



# Celebrate Poetry Month with Shel Silverstein



April is National Poetry Month. Established in 1996 by the Academy of American Poets, its purpose is to increase the attention paid to the art of poetry, to our poetic heritage, and to poetry books and magazines. Celebrate Poetry Month by sharing the poetry of Shel Silverstein with your students using the activities below.

## Activities for Younger Students

### Rhyme Time

Because recognizing the subtle changes in sound is a necessity for kids as they learn to read, Shel Silverstein's poetry is a natural choice to practice these important skills. Read any of his many rhyming poems (e.g., "If the World Was Crazy," page 46 in *Where the Sidewalk Ends*, or "Play Ball," page 131 in *A Light in the Attic*) aloud to children, instructing them to listen for rhyming words. When they hear a pair, they should raise their hands or clap. Check to see if they can repeat the rhyming pair of words. What is the repeating sound? What sounds are different between the two words? Can students think of other words that would also rhyme with that pair?

### Through Artists' Eyes

Read several poems to the students, but do not share Silverstein's hilarious illustrations. Have students draw their own illustrations of the poems, then share Silverstein's illustrations of the same poems. Are there any objects that are in both pictures? Explain that a perspective (or view) is the angle that an artist uses to make a drawing, like a photographer uses when taking a picture. What view did different students draw their picture from? Which view did Shel choose? Now encourage students to create a new picture that illustrates the same poem but from a different view.

### Lunch & Munch

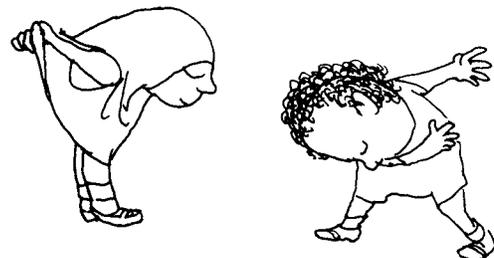
Read the poem "We're Out of Paint, So . . ." (page 70 in *Falling Up*) aloud to the children. Then divide the class into six groups to brainstorm lists of foods, one for each of the colors mentioned in the poem—red, purple, blue, black, brown, and yellow. Students can draw pictures if spelling is an issue. Then, as a class, review the lists and circle the foods that are good for their bodies.

### Count on Poetry

As a class, have students count the number of syllables, words, rhymes, or stanzas in any pair of poems (e.g., "Eight Balloons," page 58 in *A Light in the Attic* and "Eighteen Flavors," page 116 in *Where the Sidewalk Ends*). Then graph the results. Repeat the project in pairs or small groups with additional poems.

### Faces & Feelings

Have children create two faces, one happy, one sad, using the front and back of a plain paper plate. Then as they listen to a Silverstein poem, have them hold up the face that best matches how the subject of the poem feels. Discuss the clues they used to make their choice.





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## Activities for Older Students

### Interpretation Investigation

Have children partner up to answer the following questions about three of their favorite poems: Who is the poem about? What happened in the poem? Why? Then have pairs switch poems and see if they agree with the original pair's answers. Discuss as a group how there can be many interpretations, or meanings, of the same poem.

### Mood Palette

Discuss how artists choose colors to create moods for their pictures and poets choose words. Then assign small groups and give each group a palette of primary paints. Have kids mix five colors that they think best represent the mood of their favorite Shel Silverstein poem. Discuss why they chose the poem and why those colors best represent the mood of the poem.

### Poetic Personification

Personification, a tool that poets often use, is a pretense that an object is like a person in some way. Few have had more fun with this tool than Shel Silverstein. Read "Gumball Eye" (page 68 in *A Light in the Attic*) as an example. Then have children find another example of personification in one of his collections. Inspired by his rollicking example, each student could bring an object of his or her own to life in a short poem.

### "Class-ic" Poems

As a group, decide which Silverstein poem best represents your class. Then pass along all the books so another class can find "its" poem too. After all the classes in a grade (or even the whole school!) have studied Silverstein's poetry, celebrate with a Poetry Month Festival. Each class can give readings of favorite poems, and full classes can be challenged to memorize and recite their selected favorite poem for the rest of the grade/school.

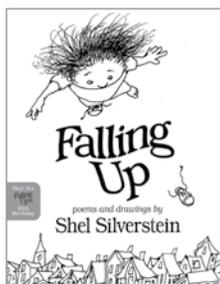
### Dramatic Interpretations

Have small groups of children each choose a poem to act out for the class (e.g., "Runny Huts His Own Cair," pages 22–23 in *Runny Babbit*). One child can read the poem while the others bring it to life, or they can create a new script inspired by the poem.

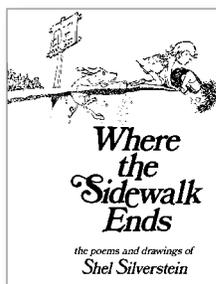
### Poetry Wax Museum

Have children dress up the way one of the characters in a Silverstein poem might dress (e.g., a student could select "Diving Board," page 24 in *Falling Up*, and dress like a swimmer). Then station the characters in rows around the room. Next, have other classmates or parents come in to "activate" the character. When they press an imaginary button in front of the child, he or she can either recite or read the poem aloud.

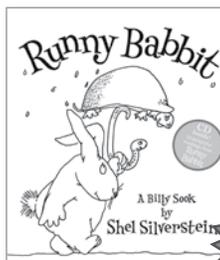
# Books by Shel Silverstein:



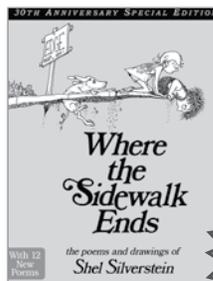
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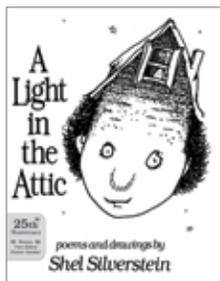
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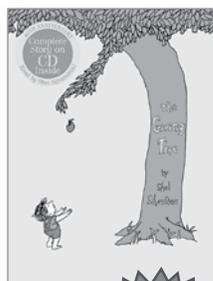
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This guide was created by Tracie Vaughn Zimmer, a reading specialist and children's poet.  
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