

Poetry is your friend.

What's that I hear from the readers? A profound snore? The title alone has apparently sent some of you running for the mouse to click away the mere thought of "oh-so-tedious, what was that we had to memorize in sixth grade?" - poetry. Yes, I know it has a bad reputation – not for being cool (unless you happen to be among the *über-cool* who *know* that *poetry really is cool*) but for being boring, incomprehensible, inaccessible or worse, pretentious. I will admit that poetry, like many fine things in life, is an acquired taste, but once you have inhaled the spiced aroma of a well played verse or thrilled to the sound of onomatopoeia or felt your heart break at the sheer beauty of words, then you, my friend, will be hooked. Poetry is more than artful crafting, it is emotion tore down and rebuilt, and it is creative flights of imagination that leave dreams wanting. This is why poetry can speak to you when nothing else can, why in moments when our words fail us, the poet steps in and creates community between us and them and the world – all with tendrils of words.

For children and adolescents who are just exploring the possibilities of language to help them express their thoughts poetry can be a wonderful vehicle for teaching and for worship. Using poetry written by other children often helps tap into a way of understanding an emotion, a concept or an attitude that a child or youth has been struggling to explain in their own words. For others, being able to write down their anger, confusion, grief, fear, or love in a concise fashion frees them from the anxiety of first speaking it out loud, yet gives pastors and educators a place to start a discussion.

Poetry takes many, many forms. Inviting children and youth to share poems in a "poetry slam" where they not only select or write the poems themselves, but perform the poem from their own understanding gives poetry movement and action in a physical way. The possibilities are endless – poetry can be used for liturgy, for illustration, for discussion, comparison, and expressions of interpretation of theological topics, life issues, or scripture.

Poetry is not all soft and sweet and overripe, it can be bracing and raw and intensely weird. It can name emotions we don't even like to admit we have and it can illumine dark and unnerving parts of ourselves that we never knew existed. Poetry is never predictable and that is part of its timeless beauty as well as its usefulness as a powerful tool in Christian education.

There are several faith reviews of poetry collections and poetic narratives available on this webpage. *Woof: A Love Story* (ages 4-8), *Believe Me I Know* (ages 8-18), and *The Brimstone Journals* (older adolescents) are just a few. Just remember, poetry is habit forming!

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