

Teachers College Reading and Writing Project  
Writing Curricular Calendar, First Grade, 2014-2015  
Unit Five – Poetry and Songs

## *Unit Five- Poetry and Songs*

*February/March*

### Welcome to the Unit

Young children are natural poets. How many times have you watched a child tap her knees and chant lines of words to the beat? How many times have you seen a youngster spot a rabbit in the cloud or see swirls in the cement on the sidewalk? Young poets find significance in the ordinary details of their lives, draft with the intention of capturing life on the page, and learn from mentor authors. A unit of study on poetry can teach children to write not only in that one particular genre but, also, to write better in general.

Across the unit, you will teach children to experiment with powerful language, to use line breaks, metaphor, and comparison to convey feelings. By the end of this study, your young writers will enjoy using both precise and also extravagant language to capture what they see and feel.

The Common Core State Standards expect that first graders be able to differentiate between genres, and so all of this work on the structure of poems moves kids towards this goal. This unit also sets first graders up to speak and express thoughts, feelings, and ideas clearly as well as be able to recognize, distinguish, and discuss poetry as a common type of literature.

### Overview

**Essential Question:** *How can I write poems and songs about things that I care about?*

- **Bend I: Immersion in Songwriting and Poetry: Setting the Stage**  
*How can I study published songs and poems in order to notice what other writers do? How can I try some of those things in my own writing?*
- **Bend II: Studying the Rhythm and Voice of Songs to Help Us Write Our Own**  
*How can I write lots of songs and poems—writing about things that matter to me?*

**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project**  
**Writing Curricular Calendar, First Grade, 2014-2015**  
**Unit Five – Poetry and Songs**

● **Bend III: Songwriters and Poets Write from the Heart: Writing Meaningful Songs and Poems**

*How can I show my thoughts and feelings in my poems?*

● **Bend IV: Songwriters and Poets Revise and Write New Songs and Poems**

*How can I make my songs and poems longer and then get them ready for publication?*

In Bend I, students will experience songs and poetry through their work in centers and through shared and interactive writing activities. It is during this week that students will get to experience many types of songs and poems in different centers so that they are prepared to write in this genre across the following three bends.

In Bend II, students will draw on Bend I in order to write their own songs. Students will begin to use tunes from familiar songs to jump-start their writing. They'll write lots of songs. Plan to spend another week working in this bend.

In Bend III, students will reach for meaningful topics to write about. The emphasis will be on asking, "What really matters to me?" Children will spend this week learning to convey their thoughts and feelings through songs and poems.

In Bend IV, students will learn that poets and songwriters, like all writers, elaborate on topics they care about. In this final bend, try to make their best work even better, saying as much as they can and writing with careful attention to detail, in preparation for the ending celebration.

## CCSS/LS Standards Addressed in This Unit

Before launching the poetry unit, take a workshop session and ask your writers to create poems. Supply them with ample paper and writing supplies, and let them take time to create and publish poems on-demand. As they write, you may choose to study what they do as process writers. Which writers take time after they construct a poem to reread and revise, rethinking white space or line breaks? Do any of the writers finish one poem, get another paper and write about the same topic using a different voice of poetry? Remember, while this is your first unit of study in Poetry writing during first grade, many of your students came to you from kindergarten workshops where they constructed and revised poems and songs.

**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project  
Writing Curricular Calendar, First Grade, 2014-2015  
Unit Five – Poetry and Songs**

Studying your students' work for poetic structure as well as rhythm, word choice, and conventions will give you insight into where and how to officially launch your unit. You may find that your students already have a sense of how poetry looks going down the page, but that they are not ending line breaks with any sense of purpose or understanding, so some of your earliest teaching may be to show writers how to not just write with line breaks, but how to decide how they want their poems to sound and then revise to make line breaks intentional.

## Getting Ready

### *Gather Texts for Students*

To prepare your children for this unit, you'll want to read aloud lots of poems. Fill your students with the rhythms, sounds, and ideas of poetry. Help children notice how poems look on the page (e.g., line breaks and white space). Direct children to notice that poetry is not written in full sentences that march across the lines on a page but rather poets use white space and line breaks to tell people how the poems should be read. Be sure to read a variety of poems to your children so they sense the breadth of the genre's possibilities. If you read only rhyming poems, for instance, then that is all they will write. Fill their heads with lots of different kinds of poems that capture life's rich and beautiful details with precision. You will also want children to notice that poems can be about anything. Some tell stories, others are lists. You will also want to sing a number of simple songs with your children so that they have tunes in their head that they can rely on. Songs such as "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star," "The Wheels on the Bus," "Happy Birthday," and "Mary Had a Little Lamb" are easy to remember. You may want to write a class song through shared or interactive writing, sung to one of these tunes.

