhythm and cadence of prose have their own music, but elementary children need the simple striking rhythm of verse, whose rhythm is quite unmistakable.

Most children enjoy the additional music of rhyme, especially the regular terminal rhyme that most children notice and enjoy and remember.

Sing a song of sixpence,
A pocket full of rye,
Four and twenty blackbirds
Baked in a pie.
All children will rejoice in rye -- pie. But there will be some who enjoy the rhyming of words throughout and to whom even the chime of vowels will make music. In those who do not have the ear for music of words, some attempt should be made to evoke it.¹

An adequate knowledge of the historical and social background out of which distinct types of literature have sprung, is essential to literary understanding and appreciation. No one is equipped to judge the newer trends and to detect recurrent issues, who lacks the knowledge of what has gone before.²

In giving a historical account of the development of poetry, along with children's literature, the fact must be kept in mind that no period ends before another begins, and that there is a necessary formative or transition period between the two; hence the apparent occasional inconsistency in chronology of the different writers and periods.

Poetry for children has developed generally along with prose written for them. At first they had only folk rhymes, singing games, ballads, and other traditional verse originally enjoyed by all ages but which was gradually passed down as children's literature as adult taste became more sophisticated. Poetry of the first rank in the seventeenth and

²Annie E. Moore, Literature Old and New for Children, p. 3.
eighteenth centuries contained a good deal which the older child could enjoy, but except for anonymous verse, there was very little which the younger children could fully enjoy. It is safe to say that the most progressive of eighteenth century leaders in the field of literature for children never dreamed of the wealth and variety of reading material that would be available for them, just a century later.

Although there was little literature written for children until the last half of the eighteenth century, books for children appeared much earlier. These, however, were lesson books, intended to instruct the child in religion, morals, and manners.

By far the most important school book of early times was a New England primer which was published about 1690. The main feature of it was the "Westminster Catechism." It contained many questions and answers on the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, the Lord's Supper, the banishment of Adam and Eve, and other Biblical stories. Death and the uncertainty of life on the earth seemed to be the favorite theme of this New England primer. Near the beginning of the book this little jingle appeared:

Time cuts down all, both great and small,
As runs the grass --
Our life, too, must pass.
Xerxes the Great did die,
And so must you and I.
While you do cheer, death may be near.3

Isaac Watts, who lived from 1647 until 1748, is pointed out as a worthy predecessor of the better known children's poets. He was the first writer to prepare a volume of verses known specifically as children's verse, and he had a great influence on the poets of the period that followed. He suggested children's tendencies by warnings in the lessons that he tried to teach. He used Biblical examples to give moral advice. This one was written to show the danger from family disagreement:

The devil tempts the Mother's Son
To rage against another,
So wicked Cain was hurried on
Till he had killed his brother. 4

Isaac Watts is chiefly known today by a number of good hymns and songs which have been preserved for two hundred years in school textbooks, anthologies, and hymnals. His most beautiful perhaps is "A Cradle Hymn" beginning, "Hush, my dear, lie still and slumber." 5

The year 1744 was a very important one in the development of children's books, for it was during that year that John Newberry in London began to write his Nurse Truelove stories. He published over two hundred books for children. In the early American homes about the only books to be found were the Bible, the Psalter, the New England Primer, and possibly the "Hornbook," so called because of a thin layer of

5 Moore, op. cit., pp. 278-279.
horn which protected the paper or wooden surface containing the reading matter.

The first real American story book, an exclusively children's book, was published by Isaiah Thomas. This book was *Tom Thumb's Play Book*. Its purpose was to teach children their letters as soon as they could spell.

The children's book that has really stood the test of ages and has meant more to children than any other is the book of *Mother Goose's Melodies*, which was printed by Isaiah Thomas about 1785 from Oriental, French, and English collections.6

Who was *Mother Goose?* According to Andrew Lang, some verses published in France in 1650 contained an illusion to *Mother Goose* and seem to indicate that the term was current to denote some teller of fabulous stories. In 1696 *Mother Goose* first appeared as a person and an author, not in verse but in fairy tales. Charles Perrault is mentioned in connection with *Mother Goose*. In 1696 he published in book form about eight stories in French called *Tales of My Mother Goose*. These were translated from French into English about 1729 and thus the term came into English.

John Newberry made the first use of *Mother Goose* as applied to nursery rhymes. In 1765 he collected and published a book of rhymes entitled *Mother Goose's Melody; or, Sonnets*.

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for the Cradle, which is believed, on good authority, to be the first collection of English nursery rhymes to bear the name of "Mother Goose." Since Newberry's death in 1767, the name of Mother Goose has been attached only to rhymes.

No copy of Newberry's first edition is extant. Charles Welch says the eighth edition was published in 1780 and it was this that Isaiah Thomas of Worcester, Massachusetts, reprinted in America in 1785. In 1833 Monroe and Francis, publishers, brought out an enlarged edition with an introduction by Edward Everett Hale. This 1833 edition is our chief source for the rhymes of today.

The Newberry collection contained only fifty-two rhymes, while some modern collections have more than six hundred.

What is the secret of the never-waning popularity of Mother Goose? Why do these rhymes continue to fascinate children generation after generation? Children naturally like poetry, and examination and analysis of the rhymes show that they contain the essentials of good poetry.

The first essential that attracts children even before they are old enough to pay attention to thought is the rhythm and jingle. The recurrence of beats or strongly marked accents, is as regular as the ticking of a clock. Children like to give expression to this rhythm by clapping, patting, skipping, and marching. Just as any other poetry,

Moore, op. cit., p. 11.
the rhythm contributes to the tone.

Ding, dong, bell,
Pussy's in the well.

To market, to market, to buy a
fat pig,
Home again, home again, jig-gety jig.
To market, to market, to buy
a fat hog,
Home again, home again, jig-gety jog. 8

Annie E. Moore points out that it is "no metaphor" to say that "Mother Goose should be the child's first book of knowledge, his first natural history, and his introduction to sociology." Herein he meets a marvelous procession of human characters, from kings and queens to servants, maids, and stable boys, "all in jolly democratic camaraderie." To follow this procession "leads to every kind of environment." We enter palace and hut, court and kitchen, church, market, shop, fair, mill, and inn. We visit city, village, farm, garden, seashore, lane, field, stream; we dine upon bread, honey, milk, roast beef, fish, tarts, butter, cheese, pie, cake, and nuts, either sitting in state with King Cole or sharing a meager supper with Tommie Tucker. 9

There appeared early in the seventeenth century some writings for children that doubtless were intended for recreatory reading but which were so devised that they were

8Lillian Hollowell, A Book of Children's Literature, pp. 691-692.

9Blanche Weeks, Literature and the Child, pp. 159-160.
also a media of religious instruction. James Janeway contributed a book of verse, The Token for Children. John Bunyan wrote a Book for Boys and Girls or Country Rhymes for Children which dealt with barnyard animals but was wholly devoid of interest for children. 10

During the late eighteenth century, the first school of writers whose poetry was intended specifically for children, was founded by Jane and Ann Taylor, who, like Watts, emphasized the teaching of moral lessons but developed the themes along original lines; Charles and Mary Lamb's poems show unmistakable traces of Watts' influence, and even William Blake owes something to Watts, who could at times melt into tenderness at childhood's innocence. 11

Other writers of this period, and adherents of Jane and Ann Taylor were Elizabeth Turner, Sara Coleridge, Adelaide O'Keeffe, Barnard Barton, and Isaac Taylor.

Jane and Ann Taylor almost dominated the children's literature during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. They were the first poets to write exclusively for children and the great popularity of Original Poems and Rhymes for the Nursery brought forth a crop of imitators. When they were children, they published their first book. Their poems were spontaneous and grew out of a charming, well-ordered home life. The purposes of this first volume,

10 *bid.*, pp. 48-49.
Original Poems, were to develop the morals, refine the man-
ners, and impart interesting information to young children.
They included a rhyme and meter that added appreciably to
the attractiveness of the verses.\textsuperscript{12}

The very little child of today seems to find enjoyment
in such nature poems as "Twinkle, twinkle, little star,"
because of its tonal quality; and

\begin{center}
Thank you, pretty cow, who made
Pleasant milk to soak my bread.\textsuperscript{13}
\end{center}

While the Taylor sisters taught rather than sang songs,
they are ranked far above the mediocre writers because of
their influence on writers who followed them. A hundred
years before Robert Louis Stevenson, they wrote about stars
and sun, day and night, and play in the gardens. Despite
the aesthetic beauty of their poems, they were intent upon
pointing out the moral issues for children.

