**Defining a Story in Poetry:** A story in poetry, (or novel in verse for older readers), is a format choice the author has made and tells a story through a series of poems. Poetry stories encompass a wide range of subjects, poetry styles, and reader age ranges.

**Considering Stories in Poetry for Students at Each Reader Age**

**For young readers, ages 4-8/9:**

* Subject difficulty and story conflicts are appropriate for the youngest age readers.
* Poetry often includes rhyme, rhythmic language, poetry forms, and word play. Text may be more minimal than illustrations and those illustrations often help tell the story.
* Suitable for both read-to-me students and emerging/independent readers.
* Genre choices are somewhat limited for this age reader.

**For upper middle grade readers ages 9-12:**

* Subject difficulty and story conflicts are age appropriate and become more challenging. Hardship and death may occur. Violence is very limited. Toughest scenes may occur “off the page.”
* Stories shift from rhythm and rhyme focus to free verse, poetry forms, and techniques. Text and white space share the page. Few, if any, illustrations.
* Subject matter may be directly related to poetry or writing and/or have a spare element that lends itself to poetry.
* Genre choices are still limited, but the range begins to broaden.

**For older readers, ages 12 +:**

* Biggest differences between 9-12 and 12+ are subject difficulty and story conflicts. This age level could include hardship, violence/intense scenes, and death may occur and may be on or “off the page.”

**For Young Adult/15+:**

* Biggest difference between 12+ and 15+ is content. For 15+, the subject matter may be very intense, highly complex, and for mature readers. (Stories may reference/relate to sex, drugs, violence.) Illustrations are non-existent unless integral to story.

**Bibliography and Summaries Broken Down by Reader Age Range**

Note: Summaries were taken from Goodreads and/or individual publisher website information.

**Ages 4 -8/6-9**

**Meet Danitra Brown** by [Nikki Grimes](http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/25492.Nikki_Grimes), Floyd Cooper (Illustrations)Lothrop, Lee & Shepard, New York, 1994. Age Range: 4 – 8 years Hardcover: 32 pages 1. Afro-American-Juvenile poetry. 2. Children’s poetry, American. 3. Friendship – Poetry. 4. Single-parent family – Poetry. 5. American poetry.

This spirited collection of poems introduces young readers to Danitra Brown, the most splendiferous girl in town, and her best friend, Zuri Jackson. Scholastic: Named a Coretta Scott King Honor Book as well as an ALA Notable Book, this touching collection of 13 poems about two African American girls named Zuri Jackson and Danitra Brown, is a refreshing and illuminating way to convey a portrait of friendship.

**Emma Dilemma: Big Sister Poems** by [Kristine O'Connell George](http://gr-assets.com/author/show/236959.Kristine_O_Connell_George), [Nancy Carpenter](http://gr-assets.com/author/show/98975.Nancy_Carpenter) (Illustrator)Clarion Books, New York, 2011.Age Range: 6-9 years Hardcover: 48 pages1. Sisters – Juvenile poetry. 2 Children’s poetry, American.

Emma is Jess's little sister . . . and her dilemma.

How can one small girl be sweet, funny, imaginative, playful, and affectionate as well as a clinging vine, brat, tattletale, and nuisance all at the same time? Why is Jess supposed to be a good big sister while Emma doesn't have to be a good little sister? The highlights and low points of this sibling relationship are insightfully evoked in short and simple poems, some funny, some touching, and all resonant with emotional truth. Every child with a younger sibling will recognize Jess's dilemma and the combination of ambivalence and deep loyalty that is built into the sibling relationship. Nancy Carpenter's graceful illustrations perceptively complement Kristine O'Connell George's agile poems.

**Gone Fishing: A Novel In Verse** by Tamera Will Wissinger, Matthew Cordel (Illustrations).Houghton Mifflin Books for Children, Boston, 2013. Age Range: 6 and up, Hardcover: 128 pages.

1. Novels in verse. 2. Fishing – Fiction. 3. Brothers and sisters – Fiction. Nine-year-old Sam loves fishing with his dad. So when his pesky little sister, Lucy, horns in on their fishing trip, he’s none too pleased: “Where’s my stringer? / Something’s wrong! / The princess doll does not belong!” All ends well in this winsome book of poems—each labeled with its proper poetic form, from quatrain to tercet. Together the poems build a dawn-to-dusk story of a father-son bond, of sibling harmony lost and found—and most of all, of delicious anticipation. Charming line drawings animate the poetry with humor and drama, and the extensive Poet’s Tackle Box at the end makes this the perfect primer to hook aspiring poets of all ages.