## Materials

### *Organizing for the Unit*

Be sure to collect a variety of poems for your children so they sense the breadth of the genre's possibilities. If you have only rhyming poems, for instance, then that is all they will write. Prepare for the unit by remembering you want to fill their heads with lots of different kinds of poems but above all, with poems that capture life's rich and beautiful

**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project  
Writing Curricular Calendar, First Grade, 2014-2015  
Unit Five – Poetry and Songs**

details with precision. You will also want to sing a number of simple songs with your children, so that they have tunes in their head that they can rely on.

You could send a letter home with children before the unit begins asking that they bring physical objects from home to write about. You might decide to have students keep a “Tiny Topics” notepad to help children live like writers, seeing ideas for poems and songs everywhere they turn, so you will want to construct one of your own to serve as a model for your budding poets. This could be a small notebook that children can wear on a lanyard and take everywhere with them. Teach them that anytime, anywhere they have a strong feeling they can stop and sketch a little picture to remind them of it later during writing workshop. Then, when the unit begins, during a minilesson you could teach writers to use the sketches, observations, and notes from inside their Tiny Topics notebook, chose a few, then turn them into poems or song.

**Some Possible Mentor Poetry Anthologies for This Unit Include:**

- *Blast Off! Poems About Space*, selected by Lee Bennett Hopkins (Harper Trophy, 1995): A collection of poems about space.
- *Creatures of Earth, Sea, and Sky*, by Georgia Heard (Wordsong Boyds Mills Press, 1992): This is a beautifully illustrated collection of poems that express the enchantment of the natural world.
- *Good Luck Gold and Other Poems*, by Janet S. Wong (Simon & Schuster, 1994): This collection of poems gives the reader insight into the experiences of Chinese American children. A variety of poetic forms are used, including rhymed poetry, free verse, and haiku.
- *Little Dog Poems*, by Kristine O’Connell George (Houghton Mifflin, 1999): This is a collection of poems every dog lover will relate to and remember.
- *Songs of Myself: An Anthology of Poems and Art*, compiled by Georgia Heard: This is an anthology of twelve poems and one traditional song about identity and the self.

**Possible Mentor Songs Include:**

- Songs to put you to sleep: “Hush-a-Bye Baby,” “Hush, Little Baby,” “Day Is Done”
- Songs to show a strong feeling: “I Can See Clearly Now,” “What’s Goin’ On,” “Celebrate Good Times,” “Oh, What a Beautiful Morning”

**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project  
Writing Curricular Calendar, First Grade, 2014-2015  
Unit Five – Poetry and Songs**

- Songs to teach a dance: “Hokey Pokey,” “Do the Locomotion”
- Songs for people you love: “You Are My Sunshine,” “You’ve Got a Friend,” “Frère Jacques”
- Songs that teach about something: “Wheels on the Bus,” “This Land Is Your Land”
- Songs that tell a story: “The Bear Went over the Mountain,” “Itsy Bitsy Spider,” “Mary Had a Little Lamb”

**Mentor Song Books and Compilations:**

- *The Eensy Weensy Spider / Skip to My Lou*, by Mary Ann Hoberman, board books with cassette (Megan Tingley Books, Little, Brown and Company).
- *Take Me Out of the Bathtub / Are You Quite Polite? / Smelly Locker*, by Alan Katz (Margaret K. McElderry Books, Simon & Schuster).
- *Diez Deditos Ten Little Fingers & Other Play Rhymes & Action from Latin America*, by Jose-Luis Orozco (Puffin Books, 1997).
- *If You’re Happy and You Know It / This Little Light of Mine* and many more . . . , by Raffi (Knopf Publishing).
- *The Itsy Bitsy Spider / Row, Row, Row Your Boat / How Much Is That Doggie in the Window?* (and many more titles are available), by Iza Trapani (Charlesbridge Publishing, book and CD).
- *Follow the Moon / Without You / Angel Face* (and many more titles), by Sarah Weeks (Laura Geringer/ Atheneum, book and CD).
- *Getting to Know You! Rodgers & Hammerstein Favorites*, by Rosemary Wells (HarperCollins, 2002). *Old Macdonald / Mother Goose Songbook*, by Jane Yolen (Boyd’s Mills Press). *Let’s Sing about It!* (songs & rhymes on chart, CD) Mondo Publishing.

***Use Additional Professional Texts as Needed***

**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project  
Writing Curricular Calendar, First Grade, 2014-2015  
Unit Five – Poetry and Songs**

When designing this unit, you might need to call on some inspiration and mentors too! You can draw on professional books, including *Awakening the Heart: Exploring Poetry in Elementary and Middle School* and *For the Good of the Earth and Sun*, both by Georgia Heard; *A Note Slipped Under the Door: Teaching from Poems We Love*, by Nick Flynn and Shirley McPhillips; *Handbook of Poetic Forms*, edited by Ron Padgett; *Wham! It's a Poetry Jam: Discovering Performance Poetry*, by Sara Holbrook; *A Kick in the Head: An Everyday Guide to Poetic Forms*, edited by Paul B. Janeczko; and *Getting the Knack: 20 Poetry Writing Exercises*, by Stephen Dunning and William Stafford.

