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## How To : An Original Picture Book for Children

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How To  
An Original Picture Book for Children

By Morgan Wright  
Childhood General Education

Mentor:  
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of  
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## **ABSTRACT**

This independent study was focused on the creation of an original, social-emotionally oriented “how to” picture and poetry book for children ages five through seven. A wide variety of books for children, from old classics to recent publications, deal with themes relevant to children’s social-emotional lives. However, many of these books are written in narrative fiction form, or are framed using a logical, adult-centered lens. The goal of this book project was to create poetry and illustrations which authentically conveyed the unique emotional textures and roundabout logic of childhood associated with everyday experiences. Child development research included cognitive and emotional development in ages five through seven, as well as perspectives on literacy, language, and functional development. A review of the literature for children analyzed poetry books, how-to books, books dealing with abstract themes, illustrations, formatting, and the depiction of the logical and emotional lives of children. The original work was shared with two groups of children of different ages. Children in both age groups expressed engagement and enjoyment, and seemed to connect readily with the content and form of the book. Major conclusions of the project include the necessity of in-depth investigation of child development in order to authentically capture a child’s viewpoint; the importance of bringing teachers’ creative selves to their work; and the powerful impact that sharing the book with children had on the author’s perspective on the final product.

*To my family*

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## RATIONALE

Since starting my coursework at Bank Street, I have been intrigued and concerned by the challenge of how teachers, as they grow in their knowledge and practice, can maintain their connection to the child's experience of the world. In my own teaching, I find that I sometimes get caught up in curriculum and theory and, as a result, lose touch with my memory and understanding of the visceral sensations and experiences of childhood. Amid growing consensus that social emotional learning in early childhood is essential to future academic success and developmental health, a teacher's ability to honor and empathize with a child's daily struggles and joys seems paramount to their role in the child's life. In part due to Bank Street's emphasis on children's literature in their teacher education programs, I have developed the belief that children's literature also has a vital role to play in honoring and empathizing with the child's experience. This project engages with the question of what it could look like for an original piece of children's literature to deal authentically with specific experiences of childhood by sharing those experiences through child-like logic and imaginative poetry.

The idea for this book was born in Spring 2016 in Bank Street's *Language, Literature, and Emergent Literacy* course, taught by Mollie Welsh Kruger. Among the ideas that I generated for my final project in the course was an illustrated poem, "How to Read a Book." Beyond the nuts and bolts of how one learns to read, I felt there was potential for a celebration of reading and storytelling from a child's perspective. How to capture, in word and image, the child's sensation of reading a story and watching it come to life in their imagination? But I soon began to think of other things that could follow the

words “How to...” all of which would be delightful and rich to explore through the child’s experience and perspective, such as “How to make friends,” “How to say goodbye,” and “How to fall asleep.” For children, everyday acts like finding lost items or saying “thank you” are imbued with a unique texture and emotional weight, and are much less straightforward than how adults experience them. Certain life skills that adults take for granted and expect children to learn at a fairly young age are actually enormously challenging for a young human to master. This was an important lesson for me to learn as a preschool teacher, and has stuck with me even as I have moved into contexts with older students.

For preschool and early elementary school children, acquiring social skills and learning how to communicate with other humans are among the central tasks they must work on, both in and outside of school. It is easy for an adult to say, “Use your words,” or “Make new friends.” But for a five-year-old, words are sometimes ungainly, or frustratingly inadequate, and the world of friends and playmates is overwhelming, and is governed by mysterious, unknowable rules. Through their play, young children must learn to use social language, get along with others, to take other people’s perspective, and figure out how to make and keep friendships (Wood, 2007). Basic skills around functional independence are also important in preschool and early elementary school, like learning how to follow rules and routines, and gradually mastering tasks around independence like tying shoes and keeping track of belongings. The challenge of the early childhood teacher is to take on the child’s perspective in these tasks and understand them for the complex challenge they pose to their students.

A teacher working with children between the ages of four and seven is reminded almost every moment, in every interaction, that the world of children operates under a completely different set of rules than the world of grown-ups. Daily routines have a particular magic or dread attached to them. As Dorothy Cohen explains in *Observing and Recording the Behavior of Young Children*:

...children understand time and schedule only hazily. Nor are these the criteria by which they guide their activities. For young children, routines are either an end in themselves or a deterrent to the important business of living. For example, washing hands does not necessarily have any connection with lunch at all...To children, routines have a meaning all their own, and it is not an 'adult' meaning (Cohen, 2008, p. 20)

Similarly, a particular stone, or piece of paper, or colored string may have special properties or be exceedingly precious to the child, unbeknownst to the ignorant grown-up. Everyday furniture takes on amazing new capacities in imaginative play, which sometimes clashes with the limitations of reality. Children in Piaget's preoperational stage of cognitive development (approximately between the age of two and seven) are still working on their knowledge of identities as constant, understanding functional relationships through increased symbolic thinking, and recalling information and experiences in service to problem solving. They can still move fluidly between imaginative thinking and realistic thinking, which aligns with the early childhood hallmark of using dramatic play and imagination to understand their world (Miller &



Church, 2018). This ready capacity for animism and magical thinking represents a stark difference between the cognitive life of young children and that of adults.

An enormous majority of a child's world is created and framed by grown-up rules and linear rationality, while the way that a young child experiences the world does not usually follow those rules. In children's literature, however, these experiences (like making new friends, dealing with emotions, going to school) may be framed linearly and logically, using child-friendly language. There exists a wealth of children's books with an educational or instructional purpose, but I find that they often follow a linear, logical, one-to-one correspondence. Of course, there is nothing inherently wrong with clear, logical, linear presentation of information in children's books. In fact, Giorgis and Glazer would argue that this clarity and coherence is essential in evaluating children's literature: "The story will not have the lags, random happenings, or intrusions that characterize real life" (Giorgis & Glazer, 2009, p.36). But one could ask, why not? Ambiguity, randomness, and lack of closure can also be powerful tools in a book for children because these young readers do not always experience their world in a logical, linear way. I started to wonder what it would look like, for a book to use poetry to frame everyday tasks and experiences in the roundabout, imaginative mode of childhood?

Some of my clearest and longest-lasting memories from childhood have endured in the form of this illogical poetics of childish experience. The satisfied sensation of vanity at the sight of how my five-year-old feet, clad in lavender purple socks, fit snugly into my first pair of shiny black dress shoes. The sinking, heavy dread in my stomach when I had lost something special and failed to find it, no matter how thorough my

search. The itchy feeling of being told a secret too juicy to keep. The urgent surge of busy-ness and purpose that accompanied the creation of an imagined economy (a fairy house, a pretend store, a treasure hunt). My deep sense of pride when I finally succeeded in peeling a clementine in one unbroken spiral. The seemingly impossible task of, when playing with a group of other children, deciding on a game to which everyone can agree (and then figuring out the rules!). If I were to write these experiences and sensations into this children's book, for example, "How to decide what to play," my goal would not be to describe it accurately or sequentially. My goal, instead, would be to capture the spirit of it, the essence of how it felt and what it meant in the world of play—through a child's eyes and mind.

