

LINGUISTIC DEVELOPMENT  
THROUGH  
POETRY MEMORIZATION

A MASTERY LEARNING APPROACH

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*Linguistic Development Through Poetry Memorization*

First Edition

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## PREREQUISITES FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

As I have traveled the country during the past ten years, working with homeschool students and their parents as well as with teachers and administrators in public and private schools, it has been most gratifying to be able to share an approach to teaching writing that has significantly helped raise the written and oral communication skills of countless children of all ages. The many effective methods and techniques of the *Blended Structure and Style* syllabus which we use to teach composition have made a huge difference in the lives of thousands of students, parents, and teachers. However, no matter how brilliant and effective at teaching writing one may become, a frighteningly true but significant fact keeps raising its ugly head. It's simple; it's obvious; it's terribly important, and that is this; **You can't get something out of a child's brain that isn't in there to begin with.**

If you have no Chinese in your brain, you can't get any Chinese out of your brain; if you don't have any music in your brain, you can't get any music out; if you don't have any geometry in, you won't get it out, etc., and this is just as true for one's native language as it is for less familiar subject matter. Getting something into the brain is clearly a prerequisite to getting it out. Now, to be a competent writer or speaker of English, a student need not be well equipped with an extensive knowledge of grammar, nor is it necessary for him to do great loads of worksheets and exercises designed to teach usage and mechanics. It is not necessarily even true that the more time spent writing, the better the writer he becomes. If he is a native speaker of English, he needs one thing above all else, and that is this: **a large database in his brain of reliably correct and sophisticated language patterns.**

Reliably correct and sophisticated language patterns are the core of linguistic competence, especially in English, where the "rules" of grammar are less than perfectly consistent, and usages vary greatly because of the uniquely rich multi-lingual origins of the English language. Vocabulary, of course, is critical—but even more vital than knowing a lot of words is knowing how those words naturally, correctly, even artistically fit together in phrases and clauses. The students who write well are always the ones who possess an extensive repertoire of words, an intuitive understanding of when and how those words can be used in idioms and combinations, and an automatic sense of when they have been used correctly or awkwardly. What enables this type of sophisticated linguistic talent is not a conscious knowledge of "rules", but the database of language information which has been stored in the brain.

This brings us to the next question—where do students acquire their database of linguistic patterns? What is the main source of language in children's lives? Although it certainly varies from family to family, for most of the children in this country today, the top two sources of linguistic input would likely be the media (TV, radio, internet, billboards, magazines and newspapers), and peers (children of approximately the same age). Sadly, as is obvious to any intelligent observer of our culture, neither media nor peers are likely to be a consistent source of what children most need: reliably correct and sophisticated language

patterns. Other sources of language in children's lives would be adults—primarily parents and teachers (most of whom are very busy and find that even their communication with children often leans more toward the expedient than toward the sophisticated), and lastly: the books that children read or that adults read out loud to them. Much can be said about why children need to be read to out loud—in much larger quantity than they usually get, even—or especially after they reach an age of being able to read by themselves. However, there is another vital but oft-neglected source of powerful and sophisticated linguistic patterning available to children: memorized language, especially memorized poetry.

### WHY MEMORIZATION?

Memorized (or “by heart”) language was a mainstay of education for almost all of recorded history until about 60 years ago, when misguided educationists began to promulgate the idea that memorization, along with other types of “rote” learning, was harmful to children's creativity, understanding, and enjoyment of learning. Perhaps one of the most damaging doctrines ever to invade teachers' colleges, the concept that memorization was at best unnecessary and at worst downright harmful, is now handicapping a third generation of students, who, because of the sad state of the popular media, are most in need of the linguistic foundation that memorization provides. It is not uncommon to meet a young teacher or parent who has never even heard of the idea of having children memorize poems or speeches. If they didn't do it as a child, and no one has taught them it would be possible (let alone beneficial), it wouldn't necessarily occur to them. And yet the cultural, neurological, and linguistic value of memorized language is indisputable.