***Choose When and How Children Will Publish Their Anthologies***

Poetry and songs are genres that are meant to be shared aloud. Perhaps you will decide to conclude this unit with a performance where other children can snap or clap their approval at the end of the show. Another possible option is to have students record and burn their recordings onto CDs to share with others. A class compilation CD is a nice way to send home this work so that everyone can continue to appreciate all the hard work the students put into their songs and poems.

**Bend I: Immersion in Song Writing and Poetry: Setting the Stage**

***Use Shared Reading as a Way to Help Children Become Immersed in Song and Poetry and Then Give it a Go!***

From the time they are babies, children are lulled or roused by the lullabies their grandmas sing to them, the songs they hear on the radio, or the themes that accompany television shows. Most children can recite the lyrics of a song before they are able to remember their own addresses! Think about how easily you recall the simple songs you learned in childhood. We all know “Row, Row, Row Your Boat” and “Baa Baa Black Sheep” by heart. There are reasons we hold onto these songs: they have catchy tunes, the words are repetitive, and they convey distinct, lovely images.

For starters, copy songs and poems onto chart paper and use these to read, sing, and teach a wide variety of songs and poems to your students. These “shared texts” will become integral to your unit of study. Once children know a song or poem by heart, then you might reread it, stopping along the way to say, “Huh. I notice that this poem has just a few words on each line, like the lines are broken apart. Let’s call those ‘line breaks.’ Hey, I wonder why the author did that? What do you think? Turn and talk with your partner. Why do you think the author of a poem would break the lines apart like this?”

**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project  
Writing Curricular Calendar, First Grade, 2014-2015  
Unit Five – Poetry and Songs**

**“Today we’re going to think about a question: Why did the poet put just a few words on each line?”**

As children discuss the author’s reasons for some craft move, whether it is line breaks or punctuation or repetition, you’ll want to keep an open mind. Remember, there are lots of possible reasons why an author may or may not use a strategy. There isn’t a right answer. The children might guess, “Maybe she did it to make it easier to read?” Maybe! “Maybe because it looks good, like it looks pretty.” Also a great possibility. Of course you’ll want to model ideas about the author’s use of strategies that steer children toward thinking about meaning. You might say, “I’m thinking maybe she put these words together to show that they go together, as an idea.” Or perhaps, “Maybe she set this word apart, by itself, to show that it is an important word.”

**“Today I want to teach you that when readers read poetry, they think about the way the author may have wanted them to feel. One way you can do this is by thinking of words to describe what you feel after reading a poem.”**

As you launch this unit, spend a few minutes each day rereading familiar shared texts, noticing how songs and poems look on the page, noticing verses, line breaks, repeated lines, white space, and choices about punctuation, capital letters, and fonts. You and your children might notice that songs and poetry are sometimes not written in full sentences and that song writers and poets use white space and line breaks to show people how to read the poems and how to sing the songs. As you read these shared texts together, you might use Post-its to label some of the aspects of songs and poetry that you and your class notice and discuss together.

As you continue to study songs and poems with your students during shared reading time, you might stop along the way to discuss what the author may have wanted readers to feel. Then you might begin to slowly grow a chart of words that come out of these discussions—vocabulary for describing emotions and feelings. Of course, a chart like this is most useful to children if it is organized by meaning. Words that mean “happy,” for example, might be grouped together at one end of the chart, while words that mean “angry” would be grouped together at the other end of the chart, with more words in between.

***Continue to immerse students in studying songs and poetry through centers***

This reading work will probably occur during your shared reading time, separate from writing workshop. At the same time then, you might structure your writing workshop so

**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project**  
**Writing Curricular Calendar, First Grade, 2014-2015**  
**Unit Five – Poetry and Songs**

that children have a chance to explore songs and poems close-up and on their own. Many teachers build students' excitement for writing poems and songs by launching the unit with a few days of song and poetry centers. Usually teachers organize these centers so each child and his or her partner rotates among centers, spending one day in a center.

Perhaps in one center children will listen to popular songs, songs they hear on the radio as well as songs they know from school. At this listening center, children may rely on a computer/tablet with headphones or a CD player. Either way, they will press play and then listen, and sing along. At this center, you'll have a tray of paper and pens available, and children will be encouraged to draw what they picture in their minds. Children then use their drawings about a song or poem to inspire their own song or poem.