What if, in a children's book, we were to frame children's tasks, like saying goodbye or making new friends, in the colorful, emotional, illogical way that they themselves experience them? This is comparable to the logic that one can observe in children's dramatic play, which helps them understand the world and feel powerful during this stage in life in which their experience is often defined by their powerlessness and helplessness in the adult-ordered world. Barbara Biber offers an insightful perspective on the illogical coherence of children's dramatic play:

Often when play violates the line of adult logic, we can see that it has a special kind of coherence all its own—perhaps the coherence of an action rather than a thinking pattern...To understand children's play we must loosen our imaginations from the restrictions of adulthood and the limitations of logic that is tied in within literalness and objective reality (Biber, 1951, p. 49).

It is entirely appropriate for children's play to go against the rules of adult logic, and Biber's research and advocacy was essential to ensuring that imaginative play continues to be part of the curriculum and conversations in early childhood education. This acceptance of children's imaginative logic should extend to children's literature. Giorgis and Glazer write about the factors with which one can evaluate children's literature, and one of these factors is integrity: "Good children's literature contains freshness and honesty. It may touch children's emotions; it may stimulate their imaginations" (Giorgis & Glazer, 2009, p. 37). Essentially, children's literature must honor the child's emotional and imaginative experience; it must consider the child's perspective in both text and image.

My goal, then, is to translate the illogical coherence that we can observe in the way that a young child makes sense of their experience (especially in dramatic play) into poetry and art, in service to explaining the little (yet very big) things that make a child's world go 'round. Through the process of creating this book, I hope to loosen these restrictions that logic and "adulthood" place on my own imagination. I found Richard Lewis' words about poetry, play, and imagination, to reflect some of my own thinking: "If we define poetic as a letting go of the hard and fast rules of routinized reality so that objects, events, and experiences are placed in a different context, then the play of imagination is the activity that gives the initial impetus to an innate poetry of learning" (Lewis, 1998, p. 51). The product, I hope, is a piece of literature in which a young child would see their own experiences of childhood mirrored playfully yet authentically back at

them. If the final product proves to be mystifying to adults but delightful to children, then I will know that I have, to some extent, succeeded.

## CHILD DEVELOPMENT SECTION

### Introduction to the Child Development Section

Between ages five and seven, a child's mind opens and grows in so many ways—cognitively, socially, linguistically, and more. The magic of this age, in particular pertaining to this “How to” poetry book, centers on how children in kindergarten, first, and second grade have one foot in the world of imagination and one foot in their lived reality (Spitz, 2006). Their expanding abilities in reason and logic are still intertwined with an affinity for the magical, and their social selves and their physical development keep them exploring new realms of play. Various aspects of child development at this age make them a potent and wonderful audience for poetry in general, and the poetry of this book project in particular, which draws so heavily from the child's perspective of both the wonders and discomforts of daily life.

The poetry in this book could certainly be enjoyed by a child as young as four, with an adult reading aloud, or by an eight-year-old reading independently. However, the primary intended audience spans older fives through the sixes and young sevens. A five-year-old would likely experience it as a read-aloud, but at six or seven a child, depending on their reading abilities, might read it to themselves or enjoy it alongside an adult or older peer. In any of these cases, it could be a reading of one or several poems, or the whole book read in sequence. In considering the poems and their fit for this age group, I offer a quote from *The Brightening Glance*, Dr. Ellen Spitz's book on children and imagination: “When, little by little, we find ourselves transported into children's worlds, even just briefly, we can meet them ever so much more richly in the fullness of

their joys and passions, their frustrations, reluctance, anxiety, curiosity, and in their outbursts of merriment, indignation, or sorrow” (Spitz, 2006, p. 19).

### **Intellectual-Cognitive Development**

Between the ages of four and seven, children’s intellectual and cognitive capacities undergo fascinating transformations. A five-year-old entering kindergarten still slips in and out of an imaginative world in which inanimate objects and stuffed animals behave as living things. As Chip Wood writes, “...five-year-olds do not think the same way about the world as adults do. Cause and effect are not explained through logic, but rather through intuition” (Wood, 2007, p. 59). That five-year-old is, at the same time, bound by their senses and can often only consider topics and ideas in the most concrete of terms. In the context of this book project, the combination of five-year-olds’ concreteness and imagination creates a compelling audience for poetic interpretations of concrete experiences.

At age six, children are entering a big transition in which they are working hard to structure their world in new ways. Highly industrious in the classroom, sixes will “...proudly produce a great quantity of work but are unconcerned with quality; whatever the activity—whether academics, cleanup, or snack—their delight lies in the doing (especially when doing for themselves)” (Wood, 2007, p. 81). This delight in process is also reflected in the spirit of this poetry book project, which relies on the childlike association of certain emotional textures with everyday life experiences, in which “reality has personal meaning” (Cohen, 1978, p. 77).

In many ways, the age of six is the cusp, the small beginning, of the capacity for reasoning, when children are starting to organize concepts symbolically. Young children in early school years do not always understand logical necessity, often cannot recognize logical inconsistencies, and tend to rely on effective but un-based reasoning until logic-based reasoning matures in adolescents. As Meadows writes, “An extensive body of research...shows that young children have a shaky grasp of the relationship between hypothesis and evidence, fail to coordinate multiple variables, and find it hard to keep in mind more than one hypothesis at a time...” (Meadows, 2006, p. 109). In short, the cognitive development of young children (ie., preschool and kindergarten age) does not necessarily begin with the hypothesis-testing logic reminiscent of the scientific method. Rather, according to Meadows, exploration of analogies to explain physical and social events are more important to young children’s cognitive development.

Six- and seven-year-olds are just beginning to exercise their powers of reason and logic, though they will continue to develop more fully over their future years in school. As Gretchen Owocki writes, “As they [children] go about their daily lives, they develop and test a never-ending series of little hypotheses, or ideas, about the ways in which the world works. As new experiences challenge their existing hypotheses, children refine them to accommodate new information” (Owocki, 1999, p. 41). This poetry book is meant for children roughly ages five through seven because, cognitively, these children are perfectly poised to comprehend ideas represented through words and pictures and relate them to their own lives, but not yet set in rigid patterns of fully logical reasoning. In short, they are still intimately connected to their imagination.