Young children will naturally memorize language patterns from their cultural environment. If teachers and parents don't provide high quality models, kids will automatically internalize and memorize random stuff from their environment—mainly TV advertisements and songs on the radio, most of which we would not find to be “reliably correct and sophisticated.” A child's instinctive desire to memorize is intrinsic to language acquisition, yet for the most part we ignore it, or allow it to happen so haphazardly that we miss out on one of the greatest opportunities to build sophisticated language patterns. Poetry has long served a critical role in the transmission of culture, as it tends to convey the “rhyme and reason” of life in a concentrated and memorable form. But if we don't provide the content and opportunity for organized memorization, kids will let popular culture be their teacher. In other words, if we don't provide them with Belloc, Stevenson and Rossetti, they'll memorize McDonald's commercials and Snoop Doggy Dog rap lines. Memorization is not only natural for young children, it is culturally powerful and educationally essential.

Neurologically, memorization develops the brain in a way nothing else can. Neurons make connections through frequency, intensity and duration of stimulation.<sup>1</sup> When children

memorize (and maintain the ability to recite) interesting poems, all three of these variables are involved in a powerful way, strengthening the network of neural connections which build the foundation of raw intelligence. In short, the more neurons we have connected to other neurons, the more “RAM” we have in the CPU of our brains, and the rigor of memorization is a powerful tool in this process.<sup>2</sup> Not only is organized memorization important for neurological growth, it also builds a mental discipline which will carry over into other academic areas.

Many of us may know one or more poems, rhymes, or songs from childhood, and we often take some measure of pride or pleasure in being able to recite them to this day. Frequently, the sense of accomplishment that accompanies the memorization of poetry builds linguistic and even academic confidence and spills over into other areas. Like performing a piece of music, memorization and artistic recitation of poetry requires a certain level of perfection which only conscientious effort and consistency can bring. If a student memorizes a long poem and can recite it flawlessly, he will believe that he can learn anything, be it math processes or facts from history. “By heart” learning not only strengthens the mind, it also strengthens the heart and spirit of the child.

Like any skill, memorization gets easier with practice. Again, as with music, one’s first efforts to exactly remember every word in a poem may seem labored and difficult, but as the number of memorized poems increases, so does the ease of mastering new ones. The neural network which stores language grows, and as it does, so does the speed with which new networks of brain cells can be developed and integrated. Retention is also critical. If memorized material is not regularly reviewed and strengthened, it will be lost, and the original neural connections will begin to dissipate. Therefore, critical to the development of any skill, and especially memorization, is the all-important maintenance plan, to assure that what one has worked so hard to attain is not lost by attrition. The more you have learned, the easier it is to learn more. The implications of this fact stretch far beyond the value of just knowing a few dozen poems, but indicate that memory in general can be improved from exercise—just like muscles.

It’s sad but true: memorization in schools has for the most part been left by the wayside, thought to be at best unnecessary and at worst harmful. So we now see a third generation of children who will likely be deprived of the many advantages of memorization—not just the neurological ones, but the benefits to heart and mind as well. Whereas students of yesteryear had the common experience of committing to memory a wide range of sophisticated poetry, prose, scripture, and great speeches, children of today often lack exposure to the most common nursery rhymes. Society will not likely notice the serious consequences of this omission until it is too late. Popular culture will continue to dictate the drivel that provides the linguistic and intellectual patterning for a generation, and we will wonder why the schools failed to produce a majority of people who can think and communicate well enough to sustain a free republic.

## WHY POETRY?

Acknowledging that memorization in general—and memorization of sophisticated language in particular—is a good thing, we must next ask: what should be memorized? Rote learning and recitation of sacred texts has always been a fundamental part of religious education in all major religions from ancient times to the present day, and certainly parents and teachers who raise children to learn large chunks of scripture by heart are persuaded of its spiritual value. Clearly, memorization of classics served as the educational backbone for such thinkers as Aristotle, Saul of Tarsus, Augustine, Thomas Paine, and even more modern authors such as Gene Stratton-Porter and J.R.R. Tolkien. However, poetry has always held a unique position within scripture, classics and literature for several reasons. Poetry is generally enjoyable, poetry can usually be remembered easily, and good poetry is concentrated—rich in meaning, sophisticated in vocabulary and solid in structure.