**Age 9 and up**

**Love That Dog** by [Sharon Creech](http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/11633.Sharon_Creech)**.** HarperCollins Publishers, New York, 2001. Age Range: 8 and up Hardcover: 112 pages

Summary: A young student, who comes to love poetry through a personal understanding of what different famous poems mean to him, surprises himself by writing his own ispired poem.

1. Poetry – Fiction.

"I guess it does

look like a poem

when you see it

typed up

like that."

Jack hates poetry. Only girls write it and every time he tries to, his brain feels empty. But his teacher, Ms. Stretchberry, won't stop giving her class poetry assignments -- and Jack can't avoid them. But then something amazing happens. The more he writes, the more he learns he does have something to say. With a fresh and deceptively simple style, acclaimed author Sharon Creech tells a story with enormous heart. Written as a series of free-verse poems from Jack's point of view, Love That Dog shows how one boy finds his own voice with the help of a teacher, a writer, a pencil, some yellow paper, and of course, a dog.

**Out of the Dust** by [Karen Hesse](http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/4057.Karen_Hesse).Scholastic, New York, 1997. Age Range: 8 and up Paperback: 240 pages

Summary: In a series of poems, fifteen-year-old Billie Jo relates the hardships of living on her family's wheat farm in Oklahoma during the dust bowl years of the Depression.

When Billie Jo is just fourteen she must endure heart-wrenching ordeals that no child should have to face. The quiet strength she displays while dealing with unspeakable loss is as surprising as it is inspiring. Written in free verse, this award-winning story is set in the heart of the Great Depression. It chronicles Oklahoma's staggering dust storms, and the environmental--and emotional--turmoil they leave in their path. An unforgettable tribute to hope and inner strength.

**May B** by Caroline Starr Rose. Schwartz and Wade Books, New York, 2012. Age Range: 9 and up Hardcover: 240 pages

Summary: When a failed wheat crop nearly bankrupts the Betterly family, Pa pulls twelve-year-old May from school and hires her out to a couple new to the Kansas frontier. 1. Novels in verse. 2. Frontier and pioneer life – Kansas – Fiction. 3. Kansas – History – 19th century – Fiction.

“I've known it since last night: / It's been too long to expect them to return. / Something's happened.” May is helping out on a neighbor's Kansas prairie homestead—just until Christmas, says Pa. She wants to contribute, but it's hard to be separated from her family by 15 long, unfamiliar miles. Then the unthinkable happens: May is abandoned. Trapped in a tiny snow-covered sod house, isolated from family and neighbors, May must prepare for the oncoming winter. While fighting to survive, May's memories of her struggles with reading at school come back to haunt her. But she's determined to find her way home again. Caroline Starr Rose's fast-paced novel, written in beautiful and riveting verse, gives readers a strong new heroine to love.

**Locomotion** by Jacqueline Woodson. G.P. Putnam’s Sons, New York, 2003. Age Range: 9 and up Hardcover: 128 pages

Summary: In a series of poems, eleven-year-old Lonnie writes about his life, after the death of his parents, separated from his younger sister, living in a foster home, and finding his poetic voice at school. 1. African American boys – Juvenile poetry. 2. Brothers and sisters – Juvenile poetry. 3. Foster home care – Juvenile poetry. 4 Orphans – Juvenile poetry. 5. Schools – Juvenile poetry. 6. Children’s poetry, American.

When Lonnie Collins Motion was seven years old, his life changed forever. Now Lonnie is eleven and his life is about to change again. His teacher, Ms. Marcus, is showing him ways to put his jumbled feelings on paper. And suddenly, Lonnie has a whole new way to tell the world about his life, his friends, his little sister, Lili, and even his foster mom, Miss Edna, who started out crabby but isn’t so bad after all. Award-winning author Jacqueline Woodson’s lyrical voice captures Lonnie’s thoughtful perspectives of the world and his determination to one day put a family together again.

**Age 12 and up**

**Carver: A Life in Poems** by [Marilyn Nelson](http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/53711.Marilyn_Nelson), Front Street, Asheville, 2011.Age Range: 11 and up Hardcover: 112 pages

1. Carver, George Washington, 1864? – 1943 – Poetry. 2 AfroAmerican agriculturists – Poetry. 3. Agriculturists – Poetry. 4. American poetry.