Play and imagination are central topics in the discussion of early childhood education and development. In addition to its essential role in cognitive development, dramatic play is increasingly being shown to lead to positive outcomes in literacy, self-regulation, social skills, emotional well-being, and more. Of particular relevance to this book project, the modes of imagination and perception work in close harmony throughout early childhood:

Children's wishes, dreams, and fantasies feed into their immediate sensory perceptions, and their aesthetic lives in turn shape the contours of their fantasies. This interdependence is so pronounced in early childhood because during those brief years the aggressively occupying armies of compartmentalization have not yet fully colonized our mental landscapes (Spitz, 2006, p. 4).

In her book *The Brightening Glance*, author Ellen Handler Spitz explores the development of imagination, observing how the boundary between reality and make-believe is quite porous for young children. The development of the imagination, and the constant negotiation of this porous boundary, is essential element of children's cognitive development (Giorgis & Glazer, 2009). This book project relies heavily on that premise—namely, that children this age are cognitively disposed to blend imagination with their lived experience. They can move much more seamlessly than adults through their inner and outer worlds. Richard Lewis writes about how, for children, the imagination is “The gift of becoming other than what we are—letting ourselves be transformed by the object of play, or transforming it so that we become that things—is at the very core of our imagining self” (Lewis, 1998, p. 47). I tried to capture this capacity



for imagination throughout the book. For example, in the “How to Win at Hide and Seek” poem, the key to winning is, in your imagination, to “become” your hiding place. In the “How to Fall Asleep” poem, breathing in and out turns the city lights off and turns the stars on in the sky. At this age, children’s cognitive mix of imagination and reason is perfect for a text that combines real life tasks and needs with poetic, illogical imagery.

### **Social-Emotional Development**

In his book *Yardsticks*, Chip Wood characterizes the fives as a period of “consolidation” after the emotional roller-coaster and exuberance of the fours (Wood, 2007, p. 58). Children this age are generally happy, and they need (and usually desire) rules and structure. They often seek adult approval for actions both large and small throughout their day, and they enjoy cooperation despite being attached to doing things their way. As fives get older, however, they begin to exhibit uncertainty in their feelings, thoughts, and actions. This book project speaks particularly to this phase of the fives, when the child’s emotional world takes on more ambiguity. Ideally, the poetry and themes can model how uncertainty and ambiguity can still be full of beauty and joy. Fives also need support in perspective-taking—they see themselves as at the center of their universe, and struggle with perspective-taking. Any opportunity to introduce them to a different way of thinking, a different perspective on their world (especially socially), is good practice.

Sixes’ emotional life is often shaped by their grand ambitions. For sixes, “No job is too big, no mountain too high. Their enthusiasm, however, can outstrip their skills, and

sixes risk an overpowering sense of inadequacy and inferiority as they tackle new frontiers” (Wood, 2007, p. 75). Highly sensitive creatures, sixes are easily upset when hurt, anxious to do well, and generally need a lot of encouragement. With sixes, a kind word of support or a stern look of disapproval from a teacher can have disproportionate emotional consequences. Six-year-olds have a uniquely huge capacity for enjoyment and pleasure, and become extremely excited about treats and surprises. Sixes can be highly competitive—they always want to be first, they often cheat to win, and they also use tantrums and teasing to negotiate their relationships with authority. At six, friendships start to take on equal if not greater importance than significant adults and family members.

Clearly, six is a socially and emotionally intense age for children. Conflict with a friend, a failed project, or losing a game can take on a dire emotional significance that adults might struggle to empathize with. As Dorothy Cohen puts it, “...few adults regard the child-to-child experience with anything like the seriousness with which they handle the children’s relationships with themselves [the adults]” (Cohen, 1978, p. 61). There is a certain urgency to a child’s inner social-emotional world, which may seem so small from an adult’s perspective. A significant goal of this book project is to honor the emotional impact that little tasks and events have on a young child—things which, to an adult, may seem small and inconsequential and yet, to a child, may feel like the end (or the beginning) of the world. The method for this emotional honoring is to join the child in their world of play and imagination.

For fives and sixes, dramatic play is one of the most effective ways of dealing with overwhelming or difficult emotions. As Barbara Biber writes, in dramatic play a child can "...can re-create the world not only as he really experiences it but even in the strange aspects that symbolize some of his deepest wishes and fears" (Biber, 2015/1951, p. 48). Of course, a text cannot literally join a child in their dramatic play, which is enacted in the physical world. However, poetry as a writing form is uniquely suited to accepting and mirroring the spirit of dramatic play because poems also re-create the world through symbolism. Say a child says to their friend, "Let's pretend we are puppies, and we are lost," and the friend responds, "Yes! And we are trying to find our way home." The friend has accepted the first child's premise for, and invitation into, their dramatic play. The poetry in this book is the written equivalent of that invitation, and the subsequent acceptance.

### **Physical and Functional**

Older fives are becoming better at large movements, and they can hop, run, jump, and balance without much difficulty, though they still can fall easily and are often clumsy. Fine motor skills are starting to improve, but can still be a challenge. Despite the difficulty, fives relish the opportunity to practice things like cutting up their own food with a knife, learning to tie their shoes, and brushing their hair. Their hand-eye coordination continues to develop as they move into the sixes. Despite the physical challenges of fine motor actions like As with sixes and sevens, fives need a lot of physical activity throughout their day, along with frequent breaks for rest. At five,

children's vision focuses most easily on objects close to them, and they often become visually engrossed in details (Wood, 2007).

For sixes and sevens, their visual tracking is beginning to improve, which helps in gaining more skill in reading. First graders are speedy and busy, always in motion and moving quickly between activities. With rapidly improving fine motor skills, sixes and sevens are using fingers as tools in many different ways. With their continued improvement in gross motor coordination, they enjoy all kinds of physical games in which they can explore and improve their physical capacities. With an exceptionally high energy level, first graders also tire easily and benefit from rest times. With wiggly baby teeth beginning to fall out around at six and seven, children this age often cannot help but chew on things (pencils, markers, toys, books, etc.), despite consistent reminders to the contrary (Wood, 2007).

### **Language and Literacy**

In kindergarten, a five-year-old's primary academic task, whether around language and literacy or mathematics, science, and social studies, is to engage with their concrete understanding of their world in as many different modes as possible. This helps them to eventually transition to the symbolic understanding necessary for future literacy tasks. As Dorothy Cohen writes in *The Learning Child*:

Language is the major symbol system used by adults, but the full possibilities of language...are not fully utilized by children whose thinking is still strongly tied to action, and whose words are rooted in the concrete and literal. Yet it is necessary

to their learning that they deal with their comprehension of reality in some symbolic form (Cohen, 1972, p. 89).

This “comprehension of reality in some symbolic form,” in early childhood primarily happens through dramatic play. A wooden block, a toy, or a doll stands in as a symbol for something else in an imagined scenario, which primes the child for the symbolic jump they must make in order to understand that the lines and curves of letters stand for the verbal sounds of speech and language.