Young children are naturally drawn to humorous, silly, interesting, unusual things, and many wonderful poems have been written specifically to appeal to children—for good reason. Poets like Hilaire Belloc and Robert Louis Stevenson from the last century, Shel Silverstein and Jack Prelutsky from the present time, have all known how important it is to capture the child's interest in poetry at a young age, thereby preparing them to appreciate more serious and meaningful poems in later years. If children grow up laughing and loving poems, they are much more likely to mature into adults who can pursue and enjoy the classics. When exposure to poetry is limited, or early experience of poetry tedious, students will be unlikely to later benefit from the deeper historical, philosophical, or religious works. *The Psalms*, *The Bhagavad-Gita*, *The Odyssey*, and *The Sonnets of Shakespeare* are all poetry in their own right (and even more so in their respective languages), but people won't appreciate their richness without appropriate orientation and experience. As John Senior explained how children must read the thousand "good books" so that as adults they can appreciate the hundred Great Books,<sup>3</sup> similarly children need broad experience with funny, enjoyable, and dramatic poems so that they can later plumb the minds and hearts of the masters.

Poems by their very nature are easier to remember than prose. This is fortunate. Like songs, the rhyming and rhythmic patterns intrinsic to English poetry create a "predictability" that aids and speeds memorization. Nursery rhymes exist for a reason. As children internalize those simple patterns, they are preparing for the next level of sophistication. Additionally, rhyming words help build phonetic awareness which strengthens spelling and pronunciation: "Jill/hill" and "down/crown" are simple examples. English rhymes, possible in part because of the vastness of our vocabulary, are pleasant to the ear and to the heart. Alliteration or assonance will accentuate a statement. A solid meter is musical and engaging. Generally, we respond with joy to poetic technique simply because it is artistic, reflecting a higher intelligence, and we are drawn, naturally and easily to remember it. Poems are perfect for memorization.

Because poets need to conform to their chosen rhythm and rhyme, they often need to use sophisticated words and grammatical patterns above our normal exposure or conversational usage. This is linguistic gold. By hearing—and better still by memorizing—a variety of poems, we have access to a richness of vocabulary and syntax we might never master in any other way. Again, think of the simple nursery rhyme:

*Jack and Jill went up the hill  
to fetch a pail of water.  
Jack fell down and broke his crown,  
and Jill came tumbling after.*

The language here, although seemingly simple, gives a young child some very sophisticated elements to work with. While the first sentence contains two prepositional phrases, the second is not only a compound sentence, but also contains dual verbs. The words “fetch”, “crown”, and “tumbling”, are probably beyond the normal conversational level of the young children who would learn the rhyme, but by learning it, they would acquire at least familiarity—if not fluency—with those words. They will also learn (long before they’ll hear it) that the rule “never end a sentence in a preposition” isn’t really true. Find any good poem and evaluate it for vocabulary and grammatical structure; you’ll quickly see that poems are almost always high quality language—even the simple, fun ones. When selecting poems for students to memorize, try to choose those which will provide correct and sophisticated linguistic patterns for the child. (But don’t be overly picky about it—kids are flexible enough to survive the occasional run-on, fragment, or made-up word.) Memorizing poetry builds effective linguistic aptitude.

Finally, most poems have richness of meaning; they are concentrated thought. Even simple limericks can give opportunity for questions and reflections. Quality humor requires intelligence. Poems that tell a story often have the unexpected twist or embedded moral, while poems that play with words also play with ideas. Emotional poems can help us understand our own complexity of feelings. We have an English idiom, “It has no rhyme nor reason.” The two are intertwined towards truth; we trust the beauty of the rhyme as we trust the logic of the reason. As old as language itself, poetry is a powerful tool for communication. Many teachers who value poetry get excited about giving youngsters the opportunity to write poems, yet the children often lack the breadth of experience needed to do much with it. However, by memorizing poetry, children build up a repertoire not only of vocabulary and grammar, but of poetical ideas—the stuff from which future poems will be crafted. To focus on writing poetry without memorizing it as well is the equivalent of trying to teach musical composition without having the students learn to perform any classic pieces. The results simply won’t be as good. Memorization is the most complete form of internalization, and the best way to intimately know something is to know it so well you can communicate it effectively, fluently, even artistically to another. For depth of feeling, meaning, and beauty, poetry is powerful.



Although memorizing scripture and other forms of prose is certainly admirable, poetry holds a few distinct advantages. Not only is it fun, poetry is easy to learn and leads children to a greater depth of thought and word. Most significantly, it promotes fluency with a wide variety of vocabulary and grammatical patterns, something which cannot easily be extracted from daily conversations, from exposure to popular media, nor even from books which children read by themselves. Poetry has always been a civilizing influence in society—from Ancient Greece and Israel, to Feudal Japan, to Victorian England. Poetry is the apex of literature, and thus the crystallized thought of the human race. By internalizing the best of poetry, we preserve and nurture the best of ourselves.

