

Picnic, Symphony

& Other Concepts a 4th Grader Needs to Know

Poetry Written for Children

2022 Palanca Awards

Between the Covers

Between the covers, a choo-choo train

Of sailboat pages runs off to a journey;

A spaceship fueled by words

Travels to the past, to the future

Across ages like a time machine.

Between the covers, a magic carpet ride –

Each flight, each story, a voyage to Mars

To Neverland, to the heart of a whale.

Between the covers, a window opens

To other worlds; a key leads to secrets

Yet untold. Worlds may be dark and bright,

Black and white. Only that everything –

Everything has its place –

Between the covers of a book.

[*book*]

In Pursuit of Beauty

Wings wide and flashy
With designs striking, exotic, and wild
Like tribal fabrics, like woven baskets and mats
Capturing our dreams, telling our native stories –

Oh! That we could be so light and free!

Oh! That we could be so jazzy!

Batik patterns in rainbow-burst colors, wings
Floating in mid-air, flittering, fluttering
Flapping up and down for all the world to see
Flights in pursuit of colors and beauty –

Oh! That we could stop and smell the flowers!

Oh! That we could transform, and explode

Like rainbow fragments in mid-air!

[butterflies]

What an Idea an Idea Is!

The idea of a seed, a germ of thought —
What an idea it is that grows all the more
You think about it.

The plot thickens, a plan hatches, the thought
Gathers purpose, makes sense, expands
With motives, goals, and good intentions.

The seed becomes a house, a dress
A work of art; the germ becomes the beginning
Of a book, a story, a poem.

The little thought becomes a tiny spark plug
For the creation of worlds and possibilities —
A Big Bang. When you have it, you develop it

You let it grow, you water it, care for it
You patiently work with it, until, fully, it blooms.

[*idea*]

What To Do with a Dream

A loving world, an easy life —

Maybe a little out of reach... for now

Maybe only a little step away.

So you step back, and ask for help;

Accept the offer of a helping hand.

And when you can, you be nice

You be happy, you be kind.

You close your eyes; imagine

A loving world, an easy life —

You paint our world the way

That you want it; and every step

(Small step, big step, stepstepstep)

Is a step closer... if only

You be nice, you be grand

You be lending a helping hand.

[help]

A Friend Like Mute

Arms ready to embrace, hands itching to help

Carry books, boxes, breakables

Big bottles, bags, balls, and baskets;

A smiling face, eager like an old loyal dog—

Quick to share ice cream, secrets, peanut butter

Sandwiches, and scary stories even...

The tiny voice on the other end

Of your telephone call; the ear eager

To hear, ever ready to listen, the ear

Pressed hard on the receiver — sincere

With understanding of all secrets, all things

No words can explain.

At another time, the wordless hands

Holding yours, squeezing them tight

Making you feel safe when you feel afraid

And darkly confused like the night.

[friend]

When You Don't Have a Bike

The thing to do when you don't have a bike
Is to take a walk, walk the distance, take a hike;
Take in the countryside view, follow
 The mountain paths –
 There, the woods! There, the rocks!
 There, the spring of water! There, the waterfalls!

The thing to do when you don't have a bike
Is to put your one foot in front of the other
Left foot, right foot, left, right, left, and so on.
 Climb the hill, kick the mud, rest a while;
 Stroll, wander, (*hike, hike, hike!*) and get lost...
 Until you reach the top of the mountain or hill.

Look! Look around, and there, down below –
Are the things you have conquered in a hike.

[*hike*]

Stop, Look, and Listen

With eyes, you observe; with closed mouth
You take note, you hear what is not said;
You put yourself in the other person's shoes.

With your heart, you feel their pain, you imagine
Their hurt; you imagine the life of a tree
Before you cut it down, you imagine the journey

Of a bee before you shoot it down, you ask why
Your parents are angry when you lie, or why
Your teachers want you to do good.

You listen with your heart, you take note, you
Consider the answers, you decide: That to hear
Is to listen, and to listen is to do things great, or better.

[*listen*]

Sunday by the Sea

Some old red blanket becomes a table

And Nanay's food basket becomes a banquet
Spread on the fine soft sand after a long, bumpy,
Cramped ride. We swim a little, we laugh and run
We fly Kuya's kite, and dodgeball with Tatay;
The beach ball hits us all, and rolls off before
Nanay could call, "Hungry? The food is ready!"

The family gathers, the watermelon looks so red

We bow down our head in prayer; then, dive right in –
"Adobo is life!" "Who wants more rice?"