Isaac Taylor, the younger brother of Jane and Ann Tay-
lor, was an indifferent writer of didactic verse. His poems
were fervent, yet he wrote much better prose than verse.

Adalaide O'Keefe, a friend of Jane and Ann Taylor, con-
tributed to their first collection of verses published in
1804, which bore the title Original Poems for Infant Minds:
by Several Young Persons. She was a most unimaginative
writer of verse. Her children always met disaster because

\textsuperscript{12}Moore, op. cit., p. 287.
\textsuperscript{13}Weeks, op. cit., p. 240.
of their carelessness or their disobedience.

Charles and Mary Lamb wrote flawless verse but it was not in the language of childhood. Their chief contribution was in pointing out that children's books were becoming a product in themselves, and were no longer a minor by-product of general literature.

Kate Greenaway was an illustrator, an artist, whose pictures comprised the soul of the book in which they appeared. She illustrated volumes by the Taylor sisters, and the books sold more rapidly because of her illustrations. In writing her own books of verse, although her poems lacked excitement, she marked a transition from the early didactic poetry for children to the next period of development by failing to emphasize a moral. Her illustrations in these were exquisitely beautiful. She wrote about boys and girls playing games out-of-doors, but the children do not seem drawn from life, but rather the product of the illustrator's imagination. She designed a lovely A-B-C book called A Apple Pie, and illustrated Mother Goose, creating pictures in her distinctive way.

Expanding subject matter (1860-1870). -- The philosophy of age age has greatly influenced the literature of that particular era, and this is true of both adults' and children's literature. The nineteenth century gradually ushered in a whole new order of life. Great changes in religious

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and educational views in turn revolutionized writings of this age. Around 1840-1850 the didactic ideals of Rousseau began to be supplanted by those of Froebel, and an all-round training was sought by education. Not only were the intellect and moral nature to receive training, but the imagination was given a place as well. Fairy tales, which had met with opposition on the part of the didactic writers, were highly esteemed by Froebel.

After the War of 1812, America began a rapid expansion, and this had a remarkable influence on the literature of the period. From this historical background the Indian, the cowboy, and the Yankee trader were given to literature.15

A great amount of literature for children and about them was still to be found in the school textbooks in America. After the Revolutionary War the ideals of education changed from those of colonial days. However, a few textbooks continued to use "The Lord's Prayer" and other prayers for children.

In the schools of the South books were very scarce, and The Old Blueback Speller by Noah Webster was in general use. It contained a number of fables, and the lessons were planned to combine with the familiarity of objects, useful truths, and practical principles. It not only contained words to be

memorized in spelling but also ten stories, seven of which were fables. These stories were told and re-told to enrich language and reading ability and to teach morals.

Lindley Murray's English Reader, published in 1829, was designed to "assist young people to read with propriety and effect; to improve their language and sentiments and to inculcate some of the most important principles of piety and virtue." This reader had two large divisions, "Pieces in Prose" and "Pieces in Poetry."

Some of the school readers introduced a different and a lighter atmosphere which was pleasing to the young children in the first year of school. They contained ideas and stories regarding kindness to animals, thoughtfulness of others, and sportsmanship in play. The characters in these readers were natural and life-like young children who were interested in games, and lived normal lives.

Another series of readers used in the schools of this period were those of James Baldwin. They dealt chiefly with nature stories, and contained descriptions of birds, trees, flowers, fruits, and animals. The following familiar verse was the only selection pertaining to religion included in this book:

All things bright and beautiful
All creatures great and small
All things wise and wonderful
The good God made them all.

16Barnes, op. cit., p. 46.  
17Ibid., p. 51.  
18Ibid., pp. 59-60.
In the middle and late nineteenth century the authors of children's literature introduced the child as a real personality, not as a plastic figure. A description of the English child is given:

Children with intense figure of life in their chubby bows, and movement in their formally dressed limbs, not jointed dolls for moral marionette shows. They still had to be guarded from recklessness and vice, but not from brave adventure, and they were allowed to possess and use imagination.19

The writers of this period gained an insight into the fanciful world of childhood.

The history of literature for children would be incomplete without reference to the American writer, Peter Parley. He was violently opposed to the tales of the supernatural and to nonsense verse as un-Christian and undesirable food for young minds. He produced one hundred volumes, treating in a form interesting to children, facts of history, biography, science, astronomy, and travel.20 The Tales of Peter Parley appeared in 1827. He is to be remembered as the first writer to introduce into literature for children a distinct American element. Before this time American-made books for children were, for the most part, reprints of the literature of other countries, particularly England.

Within the next few decades there again began to appear types of literature of marked originality among which

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19Darton, op. cit., p. 280.
20Weeks, op. cit., p. 66.
was the fanciful tales often termed the modern fairy tale. To Hans Christian Andersen might well be accorded the title, "Father of the Modern Fairy Tale."²¹

Edward Lear (1812-1888) had no literary forerunner -- he is simply himself.

The pure nonsense which he wrote must have sprung from sheer exuberance of spirits which found a ready outlet through his facility in making clever, witty rhymes. Add to this the constant stimulation of an audience composed of merry youngsters and appreciative elders, and the situation is perfect for the production of some of the jolliest verses ever written. In Lear's own words:

There was an old Derry doun Derry,
Who loved to see little folks merry;
So he made them a book
And with laughter they shook
At the fun of the Derry doun Derry.

And children have been shaking with laughter ever since, as one edition after another of the "Nonsense" books has come out.²²

Edward Lear was also a gifted artist and he employed this talent to add to the appeal of his writings. The first Book of Nonsense published in 1846, consists entirely of limericks, and young children find these much funnier when carried along by the contagious laughter of grownups. The unity between the crude, absurd sketches and the ridiculous verses is perfect.

Lear wrote his poems for no purpose except, as he says,

²²Moore, op. cit., p. 291.
"nonsense, pure and absolute." He gets many of his most de-
lightful effects through the words and names which he invents
so prolifically. Older readers having a larger command of
the English language find great delight in his audacious puns
and other linguistic contortions which occur on every page
of the "Nonsense" books. One of his most familiar poems is:

The owl and the pussy cat
Went to sea,
In a beautiful pea-green boat.
They took some honey, and
Plenty of money,
Wrapped up in a five-pound note,

which ends with the strange couple being married by "the
turkey who lived on the hill," using a ring furnished by the
"piggy" from the end of his nose.

They dined on mince and
Slices of quince,
Which they ate with a runcible spoon;
And hand in hand on the
Edge of the sand
They danced by the light of the moon.

Later History

Transition to child-interest verse (1870-1920). -- To-
ward the close of the nineteenth century, although there were
few great juvenile poets aside from Robert Louis Stevenson
and Christina Rossetti, there were many other poets who
wrote poems for children. Among these were Jean Ingelow,
Lucy Larcom, Celia Thaxter, William Blake, Eugene Field,
James Whitcomb Riley, and others.
Jean Ingelow mingled childhood and fairies in her lyrics. Her verses contained a pleasing spontaneity. She thought it was delightful to "put one's head into the nest of a hollow tree and find it full of fairies."\(^{23}\)

Celia Thaxter's best poems were those of the sea and of birds. She wrote a number of lullabies and presented some well-drawn character sketches of little girls. One of her most familiar poems is "The Sandpiper."