In their literacy work, sixes and sevens are using this symbolic understanding of letters to understand and recognize words. This is the real work of learning to read, a magical and often laborious task which happens at a widely different pace for different learners (Cohen, 1978). At this age, many children are beginning to write their own simple sentences and stories. This is also a time of enormous vocabulary growth, with many first graders learning five to ten new words every day! In both listening to and telling stories, they are able to understand the passage of time more accurately (past, present, future), and can understand character’s basic feelings and motives. Their oral storytelling becomes more and more complex as they begin to recognize the complex and varied uses of spoken language (Anthony, 2018).

Beyond the linguistic building blocks for literacy, children ages five through seven benefit from opportunities to play with language. With their growing vocabulary and new awareness of language, exposing children this age to poetry is an oft-neglected opportunity to play with language in early elementary school classrooms. Sixes and sevens particularly love language play, and the books that are exposed to should be

playful and exuberant. Poetry echoes the free and creative language use that one can observe in children's dramatic play. The freedom of language exploration that children find in play reflects "...an absence of boundaries and prescriptions that we cannot grant them outside of their play lives" (Biber, 2015/1951). Children in the fives may need support from adults and more experienced peers to benefit from the language play offered by poetry, because fives can exhibit literal interpretation of language.

However, the way fives and older sixes use language forms a bridge between their inner and outer worlds which allows them to access poetry despite its figurative language. For example, older fives and some sixes often use language to initiate activity—they think out loud, and might talk themselves through the steps of a difficult task using spoken language (Wood, 2007, p. 68). Like the boundary between their lived experience and their imagination, their boundary between internal and external language is somewhat fluid and makes them eager audiences for poetry and language play.

In terms of their reading abilities, poetry is a welcome addition to the fives, sixes, and sevens reading landscape. For the fives, who are still struggling with the challenge of left to right eye tracking, the short lines of poetry are accessible and appealing. Moving toward sixes, children are beginning to show their understanding of differences between genres, for example, poetry versus essay. Poetry dealing with common themes that sixes and sevens enjoy reading and writing about, such as best friends, school, family, pets, and possessions, is a wonderful place to start. Sixes and sevens also have a growing appetite for fantasy. The poetry in this project deals mostly with these universal themes common in children's everyday lives, with a sprinkling of fantasy and wonder.

## LITERATURE FOR CHILDREN REVIEW

### Introduction to the Literature for Children Review

This literature review has been an emergent process rather than a systematic plan, with one book leading to another and unexpected discoveries made along the way. I have created a children's book which, from the beginning, defied most attempts to categorize it in a specific genre or form. If I had been writing, say, a non-fiction book about a historical figure or event, I would have known exactly what section of the library to go to in my search for mentor texts. In my case, with my difficult-to-define idea, where to begin? I was writing poetry, so I could have started looking in the poetry section. On the other hand, many of the children's books found in the picture book section also reflect the sort of poetry and poetic language that I was aiming for. My poems were all going to be related to this "how to" theme in regards to early childhood experiences, so I could simply search "how to" on the library catalog and then go wherever it sends me.

I ended up doing all of these things. I collected several books with "how to" in the title, some of them wildly different from one another. I visited the poetry section of the children's wing of the Central Brooklyn Library at Grand Army Plaza, and pulled a dozen books off of the selves—single illustrated poems, poetry collections, and more. I gathered suggestions from friends, advisors, and teachers who also work with children in the four to seven age range, which is my intended audience. I reread old classics, and found new ways to look at them. And, more often than not, I would be searching in the picture book section of the library for a particular book or author, and something else

entirely unexpected and unlooked for would catch my eye. And it was often just the thing that I needed.

Categories emerged as I added to my repertoire of texts and became more aware of how they were informing my work. The poetry section of my review discusses just a few of the books and poets which helped me build my confidence as a writer and better understand where my book fits into the field of children's poetry. The "How To Books" section covers a handful of books which share this phrase in their title and also have some interesting similarities. I also included an "Abstract or Complex Ideas for Young Readers" section. While I ended up finding only a few titles to include in it, I felt it was important to acknowledge that the book I created is more abstract than many books for children in this age range. This section is followed by "Children's Logic and Emotional Life," which featured heavily in my Child Development section and was a key influence on my writing. The final section of the review is a discussion of the books which inspired my illustration and formatting which, despite coming at the end of this written review, was an enormous part of my creative process.

### **Poetry for Young Children**

When I consider what this book actually is, in terms of the reader's experience, it is a book of poems. When I initially settled on this idea of a "How To" book, I was quite excited about the idea and spirit of the book but did not, in fact, imagine it as a book of poetry. However, over the course of generating the text and the artwork for these pages, I realize that, when all is said and done, this is a book of poetry for young children. Thus,



the first section of this literature review will address the poetry texts that influenced my work. Upon starting work on the text, my initial confidence and excitement lagged briefly because I did not see myself as a poet, and in fact have almost no experience writing poetry for any audience. Because of this, I had to read a variety of poetry, for adults and for children, simply to get a sense of what I liked and what resonated with me in particular in relation to my ideas for this project.

Nikki Giovanni's poetry for young children caught my attention early in the process. I was particularly struck by her poems in *The Sun is so Quiet*, because she focuses on particular moments and describes them from a young child's perspective using figurative language while still keeping it accessible. Giovanni's poetry in *The Sun is so Quiet* also reminded me that not all poetry for young children has to rhyme. Poetry collections also were helpful in my exploration of poetry for young children. Picture book collections such as William Jay Smith's *Up the Hill and Down* were important because of the range of styles and perspectives they offer, and as mentor texts they also provided guidance around poem length, vocabulary level, and structure.

I barely scratched the surface when it comes to the range of poetry available for young children. However, in the limited exploration that I was able to do, I grouped the poetry that I was reading into loose categories by subject. Many poetry books for young children feature poems by one author on various topics, like Nikki Giovanni's *The Sun is so Quiet*. Poetry collections are plentiful, with various authors writing on a variety of topics or focusing on one subject. Finally, it is common to find poetry picture books written by a single author, in which every poem focuses on a specific topic (such as

David Elliott's *In the Sea* or Walter Dean Myers' *Jazz*), or books in which the poems follow a story, like Kristine O'Connell's *Emma Dilemma*.

This category, in which all the poems in a book relate to one topic, most accurately describes how my book fits into the realm of children's poetry; each poem is connected to the same "How to" theme. However, that theme encompasses a range of topics such as friends, games, and emotions. Also, I quickly learned that children's poetry comes in an enormous range of forms. There are an infinite variety of rhyme schemes, or no rhyme scheme at all; poems come in different formats and arrangements, such as shaped poems, list poems, and more. I honored this diversity by not following one particular form. Some of my poems rhyme, while others do not. Some poems are spread over two pages, while others are grouped into two stanzas. However, two trends, which I found in my mentor texts and which I kept consistent over my book, were poem length and vocabulary complexity. I limited my poem length to 40 or fewer words, with only one or two longer words which would be unfamiliar to a young reader.