In another center, children use instruments or tap pencils to keep the beat to familiar songs and poems. Get creative! Try to find rhythmic songs and clapping chants for this center. "Miss Mary Mack" and "Pat- a-Cake, Pat-a-Cake" are good examples. These children too, will be expected to write in response to what they hear, making their own poems or songs that carry the beat. In fact, you can say to them—and this is true—that this is one of the ways that many musicians get started when they are writing a new song. They have an idea for a beat or a rhythm, and then they make up some words to go with it. So, for example, children might sing and tap along to a rhythmic poem that you've taught them, like "Peas Porridge Hot." "Peas porridge hot, peas porridge cold, peas porridge in the pot, nine days old. Some like it hot, some like it cold, some like it in the pot, nine days old!" Then, they can make up new words to fit the rhythm, for example "Little puppy dog. Little puppy dog. Teeny tiny teeny tiny little puppy dog!" This may feel a bit silly, and some of your children will have fun coming up with nonsense words that match the beat or rhythm.

Of course, you'll also want to introduce children to the concept that sets poets aside from all other writers—their ability to see things differently. So another center could focus children's attention to look with fresh eyes at everyday objects: a crayon, a backpack, a chair. You can find poems that show children how poets see everyday objects with different eyes. You may teach children that poets see and then re-see and then see again, each time noticing something more. You might suggest that poets sometimes draw what they observe as a way to slow down and pay very close attention. Then, just as poets try to write about what they see and depict it in new ways, so too can the children write about what they observe and draw in new ways.

With your encouragement, children can begin to jot down notes about whatever they have been studying and drawing, trying to see these objects in different ways. As you sit down with children working at this center, you might say, "Wow! This feather reminds me of snowflakes falling from the sky." Then, demonstrate your enthusiasm for poetry by



**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project**  
**Writing Curricular Calendar, First Grade, 2014-2015**  
**Unit Five – Poetry and Songs**

grabbing a piece of paper from a tray at the center of the table and show the kids how you can simply turn that idea into a poem. “Snowflakes falling from the sky,” you might write, with line breaks for emphasis. Then you might turn to your kids and say, “What do you think of my poem? Do you think you could make one too?” For example, a child might say a stapler is like an alligator’s mouth or a class plant is like a tree for ants. Young children are far better at this kind of inferential, imaginative thinking than many adults. They’re accustomed to the world of make-believe and can easily pretend that a stone is really the moon or the clock on the wall is watching over us. Then, of course, you can teach kids that if they want, they can turn any poem into a song by simply singing it to their own made-up tune.

The list of possible centers could go on and on. In another corner of the room, children might be stationed at a window with a view, to practice looking at the world through the eyes of a poet or songwriter and recording what they see. Meanwhile, in another center, each child might read poems that contain strong imagery, such as “Turtle” by Charlie Reed, and then draw or paint what he or she sees in his or her mind’s eye. You could invite children to join you in bringing in objects to use in a “five senses center,” where they could practice using descriptive sensory language. In another center, children could learn to compare objects by using phrases including “like a . . .” or “reminds me of . . .” or “as a . . .” You might hang your children’s paintings or sketches next to the poem they each illustrated, marveling at how one poem can provoke so many different images. In other centers, children could make shape poems or cut up poems to play with the line breaks. Another center could set children up to collect their favorite poems and to paste these into their very own poetry anthologies.

It might be tempting to try out all of these, but that isn’t necessary or even desirable. Pick just a few, perhaps three or four or one center for each of the tables where children sit. Aim for centers that are based on your observations and assessments of your children’s oral language, stamina for writing, and other goals.

If your children tend not to write much, choose centers where they’ll be drawing and writing up a storm; if your children have trouble staying still for long during writing, choose centers where they’ll be very active with singing and tapping out beats or moving around. If your children need help with writing with detail, you’ll want to choose a center that supports that. The possibilities are endless.

## Bend II: Studying the Rhythm and Voice of Songs to Help Us Write Our Own

**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project  
Writing Curricular Calendar, First Grade, 2014-2015  
Unit Five – Poetry and Songs**

***Ask Students to Look Back at the Writing They Created in Centers, Looking for the Songs That are Already There or the Words That Can be Turned Into Songs***

After a few days of song and poetry centers, each child will have collected a few drawings or lists of words or a rudimentary song or poem or two in his or her writing folder. These initial pieces of work will help them launch into the next phase of the unit: writing their own songs. You might decide to begin by teaching children that they can look back on all they have accomplished during their time in centers and ask themselves, “Did I already write a song? Or did I write an almost-song?” You might, in a minilesson, demonstrate rereading through your own writing folder, pausing at the end of each piece to say, “Can I sing this? Let me try.” Of course, the resulting message will be that anything (almost anything) can be turned into a song. All you need to do is sing the words. You will want to do this with a pen in your hand, ready to make changes to the words that allow you to sing it more easily, so it rolls off the tongue a bit better. For example, perhaps you’ll model reading a list of words you created by looking out the window and making an observation. You could read it in a flat voice: “Trees. Grass. Sky. Sun.” Or you could read it like a song, stretching out some of the words, lifting and lowering your voice, making it sound melodic. Perhaps, with your pen in hand, you’ll add some exclamation points for emphasis. “Treeeeees. Grass! Suuuuuuun and Sky!” So, right from the beginning of the unit, your children will see that they already have begun to write songs. They just might not have known it yet.