Lucy Larcom wrote musically about birds and seriously about nature in general. Her "Brown Thrush" has furnished inspiration to many lovers of birds:

There's a merry brown thrush sitting up in a tree,  
He's singing to me! He's singing to me!  
And what does he say, little girl, little boy?  
Oh, the world's running over with joy!  
Don't you hear? Don't you see?  
Rush! Look! In my tree,  
I'm as happy as happy can be!\(^{24}\)

William Blake created the most fanciful of all dreams for children. He produced two volumes of lyrics for children: *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*. In these two volumes he portrayed the sweetness and lovableness of children. In this immortal poem he points out those qualities in the child and also reflects the temperament of the poet:

Piping down the valleys wild,  
Piping songs of pleasant glee,  
On a cloud I saw a child,  
And he laughing said to me:

\(^{23}\)Parton, op. cit., p. 289.  
"Pipe a song about a lamb."
So I piped with merry cheer.
"Piper, pipe that song again."
So I piped; he wept to hear.

"Piper, sit thee down and write
in a book that all may read."
So he vanish'd from my sight;
And I plucked a hollow reed.

And I made a rural pen,
And I stain'd the water clear,
And I wrote my happy songs
Every child may joy to hear. 25

Mary Mapes Dodge has an important place in the encour-
agement and development of children's literature. She wrote
Hans Brinkler, which is a story, not a poem, but it has de-
lightfully entertained boys and girls for many, many years.
She also was a leader in creating the excellent children's
magazine, St. Nicholas.

Frank Dempster Sherman wrote with remarkable freshness
and observation. 26 His favorite themes were the weather,
the seasons, and nature. In these characterizations of na-
ture he uses the "pretty fancy, rich imagery, quaint figures
of speech, and happy phrasing." 27 One of his most familiar
poems is "Daisies," given here in part:

At evening when I go to bed
I see the stars shine overhead;
They are the little daisies white
That dot the meadows of the night. 28

25Curry and Clippinger, op. cit., pp. 401-402.
26Moore, op. cit., p. 312.
28Curry and Clippinger, op. cit., p. 385.
Laura E. Richards' writings have brought laughter for three generations, and she is still creating verse just as fine, just as colorful, and just as amusing as she created in her youth. There is no message in her verses to detract from the pleasure of reading them. They were created to bring smiles and laughter from little children whom she knew and loved. She is gifted with the ability to write for children without writing down to them.\(^{29}\)

She writes the most unexpected things in happy, colorful verses, such as she has done in "A Legend of Lake Okeefinokee," a poem nine verses long which tells of the ridiculous adventures of a frog. The humor begins with the very first verse:

There once was a frog,  
And he lived in a bog,  
On the banks of the Okeefinokee,  
And the words of the song  
That he sang all day long  
Were "Croakety, crokety, crokety."\(^{30}\)

Tirra Lirra: Rhymes Old and New is a choice collection of Mrs. Richards' poetry, written for the child of nursery and kindergarten age, but which delights older children as well.

Eugene Field, toward the last of the century, produced some amusing verse for children. "The Duel," "Wynken, Blynken, and Nod," and "The Sugar Plum Tree" have given pleasure to

\(^{29}\)Weeks, op. cit., pp. 245-246.  
\(^{30}\)Ibid., p. 246.
several generations of children, because they can understand and appreciate their humor and imagination. These poems are perhaps his best contribution to literature for children.

James Whitcomb Riley, like Eugene Field, wrote of children rather than for them. They both wrote of experiences in their own childhood, but all too often the result has been to revive rather mournful memories, and their verse lacks the color and action which are necessary to childhood enjoyment of poetry. Some of their poems do have a pleasing rhythm.

Riley's success was largely due to his ability to present homely phases of life in the Hoosier dialect. "The Raggedy Man" is a good illustration of this skill. Most of his poems have their chief attraction in enabling older readers to recall the almost vanished thrilling delights of youth, but poems that do this are generally found to be interesting to children also.31

Christina Rossetti was a fervent lover of nature and this reflected strongly in her poems. One bit of verse, known and loved by children everywhere, which delights girls and boys with its musical cadence and sets them to chanting reads:

Mix a pancake,
Stir a pancake,
Pep it in the pan.

31Curry and Clippinger, op. cit., p. 388.
Her figures of speech are simple enough to be understood by the very young child. In her collection of verse for very young children, "Sing Song" will be found. Some melancholy notes and a tendency toward sentimentality is discernible in some poems, but enough of the bright and joyous type can be found to offset this quality in her poems.

Christina Rossetti began writing when still a child. She was encouraged to write by her artistic family, and critics agree that she had attained her full power as a writer by the time she was twenty years old. She had a wide range of command over subject and mood and flexibility of style, and she wrote as expertly for the adult reader as for the child.

In her "Sing Song" she wrote of cows and lambkins and setting hens, birds and flowers, wind and sun; cherries, pancakes, and bread and milk; playtime, worktime, and tender care at bedtime. These are the immortal subjects of the first collection of pure lyrics written especially for young children. And with their gentle voices she repeats her merciful message to the obscure creatures:

\begin{quote}
Hopping frog, hop here and be seen,
I'll not pelt you with stick and stone,
Your cap is laced and your coat is green;
Good-bye, we'll let each other alone.\textsuperscript{32}
\end{quote}

Robert Louis Stevenson is perhaps the most popular and best known of the children's poets of the nineteenth century.

\textsuperscript{32}Moore, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 298.
Many critics give him credit of founding a new school of poetry for children. Some critics regard *A Child's Garden of Verses* not only a children's classic but also as representing a standard of style and quality for all other writers in the field.  

The nineteenth century had seen a great change in the prevailing attitude toward children. It had grown from the old straight-laced moralistic notions and, toward the close of the century, the time was ripe for a simple, natural, and happy approach through literature to the hearts and minds of children. *A Child's Garden of Verses* was joyfully accepted by young and old.

There is a wealth of greatness and wonder in all his verses, and they are loved by all children.

One of his most musical and rhythmic poems for the young child is:

> 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 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.

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33Ibid., p. 303.  
34Ibid.  
35Curry and Clippinger, op. cit., p. 384.
A brief review of the nineteenth century regarding children's literature reveals that it was characterized by an increase in religious and secular material until about the middle of the century; at that time an abundance of gay, rhythmic poems appeared, expressing the child's appreciation of nature and the happiness of children at play.

At the close of the century, children's literature had been completely revolutionized and a new school of poetry had been founded by Robert Louis Stevenson, who is proclaimed by many critics as the first true "poet laureate" of children.

Children's literature comes into its own (1920-1945). — Books for children have increased in number and in their appeal. They become yearly more attractive from cover to content, and more writers of the better class are writing children's books. The result is that the present market offers an abundant supply of excellent books appealing to practically any and all interests which children and young people may have. The man who said that the twentieth century is the child's century must have had, among other things, the modern high grade children's books in mind. Truly, children's literature has come into its own.\textsuperscript{36}

Within the past twenty-five years we have had a period of distinct development in the field of children's literature. Not only has the number of really excellent books for

\textsuperscript{36}Edna Johnson and Carrie E. Scott, Anthology of Children's Literature, pp. 854-855.
children increased steadily during this time, but an appreciable change has taken place in the attitude of criticism toward such books. Children's librarians should be given credit for a great part in fostering the growth in taste and understanding of really good books for children. From the first the librarians have recognized the importance of children's interests, a fact of great significance in measuring the value of their influence. Through their foresight and courage, they have helped in attaining the present status which children's literature now holds. In our schools, until recently, the theory and practice of teaching children's literature have been academic rather than creative. In recent years, however, with new emphasis on experimental methods of teaching, the modern schools are adding yearly to the desirable reading material for children. Through John Dewey's influence upon current educational practice, books are being used that are more truly representative of children's interests in the twentieth century. 37

That literature of childhood is immeasurably richer than it was twenty-five years ago is clearly apparent, not only in the work of our best contemporary writers who have met the approval of children, but also in the marked improvement in the literary style and quality of the avowed "juvenile."

