

INTRODUCTION

The ancient author Horace wrote an instruction manual for poets and playwrights entitled *Ars Poetica* (*The Art of Poetry*). In it he said, “Poets wish either to profit (instruct) or to delight.” All worthy literature, including poetry, will point our souls to truth, goodness, and beauty, which ultimately both delights us and instructs us in wisdom.

Authors and poets through the ages have echoed Horace’s words. Popular American poet Robert Frost said, “A poem begins in delight but ends in wisdom.” Percy Shelley offers one of the most beautiful and poetical expressions of this thought:

Poetry is a fountain forever overflowing with the waters of wisdom and delight.

This series of Poetry Readers is based on Charlotte Mason’s model of poetry study. She said, “Poetry takes first rank as a means of intellectual culture. Goethe tells us that we ought to see a good picture, hear good music, and read some good poetry every day.”¹ Miss Mason recommended that students focus on one poet at a time, “reading his or her poems over a complete term, or even a complete year, . . . that he may have time to do what is in him towards cultivating the seeing eye, the hearing ear, the generous heart.”²

Each Volume in the Poetry Readers series includes three or four poets, along with several selections from Shakespeare’s sonnets and plays, providing more than enough poems for a full year’s poetry

¹ Charlotte Mason, *Volume 5: Formation of Character*, (Illinois: Tyndale House, 1989), p. 224.

² *Ibid*, p. 224.

study. Our six year cycle of poets will introduce students to many of the most beautiful and well-known poems in the English tongue. Our aim, in the words of Charlotte Mason, is to set an “ample feast of which everyone takes according to his needs, and leaves what he has no stomach for.”

HOW TO USE THE POETRY READERS

Plan to spend six to nine weeks with each of the poets in this volume, and another two or three with Shakespeare. Choose a poem for each week, and read it aloud several times over several days during that week. That is really all there is to it! See *On Reading Poetry with Children* at the end of this introduction to see an example of this method in action.

The vast majority of poetry reading should be unhindered by explanations and comprehension questions, but should simply allow the reader and listeners to interact with the poet. The chief aim is simply to delight in the poem.

Here are a few additional ideas for your poetry study:

- 1 Make poetry study part of your daily routine. If you have more than one child, gather them all together—or better yet, choose a time when they are already gathered, like a mealtime or regular read-aloud time. Then read the poem with expression and proper pauses, but with little or no commentary.
- 2 Try to read the poem (or a portion of it, if it is long) at least once more during the day. Ask your students to tell you something in the poem that caught their attention or gave them delight. Do not belabor this; the main point is to read and enjoy the poem.