### MASTERY LEARNING – WHAT IS IT?

Mastery learning means just that—learning for complete mastery. In the case of memorization, it means knowing every word and its correct place, and being able to recite it with excellent fluency, speed, pronunciation, and inflection. How then does one coach a child toward such perfection? The best example of how this has been done in the past can be seen in the phenomenal results of Suzuki Method™. Also known as “Talent Education” or Ability Development, Dr. Shinichi Suzuki’s original method was called the “Mother Tongue Method of Education” and was based on his observations about how children learn their native language. Suzuki realized that children as young as six or seven years were able to learn to speak a language easily and fluently, but that adults studying a foreign language could seldom reach such a high level of ability even after ten or twenty years of study. He concluded that not only do children have an amazing aptitude for learning anything, but also that the way they best learn is very different than what takes place in traditional education. By observing how children acquire fluency in their mother tongue, he identified four principles—the pillars of Talent Education: 1) the earliest period, 2) the best teacher, 3) the best environment, and 4) the best method of learning.<sup>4</sup>

Suzuki noted that children begin learning their native language from the earliest possible age; before birth they begin hearing their mother speak. From birth onward they are hearing, trying to understand, and attempting to imitate the language in their environment. He proposed that the young child absorbs language most easily, which concurs with the observations of Maria Montessori,<sup>5</sup> Glen Doman and many others. Additionally, Suzuki noticed that young children are able to acquire a nuance of expression in dialect that adults are never able to achieve—no matter how many decades of study and practice. He therefore proposed that whatever you want to teach—be it language, music, art, or mathematics—the younger the child is when instruction begins, the more effective the instruction will be. Until Suzuki began demonstrating his amazing results with children as young as three and four years old, music educators generally held that it was best to wait until the child was mature enough to show some potential talent before investing time and money in music lessons.

Suzuki claimed and later proved that “talent” is not only inborn, but that every child has a sprout of talent which can be nurtured from the youngest possible age if done so by the proper methods.

Who teaches a child to speak? They don’t go to school (and certainly don’t have to take any multiple-choice tests) to learn their native tongue; they learn it one-on-one, most often from their mother. Mothers are superbly well qualified to teach their children to speak their language, as they know what they are teaching, and they have time, patience, and love. Dr. Suzuki realized that when mothers are involved, education is at its best, even going so far as to state, “A nation's prosperity depends on women's strength.”<sup>6</sup> The Suzuki Method of music instruction requires a parent to learn all about playing the violin (or ‘cello or piano, etc.) and become the “home teacher”, guiding the child’s practice each day according to the instructions of the music teacher. Educators today still know that results are better when parents are involved, and home school families have found that in most cases they can easily teach children basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic in a fraction of the time required in a typical classroom setting.

Environment is critical. Anyone who has tried to learn a foreign language as an adult is well aware how much easier it is to gain fluency when living in the country or with people who speak it. The classroom/textbook approach to learning a foreign language is notably ineffective, as can be seen by the millions of adults who have “taken” Spanish or French in high school, but couldn’t carry on a conversation with a five-year-old native speaker. Suzuki saw how the environment of children was saturated with language— auditory, visual, even kinesthetic—and determined that creating an intensely musical environment was requisite for effective music education. Thus he promoted the use of recordings, so that children could listen every day to the music they were going to be learning to play. Although some traditional music educators considered this to be “cheating” (claiming that students shouldn’t hear the melody before figuring it out from the printed notes), Suzuki knew that young children of three or four years old wouldn’t be able to read notes for some time, and that to reach a high level of ability, starting young and saturating the environment with music by way of recordings was essential. Now the results are in—Suzuki’s methods have produced all the top musicians in the world; the traditionalists are light-years behind. True ability development requires an environment where the student can be deeply immersed in what he is learning.