Through the contributions of such writers as Rudyard Kipling, Walter de la Mare, James Barrie, Hugh Lofting, Charles J. Finger, and A. A. Milne we have come to appreciate more fully that the best books written by adults for children will always be those of literary artists.38

The newer point of view in the criticism of children's books shows itself clearly in the higher standards that prevail in the editing and compiling of all anthologies of literature for children. Many years ago John Greenleaf Whittier established the fine tradition of the poet's anthology for children with his compilation of Child's Life in Verse, and this type of anthology by the poet ranks second only to the anthology of poetry made by the child himself. Many later poets have followed Whittier's example in the exquisitely chosen collections of genuine poetry for children made by such contemporary poets as Walter de la Mare, John Drinkwater, Sara Teasdale, Alice Meynell, and William Rose Benet.39

During this period many outstanding writers of adult literature have devoted a large part of their time and talent in writing poetry for children, but there are many others who write exclusively for children. The poetry of this period, more than of any earlier period, reflects through the poet the temperament of the child. In imagination, curiosity, wonder, play, spirit, and obedience to impulse, they claim

38 Ibid., p. 191
39 Ibid., p. 192.
Contemporary poets have preserved and incorporated in their verse the child-like attitude toward life; as a result, childhood has been glorified. The children's poet has projected himself, his spirit has taken up its abode for a while in some child's heart -- and he may tell us what a child is, how he feels, fancies, hopes, hears, and bears himself. 41

The subjects of modern verse for children vary greatly and are vastly different from themes of preceding poetry. The mystery of mortal existence, the deeply religious philosophies and problems used in earlier verse for children, have been omitted from contemporary verse for children and child-like interests such as sports, toys, nonsense, home life, lullabies, and fairies are glorified. In spite of the fact that many writers, especially in England, believed that children should only be given the truth in scientific and religious facts as almost the only suitable subjects for literature designed for children, little of this more serious and technical material is now incorporated into children's poetry.

Something within the heart of childhood and dormant in many grown-ups, has sprung up to reject this point of view every time a "practical" world has tried to impose it. Let a Walter de la Mare appear, followed by a Rose Fyleman and numerous other poets who write with equal beauty in a similar vein, and the walls crumble and fairy troops trip back again. 42

Not only have contemporary poets vitalized subject matter

40Barnes, op. cit., p. 1. 41Ibid., p. 3.
42Moore, op. cit., p. 274.
for their young readers, but they have accomplished this fact by means of a new and fascinating technique and style. They realize that children find pleasure in beautiful, peculiar, and amusing names of objects, people, and places.43

Thus, modern verse for boys and girls appears to be true and sincere, written with beautiful art, and not manufactured according to a recipe; because of this lambent radiance, it is performing a vital service in the cultural and emotional education of the child.

The more prolific writers of the contemporary group have been Walter de la Mare, Rose Fyleman, Rachel Field, A. A. Milne, Eleanor Farjeon, Elizabeth M. Roberts, Dorothy Aldis, and Nancy P. Turner. These are the writers who have contributed some rather than much verse, yet they are outstanding in the field of children's poetry: Vachel Lindsay, Carl Sandburg, Amy Lowell, Hilda Conklin, Rowena Bennett, and John Drinkwater.

Each of these writers has found inspiration in the interests and experiences of childhood. They have brought to their writings of verse for children a rich imagination and their finest craftsmanship. The result of the interest of these writers in children and their experiences has been to add to literature for children a store of charming, and in part, literary verse.45

43Ibid., p. 269.  
44Ibid., p. 9.  
45Weeks, op. cit., pp. 77-178.
With the turn of the century, there entered the most important figure who has so far appeared among writers of poetry for children, for in 1901 Walter de la Mare published Songs for Childhood, his first collection of poems in a field in which he has since become so famous. After this volume there appeared A Child's Day, another volume of child's verse. Peacock Pie, his best known collection, came out in 1913; Down-a-Down Derry in 1921; and the anthology Come Hither, which is one of the outstanding contributions of its kind. In 1930 came another volume of children's verse, Poems for Children. A writer for adults and children, Walter de la Mare has pictured in his poems for children a world of imagination, enchantment, and beauty with complete simplicity and understanding of childhood. His poems have a singing, musical quality, and an emotional tone so that the reader can feel with De la Mare that "a poem is a transfiguration of emotion."\(^{46}\)

De la Mare's greatest gift is displayed in the realm of fairyland or on its mysterious borders. Fairies as depicted by De la Mare are never little airy sprites wearing ballet skirts and carrying wands. "Berries" shows the plain fairy of the hills who knows all the hedgerows and lanes where berries grow thickest and is generous with kindly neighbors. "Melmillo" is as melodious as its title and shows a true wood spirit in possession of the woodland, all her birds folded

\(^{46}\)Ibid., p. 189.
to rest --

In the wood -- thorn, elder, willow
Danced alone -- lone danced Melmillo.

Laughter and fun ripple and sparkle in many of his poems. Songs of Childhood and Peacock Pie are in their completeness true literary treasures, and children should be privileged to personal ownership of them. 47

Among kindergarten and primary school children Rose Fyleman is probably the best-known living poet. Although English, as a real person she is better loved by American children than most of our own American writers.

It is as a poet of fairy-land that she has made her strongest appeal to children and her most distinctive contributions to children's poetry. She sees fairies everywhere. One of her poems begins:

Some days are fairy days,
The minute that you wake.
You have a magic feeling
That you never could mistake. 48

Rose Fyleman's belief in fairies is here expressed in what is perhaps her most widely known poem. The first stanza is given here:

The fairies have never a penny to spend,
They haven't a thing put by.
But theirs is the dower of bird and of flower,
And theirs is the earth and the sky;
And although you should live in a palace of gold,
Or sleep in a dried up ditch,
You could never be poor as the fairies are,
And never as rich. 49

Rachel Field is an American writer who has done much to foster literature for children. She has contributed both prose and verse which children read and love. She has the happy gift of being able to think with a child; to sense the play of his imagination. She understood the psychology of childhood and recognized children's interests in their objective world. She wrote of various things, the city, of pine trees, the sea, lighthouses, and a host of other things. Her word pictures are clear-cut and defined, with only that detail which is essential so that her writing seems simple and unforced. She writes for children without writing down to them.  

_Taxis and Toadstools_ is the collection of her poems which made Rachel Field known and loved among children. It has perhaps as many admirable poems for children as any volume of original verse of the last ten years. Her poems have variety of theme, attitude, and treatment. Although many of her poems in this volume are about the city and of the people we find there, she has in this volume a section called "Fringes of Fairyland." The poem entitled "The Elf Tree" is magic to children, and it begins

> Whenever I pass a gnarly tree  
> I knock my knuckles three times three  
> _my_ heart beats fast in case it should  
> Be the right tree in all that wood.  

Based on children's experiences and couched in language

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_50_ Ibid., pp. 191-192.  
the seriousness of a child.\textsuperscript{54}


"The Three Foxes" is a fast-moving poem and gets off to a good start with these lines:

\begin{verbatim}
Once upon a time there were
three little foxes
Who didn't wear stockings, and
they didn't wear soxes,
But they all had handkerchiefs
to blow their noses,
And they kept their handkerchiefs
in cardboard boxes.\textsuperscript{55}
\end{verbatim}

For the most part, Milne's poems are pure nonsense, or story poems told with a subtle whimsical humor, centering around the little things in a small boy's life. He has also written, in the above mentioned volumes, more than a dozen poems which possess beauty of a different kind -- a whimsical, serious beauty which appeals to the perceptions of the somewhat older child. Among these are "The Wind" and "The Blackbird."

Dorothy Aldis has written many poems for children, choosing simple domestic scenes and events in which she portrays both humor and charm. Her work is rather uneven as to

\textsuperscript{54}Ibid., p. 329. \textsuperscript{55}Barnes, op. cit., p. 28.
CHAPTER III

SUGGESTED SUBJECT MATTER

It is the purpose of this chapter to suggest some of the best samples of verse from both the old and the new, adapted to children in the primary grades. The selections have been guided by two important elements which enter into good poetry for children: poetic merit and children's interests. The selections have also been influenced by the desire to meet different tastes in different age children.

Children are more likely than adults to enjoy poetry, since enjoyment of poetry does not depend so much on intellectual ability as on imagination and the senses, and hence is more suited to the child's nature. Poetry is a world all its own, a thing set apart from the materialism and conventionalism of everyday living. It is a means of communication between everyday material things and that other world in which concepts exist that cannot be translated into the language of sense.