“Today I want to teach you that writers go back to what they’ve already written to see if they can use it for their new writing. One way you can do this as songwriters is by going through your folder and saying, ‘Can I sing this? Let me try.’”

***Teach Students to Write Their Own Songs, Considering Familiar Tunes and Rhythms to Craft Songs with Purpose***

Of course, they can write more complex songs by studying the songs they know well and borrowing some of the musical qualities (the tune, the structure of the verses and refrains, and the rhythm in particular) to apply to their own songs. You might begin by teaching children to sing a familiar tune and then invent their own lyrics. Of course, it is not required that every child do this. They might decide to write their own poem or song from scratch. Perhaps some children will recall what they learned during centers, and they’ll prefer to sketch and then make a list or write an observation. But it is likely that many of your children will be excited about this lesson. The aim here is for children to be energized by making favorite songs their own and creating songs from rhythms they themselves dream up. Imagine a child singing about going to her cousins’ house to the tune of “Here We Go

**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project**  
**Writing Curricular Calendar, First Grade, 2014-2015**  
**Unit Five – Poetry and Songs**

Round the Mulberry Bush” like this: “Here we go to my cousins’ house, my cousins’ house, my cousins’ house. Here we go to my cousins’ house on this pretty day.” Children can write adaptations of any familiar song they know. For example, “The Wheels on the Bus” becomes “The Wings on the Airplane.” “The Eency Weency Spider” becomes “The Eency Weency Sister” (“... she climbed up the monkey bars”). Songs such as “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star,” “London Bridge Is Falling Down,” “Happy Birthday,” and “Mary Had a Little Lamb” have melodies that are easy to remember.

You might move on to study and write songs that teach something, such as counting songs, alphabet songs, how-to songs, or songs that contain information. In a minilesson you might sing a bit of the song “The Ants Go Marching,” a counting song, and then demonstrate how you can take the same structure and tune to count something else—puppies, kids, anything. As you adapt the song, you’ll stop to think, “Wait, puppies can’t go marching down into the ground. That would not make sense. Where would puppies march to? Let’s change it so our song makes sense.” As a first grade teacher, you probably use songs for many different reasons throughout your school day, such as cleaning up, giving directions, and celebrating. You will want to harness the purpose for the songs that you sing in your classroom and pass them along to your students. Teach your students that we are inspired to sing songs when we want to celebrate, to give directions, to remember things, to tell about a feeling, to tell about an event, to tell about something that we want to have happen, to play a game, and any other purpose we have.

Some of your budding composers might prefer to tap out their own individual beats and rhythms from scratch. At each table, you might make rhythm sticks or small shakers available to inspire your children to try this out. They may tap their pencils, clap their hands, or play actual instruments. Once they have a beat going, they can use their creative sensibilities to come up with words. Some kids may go the other way around, writing out their lyrics and then adding a tune or beat that seems to match the song. Don’t be surprised if children are tapping their fingers on their desks long after writing workshop is over or skipping and singing as they head home at the end of the day. Of course, it is not mandatory that every child tap out a beat to get his or her writing down on the page! As always, each new strategy is added to the growing list of choices, a repertoire that children can call upon when they are stuck and choose from as needed.

***Teach Other Strategies for Song and Poetry Writing, Being Inspired By Objects and Using You’re Senses***

**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project  
Writing Curricular Calendar, First Grade, 2014-2015  
Unit Five – Poetry and Songs**

Of course, your children already know how to get inspired by objects to write lists or observations from their work during centers and other units, so another strategy is to look at or think of an object and let it inspire a song.

Have them close their eyes and imagine the soothing sound of rain on the window, how a tree sounds as it sways in the wind, and to turn those sounds into songs. As children do all this writing, you may want to give them paper that has been cut long, channeling them toward shorter lines. Then, all they need to do is sing it out, instead of reading it in a “plain old” voice. You might teach children how songwriters often repeat the important words in the list because this can accomplish two things: it shows the readers which parts are more important, and repetition can also give the list the voice of a song. That is, we don’t usually repeat a word three times in a row when we’re talking, but songs do it all the time. Try to focus on keeping volume and stamina sky high, and keep tabs on each of your children to help them to be sure they are getting plenty of words down on the page, working with complete independence. By the end of this second bend, your children should be beginning to grasp that songs are different from other kinds of writing they have done, and their work will reflect this.