#### **Annotations: Poetry.**

##### **Elliott, D. (2018). *In the Past*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press.**

David Elliott's poetic homage to prehistoric creatures large and small will delight children of all ages, particularly six- and seven-year-olds with a particular passion for dinosaurs and their relations. Each two-page spread is a stunning, colorful illustration of a prehistoric animal, accompanied by a poem titled with the animal's name. The poems are relatively short, with word counts ranging from three to forty words, and the majority of them are written in the second person—speaking directly to the animal. This format, with each two-page spread featuring a stand-alone poem directed towards a particular creature, echoes other poetry books by Elliott. These include *In the Sea* (2012), *In the Wild* (2010), and *On the Farm* (2008), all illustrated with Holly Meade's woodcut illustrations. *In the Past*, however, was illustrated by Matthew Trueman, whose watercolor and mixed media illustrations give the prehistoric creatures a delightful realism and immediacy which lend power to the sometimes wry poetry.

**Giovanni, N. (1996). *The Sun Is So Quiet*. New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company.**

Nikki Giovanni's collection of thirteen short poems captures innocent delight in sensations associated with small childhood moments. Many of the poems draw inspiration from seasons and nature, like "Winter Poem" and "Strawberry Patches," but a few of the poems communicate other childhood sensations like "The Reason I Like Chocolate." The language is simple, lyrical, light-hearted, and vivid, appealing to the short attention span, eager senses, and small yet growing vocabularies of young readers. Personification of natural elements, playful rhyming, and well-placed figurative language lend an aura of magic and wonder to everyday experiences. Ashley Bryant's gouache and tempera illustrations supports young readers by clearly depicting the subject of the poem on each two-page spread. Bryant also joyfully incorporates additional colors, shapes, and symbols which honors the spirit of Giovanni's poetic language.

**Greenfield, E. (1978). *Honey, I Love*. New York, NY: Thomas Y. Crowell Company.**

In *Honey, I Love*, Eloise Greenfield has crafted sixteen poems which are, in a sense, love poems to everyday life. Greenfield's poetry is frank and joyful in its appreciation of experience, from long, rainy train rides and running gloriously fast to love for self, family, and place. Greenfield evokes the simultaneously self-centered but utterly self-less perspective of a child who sees her world for what it is: full of joys, contradictions, sadness, love, and community. Celebration of Blackness—in history, in family, in music, and more—is integral to the arc of all sixteen poems. Diane and Leo Dillon's illustrations, part portrait-sketch and part child-like print, weave seamlessly with the text and add a level of richness and heart. After reading *Honey, I Love*, a reader (child or adult!) might feel prompted to consider their own "I loves," and begin to look at their world more closely so as not to miss the embedded poetry that Greenfield captures with such abandon.

**O'Connell George, K. (2011). *Emma Dilemma: Big Sister Poems*. New York, NY: Clarion Books.**

In *Emma Dilemma*, Kristine O'Connell George's poignant poems evoke the emotional essence of big-sisterhood, in all its joys and frustrations. Told from the point of view of older sister Jess, *Emma Dilemma* is comprised of more than thirty vignette-like poems illustrating the delights and disasters of Jess' relationship with little sister Emma. The collection of poems loosely follows a chronological order, with the first few poems introducing the "dilemma" of Emma, and Jess' first day of fourth grade. The climax, taking the form of a tree climbing accident which puts Emma in the hospital with a broken arm, tugs at the readers' heartstrings because we watch it all unfold through Jess's eyes. Nancy Carpenter digitally-rendered pen and ink illustrations make the characters come to life, without overshadowing the the tender, funny poetry told in an authentic voice of childhood.

**Smith, W. J. (2003). *Up the Hill and Down: Poems for the Very Young*. Honesdale, PA: Boyds Mills Press, Inc.**

In *Up the Hill and Down*, Former Poet Laureate William Jay Smith has compiled twenty-nine poems from a diverse range of well-loved authors and poets including Gwendolyn Brooks, Robert Louis Stevenson, David McCord, and more. The poems in this collection which particularly shine, at least in the context of this project, are the ones that deal more intimately with children's experiences and are written from a child's point of view. For example, "The Island," by Dorothy Aldis, describes the happy discovery of a secret "island" of grass left unmown in a beloved meadow, where bees and butterflies can still be found. Delmore Schwartz' "Cherry Alive" captures the silly, joyous freedom of make-believe play. William Jay Smith's own poem, "My Body," is delightful in its brevity: "Wherever I go, it also goes/And when it's dressed, I'm wearing clothes." Somehow, in thirteen words, Smith communicates the genuine child-like puzzlement over the relationship between self and body! Allan Eitzen's colorful multimedia illustrations communicate humor and action which younger readers of poetry might miss without the visual support.

### **"How To" Books**

Many of the "how to" children's books which I found, read, and developed a relationship with were written with humor as the primary goal. A recent example, which can be equally enjoyed by adults and children, is the hilarious *How to Put Your Parents to Bed*, by Mylisa Larsen. In Jennifer Huget's *How to Clean Your Room*, the whole point of the book is that it is actually teaching the reader how to *not* clean their room, or how to clean their room in the most annoying and ineffective way possible. Helaine Becker's *You Can Read* is largely driven by the humor associated with reading in increasingly strange and funny situations. *How to Bicycle to the Moon to Plant Sunflowers* by Mordecai Gerstein is totally outlandish and impossible, complete with cartoon-like speech bubbles and funny labels which are probably more easily appreciated by older readers or adults.

An interesting exception to this humorous trend is *How to Catch a Star* by Oliver Jeffers. This book does not aim for comedy, and Jeffers actually captures a particularly sweet essence of children's logic, which is discussed later in the review. Another highly notable exception to the comedic "How to" books is a lovely, sincere book by Julie Morstad titled, amazingly, *How To*. I discovered this book late in the process of reviewing potential mentor texts. At first I was mildly dismayed by the discovery, because it appeared that my book had already been written! Morstad's "how tos" were so similar to mine—"How to be brave," "How to make new friends," "How to wonder," and many more. The essence and purpose of this "how to" book parallels mine almost perfectly. However, the exploration of each "how-to" in Morstad's short picture book relies entirely on the illustrations and the reader's imagination, because each "how-to" statement (such as "How to wash your face") is the only text on each page spread. This is in contrast to my book, in which a short poem and an illustration accompany each "how-to."