The fourth pillar of Talent Education, and perhaps most significant for us, is a correct understanding of the method of skill acquisition, since it is so very different from what most of us experienced in our schooling. Suzuki modeled his pedagogy after the way children gain their language ability—one word at a time, while never stopping to practice and use the words they’ve learned so far. When children begin to talk, they will begin with one word—usually “mama”, and then use that word constantly, even incessantly for everything they want, until using that word has become very easy. That may take days, weeks, or months, but when using that one word has become easy, they will add another word and

then use those two words—constantly—until using two words has become easy. That may take days, weeks, or months, but when both of those words can be used easily, fluently, effortlessly, the child will add another, and when using three words is easy they add a fourth, etc., but never stopping the use of the words they have acquired so far. This process continues naturally until by the age of six or seven, an average child has a vocabulary of many thousands of words, which can be combined into phrases, clauses and sentences, and they do so effortlessly, easily, fluently—to such a degree that no one else can do it. Suzuki applied this system to music education, and it is particularly needed in the arts, but the truth of the basic concept is what allows mastery learning in any area of study. We don't, however, truly realize the brilliance of the method until we juxtapose it against our standard textbook-style approach, or what one might call the “non-ability development” method of education.

In a typical school setting, subjects such as history, science and grammar are generally divided into units and chapters, sections and lists, presented to the students by way of text and lecture/discussion, possibly enhanced with an occasional written paper or project, and finally testing. Once the unit is complete, the curriculum moves on, seldom addressing that chapter's content again (although in high schools and college courses, there may be a mid-term or final exam) and it is sooner or later forgotten, until it comes again with the next round of history or science or grammar years later. You probably remember the “chapter test” and how you could cram for that quiz by holding a few dozen miscellaneous facts in your head for a short time—long enough to pass the test—and then safely forget most of it. Overall, retention was poor; lasting benefit was minimal. Unless those bits of information were amazingly interesting to you, there simply wasn't enough frequency, intensity, or duration to allow for permanent retention.

This can be painfully apparent to parents on a daily basis, as evidenced by a child's response to the question, “What did you do in school today?” to which they answer, “Nothing” or “I don't know,” and also becomes very clear at the end of the year, when the only thing they remember from seventh grade is the very last chapter of the textbook or the last unit done in science. Typical spelling tests as we may have experienced them are another stunning example of non-ability development education; you get the list on Monday, the pre-test on Wednesday or Thursday, the final test on Friday, and whether a student gets 100% or 80% or 60% on the final, they get a new list on Monday. Repeat. Mastery learning would require the student to score 100%, probably twice in a row, before moving on to a new list—but that would require individualized instruction which is so very difficult in a classroom setting. Certainly there are exceptions—students who learn and remember more easily, and teachers who cleverly engage students in more effective ways of learning—but they are uncommon. Sad but true, this “non-ability development” method of education is so prevalent today, that we have essentially institutionalized it in universities, where courses are taken mainly for requirements, credits, and grades, and students don't really expect to remember much after the final is passed and the semester is over.

Shinichi Suzuki proved through music education that every child can learn, and that how well they learn can be accelerated by starting at a young age, having the best environment, being coached by the best teacher, and most significantly, using the best method of skills acquisition. When children are taught by good Suzuki Method teachers, they don't stop playing a piece of music just because they've memorized it and are now learning a new piece, no—they play every piece they've learned every day until playing it is easy, effortless, and pretty much perfect. Even then they continue to review regularly, so that they never forget a piece they've learned. That's how—at the age of five or six or seven—a properly trained Suzuki student can perform—nonstop and probably without error—a dozen or more pieces for a Book One graduation recital, making it look simple, easy and fun—an achievement few adults could even imagine. This is true ability development. This is Talent Education. This is mastery learning.

## HOW THIS POETRY MEMORIZATION PROGRAM IS SET UP

By now, you should be convinced that memorization helps to grow the brain, build mental discipline, and strengthen the spirit; that poetry is enjoyable, easy to memorize and linguistically rich, and that a high level of ability can be developed by using the Talent Education methodology. If so, you are ready to begin a long-term program to have your students memorize many dozens of poems, be able to recite them with confidence and artistry, and retain that ability for life. The primary benefits will include giving the student not only a rich database of vocabulary and sophisticated English language patterns, but also enhanced memory and intelligence, a greater appreciation for poetry, and even an increased aptitude for writing poems.

Completing this program will likely take several years, but dramatic results should become apparent in just a few months. The method is very similar to Dr. Suzuki's plan for music instruction, with poems divided into four books, or levels. Audio recordings of the poems are included to provide easy opportunity for abundant repetition, which will also allow young children to memorize poems long before they can read them. Level One begins with very short, enjoyable verses. Gradually the length and sophistication of the poems increase. Interspersed throughout all the levels are occasional short selections, so as to give the students a break from too many long ones in a row.