**“Today I want to teach you that songwriters often repeat the important words in their song’s list. They do this to give the list the voice of a song and to show which parts are really important.”**

### **Bend III: Songwriters and Poets Write From the Heart: Writing Meaningful Songs and Poems**

***Teach Students that Poets Write From the Heart. Scaffold this Work by Having Students Write About Topics that are Important to Them, Using Special Objects as Inspiration.***

The first half of the unit scaffolds kids so that ideas for songs were readily available: objects to look at were right at their fingertips; familiar songs and poems surrounded them across the day, so that all they needed to do was list the words that came to mind, adapt an existing text, and voilà! A song! A poem! Now, you’ll turn a corner in the unit, encouraging children to reach deeper to find topics for songs and poetry that really matter to them. Instead of just writing about any ol’ thing that comes to mind, you’ll invite children to think, “What is important to me?”

**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project  
Writing Curricular Calendar, First Grade, 2014-2015  
Unit Five – Poetry and Songs**

**“Today I want to teach you that poets and songwriters dig deep to think about something they love and find the reason they feel such strong feelings. You can do this in your writing by thinking, “Why is this object so important to me?” and then write those strong feelings into your poem or song.”**

Perhaps at this point in the unit, you’ll invite each child to bring in an object he or she cherishes—a special blanket or stuffed animal, a photograph or a piece of jewelry or a toy. Then you can teach them, in a minilesson, that they can fill their poems and songs with meaning by writing about topics that inspire strong feelings. Poets and songwriters dig deep to think about something they love and find the reason they feel such strong feelings for this object. The resulting song or poem could be as simple as “I love cookies so much because my mom bakes them for me.”

***Teach Students That Writers Include Strong Feelings in Their Poems and Songs and Teach Them Strategies for Showing These Feelings***

Once your children are reaching deeper for more meaningful topics to write about, you might notice them struggling to find ways to show how they feel. You might see children, in their efforts to convey a strong feeling, using words like *very* or *really* (as in, “I really, really, really love my blanket.”). Go ahead and compliment these approximations! After all, poems and songs like this are moving in the direction of conveying a strong emotion. As a next step for children who are writing this way, you might teach your children that writers have lots of strategies for showing strong feelings. And one effective way of showing their feelings about an idea or an object is to write a poem or song where they speak directly to the object (or person or place). For example, a child writing about his favorite toy car might write, “Oh, toy car, how I love you. You are always so much fun. You make me feel happy.” Then, of course, the writer might imagine what the object might say back to him. As you move around your children during the writing workshop, you can nudge them to try these new strategies out. “Try it! You might like it!” you can say. “You can always change it back after you’ve tried it out.”

**“Today I want to teach you that poets and songwriters show strong emotion in their writing. One way they do this is by speaking directly to the object. You might try writing directly to your object and then imagining what the object might say back to you!”**

Of course, writing to show a strong feeling is something your children probably know how to do from other units of study. You taught children to do this when they wrote personal narratives. You may decide to pull out the charts from past units. For example, a lesson

**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project**  
**Writing Curricular Calendar, First Grade, 2014-2015**  
**Unit Five – Poetry and Songs**

from the *Writing for Readers* unit that taught children that the ending of a story could show the strong feeling could also be applied to poetry and songs. Children might even add a speech bubble to the picture accompanying the song or poem, and then that speech bubble might inspire an idea to add to the writing.

***Poems and Songs are Meant to Be Heard! Build in Time for Students to Work with Their Partners, Sharing Their Writing and Revising it***

Hearing poetry is as important as writing poetry so each day, before children write, you might give them a few minutes to share a song or poem or two with their writing partners. You may decide to teach some minilessons to help students do this work. You may, for example, teach writers that poets try their poems with different line breaks and read it aloud one way, then another, to their partner and partners can offer advice as to which way makes the meaning bigger, clearer. Or you might teach poetry partners to read their poems to each other while their partner closes his eyes and tries to imagine the image the poet is working hard to create. Then, he can offer feedback using the strategies and charts around the room to help his partner revise to make his word choice even better. As they read to their partners, encourage them to read and sing with utmost expression. Coach them to use gestures and grand pauses, to lift their voice, and sing and read with feeling. As they share their work, encourage them to keep their pen in their hand the whole time, in case they want to make a change or a new idea crosses their mind. You'll soon notice children crossing parts out and revising their work completely on their own, simply because they had the chance to share it with an audience, their partner, and hear what their words really sound like when read aloud.

**Bend IV: Songwriters and Poets Revise and Write New Songs and Poems**

***Teach Students How to be Good Poetry and Song Partners. Give Them Strategies for Listening, Reading, Complimenting, and Questioning***

By now your children are writing up a storm. Their writing folders are filled to the brim, overflowing with short little ditties, lists, poems, and songs. Probably most of these are one-liners with line breaks, a few words or a single word per line. At this point, your children have grasped (or are beginning to grasp) the concept that songs and poetry are different from other kinds of writing and also that songs and poetry hold meaning. Now you might want to nudge children toward writing a bit more, elaborating on their ideas. You will want to teach them to revise.