Poetry is not essentially informational, since it comes about largely through feelings. It is imaginative thought appealing to the emotions and expressed in artistic
and beautiful language. Poetry gives the child a new mode of expression, which is fascinating because of its lilt and melody, its beautiful word pictures. It paints pictures through the medium of words and causes children to think of nature, people, and animals in more intimate and appealing terms.¹

There is no intent to define exactly what the primary child should read. The poems suggested here are recommended because other primary and elementary school children have read them with pleasure and understanding. They are good as to content and form and within the range of the child's probable experiences and interests. It is by these criteria that one must first select that which he will offer, or provide for, a child to read. As he grows in experience, as his reading of poetry widens, and his pleasure in it increases, he will be found moving from the objective toward the subjective; from the simpler verse forms to the more complex. When he does, then there is a great body of literature awaiting him — the poetry written through the ages for the adult, as well as recent and contemporary poetry written for the child. Thus can he, indeed, roam far and wide, and keep always within the fine and the beautiful in literature.²

Children should be given contact with a great deal of

²Weekes, op. cit.
poetry as a part of their literary experiences, not, however, as a means of training the memory, or of giving information, but as a means of pure enjoyment. The one single purpose of poetry is to make glad the heart of man.  

The study of children's preferences shows clearly that among the poets who have celebrated childhood, the children have chosen for their own those whose poetry is genuine. Thus the unwaning popularity of Mother Goose from generation through generation stands as proof of the child's constant preference for the best. We have seen the welcome accord given by children to the poetry of Walter de la Mare and A. A. Milne. In the same way children have cared for William Blake's Songs of Innocence when allowed to enjoy in their own fashion those matchless songs of childhood. By reading carefully the body of poetry children really like, adults can most surely discover what constitutes for children the appeal of poetry.  

In giving this list of suggested subject matter it has been kept in mind that, although this list is for children in the kindergarten, primary, and low elementary grades, certain poems for children belong in any grade since experiments show that they are appreciated by children of all ages, even from "seven to seventy." Other poems suggested are in

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3Storm, op. cit.

4Evelyn E. Gardner and E. Ramsey, A Handbook of Children's Literature, p. 117.
themselves good but lacking in universal appeal. They need to be considered more carefully and offered to children of the particular ages to which they are suited.  

This list is a flexible classification and there may be much overlapping because aesthetic enjoyment is one of those intangibles which refuses to be standardized.  

Types of poems given in the list are generally classified as narrative and lyric poetry dealing with such subjects and phases of child interest as Mother Goose and nursery rhymes, lullabies, fairies, nature, children, animals, home, patriotism, holidays, and various other topics which are within the interest and experience range of young children. It consists of poetry old and new and includes many works of our fine contemporary writers of children's poems. 

The chronological order will not be followed because the list is made up largely of a group of living writers, and the order of their appearance is not important since all are inheritors of the past and each one is trying in his or her own way to sing the songs of childhood in key with the eternal spirit of childhood and in the spirit of the times.  

Poems which have more activity and are much enjoyed by children in the lower grades are two by Vachel Lindsay, "The Little Turtle" and "The Moon's the North Wind's Cooky."

6 Moore, op. cit., p. 9.  
7 Ibid., p. 278.
The latter one is given here and is typical of children's imagination:

The Moon's the North Wind's Cooky
He bites it day by day,
Until there's but a rim of scraps
That crumble all away.
The South Wind is a baker.
He kneads clouds in his den,
And bakes a crisp new moon -- that -- greedy
North -- Wind -- eats -- again! 8

"Skipping Ropes" by Dorothy Aldis is an example of a poem without a plot presenting a beautiful word picture which appeals to children's imagination:

Someday
Jane shall
Have, she
Hopes,
Rainbows
For her
 Skipping
 Ropes. 9

Children must have an opportunity to hear the same poems over and over again so that the beautiful words and pictures in their favorite poems come to be a part of themselves. For some years the outstanding poets for children were Christina Rossetti and Robert Louis Stevenson, and Rossetti's Sing Song and Stevenson's A Child's Garden of Verses were widely used. From Sing Song by Rossetti, "Who Has Seen the Wind" is one of the most familiar:

8From Vachel Lindsay, Johnny Appleseed and Other Poems.
9From Dorothy Aldis, Everything and Anything.
Who has seen the wind?
Neither I nor you;
But when the leaves hang trembling
The wind is passing through.

Who has seen the wind?
Neither you nor I;
But when the trees bow down their heads,
The wind is passing by.10

From Stevenson's A Child's Garden of Verses, a humorous, playful poem that never fails to please children is "Time to Rise":

A birdie with a yellow bill
Hopped upon the window sill
Cocked his shining eye and said:
"Ain't you 'shamed, you sleepyhead!"11

Today there are many poets whose verse is concerned with the child's own world and is written in simple musical English. A. A. Milne in When We Were Very Young and Now We Are Six has given us such delightful poems as "The King's Breakfast," "Disobedience," "Nursery Chairs," "The Three Foxes," and many others with beautiful flowing rhythm. Rachel Field in Taxis and Toadstools delights children with such verse as "The Animal Store," "The Ice Cream Man," "The Toy Shop," and "Skyscrapers." The latter gives children a different impression of skyscrapers:

Do skyscrapers ever grow tired
Of holding themselves up high?
Do they ever shiver on frosty nights
With their tops against the sky?

10From Christina Rossetti, Sing Song.
Do they feel lonely sometimes
Because they have grown so tall?
Do they ever wish they could lie right down
And never get up at all?12

Rose Fyleman's poems about fairies should be included in any course of children's literature, as well as Dorothy Aldis' Everything and Anything and Walter de la Mare's Peacock Pie. The poem "Some One" is an example of this and is filled with childish imagination and playful spirit:

Some one came knocking
At my wee small door;
Some one came knocking,
I'm sure -- sure -- sure;
I listened, I opened,
I looked to left and right,
But nought there was a-stirring
In the still dark night;
Only the busy beetle
Tap-tapping in the wall,
Only from the forest
The screech-owl's call,
Only the cricket whistling
While the dewdrops fall,
So I know not who came knocking
At all, at all, at all.13

Many poems from these authors and others are included in Marjorie Barrow's One Hundred Best Poems for Boys and Girls. This is an excellent anthology of children's poems.

The following is a list of a wide variety of books of poems old and new, recommended as suitable subject matter for teaching poetry to children. It is given in the following order: Mother Goose collections, individual poets' works, and anthologies.

12 From Rachel Field, Taxis and Toadstools.
13 From Walter de la Mare, Peacock Pie.
Mother Goose Collections

6. Fish, Helen, *Four and Twenty Blackbirds*, Stokes.
7. Greenaway, Kate, *Mother Goose*, Warne, N. D.

Individual Poets' Works

15. De la Mare, Walter, *Songs of Childhood*, Longmans.
44. Richards, Laura E., *Tirra Lirra*, Little.
47. Rossetti, Christina, *Sing Song*, Macmillan.
52. Tippitt, James, A World to Know, Harper.
53. Tippitt, James, I Spend the Summer, Harper.
54. Turner, Nancy, Magpie Lane, Harcourt.
55. Turner, Nancy, Zodiac Town, Harcourt.
56. Welles, Winifred, Skipping Along Alone, Macmillan.
57. Wynne, Annette, For Days and Days, Stokes.

Anthologies
1. Barrows, Marjorie, One Hundred Best Poems, Whitman.
2. Association for Childhood Education, Sing Under the Silver Umbrella, Macmillan.
8. De la Mare, Walter, Come Hither, Knopf.
9. De la Mare, Walter, Tom Tidders Ground, Collins.
11. Harrington, Mildred, Ring Around, Macmillan.
15. Lang, A., Blue Poetry Book, Longmans.
28. Poisy Ring, Houghton.
CHAPTER IV

SUGGESTED TEACHING METHODS

Most children are naturally fond of poetry. They can be stirred by words and swayed by the rhythm of a poem even when they are far from a full understanding of the deeper meaning.