This collection of poems assembled by award-winning writer Marilyn Nelson provides young readers with a compelling, lyrical account of the life of revered African-American botanist and inventor George Washington Carver. Born in 1864 and raised by white slave owners, Carver left home in search of an education and eventually earned a master's degree in agriculture. In 1896, he was invited by Booker T. Washington to head the agricultural department at the all-black-staffed Tuskegee Institute. There he conducted innovative research to find uses for crops such as cowpeas, sweet potatoes, and peanuts, while seeking solutions to the plight of landless black farmers.Through 44 poems, told from the point of view of Carver and the people who knew him, Nelson celebrates his character and accomplishments. She includes prose summaries of events and archival photographs.

**Shakespeare Bats Cleanup** by [Ron Koertge](http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/62567.Ron_Koertge). Candlewick, Cambridge, 2006. Age Range: 12 and up Paperback: 116 pages

Summary: When a fourteen-year-old baseball player catches mononucleosis, he discovers that keeping a journal and experimenting with poetry not only helps fill time, it also helps him deal with life, love, and loss. 1. Poetry – Fiction. 2. Baseball – Fiction. 3. Authorship – Fiction. 4. Diaries – Fiction. 5. Sick – Fiction.

When MVP Kevin Boland gets the news that he has mono and won't be seeing a baseball field for a while, he suddenly finds himself scrawling a poem down the middle of a page in his journal. To get some help, he cops a poetry book from his dad's den - and before Kevin knows it, he's writing in verse about stuff like, Will his jock friends give up on him? What's the deal with girlfriends? Surprisingly enough, after his health improves, he keeps on writing, about the smart-talking Latina girl who thinks poets are cool, and even about his mother, whose death is a still-tender loss. Written in free verse with examples of several poetic forms slipped into the mix, including a sonnet, haiku, pastoral, and even a pantoum, this funny, poignant story by a master of dialogue is an English teacher's dream - sure to hook poetry lovers, baseball fanatics, mono recoverers, and everyone in between.

**Shark Girl** by Kelly Bingham. Candlewick Press, Cambridge, 2007.Age Range: 12 and up Paperback: 288 pages

Summary: After a shark attack causes the amputation of her right arm, fifteen-year-old Jane, an aspiring artist, struggles to come to terms with her loss and the changes it imposes on her day-to-day life and her plans for the future.1. Amputees – Fiction. 2. Artists – Fiction. 3. People with disabilities – Fiction. 4. Self-acceptance – Fiction. 5. Interpersonal relations – Fiction. 6. Novels in verse.

On a sunny day in June, at the beach with her mom and brother, fifteen-year-old Jane Arrowood went for a swim. And then everything — absolutely everything — changed. Now she’s counting down the days until she returns to school with her fake arm, where she knows kids will whisper, "That’s her — that’s Shark Girl," as she passes. In the meantime there are only questions: Why did this happen? Why her? What about her art? What about her life? In this striking first novel, Kelly Bingham uses poems, letters, telephone conversations, and newspaper clippings to look unflinchingly at what it’s like to lose part of yourself - and to summon the courage it takes to find yourself again.

**Crossing Stones** by Helen Frost. Frances Foster Books, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2009.

Age Range: 12 and up Hardcover: 192 pages

Summary: In their own voices, four young people, Muriel, Frank, Emma, and Ollie, tell of their experiences during the first World War, as the boys enlist and are sent overseas, Emma finishes school, and Muriel fights for peace and women’s suffrage. 1. Novels in verse 2. World War, 1914 – 1918 – Fiction. 3. War – Fiction. 4. Soldiers – Fiction. 5. Friendship – Fiction. 6. Family life – Fiction. 7. Women – Suffrage – Fiction. 8. Michigan – History – 20th century – Fiction.

“Maybe you won’t rock a cradle, Muriel. / Some women seem to prefer to rock the boat.” Eighteen-year-old Muriel Jorgensen lives on one side of Crabapple Creek. Her family’s closest friends, the Normans, live on the other. For as long as Muriel can remember, the families’ lives have been intertwined, connected by the crossing stones that span the water. But now that Frank Norman—who Muriel is just beginning to think might be more than a friend—has enlisted to fight in World War I and her brother, Ollie, has lied about his age to join him, the future is uncertain. As Muriel tends to things at home with the help of Frank’s sister, Emma, she becomes more and more fascinated by the women’s suffrage movement, but she is surrounded by people who advise her to keep her opinions to herself. How can she find a way to care for those she loves while still remaining true to who she is?