In general, there are an abundance of straightforward "How to" books that have been written for children, including recent publications and well-loved classics. These books often relate to life transitions like new siblings (*Julius the Baby of the World* by Kevin Henkes), potty training (*Everybody Poops* by Taro Gomi), and starting kindergarten (*Kindergarten, Here We Come!* by D.J. Steinberg). Some of are nonfiction picture books, while others are fictional stories which teach a thinly veiled lesson or moral like the Berenstain Bears books ( *The Berenstain Bears and the Messy Room*, *The Berenstain Bears Count Their Blessings*, for example).

There is, of course, nothing inherently wrong with this type of book. However, the abundance of this straightforward approach to teaching children about life through literature was part of what made me excited about my idea in the first place, because it offered an alternative approach. My book fits into the “How-to” category of children’s literature by trying to authentically present a variety of How-tos in a way that balances humor and sincerity while attempting to approximate the feelings and flavor without spelling it out explicitly. In doing so, I hope to acknowledge, and help children understand, that there are different ways to think and feel about how one goes about saying goodbye, making friends, finding lost cats, and more.

**Annotations: “How to” books.**

**Jeffers, O. (2004). *How to Catch a Star*. New York, NY: Philomel Books.**

Oliver Jeffers’ *How to Catch a Star* is a sweet story that bridges the abstract and the concrete but keeps the language simple for very young children in preschool and kindergarten. A young unnamed boy loves stars, and wants one for his very own. He makes a variety of unsuccessful attempts to catch a star, with no success until the very end, after he has given up and is headed for home. It is clear from the words and the winsome illustrations that the boy is not driven by greed, but rather by a tender desire for friendship—a sentiment captured by the final illustration of the boy and his new star-friend walking hand-in-hand as the sun sets over the beach. The solid-color, somewhat geometric illustrations are somehow luminous, and a lovely match with the simple, heartfelt text.

**Gerstein, M. (2013). *How to Bicycle to the Moon to Plant Sunflowers*. New York, NY: Roaring Book Press.**

In this flamboyant, humor-filled story, Mordechai Gerstein’s irrepressible protagonist speaks directly to the reader as he explains his step-by-step plan for how to ride a bicycle to the moon to plant sunflowers. It all starts with his realization that the moon is sad and lonely up there in the cold darkness of space, with nothing and no one to keep it company. He concocts a wildly complicated and fantastically impossible scheme involving a giant slingshot, thousands of miles of garden hose, and even a letter to NASA requesting a child-sized space suit. Gerstein fully embraces a childlike view on the preparation and execution of grand adventures—the reader is even instructed to pack a peanut butter and jelly sandwich for lunch. Gerstein’s watercolor illustrations overlaid with scribbly pen

and ink are expressive and humorous, and are largely responsible for the humor of the story as the imaginative, impossible plan is made reality.

**LaRue Huget, J. (2010). *How to Clean Your Room in 10 Easy Steps*. New York, NY: Schwarts & Wade Books.**

*How to Clean Your Room in 10 Easy Steps* by Jennifer LaRue Huget is a quick, silly read for children around age seven, although younger children would enjoy it as a read aloud. Told in the second person, the young mischievous protagonist Ann explains to the reader in great detail how to clean her bedroom in a way that is fun and entertaining for herself but increasingly frustrating for her mother, who ordered the room-cleaning in the first place. Ann has a strategy for everything, from stuffing her closet full to bursting with all the toys she wants to keep, to sweeping sticky messes under the bed for the purposes of science experiments. The illustrations are rough, cartoon-like sketches which communicate the happy sloppiness of a messy room, and the prose text is just silly enough let the reader in on the joke: the best way to clean a messy room is to make it even messier, which, to a young reader, is absolutely correct.

**Florian, D. (2015). *How to Draw a Dragon*. New York, NY: Beach Lane Books.**

In this beautiful and playful book, *How to Draw a Dragon*, author and illustrator Douglas Florian offers the reader imaginative and silly words of advice to successfully draw a dragon, in the form of simple yet delightful rhyming couplets. Readers are advised on a variety of hazards one might encounter, such as sneezing and grumpiness. Each two-page spread depicts a colorful illustration of a different dragon—a long purple dragon riding a bicycle, a fat pink dragon waking up from a nap, a spiky black dragon playing the violin. The illustrations echo a child-like style of visual art, through drawing, painting, and collage. Florian’s talent shows through it all, in the vibrant and lively procession of dragons from page to page. The final page concludes with an zoomed-out illustration of a gallery or classroom, filled with children proudly showing their family members their drawings of dragons posted on the walls.

**Becker, H. (2017). *You Can Read*. British Columbia, Canada: Orca Book Publishers.**

*You Can Read* is a humorous read-aloud book targeted towards an audience of beginning readers as young as four. There are only a handful of words on each page, making it a quick and easy read. There is a clear rhyme and rhythm, and also fairly consistent repetition across the book: “You can read in the classroom/You can read in the park/You can read on a mission/undercover in the dark.” However, the fun and occasionally wry sense of humor combined with the quirky illustrations could appeal to six-year-old readers or beyond. *You Can Read* ends up being more about *where* you can read, rather than *how* to read—opening up new readers to the idea that reading can happen almost anywhere! Overall, *You*

*Can Read* does an excellent job of taking a fundamental task of school and life and finding joy and laughter in its smaller moments.

### **Abstract or Complex Themes for Young Children**

Implicit in the idea and purpose of this book project is the idea that grown-ups in children’s lives—parents, educators, caregivers—should be more comfortable with trusting and honoring young children to actually be able to, in their own way, grapple with abstract or complex ideas. So, in seeking mentor texts and reviewing the literature, I tried to seek out picture books that did this particularly well. I ended up finding a unique collection of stories and books. *Yo Soy Muslim* by Mark Gonzales was one of many high-quality examples. In a way, *Yo Soy Muslim* is almost a “How To,” told from the point of view of a parent, presumably a father, telling his daughter how to be a young Hispanic-Muslim girl in the 21st century. Gonzales uses poetic language to communicate complex ideas about the joys and challenges she can expect to face, in a way that young readers can understand.

Kobi Yamada’s *What Do You Do with...* books (*What Do You Do with an Idea?*, *What Do You Do with a Problem?*, and *What Do You Do with a Chance?*) are also popular, beautiful examples of how an author can make an abstract idea accessible to young readers through literature. In each of Yamada’s books, an abstract subject such as an idea or a chance is visually depicted by illustrator Mae Besom as a physical, sentient, whimsical creature which features as an active character in the story. Yamada’s books can serve as a starting point for discussing these abstract questions—what does it mean anyway, to take a chance?—in concrete terms with young children. *Adelaide’s Secret*



*World* by Elise Hurst was a lucky find in the library, and I chose to include it in my review because of the dreamlike way that Hurst captured Adelaide's rich inner emotional world.