You must have a silver penny
To get to Fairyland.1

Most poems are better understood by being read aloud intelligently in a low-pitched, sympathetic voice. Poems should be phrased as in music, according to the meaning, still preserving the rhythm and music of the lines.

Essential to good reading, especially of poetry, is a pleasing voice. Just as a poor singing voice mars the beauty of music, so a poor reading voice mars the beauty of a poem. The voice should be properly pitched, be flexible, capable of reflecting all nuances of meaning and emotion. The teacher's voice is a very important factor in teaching children to love poetry. No teacher will read poetry well who

1*1Elanche Thompson, Silver Pennies, Preface, p. vii.
does not like poetry. She must be genuinely interested, and have a genuine interest in and liking for children's literature.\(^2\)

To read poetry is more difficult than to read prose. The language of poetry often involves metaphor and decorative phrases that may obscure the thought. The meaning of the poem being read must be clear as well as the spirit of the writing; and retaining the beauty of the verse form, it must be transmitted to the listener. It will not do, however, to overlook the musical qualities of words and phrases in a poem while intent on getting the thought content.\(^3\)

To give the guidance that will train children to appreciate good literature, the teacher must be equipped with something more than a list of poetry and prose of a well-graded selection. She needs more than teaching techniques even of a high order. She needs more than a knowledge of the literature for children which is within the range of their interest and experiences. The primary requisite in teaching poetry, as in any other subject, is sympathetic understanding of children and childhood.\(^4\)

To get the greatest benefit from a course in literature, the child should have a background of experience which will contribute to his understanding and interpretation of what

\(^2\)Blanche E. Weekes, *Literature and the Child*, p. 274.

\(^3\)Ibid., p. 276.

\(^4\)Ibid.
is read. Reading of poetry should be to him a recreation, not merely another lesson. He should be able to create images -- pictures of what he reads or hears read that will enrich the reading experiences.

Formal training in poetry appreciation should begin informally -- which seems paradoxical -- and it should remain informal. The quickest way to kill any possible interest in a poem is to say, "Today we are going to learn a poem named 'The Little Turtle' by Vachel Lindsay. You may sit up straight in your seats and listen." Rather, establish a mood for the poems to be presented by a picture, a story, music, another poem perhaps, or just a skillful question leading up to the poem to be read. At the end of the reading take time for an interesting discussion of the poem.

To teach poetry effectively is to develop in children the love of poetry. But this cannot be done by formal memory work nor careful dissection of poems. A freshman in college was asked whether she liked poetry. Her answer was, "In the elementary school poetry was just one more thing to memorize and in high school it was just one more thing to dissect."

There is no single best procedure or method to follow in teaching poetry. The keynote of informality should be sounded in any procedure of teaching poetry. This is

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5 Ibid., p. 281. 6 Thompson, op. cit., Preface, pp. viii-ix.
7 Weekes, op. cit., p. 280.
particularly true as far as the younger boys and girls of the kindergarten and primary grade levels are concerned. This informal procedure should not rule out guidance; to do so would result in little or no training. It does infer that the time devoted to the reading of poetry is a recreatory period, a time of free, frank, personal, and informal talk over what is being read, with no thought of "dissection."

There should be nothing to indicate that a test on the subject lies just ahead. The period should be one of natural, spontaneous, free discussion of the aspects of the poem that interest each member of the group.⁸

The child's first contact with poetry is an auditory one; he listens to poetry much as he listens to music. A large measure of the beauty of poetry lies in its tonal quality, in its cadence, its rhythm, its time beat, the sound of single words, of phrases, and larger word groups. Children express interest in these aspects of a poem, long before they are interested in content. This interest is expressed in their motor responses, such as bodily swaying to the rhythm or time beat and by joining in when they hear repetitive words or refrains.⁹

Any participation in poetic response should be spontaneous and should be encouraged among little children. From the earliest school days children should be encouraged

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⁸Ibid., pp. 281-282. ⁹Ibid., p. 282.
to bring into the classroom poetry which has been heard or read outside. The teacher must create within the room the atmosphere of poetic enjoyment. She must be natural and free from artificiality and staginess when reading or saying poetry to the class. She should introduce a poem informally, letting the introduction come naturally from some normal situation, as would be the case in any informal social situation.

Blanche Weekes gives account of this incident in her discussion of presenting a poem:

A teacher introduced Stevenson's poem, "My Shadow," by saying after the class had assembled in the morning circle: "I saw you playing with your shadow when I walked behind some of you on my way to school. I know a poem about a boy and his shadow," and she immediately began to say the poem.10

Children are by nature spontaneous, ready to express an idea or offer a suggestion if they have not been regimented into silence. For the primary teacher who wishes to instill the love of good literature in children, the most helpful suggestion is to be natural; to encourage children to be natural and spontaneous; to create and maintain a normal, natural, happy atmosphere in the classroom; to take pleasure one's self in poetry and in the reading and saying of poetry to children; to know a great deal of poetry for children and to let the reading and saying of poetry become a daily habit.11

\[\text{\textsuperscript{10}}\text{Ibid.}, pp. 282-283.\] \[\text{\textsuperscript{11}}\text{Ibid.}, p. 283.\]
Allan Abbott makes two points which might well serve as guiding principles to one who must give training in literature appreciation.

Reader and poet together produce the poem, like the string and body of the violin; the poet plays on the strings, but the real music comes from the resonance of the body of the instrument, which is the mind of the reader. The response to such provocation in words will be just as varied as the experiences, actual or imaginative, of the reader; no two persons will give back the same echo. For this reason, no one response is necessarily better or truer to the poet's meaning than some other; indeed the most imaginative lines are so because they call up so many and so varied associations in readers' minds.  

When poetry has been presented the last thought should be in relation to the fine thought content and the fine form of what has been read. All suggestions for memorization or creative efforts, if they must be made, belong preferably to the development aspect of the study. The stimulation to read other poetry should be inherent in the "lesson." It is best when unvoiced, at least by the teacher. When a child expresses a desire to read more verse, it is an indication that he has to some degree appreciated the poem or poems that have just been read. A teacher can sustain interest in poetry, even if very little can be presented each day. 

Sometimes a single reading of a poem is preferable to several readings. Reading with no discussion is often very

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13 Weekes, op. cit., p. 291.
desirable; indeed, some poetry can be hurt by discussion of any sort. Whimsical beauty which can only be sensed, poetry which arouses children’s deepest feeling of emotions which one hardly cares to express in words or cannot find words to express himself adequately, tend to be food for thought rather than a subject for discussion.

Presentation of a Poem

If there is a single rule relative to procedures in training in appreciation of poetry, it is that the poem must first be presented as a whole. Just as one would not expose a part of a picture at a time to be looked upon. After a view of the whole picture, certain aspects may be brought to the attention of the children, but the parts which are now to be emphasized have first been seen in relation to the whole picture, and to each part which makes up the whole. So it should be with literary units of poems. The first reading, then, should be the reading of the whole poem. As the appeal of poetry, like the appeal of music, is to the ear, the audience should listen rather than follow the printed page. The first reading of a poem should be done by the best reader in the group, which in many cases is the teacher, but not always. The teacher should guide and encourage her pupils to read poetry themselves so that others will enjoy hearing them read.

After a new poem is read, usually the natural outcome is
comments and questions from the group. In all too many cases it is the teacher who makes the comments and asks the questions. These should come from the children who must be themselves active. Often the teacher's questions, which she is prone to plan meticulously in advance, are not the questions which come into the children's minds. The teacher, of course, enters into the discussion, not to inform the child what to think, but to guide his thinking. Her opinion is essential in a group discussion, for it tends to clarify points not quite understood, and set standards of what is fine and good. In this way the teacher contributes to the development of taste and the stimulation of new interests. 14

After the discussion, the poem should be read again as a whole. To read it thus again, is a means of unifying it, or setting each part which has been discussed and read separately, into the poem again, in its right relationship to every other part of the poem as a whole.