It is recommended that all students, regardless of age, begin with Level One, and proceed through the levels in order. If older students balk at learning some of the simpler or sillier poems, point out to them that such poems will be very handy for entertaining young children they may come across when babysitting, at family gatherings, community events, etc. They may already be teaching younger kids in some capacity, and certainly many will become parents. Poems in this program were chosen with several criteria: humor and enjoyment, vocabulary and linguistic quality, classic and cultural literacy, character and

message. The accompanying CDs and charts were designed to help you be successful using the poems in this book; however, if you disapprove of one or more of these selections, you are certainly welcome to replace them with other poems of your own choosing.

Although this compilation contains no distinctly religious content (and is therefore acceptable for purchase and use by public school programs), individual parents or teachers may wish to supplement this compendium with poetry or prose from scriptural or sacred sources of their choice. To that end, we have included space for a few “Personal Selections” at the end of each level. This personal selection requirement will also encourage children in the same family or classroom to individualize the program by choosing a few poems which they especially like.

## HOW TO TEACH THE PROGRAM

The basic principle is this: teacher and students recite together one poem several times a day. If the students are able to read, they may have a copy of the poem to follow, if not, then the teacher may need to recite and have students repeat one line at a time. This should be done every school day until the poem can be recited correctly, easily, and without hesitation. (As the first several poems in Level One are quite short, this should happen quickly—perhaps in a few days.) When the first poem is mastered, the second poem is introduced in the same appropriate way, and practiced together several times each day. However, the first poem should not be forgotten, it should also be said at least once each day. When the first two can be easily recited, a third is introduced and practiced, while the first two continue to be recited, and so on. This is the “E.P.E.D.” (Every Poem Every Day) method of practice, so that by the end of Level One, the student is reciting every poem they’ve learned every day. Note: Multi-stanza poems should be learned in sections, with one stanza solidly learned before adding another. It is also preferable that students recite the title and author’s name as well.

Some of the poems, especially the older ones, may contain words or idiomatic expressions unfamiliar to students. Additionally, you may find terms or statements of social, scientific, or historical significance. A good teacher will seize the opportunity to explore these words and meanings. Don’t assume students have a certain level of understanding; constantly check for comprehension, and take whatever time is necessary to ensure that students get full value and benefit from the words they are memorizing. Likewise, short biographical statements about the authors have been included when possible, and it is beneficial for students to have some information about the names of the poets they hear and recite. Share this information with them as is appropriate to their age and interest, and do more research together as opportunities arise.

When the student has learned all poems and is prepared, a Level One graduation party can be scheduled, where family and close friends gather and listen as the student

recites, clearly and correctly, all twenty poems of Level One. This event should be accompanied by the presentation of a certificate (and a small party of sorts—perhaps with popcorn and a movie). The student has then graduated to Level Two and now begins to learn the next twenty poems. However, the Level One poems learned must not be forgotten, so the student continues to recite them according to the “E.O.P.E.O.D.” (Every Other Poem Every Other Day) schedule while using the “E.P.E.D.” schedule for the Level Two poems as they are learned. When ready, the student may do a Level Two Graduation recitation and party, at which point they begin to learn the poems in Level Three. Level One poems are then said according to the “E.T.P.E.T.D” (Every Third Poem Every Third Day) schedule, and Level Two Poems go on the “E.O.P.E.O.D.” schedule. This sounds more confusing than it is, but recitation charts are provided to help you and your students stay organized.

By following this method and continuing to regularly recite all the poems learned through to the end of Level Four, students will very likely have achieved a level of frequency, intensity, and duration that will give them life-long retention of all eighty poems—a gift for which they will always be grateful. At some point in the sequence, you may determine to cut back on the E.P.E.D./E.O.P.E.O.D system (perhaps because of time constraints) but you should be certain to provide enough opportunity for recitation of learned poems to maintain the repertoire.

Although memorizing and reciting daily so many poems may at first seem like a daunting project which will require large amounts of time, consider a few points: 1) Given the huge benefits of memorizing poetry, it may well be one of the best uses of your available school hours. 2) Recitation of memorized poems can easily be done away from a desk—perhaps in the car, while cooking or folding clothes, during a walk, etc. 3) Memorizing new poems gets easier in direct proportion to the number of poems already memorized; in other words the more you have learned, the faster you can learn more. 4) The Audio CD recordings will help you use repetition so that students can memorize poems more quickly and accurately; you don’t have to do it all yourself. So, although it may seem like a huge undertaking, give this system a try, and read the introduction to this book as often as needed to be reminded of the importance of memorized poetry.