**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project**  
**Writing Curricular Calendar, First Grade, 2014-2015**  
**Unit Five – Poetry and Songs**

Throughout the unit, your children have been sharing songs and poems with their writing partners, and this will continue with renewed importance. Children’s writing partners will fuel their motivation and enthusiasm for sticking with a poem a little longer, to add on, to take parts out, and to revise. You might start this bend by teaching your writers that, as partners, they have two very important jobs to do. You might say to your young writers, “The first job, the job of being an active listener, has a few parts to it.” Then, on chart paper, you might sketch two stick-figure writing partners. “First, you have to look with your eyes at your partner.” You’ll draw arrows from one of the stick-figure’s eyes. “Then you’ll listen very closely with your ears.” You’ll draw some arrows coming from the ears. “You’ll probably need to point to the words along with your partner, too—to make sure he or she didn’t forget anything.” You’ll draw a piece of paper between the two stick figures, with both figures holding the paper. Teaching your students to point along with their partner on their partners’ writing is incredibly helpful for two reasons: they might be able to catch some of their partners’ mix-ups on the page, but more likely, it will simply keep them more engaged and therefore make them better listeners.

“The other important job,” you’ll tell your class “is to read your work to your partner so that he or she really understands what your song or poem is all about.” The different ways that we sing or read our songs and poems give off different feelings and, thus, add to the meaning of our work. You will want to show your students that your voice carries a lot of meaning with it. “If I want my audience to appreciate the peacefulness or beauty of my song, then my voice will probably be light and soft, but if I’m warning my audience of something dangerous, then I’ll sing in a sharp and, possibly, low tone.” It’s great to give students a chance in partnerships to sing their songs and read their poems in different voices, to see how each way communicates different feelings.

With partnerships going strong, you might teach your children that one of their jobs as a listening partner is to compliment the strategies that the writer is trying out. You might teach your children that they can use the writing charts in the room for ideas for compliments. Your young writers might need some language for complimenting. A few transferable talk prompts such as “I noticed that you tried . . .” or “I see that you . . .” might be helpful to model and coach into. The next step, then, would be to teach the listening partners how to support the writer. For example, children can use the charts in the room to make suggestions. They might say to each other, “Have you tried . . .” from a chart listing key strategies that you have taught. With a partner who is truly listening, it is remarkable how seriously young children will take their work. Don’t be surprised if it is difficult to get children to put their writing away at the end of writing workshop!

**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project**  
**Writing Curricular Calendar, First Grade, 2014-2015**  
**Unit Five – Poetry and Songs**

“Today I want to teach you that when you’re working with your partner, you can use the charts in the classroom to help them fix-up their writing. One way you can do this is by checking the chart for something they did well and say, “I like how you...” and then checking the chart for something they could add and say, “You should try...”

As they’ve done in other units, partners will read together, offering each other suggestions about line breaks and white space. They might ask each other, “Why did you choose to add a line break here?” Partners could ask each other questions such as “Where is the big feeling in this poem?” or “What are you trying to show us in this song?” They will help each other think about their topics, the craft of their poems and songs, and the feelings they convey. You could teach them to ask each other questions such as “What small moment are you trying to rewrite?” or “Which writer do you want to be like?” Partners might also make suggestions such as “Have you thought of using this word instead?” Together, partners might play with language or line breaks to explore other ways a poem or song could sound or look to match the writer’s meaning. Partners could even work to help each other come up with new topic ideas, either by revisiting the special objects that they began to use in Bend II or by reading through their Tiny Topics notepads together.

***Teach Students That Writers Revise Through Elaboration—Adding Verses, Making Comparisons, and Thinking About Word Choice***

You can then turn your attention to introducing a few new strategies for lifting the level of the work your class is producing, chiefly by elaborating and adding more detail. By now, many of your children have hit upon topics that they are passionate about, yet their poems and songs remain the equivalent length of one or two sentences. If you read this ahead of time and are tempted to get their writing to be highly detailed and lengthy from the beginning, don’t! The quick drafts at the start of the unit are quite intentional. This leaves their work perfectly set up for revision! If your children do too much revision, going back over and over their songs and poems from the beginning, they might not be as willing to revise at this point in the unit.

Show your children a favorite song or poem with multiple verses. Cover all of the text but the first verse. Read the first verse, and when you get to the end, you might say, “When poets and songwriters are writing about something they truly love, they often have so much to say about it that when they get to the end, you know what they often do? They don’t just put down their pen. They don’t just say, ‘Oh! I love this topic. But too bad. I guess I’ll stop writing about it.’ No! They skip a line, pick up their pen and write another one about the same thing! A new verse!” Then read aloud the next verse, highlighting how it is still the same topic, the same piece of writing, just another part. Since your children are



**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project**  
**Writing Curricular Calendar, First Grade, 2014-2015**  
**Unit Five – Poetry and Songs**

writing on sheets of paper with room for line breaks, many of them will now need multiple pages to make room for more verses about the topics they love most.