Memorizing

It was an accepted practice of the traditional school to require memorization of poems. Some traditional curricula stated the specific poems to be memorized and even the seasons during which this work should be done. The practice today is to let the child decide what he will memorize -- or

14Weekes, op. cit., pp. 298-299.
whether he will memorize any of that which he has been reading or discussing. It is quite voluntary on his part, and what he memorizes is his own choice, usually what appeals to him most, be it merely a part or a whole. If, from his early school years, he has found pleasure in poetry, then it is certain that he will voluntarily fix much of it in his memory.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 302-303.}

Significant motivation, which implies having a personal need or interest which an activity meets or satisfies, is a strong stimulus to memorization. What others in the group can do well stimulates a child to his best effort. The teacher's ability to say poetry well also may prove highly stimulating. The total situation, largely under the teacher's control, should provide the stimulation to memorize. No one can predict the exact nature of the stimulation which will set children voluntarily to memorizing. Once the habit of memorizing has been established, by the proper classroom attitudes, it will be quite a matter of course.

After the poem has been presented as a whole, and after the discussion and study, the teacher may ask, "Does any part of the poem keep coming back to your mind?" or "Has any part stayed in your mind?" Then call upon the one or ones who answer "yes" by letting them recall orally the part which they remember. Or the teacher might say, "Let us take
a few minutes to memorize the parts we like best." Then both teacher and pupils definitely attempt to memorize the preferred parts. It may be a few lines or many, but the choice is personal.

Except for purposes of entertainment there seems little occasion for memorizing an entire poem, unless it be in choral speaking. There are many reasons for this statement and to the average reader they are evident. To memorize parts of poems, however, and very short poems for pleasure and enjoyment is a very worthwhile activity in the primary grades.

To fix a poem in memory does not require a great number of repetitions of the kind that tend toward rote memorization. The "whole method" of learning will reduce the number, as unity will be preserved. One objective of memorization on the child's part is the feeling or thrill aspect -- pleasure in accomplishment and the desire to retain that which pleases.16

Little children in the earlier years of school, joining in when the teacher reads or says poetry, are having experiences in which they all delight. These experiences could lay the foundation for choral speaking. This type of activity is very desirable for the primary age child, as it is entirely voluntary and spontaneous on the part of the child.

A very delightful method of presenting poetry to young

16 Ibid., pp. 306-307.
children is by records played on a record player. A number of these records are available among which are many nursery rhyme records and the poems of A. A. Milne taken from his volumes of verse, When We Were Very Young and Now We Are Six. The response to rhythm and content when presented in this way gives vitality to the activity which is very satisfying to both children and teacher.

The ultimate aim of teaching poetry is to cultivate appreciation of it in the hearts of the children. Poetry is a beautiful and intensified expression of thought or feeling. No two people, perhaps, react alike to the same things. Children especially vary in their capacity to appreciate and also in their manner of showing appreciation in poetry. Silence may be the finest evidence of clear understanding and keen enjoyment. Over-analysis kills children's interest. Teachers should furnish rich opportunities for the development of a love and appreciation of the very best in poetry.17

Radio programs are helping to develop appreciation and enjoyment of poetry. More of these radio programs devoted to children's poetry and stories should be made available to school rooms.

Suggested Teaching Activities

Children in the primary grades like to reproduce, in some way, that which impresses them. In poetry this may be

done in various ways, among them pantomime, dramatization, puppet shows, response to rhythm, choral speaking, scrapbook collections, through various art media, and creative verse by children.

Variety may be introduced by having a poem enacted in pantomime while the remainder of the class give it in oral concert.

Some poems or rhymes can be dramatized quite successfully. Children enter wholeheartedly into this activity. The wearing of simple costumes adds materially to the interest and pleasure of this activity.

Where a musical setting has been provided, it can be used for rhythmic response in time with the rhythm of the poem being used.

Many poems may be reproduced through art activities. Free expression drawings of parts of poems, paper cutting, pasting and clay modelling in primary grades to illustrate meanings of poems are stimulating activities for young children.

Making illustrated scrapbooks of favorite poems which children love and can keep, helps to develop a lasting appreciation for poetry. When children can read poetry with some independence, their interest in collecting and constructing opens to them many delightful approaches to further
acquaintance with poetry. As a child gathers poems for an individual anthology, he is eager to read an abundance of poetry in search of new treasures. From year to year, the child will continue to enjoy the making of such personal collections, but the teacher must recognize this as a highly individual activity and keep away from the idea of a general assignment.  

To let children give a puppet show of some story, poem, or jingle is like dramatization, to give them absolute happiness, for while entering into either of these activities, they become really like the characters which they portray.

Choral speaking is what the term implies, the speaking, not the singing or the chanting of verse, so that the group becomes a verse speaking choir. Each individual must interpret the poem for himself. At no time is this interpretation surrendered to group interpretation, though it must become merged, but not submerged in it. The interpretation which a group finally follows is decided upon after group study and discussion of the poem. The individual may hold to his own interpretation from the standpoint of the key in which he speaks the lines, the manner in which he says them, or the points of emphasis. Time beat as well as length of pause or rest is important and must be observed by all alike.


20Mountains A. Bone, Children's Stories and How to Tell Them, pp. 60-62.
to avoid confusion.

Voices in a speaking choir must be grouped according to pitch -- high, low, medium, loud, shrill, dull, and monotonous, and these must be separated into similar groups. An essential to choir speaking is voice control and to approximate the middle or more desirable speaking range. From the standpoint of voice or speech improvement this control is of major importance; from the standpoint of training in literary appreciation, such control is a by-product. From group choral speaking, greater individual self-confidence on the part of the timid children and finer comradeship from group activity will result if properly conducted.\(^\text{21}\)

Besides recreation and pleasure given to children through choral speaking, it is an excellent way to improve speech defects in children.

The revival of choral speaking is now so general and bringing poetry back to the masses, from whence it came, is the finest attribute of the choral speaking movement. It is group interpretation of poetry instead of individual interpretation, although, as Carrie Rasmussen says:

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\text{... to be truly educational it should be group expression in which the individual retains his individualized powers. Through this group work the timid child will lose his timidity and gain self-confidence, while a bold child will learn to conform to the spirit of the group for best results.}^{22}\]

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\(^{21}\) Weeks, op. cit., pp. 312-313.

\(^{22}\) Carrie Rasmussen, *Choral Speaking for Speech Improvement*, p. 13.
Choral speaking is the result of a highly specialized technique. It is not a stunt or a mode of haphazard group speaking. It is an excellent means of motivation in appreciation of poetry when properly used.23 Any number of children may participate in choral speaking; that is, the average number of any classroom. In the case of primary age children, the poem is read to them first. Simple poetry, such as a Mother Goose rhyme, with a marked rhythm, or dramatic poetry, is best for beginners: "Baa, baa, Black Sheep, Have You Any Wool?" is a good one. Children have heard and said it before, but they have, perhaps, never seen anything in it except a rhythmical swing and enjoyment of sound which they liked. In developing this lesson questions are asked, such as: "Who says

Baa, baa, Black Sheep,
Have you any wool?"

They will answer: "A man," "A lady," "A girl," "A boy." The discussion follows. Who knows whether it is a man, woman, or child who asks the question? That is not important. It may be a father to some children, a mother to others, a little boy to some, and a little girl to still others. The important thing is that we know a question is asked. "Who answers

Yes sir, yes sir,
Three bags full"?

Some queer answers may be forthcoming. Children have

23 Ibid.
not been taught to think out these rhymes. They know them only for sound and rhythm. But the discussion should continue until they all realize it is the Black Sheep speaking.

"And then he says," continues the teacher,

"One for my master,
And one for my dame."

These words "master" and "dame" may not be familiar to young children, and will need to be discussed until it is understood that the Black Sheep wants to give wool to her owner and his wife.

Continuing,

"Put none for the little boy
Who lives in the lane."

All children may not know what a lane is. That must be made clear to them. When they understand that the sheep will not give wool to the little boy who is crying, the children will no doubt begin to think it was the little crying boy who asked the Black Sheep the question in the first place.

Now they can begin to say the rhyme with understanding. They will, no doubt, want someone to ask the question and the others answer it, or they will want a group to answer it. The children will probably suggest this procedure, which will be group speaking. If they do not, the teacher may suggest it, and they will enjoy it, and as they say it over and over in various ways, they will give it better interpretation.