Lastly, keep in touch. Let us know how it’s going—any joys, frustrations, confusions, or problems you may have with this program. I firmly believe that our task of raising leaders, competent communicators who are empowered to speak the truth and speak it well, is an undertaking of monumental importance. Doing our best as parents and teachers, we can perhaps raise up such a generation; let us work together. So don’t hesitate to contact me personally if I can be of assistance to you as you strive to prepare your children to write and speak powerfully. May your efforts be blessed and multiplied.

Andrew Pudewa  
March 1, 2005

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Doman, Glenn, and Janet Doman, *How To Multiply Your Baby's Intelligence*. (Philadelphia: Gentle Revolution Press, 2001)

<sup>2</sup> It is notable that of those who score highest on standardized tests like the SAT, a large number are music and drama students. Although this may be because smart kids are attracted to music and drama (or possibly because these activities are often indicative of a higher economic or social background), it is much more likely due to the fact that music and drama help to create intelligence; both disciplines require large quantities of memorized repertoire.

<sup>3</sup> Senior, John, *The Restoration of Christian Culture*. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983)

<sup>4</sup> Suzuki, Shinichi, *Nurtured by Love* (Tokyo: Suzuki Method International, 1986)

<sup>5</sup> Montessori, Maria, *The Absorbent Mind* (NY: Owl Books, 1995)

<sup>6</sup> Suzuki, Shinichi, *Young Children's Talent Education & Its Method* (New York: Birch Tree Group, 1999)

## CHARTS, RECORD-KEEPING, & CERTIFICATES

The following six pages are provided to help you organize the EPED (Every Poem Every Day), EOPEOD (Every Other Poem Every Other Day) and the ETPETD (Every Third Poem Every Third Day) systems as described on pages 10-11. Although you may easily be able to do this without such detailed record-keeping, marking the boxes allows children to see their progress and it would be reasonable, especially for young children, to earn a small prize for a well filled in chart. Level One charts are provided for your convenience and to help illustrate the system; the blank charts can be used for Levels Two, Three, and Four. The charts in the book may be copied freely.

Also provided is a sample certificate, which may be used to acknowledge children's progress when they accomplish the perfect memorization of one entire level of twenty poems. Feel free to use it as is, or create your own, more colorful design.

## LEVEL ONE

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### Level One Poems

1. **Ooey Gooley** [Author Unknown]
2. **Celery** by Ogden Nash
3. **The Little Man Who Wasn't There** by Hughes Mearns
4. **The Vulture** by Hilaire Belloc
5. **After the Party** by William Wise
6. **Singing Time** by Robert Louis Stevenson
7. **The Yak** by Hilaire Belloc
8. **The Ingenious Little Old Man** by John Bennett
9. **My Shadow** by Robert Louis Stevenson
10. **There Was an Old Person Whose Habits** by Edward Lear
11. **Jonathan Bing** by Beatrice Curtis Brown
12. **Whole Duty of Children** by Robert Louis Stevenson
13. **Godfrey Gordon Gustavus Gore** by William Brighty Rands
14. **My Gift** by Christina Rossetti
15. **The Swing** by Robert Louis Stevenson
16. **Persevere** [Author Unknown]
17. **Who Has Seen the Wind?** by Christina Rossetti
18. **The Eagle** by Alfred Tennyson
19. **The Swan and the Goose** by William Ellery Leonard
20. Personal Selection (8 lines or shorter)

### NOTES:

There seem to be several versions of “Ooey Gooley” floating around, and even the spelling of the title is in question. I have chosen the one I like most—but don’t be surprised if you come across variations.

After starting Belloc’s poem “The Yak”, our family enjoyed consulting the encyclopedia and discovering a bit about Yaks; we found that Belloc’s statements may not be quite as odd as we first thought.

Edward Lear wrote countless limericks, ranging from the cute to the inane, most all of which can be found in his 1846 manuscript, *A Book of Nonsense*. You may (or may not) enjoy reading more of his absurd verses, but either way you’ll be amazed at his laugh at his drawings.

“Persevere” seems to have first appeared in the McGuffey Readers.

For the Personal Selections of Level One, you may enjoy looking into the work of more modern poets such as Shel Silverstein and Jack Prelutsky, who both wrote many books of delightful (and often silly) poems for children. A bibliography of anthologies is provided for you on the last page of this book.