As children begin to reach for more to say about their topics, some of them will get stumped about what else they could add to their writing. You might teach your children to write with a bit more sophistication by using a comparison to show how the object makes the writer feel. For example, a child might write, “Cookies are like a big warm hug.” You’ll want to have read many songs and poems containing examples of this to your students. In a minilesson, you might practice the strategy of using comparisons by writing group songs and poems where children work together to compare an important classroom object—say, your easel or the lights, to something else. You’ll be surprised to discover how many ways your students come up with to describe the lights: the ceiling is like the sky and the lights are the sun, shining down on us! You’ll find that children love incorporating this technique into their own songs and poems. All of a sudden, a pencil is like a magic wand that makes things come to life! Compliment your children’s approximations enthusiastically. Perhaps “I feel as happy as a car at a gas station” isn’t the most majestic comparison, but it’s a start.

While children are revising their poems and songs, you might also push them to think about language and word choice as a way to create clear images. They might explore the difference between *fry* and *sizzle*, *shine* and *sparkle*, *cry* and *bawl*. This work is all in alignment with the Common Core State Standards around language. To guide your young writers through this work, you may find it helpful to choose a few mentor poems or specific poets and/or songwriters to study. These mentor texts provide your children with real and inspiring examples of how poets play with language and text placement to convey meaning. You could teach students how to create rhythm like Eloise Greenfield, line breaks like Bobbi Katz, or imagery like Valerie Worth.

“Today I want to teach you that songwriters and poets think very carefully about the words in their poems. They think about what they’re trying to say and what the perfect word would be. You might go back through your poem or song and see if you can find a place where a different word would make your writing even better.”

***Getting Students Ready for Publishing by Thinking about Words, Letters, and Punctuation***

As children read and sing their work to one another, you’ll probably find that is the perfect opportunity to remind them how changing a line to all capitals is one way the writer might let us know exactly how it is meant to be read or sung aloud. In partnerships, children might work together to decide, word-by-word, line-by-line, where it might make sense to

**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project**  
**Writing Curricular Calendar, First Grade, 2014-2015**  
**Unit Five – Poetry and Songs**

write with all caps or a large bold font. In this way, children are thinking about conventions in a purposeful, meaningful context.

Additionally, you might teach into thinking about punctuation. When children read or sing aloud their work to an audience (their partner), it becomes more apparent where it might make sense to use a period for a full stop or an exclamation point for emphasis or perhaps a question mark when appropriate. Of course, songwriters and poets have options when it comes to punctuation. Sometimes a song or a poem without punctuation looks and sounds more smooth, like all of the ideas are more connected. Some of your young writers might prefer their writing this way. You might say to your children, “One way that poets decide on punctuation is to try a line with punctuation *and* without it. Then they decide which way is better.” You might then demonstrate how you reread your own poem (perhaps enlarged on chart paper to make it easier to see) and try out punctuation, then take the punctuation out when it doesn’t make sense to have it there. However your children decide to punctuate (or not), the bigger concept is to do so intentionally. That is, some poets don’t just leave punctuation out because they forgot. They do it on purpose because it will add something to their work.

As children listen to each other’s poems and songs, encourage them to listen to how their work sounds. “Does it sound like a song (or poem)?” they might ask each other. Of course, a little bit of repetition in a song or a poem can really lift the author’s voice. You might teach the kids that a chorus holds the song together. You could also teach that many important words or lines in songs—sometimes called the refrain—are repeated. Children love repetition; it not only helps them recall something, but it’s also a fun part of singing. Think about the pleasure of belting out the refrain, “Fa la la la la la la la,” or “Old MacDonald had a farm, E-I-E-I-O!”

You will, of course, continue to teach what makes for good writing and carry over things you’ve taught in previous units: details, the look of the poems, specific marks so others know *how* to sing the songs, and the importance of hearing and writing all the sounds in their words.

### ***Celebration***

By the end of this unit, your students will have many, many little songs and poems bursting from their folders. At this point in the unit, you’ll want to decide how many you’d like for them to publish. A few days before your planned writing celebration, invite children to pick a collection of songs or poems that they know they can read and can imagine performing. You might remind your children of a strategy or two for getting their work ready for readers, perhaps double-checking spelling and the spacing between their words. As

**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project  
Writing Curricular Calendar, First Grade, 2014-2015  
Unit Five – Poetry and Songs**

children prepare for the writing celebration, they may reread their songs and poems aloud with a partner to practice their movements and intonations.

Poetry is a genre meant to be read aloud. Perhaps this unit will conclude with a poetry performance, a “coffee house” where hot chocolate is served and other children can snap or clap their approval at the end of the show! Or maybe you’ll have kids make “albums” of their songs. Go for it! Let the children record and burn their recordings onto CDs for the songwriters to share with others. Children can celebrate by passing out lyrics and teaching each other their songs can be sung. Some teachers even hold little concerts in which children perform for an audience.