

Top 10 poetry books for children

1. [The Opie Book of Nursery Rhymes](#)

Iona and Peter Opie were a couple who had a rich collection of children's books, games and toys. They also collected schoolyard rhymes and chants, and in this treasure house of nursery rhymes, you'll be enchanting your ear for life. Nursery rhyme rhythms are perfect for rolling off the tongue. Besides, you'll meet some interesting people like Old Mother Hubbard and Georgie Porgie Pudding and Pie.

2. [Collected Poems For Children by Charles Causley](#)

This beloved son of Launceston, Cornwall, where he lived most of his life, once said: "A poem has to match its subject. But really the whole thing is just as much a mystery to me now as when I started." He said that when he was 80, and having written poems for decades! In Causley you'll return to the oral music of nursery rhymes, ballads, and the storytelling tradition. Can't go wrong, can you? "Jeremy Peep/When asleep/Walks the level/And walks the steep..."

3. [Umpteen Pockets by Adrian Mitchell](#)

Mitchell was a passionate and much-missed voice for peace, unafraid to express rage at injustices. In this fat, compassionate collection, you can get your poetic teeth into all sorts of treats, from spells and nonsensical teasers to brave poems that move you and make you think about the state of the planet and the creatures that share it – two-footed and four-footed alike.

4. [Season Songs by Ted Hughes](#)

Hughes was a strong champion of writing by children themselves and [started the WH Smith Young Writers Competition](#). Known for his muscular language and keen sense of the dark power and beauty of nature, he is the bard of the seasons in this collection. My favourite is Leaves. from the autumn section. "Who killed the leaves?/Me, says the apple, I've killed

them all/Fat as a bomb or a cannonball/I've killed the leaves." Do you recognise the sound of Who Killed Cock Robin? Told you you couldn't go wrong with nursery rhymes.

5. Only One of Me by James Berry

Berry, who was born and grew up in the countryside of Jamaica, has been living in England for more than 50 years and is rightly considered a pioneer of British/Caribbean poetry. He marinates his English in Jamaican rhythms and folk talk, including proverbs and worksongs. Begin with his charming letters by pets to their owners. In these scribbled notes, the animals get things off their chest and express their innermost hopes. "You know I'm so big/ I'll soon become a person." So dreams the special big-puppy-dog.

6. Two's Company by Jackie Kay

A great celebrator of her Scottish/Nigerian heritage, she holds Burns Night (January 25), in honour of the much loved Scottish poet, Robbie Burns, among her most cherished childhood memories. In a very real and believable voice, like that of a mate confiding a secret in the playground, she reveals those inner adolescent fears and fantasies. Like having a crush on a schoolteacher. "I'm scared of my own heart beat/it's so loud someone might say/'who's on the drums?' and I'd blush/(not exactly beetroot) but blush/ all the same."

7. A Spell of Words: Selected poems for children by Elizabeth Jennings

Jenning once said: "Only one thing must be cast out, and that is the vague." Good advice. And in her own poetry there is a directness and a wisdom delivered with a calm and measured musicality. Even when gazing up at clouds, there's nothing imprecise here, but a concrete meditation. "A folding of clouds/ Is kind to the eyes, is a painted lullaby/ And there are few words to say why/ Colours and ruffs and bubbles and bold balloons/ Take our hearts, lift our spirits and glow/ In our faster-beating hearts, in our minds also?/We need new words for the sky."

8. Everybody Got a Gift: New and Selected Poems by Grace Nichols

Nichols was born in Guyana, South America. It just so happens that I was also born in Guyana and it just so happens that she's my wife. Am I a little biased? Perhaps. But in this collection, you'll find a lyrical breeziness where rainforest meets English landscape as well as a robust marriage of Caribbean Creole and so-called straight English with echoes of nursery rhyme and rap. Even when delighting in a delicious raspberry, her memory flashes to the tropics, a child of two cultures. "But raspberry/why does one of/your tiny pulps-all aglow/Remind me so/of a full-blooded/mosquito?"

9 . An Imaginary Menagerie by Roger McGough

After leaving sixth form at my Roman Catholic secondary school in Guyana, I came across McGough in the landmark Mersey Sound anthology, which had a freeing-up effect on me, especially after studying more formal poetry for exams. In Roger's menagerie here, you can expect animals that are hybrids of mind-tickling wordplay. In Roger's prankish hands, caterpillar becomes "catopillow" and beware the allivator, that reptile that swallows shoppers at the top of the stairs.

10. New and Collected Poems for Children by Carol Ann Duffy

As poet laureate, Duffy is behind [Anthologise](#), a national poetry competition for secondary schools to put together their own anthologies. But she's also busy writing and her solid New and Collected will amuse as well as challenge in edgy uncluttered language. Here's how she invites you to see the familiar moth with new eyes: "A moth is a butterfly's dark twin/dressed in drab wings/She isn't scary/Think of her as a different thing-/a plain-clothes fairy." This collection is a cauldron of surprises.