

Poetry and verse novels

3-5 years

Each Peach Pear Plum by Janet and Allan Ahlberg

A rhyming I-spy game where little ones hunt for Cinderella, Tom Thumb and other storybook faces hiding in each picture.

We're Going on a Bear Hunt by Michael Rosen and Helen Oxenbury

A chant-along family adventure full of swishy, swashy sound effects that children love to act out.

A Great Big Cuddle by Michael Rosen and Chris Riddell

Silly, tender poems made for the very young, with lively illustrations on every page.

The Gruffalo by Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler

A quick-witted mouse invents a monster, then meets him. The rhymes are easy to learn by heart.

Hairy Maclary from Donaldson's Dairy by Lynley Dodd

Bouncy rhymes follow a parade of naughty dogs, and the story ends with a scare from a cat.

Here's a Little Poem edited by Jane Yolen and Andrew Fusek Peters, illustrated by Polly Dunbar

A gentle first poetry anthology that is ideal for bedtime sharing.

Room on the Broom by Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler

A kind witch keeps losing her things, and a growing crew of animal friends helps her out.

The Owl and the Pussycat by Edward Lear

Classic nonsense verse with a runcible spoon and a wedding by the sea. It's a lovely first taste of "proper" poetry.

5-8 years

Please Mrs Butler by Allan Ahlberg

Funny, cheeky poems about school life that children recognise at once ("Please Mrs Butler, this boy Derek Drew..."). Many will want to read them aloud.

***Mustard, Custard, Grumble Belly and Gravy* by Michael Rosen and Quentin Blake**

Rosen's mischievous poems about food, family and everyday mishaps, with Blake's scribbly drawings.

***Crazy Mayonnaisy Mum* by Julia Donaldson and Nick Sharratt**
Rhythmic, giggle-inducing poems about family life, with Sharratt's bright pictures.

***Dirty Beasts* by Roald Dahl and Quentin Blake**
Short, wicked rhymes about animals with deliciously gruesome endings.

***The Ha Ha Bonk Book* by Janet and Allan Ahlberg**
A jumble of jokes, riddles and daft poems that is perfect for dipping into.

***Heard It in the Playground* by Allan Ahlberg**
Poems about playtime, friends and playground rules. It's good for reading aloud and reciting.

***The Puffin Book of Fantastic First Poems* edited by June Crebbin**
Short, snappy poems from many poets, which makes it a good first anthology for new readers.

***Green Eggs and Ham* by Dr Seuss**
Famous rhyming nonsense that helps children feel like confident readers.

8-11 years

***The Hat* by Carol Ann Duffy**
A witty collection with a title poem in which a hat is tossed from one famous poet's head to the next. Other poems cover socks, school and cows on a shopping trip.

***Revolting Rhymes* by Roald Dahl and Quentin Blake**: Fairy tales get wicked twists and some gruesome, funny endings. It's a reliable way to win over a reluctant reader.

***Funky Chickens* by Benjamin Zephaniah**
Rhythmic poems with a rap and reggae beat, full of humour and attitude.

***Give Us a Goal* by Paul Cookson**
Football poems for fans, covering the thrills, the mud and the heartbreak of the beautiful game.

***I Bet I Can Make You Laugh* by Joshua Seigal**
Performance-style poems built on school-day humour. The title is a challenge that's hard to resist.

***You Have Been Warned* by Roger McGough**
Cheeky, mischievous poems from a master of wordplay, with plenty of silliness for reading aloud.

***Love That Dog* by Sharon Creech**

A boy who claims to hate poetry slowly finds his own voice in this short verse novel. It has a moving ending, and it's worth knowing that it talks about grief.

***The Lost Words* by Robert Macfarlane and Jackie Morris**

Spell-like nature poems paired with stunning paintings, ideal for sharing and for nature lovers.

***Overheard in a Tower Block* by Joseph Coelho, illustrated by Kate Milner**

Poems about growing up in a tower block, funny and affectionate with a few sadder moments.

***Where Zebras Go* by Sue Hardy-Dawson**

Imaginative poems full of wonder and the unexpected, which suit readers who like to daydream.

11-14

***The Weight of Water* by Sarah Crossan**

A Polish girl starts at a new school in Coventry, and swimming is her escape. It's moving and hopeful, and easy to read.

***Booked* by Kwame Alexander**

A football-loving, word-loving boy works through family trouble in energetic verse. It's a great pick for sporty readers.

***Rebound* by Kwame Alexander**

A grief-struck boy finds his way through basketball and a summer with his cousin. It's a fast, emotional verse novel.

***The Door of No Return* by Kwame Alexander**

A historical verse novel set in West Africa, about a boy caught up in the slave trade. A powerful read.

***A Change Is Gonna Come* by Catherine Johnson and Irfan Master**

Stories and poems by a range of Black and Asian writers, with different voices and moods.

***Somebody Give This Heart a Pen* by Sophia Thakur**

Spoken-word poems about identity, friendship and finding your voice, aimed at readers who want honesty.

***Great Goddesses* by Nikita Gill**

Goddesses and monsters from myth retold with a modern, empowering twist.

***One* by Sarah Crossan**

A verse novel about conjoined twins who face life-changing decisions. Moving and written with deep feeling.

***these are the words* by Nikita Gill**

Over 100 caring, direct poems for teens, with sections on hurting, body image, protest and healing. 12+.

***Long Way Down* by Jason Reynolds**

A boy's 60-second elevator ride on the way to avenge his brother's killing, with ghosts boarding at each floor. 12+

14+

***The Poet X* by Elizabeth Acevedo**

A Harlem teen finds her voice in a slam poetry club while clashing with her strict mother. The book deals with topics including faith, first love and street harassment.

***Run, Rebel* by Manjeet Mann**

Amber's only freedom is running, but her controlling father and arranged-marriage pressure close in. A powerful verse novel with domestic abuse themes.

***Wild East* by Ashley Hickson-Lovence**

A teenage would-be rapper moves from East London to Norwich, facing racism, loss and gang pressure.

***Louder Than Hunger* by John Schu:** A 13-year-old fights anorexia in a hospital programme, told in verse. It's honest and hopeful, but content could be distressing for some readers.

***Clouds Cannot Cover Us* by Jay Hulme**

A poetry collection for older teens that explores identity and belonging with candour.

***Where the Heart Should Be* by Sarah Crossan**

A verse novel set during the Irish Famine. Powerful and moving, with Crossan's usual intensity.

***Clap When You Land* by Elizabeth Acevedo**

Two sisters, one in the Dominican Republic and one in New York, discover each other after their father's plane crash.

***Punching the Air* by Ibi Zoboi and Yusef Salaam**

A wrongly imprisoned teen uses art and poetry to hold onto his sense of self. The book deals with the subject of injustice and is best for mature readers.

***Crossing the Line* by Tia Fisher**

Grieving his dad and bullied at school, Erik gets pulled into county lines drug dealing and has to find a way out when his sisters are threatened.

***If my Words had Wings* by Daniell Jawando**

Released from a young offenders' prison, Ty is determined to start again, and spoken word gives him a voice. Raw but hopeful – contains themes that some readers may find upsetting.