The yellow mangoes are sweeter, the sky is bluer;
The fuzzy cotton candy clouds are sailboats,
Elephants, and whales; the foam of the waves
Are hundreds of white rabbits jumping in the blue;

And our laughter is louder than the murmur of the sea.

[picnic]

What O – ?

What O is a door, an Opening, a window

An entrance that leads to a world

A path that leads to many, and endless

Possibilities?

And all you need is to make a first step –

A first “Yes”, a first action, a nod of the head

A handshake on something, a “Thank you”

For a door swung open – however wide

However small, however narrow

The path revealed.

What O is only a little difficulty, not

A real Obstacle for a true-blue Optimist, but

Only a test for inventive solutions

And curiosity?

What O is an Option, a chance, an Occasion

That lets you give your best shot at doing

What you want, or solving a challenge

With your creativity?

Tell me, what O opens more occasions

For optimism and zest other than

The overtly obvious Opportunity?

[opportunity]

Where Rainbows End

After the rain, the sky wears

A multicolored scarf with a ROY G BIV tag:

Redorangeyellowgreenblueindigoviolet.

But what is Indigo? Is it Indian? Is it a plant, too?
Is it deep reddish blue, or dark purple blue?

Or maybe, it is not a scarf in the sky at all.

(Forget about Indigo!) The heavens could be
Building a modern bridge that gathers all colors
And connects everything from east to west,
From your smile to the ends of the world.

But what of the tales, what of the pots of gold,
Of fairytale worlds behind the big arch of colors?
Do unicorns slide off it? Do winged horses?
Colors and illusions, water and light, rain and sun;
So many stories, so much magic and myth!

A smile on 'rain', a kiss on 'bow'. Oh, what a word!
'Rainbow', 'Rainbow', I'm still in awe of you!

[rainbow]

Calling All Unicorns

Unique and singular
Mythical and magical—
First, they were; and then,
 They weren't.
 Where have they gone?

Creatures of legends—
White, horselike
With cloven hooves,
 With long straight horn
 With spiraling grooves.

Symbols of fantasy
Or rarity, or purity, or grace—
One-horned and fantastical
 Fierce and wild, legends say.
 But where are they?

If you are so lucky
To be a freaky unicorn,
Do not hide, and do not cry.
 Come out, come out, do not be shy;
 Come out today and, with me, play.

[unicorns]

The Window Has Two Sides

A hole in the wall, a small
Opening to the world, a peek;

A frame of light to show
The bigger world outside –

A slice of the verdant hills
A portion of mountains, and some

Vivid green fields; a rectangle
Or a square of salty sea

Some sand and the scorching sun.
Whatever you want to see!

A window is where we dream
When we look outside, and look up.

A place for first looks
A place for last glances

Where we wave our goodbyes
And scream our welcome surprises.

[*window*]

Coming Together

When a violin helps a flute, and a triangle
Assists the drums, and the cellos jump right in
And clarinets and bassoons blend in
With the joyous trumpets and trombones,
A symphony is born. Families of strings, brass,
Woodwinds, percussion play together for music
Much grander than each member's sound.

We go to listen to them, and they come together
To listen to each other, to blend their gifts, and
Build something beautiful, something "symphonic".
Plucked, bowed, blown, struck, whatever it takes
To make a celebrated rainbow of sounds –
One band, different colors – beautiful, magical
Against one blue humbled and listening sky.

[*symphony*]

Where Words Play

A poem is a playground where words parade –
Where words march, or skip, or hop and leap
Or play hide-and-seek with codes, meanings
And secret messages.

Sometimes, the game is in the rhyme and sound;
Sometimes, in ants as big as elephants.
In poems, sunsets can be yellow and green
And nights can be as bright as day.

A poem is also a telescope, or a microscope –
Sometimes, you see more; sometimes, less.
Sometimes, all you see are words, letters
Arranged in a special order;

And maybe sometimes, magically, when you
Least expect it, you can even watch it happen –
You can “see” the sound of chattering words
Feel the faintest sigh, or hear the endless laughter.

[*poem*]

The Automatic Eraser Switch

Around the world, every 24 hours or so

There is that early morning switch like a light,
A reset button at the end of a long black night –
Where the moon's journey through darkness ends,
Where the stars whisper their goodbyes, and fade
Into their goodnight. Everything else is erased.

The new day begins, rebooted, like a blank page
With its fresh starts, and endless possibilities;
The sun resurrects itself automatically so you can
Start again, and be the light that you want to be.
At daybreak, the sun erases all past mistakes;
At sunrise, your newest unique story begins.

[*sunrise*]

Nothing follows.