Communicating abstract thought and ideas for young children is certainly a challenge, and I found that books and stories which fit into this theme rely heavily on children's imaginations. A wonderful recent example of this is Christopher Myers' *My Pen*, published in 2015. Myers uses complex and delightful figurative language to write about the imaginative powers of his pen: "My pen is smart as a snowflake...My pen is simple as a raindrop." Myers' pen and ink illustrations are detailed, joyful, and intricately textured, and also served as helpful examples for me in thinking about how to use imagery and illustration to make metaphor and simile accessible to young readers who might be accustomed to more concrete language.

#### **Annotations: Complex and Abstract Themes.**

##### **Gonzales, M. (2017). *Yo Soy Muslim*. New York, NY: Salaam Reads.**

*Yo Soy Muslim* celebrates multicultural identity, Indigenous Mexican heritage, and the diversity of the Muslim world through simple, vivid poetry accompanied by Mehrookht Amini's gorgeous illustrations. With about 15 words per two-page spread, Mark Gonzales' poetry, which is framed as "father's letter to his daughter" elegantly pairs simple verses with complex ideas and emotions: "And there will come a day/when some people in the world will not smile at you." Children and adults will admire the full-page illustrations, which capture both the vibrant joys and the dark fears associated with growing up Muslim in the Western world. The language is generally simple enough to be accessible to a range of ages. However, the complex issues of multiculturalism and identity and the perspective-taking required to fully grasp their meaning might make this book best suited for children at least seven or eight years old.

##### **Hurst, E. (2015). *Adelaide's Secret World*. New York, NY: Knopf.**

In *Adelaide's Secret World*, writer and illustrator Elise Hurst explores loneliness, introversion, creativity, and empathy through a subtle, simply-told story and rich, colorful paintings. Adelaide, in the form of an elegant red-cloaked rabbit, is an artist who finds herself lonely after friends and customers stop coming to her

shop. She is filled with the quiet magic of her creations and wonderment in the magical world around her, but feels like something is missing. This story, which is driven significantly by the hazy, dream-like illustrations, captures the essence of a feeling which is often so hard to describe—that feeling, shared by many creative introverts, of holding a rich inner world inside and struggling to find social connection. This book may have particular emotional appeal to shy, creative children ages six and above.

**Yamada, K. (2017). *What Do You Do with a Chance?* Seattle, WA: Compendium, Inc.**

Like his other books *What Do You Do with an Idea?* (2014) and *What Do You Do with a Problem?* (2016), Kobi Yamada's *What Do You Do with a Chance?* takes an abstract concept of "taking a chance" and turns it into a delightful, endearing creature which embodies the plot of this story. An unnamed child protagonist is approached by a golden, bird-like "chance." He is fascinated by it, but unsure of what to do, and then it slips away because of his uncertain hesitation. Eventually, after angrily sulking over his failure, he sets off on a quest to find the lost "chance," and in the end discovers he now has the courage to take it—and actually had it all along. The language is simple and straightforward, and on its own would not provide the needed inspiration and emotional tenor. Mae Besom's pencil and watercolor illustration work, depicting the delicate flight of the "chance," the brooding darkness of defeat, and the blazes of hope and adventure, are what actually bring this story to life.

### **Children's Logic and Emotional Life**

Part of exploring the field of children's literature for this project involved familiarizing myself once again with some old friends from childhood read-alouds. Through this process, I found that many of the timeless, best-loved children's books, which have remained immensely popular decades after first being published, often share a similar trait: they highlight children's logic and emotions as a central defining feature. Some standout examples include Kay Thompson's *Eloise*, with the title character's unabashedly wild antics and runaway imagination, and *Where the Wild Things Are*, with Maurice Sendak's award-winning illustrations and honest, authentic representation of childhood's anger, sadness, disappointment, and redemption (Lanes, 1980).

A.A. Milne's classic *Winnie-the-Pooh* is also a marvelous example of a story which delightfully captures a child's roundabout yet inescapably truthful sense of logic. *Winnie-the-Pooh* is a chapter book with spot illustrations rather than a picture book, and so in some cases would fall into a different category than many of the books that I looked at for this literature review. However, the way Milne portrays Christopher Robin and the other denizens of the One Hundred Acre wood is the exact sort of honoring of a child's experience and imagination that inspired me at the beginning of this project, in contrast to the patronizing or goofy tones that are found in some other corners of the realm of children's literature.

There are also a wealth of more recently published examples of children's books and authors which share this same trait of honoring children's emotional and logical life through literature. Mo Willems has captured this in a variety of kinds of books, from his adorable and poignant *Knuffle Bunny* stories about the urgent crisis of a lost comfort object to the much-loved *Elephant and Piggie* books which so accurately and light-heartedly capture the idiosyncrasies of friendship that children of all ages grapple with. *Sam and Dave Dig a Hole*, by Mac Barnett, is another recent standout. Barnett tantalizes the audience with the childlike anticipation of finding "something spectacular," readily inviting the inevitable frustration when the two boys barely miss discovering the treasure of their dreams. These authors have clearly delved deep into the hearts and minds of children, and brought what they have found to their work in literature.

However, as I was basking in these wonderful books, both old and new, I realized something: they are, for the most part, fictional stories, written in prose narrative form.

Some outstanding exceptions are, among others, the poetry and wordplay of Dr. Seuss and Shel Silverstein. Both authors used poetry as a joyful tool to capture the whimsical, imaginative, disordered yet orderly way that many children view their world. The fact that these are exceptions, rather than an abundant selection, left me with the question of why such few well-known, popular children's books which capture a certain child-like essence of thought are books of poetry? Is it because poetry as a form of literature is considered less accessible to young readers? Or is it because poetry is viewed as a form of writing meant for only certain subjects and themes? While exploring these questions in greater depth falls somewhat beyond the scope of my current project, they remain in the back of my mind as I move forward.

**Annotations: Children's Logic and Emotional Life.**

**Kay, T. (1955). *Eloise*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.**

In the realm of children's literature, Kay Thompson's *Eloise* requires no further introduction. Precocious six-year-old Eloise, who lives on the top floor of the Plaza Hotel in New York, has delighted readers since 1955 with her hilarious antics and exploits as she careens through the building from top to bottom, from morning to night. Hilary Knight's distinctive illustrations are, in fact, the star of the *Eloise* show. Eloise's enormous range of emotional expression and exuberance of motion are made evident primarily through Knight's illustrations rather than the wry, minimal text. Few children's books equal the authentic reproduction of a six-year-old's utterly unique logic, from the grave necessity of braiding her pet turtle's ears every morning to the way she moves freely between fantasy and reality throughout her days and nights. Even this movement between fantasy and reality is primarily brought to life through Knight's illustrations, with comically imagined red line drawings overlaying the illustrated reality.