They may sing-song at first, but if they really understand the thought behind the poem, and try to make the meaning
clear, they will eventually overcome this sing-song quality.

Small children thoroughly enjoy dramatization. Some one could be Black Sheep, and some one could be the little crying boy who asks the questions. Several children could be sheep. Half the room could ask the question and the other half give the answer, then alternate. By this time they all know the words and it is fun.24

Creative Writing

Like all creative work, while it cannot be compelled, it frequently can be evoked. The main requisites of the teacher are a spirit of sympathetic understanding with her group and an appreciation and knowledge of poetry for children. If she has these and the patience to proceed slowly, both she and her children may hope to find the joy and enrichment which come from poetic self-expression.25

The necessity of building up a background will be evident in the beginning of these efforts. We must not quench the desire for poetic expression on the part of the child by asking him to write a poem before he has cultivated an appreciation for poetry. The amount of time spent on the cultivation of appreciation probably will show greater returns than any other comparable period of the process. Its length will depend upon the previous experiences of the children.


If the teacher likes poetry, the time spent on this preparation will be most enjoyable. She will select poems within the experience and comprehension range of the group. She will judge by the response to the poems on the part of the group, which type poems are best liked by the children and will read similar ones. When children show that they are eager for this reading period of poems, the teacher may help children make analysis of various poems by telling them she would like for them to ask questions and encouraging comments, and asking certain questions herself. Such questions as: "What part of the poem did you like?" "Could you see any pictures?" "What do you think the poem tells us?" In this way the teacher stresses the importance of the thought in poems instead of merely rhyming lines. In studying poems attention should be given to words, phrases, and rhythm.

After appreciation has been awakened and some skill in analysis developed, attention may be called to appropriate words and phrases. "Were there words in the poem that you liked especially?" "What words helped you to see a picture?" "Were there color words?" "What were the funniest words or the most exciting words in the poem?" Let children give all the descriptive words they can supply about some occasion or object of interest. The more play spirit you can get into the activity, the better. Children must gain the feeling
for effective words. Nothing kills a creative glow in children so much as too much formality.

Definite attention must be called to rhythm before attempting to write poetry. The teacher may ask: "How does a poem differ from a story?" After a discussion engaging in this activity the group may decide that "a story runs along, but a poem sort of swings and sings." At this point the teacher could say, "You, too, can make poems. Suppose we try." Bell Johnson, telling of an activity on creative writing in her classroom, says:

First we think of something we want to talk about. Then we try to use the right words to say best what we want to say. Then we make it swing and make it sing.

Since emphasis was always on thought, the compositions of this period were quite prose-like. Rather characteristic is this bit:

Birds, birds, you had better be on your journey,
You have a long way to travel and it's going to be cold here --

and from another group:

Leaf buds crawling out of little costs
Violets popping up to meet you,
Gardens making things to eat
Good morning Spring!26

The attitude of the teacher is most important when guiding children in any creative activity. Much appreciation for effort and accomplishment should be expressed by her. No critical word should be spoken of any effort but suggestions of how lines can be improved.

26 Ibid.
The first work in creative writing will, perhaps, consist of rhythmic sentences suggested by the individual children and arranged by the teacher. The advantage of this composite group work is that each child feels that he has had a share in the poems written yet it would be difficult for a single child to produce such compositions alone. For example:

Cars, cars, stop
The cars cannot stop
They slide and slide
They go faster and faster at the stop sign!
Men put on the chains!
Shift your gears
The streets are slick with ice. 27

Emotional interest is necessary to writing poetry, so it is well to wait for some occasion in which the group is interested as a setting for a group poem. This emotional quality cannot be over-estimated. It is the quality which gives release, sets free the imagination, and helps the child find words and phrases which exactly fit the pattern of his thoughts. A teacher who is in rapport with her group will share and help sustain this emotion until it is finally captured in words.

Child thought -- and not the teacher's -- should be the standard. The teacher should not give or seek to evoke any certain word or phrase. The effect is deadly as the child begins thinking of what the teacher may want or expect him to say.

27Ibid.
If the initial preparation to verse writing has been carefully made and the children have learned many poems, the rhythm seems to come of itself. Children are quick to sense a line of rhythm and say, "It doesn't sing" or "It sounds jerky." The teacher may say, "Can you make a line that sounds like this one?" and repeat a line smoothly and slightly accented.

It seems better, when attempting to create verse with primary children, to attempt to create authentic thoughts and thought patterns in the first and second grades and leave rhyme until at least the third grade. It is quite certain that any group attempting verse writing for the first time will write with finer feeling and surer authenticity if they postpone rhyming until at least a year. Rhyme in poetry is an embellishment, never a necessity. The important thing to the beginner in the creative field is that the child's thought be kept "aromatic and sure" and that complete emotional freedom be encouraged and nurtured.28

Attempts at creative verse writing should be kept entirely recreatory as far as the individual children are concerned. It is the joy quality of the activity that arouses persistent effort. It is the producing rather than the product that should be of greater concern to the teacher. At the same time children must be encouraged to produce the best

28Ibid.
products they are capable of producing. The result may be mediocre, but whatever it be, it should represent the child's best efforts. The harmonious, rich development of the child, is the ultimate goal of all teaching activities.²⁹

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions reached in this study are a result of research of the historical background and development of poetry for children, and of what is best in subject-matter and teaching methods for teaching poetry to children in the primary grades.

In Chapter I the introduction stated the purpose, the plan, and the source of data of the problem under study.

In Chapter II the historical background of children's poetry is given. This study is separated into the early historical period, during which most of the writings were didactic, with moral and religious emphasis; and the later period, during which there was a transition to child-interest verse.

In Chapter III, subject-matter was discussed and a suggested list of poems suitable for primary children was given.

In Chapter IV a discussion of teaching methods and techniques was presented, including a report on various teaching activities which enrich the curriculum of literature for children, and help to develop a deeper appreciation for poetry.
Enough research has been done in the field of children's poetry that the writer feels justified in making the following conclusions:

Conclusions on the Study of the Historical Background of Children's Poetry

1. There has been a great change in the type of poetry written for children. The swing has been from didactic poetry with moral and religious emphasis, to child-interest verse.

2. The amount of verse written for children has increased from a scant amount published during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries, to an abundance of books of poems for children offered by writers of the latter nineteenth century and by a great number of contemporary writers.

Conclusions on Subject Matter

1. Poetry is important enough to children to be given an outstanding place in the primary school curriculum. It plays a definite part in enriching reading activities and adds joy, pleasure and recreation to classroom instruction.

2. Children's poetry fits into the modern primary curriculum and helps to create an environment that is conducive to fuller personality development.

3. Children should be given contact with a great deal of poetry as a part of their early literary experiences.
Wide variety as to types of poems and subject matter of poems is important since there is such a wide variation of reading interests and tastes among children of the same age and grade levels.

4. Any suggested list of subject matter should include poems of both early and recent writers. In this way children will be given the entire scope of development in types of poems written for children.

Conclusions on Teaching Methods

1. The methods of teaching poetry to children have changed from the didactic method to the activity method involving recreation and pleasure for the individual child and the group. Progress toward the newer and more effective practices in teaching poetry is being achieved in modern primary schools.

2. Creative writing of poems by children releases their power of self-expression, and provides for freedom and recreation in the classroom. It develops children's interest in increasing their vocabularies by stimulating thinking, and through eagerness on the part of the child to give expression in verse to his emotional feelings.

3. If a child is a guided learner and experimenter by means of proper methods of poetry instruction, he will be led into unknown fields of interest and assisted in developing a greater appreciation of all good literature.
General Conclusions

1. Children's poetry is one of the simplest, yet one of the most powerful agents in the field of children's literature.

2. Poetry develops the child's emotional nature, and tends to give him interest in moral and spiritual thinking. It also helps to develop greater appreciation of art, music, and literature, and trains him to distinguish between the cheap and the great in all fields of human experiences.

3. Contemporary poetry glorifies childhood. In verse of this period children seem to speak for themselves and the poetry is, in turn, the spirit of childhood.
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