**Milne, A. (1926). *Winnie-the-Pooh*. New York, NY: Dutton Children's Books.**

A. A. Milne's classic read-aloud stories of Christopher Robin's adventures with his beloved stuffed Edward Bear named Winnie-the-Pooh still charm readers irresistibly after almost a hundred years since they were first published. These stories are written as if they were being told to young Christopher Robin—but they also feature Christopher Robin as a secondary character who aids Pooh, Piglet, and other denizens of the Hundred Acre Wood in their adventures and

predicaments. For many readers, the most loveable thing about Pooh is the fact that, as a bear of Very Little Brain, the logic which he uses to approach his predicaments is either concrete to the point of error or entirely made up! And yet, somehow, it seems to all make sense and come out right in the end. Ernest H. Shepard's spot drawings and the occasional full page illustration were originally published as black and white line drawings, or "decorations." Not only do Shepard's drawings capture the unique personalities of each character, they are essential to the timeless nature of Winnie-the-Pooh and the Hundred Acre Wood.

**Sendak, M. (1955). *Where the Wild Things Are*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.**

In Maurice Sendak's acclaimed *Where the Wild Things Are*, young Max, after wreaking havoc at home while dressed in his "wild thing" costume, is sent to bed without supper. In the face of his childlike rage, his bedroom transforms into a jungle forest and sea, over which he sails to the Land of the Wild Things. There, he becomes King of the Wild Things and leads them on a wild rumpus, until he begins to feel lonely and homesick. Upon returning from his imaginary journey, he finds his supper waiting for him, "still warm." *Where the Wild Things Are* has, of course, delighted readers for more than fifty years. A deeper read of the book reveals a tender, authentic reflection of a child's emotional life—the over-enthusiastic "wild thing" play, the rage and disappointment over unfair punishment and fun cut short, the yearning for escape, and then the return to forgiveness. Sendak's fantastical, award-winning illustrations echo the dream-like quality of the *Wild Things* story. His artwork and style is also authentically strange, even dark. His Wild Things actually look wild and scary, and he does not shy away from visually depicting Max's emotional vulnerability—his anger, selfishness, pride, and fear.

### **Illustrations and Formatting**

This book project is made up of 11 individual "How to" poems paired with illustrations; however, in most cases, my idea for the illustration came before the poetry. Having enjoyed many aspects of making visual art since a young age, I am much more comfortable with my identity as an artist than my identity as a writer of poetry. When I approached my work on this book, my go-to first step for each page was often sketching and brainstorming the illustrations first. Similarly, when I approached my work in

reviewing children's literature for this project, I spent just as much time reading as I did looking at illustrations (if not more!).

I decided quite early in the process that my illustrations would be multimedia, both within individual illustrations (for example, "How to send a letter" includes both drawing and collage) and across the whole book (two collage illustrations, two Conte charcoal crayons, three black and white pen illustrations, and four pen and watercolor illustrations). Given this focus on multimedia, I drew inspiration from children's illustrators who use collage and other forms of multimedia illustration. Eric Carle, Leo Lionni, and Lane Smith's collage and multimedia illustrations have delighted young readers for many years. Additional multimedia inspiration came from Bryan Colliers' bold collage and watercolor in *Uptown* (2000), Beatrice Alemagna's whimsical mix of pencil, watercolor, photographs, and more in *A Lion in Paris* (2014), and Yuyi Morales' rich, colorful multimedia collages in *Dreamers* (2018), among others.

In my process of reviewing children's literature for this project, I also learned a great deal by exploring the role of illustrations in poetry books. I found that illustrators of poetry for children have a unique role because, with poetry often being a more figurative and abstract experience for young readers, the illustrations may serve as a stronger visual aid to interpreting the text than with narrative prose. I found this particularly evident in Ashley Brian's illustrations for Nikki Giovanni's poetry in *The Sun is so Quiet*. Also, the formatting and arrangement that links poetry with its accompanying illustrations seems to be an art in and of itself. Sarah Jacoby's illustrations in *The Road Home* by Katie Cotton are a beautiful example of this, because not only do the pictures

add essential context to Cotton's poetic verse, but the placement of the text in white spaces or in other parts of the illustration makes the poetry flow from one page to the next.

In general, I found myself drawn to children's books in which the illustrations felt like a character all their own. This characteristic is what made me pick up Colin Thompson's *The Paradise Garden* and *How to Live Forever*. In both of these books, the illustrations seemed to tell a story all their own and were a central element of the reading experience, rather than a supplement to the text. I felt similarly about many other books and illustrators which fall into other categories of my literature review—Maurice Sendak's *Where The Wild Things Are*, Hillary Knight's illustrations in *Eloise*, Mehrookht Amini's illustrations in *Yo Soy Muslim*, and much more. In many ways, I think I was seeking mentor texts which mirrored by own passion for the powerful role illustrations play in all children's literature, regardless of genre or reading level.

#### **Annotations: Illustrations and Formatting.**

##### **Cotton, K. (2017). *The Road Home*. New York, NY: Abrams Books for Young Readers.**

Sarah Jacoby's delicate, layered illustrations catch the eye with their natural beauty and the way they interact with Katie Cotton's poetry text in *The Road Home*, which follows a parent rabbit with a young bunny in their long journey home. On some pages, a full-page illustration subtly frames a four-line poetry stanza between two arching trees, or in the perfect gap of white space above swaying grass and flowers. On other pages, whimsical spot illustrations break up poetry stanzas into two-line pairs to illustrate sequential or rising action. And in the final two pages, when the "road to home" turns into "this road is home," the text is seamlessly incorporated into the full-spread landscape illustration, as if it grew there overnight. The play of light, movement, and color bring the poetry to vivid life, which will capture the imaginations of young animal lovers ages four to seven.

**Thompson, C. (1998). *The Paradise Garden*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.**

*The Paradise Garden* is a visual feast, and it is included in these annotations largely because of the bright, detailed, and somewhat bizarre illustrations. The story centers on Peter, a boy of perhaps ten who can no longer stand the noise of his city home and runs away to live in a semi-magical garden nearby. The story itself has a detached feeling, and the plot wanders slowly without a clear sense of rising action or climax. The reader never even sees Peter's divorced parents, and when he returns home at the end, there is no hint as to how he is received after his months-long absence. The garden itself seems to be the main character of the story, which is evident through the delight and whimsy of Colin Thompson's illustrations. Tiny secret houses, fairy-like creatures, vibrant plant life, and magically expressive animals adorn every page with rich color hues and detailed outlines. Each spread is full to the corners, brimming with illustrated treasures, sometimes tracking small visual storylines over the course of the book. The visual complexity and the "runaway" storyline are best suited for mature seven year olds and above.

### **Concluding Thoughts on Children's Literature**

I imagine that most artists, writers, and creators want to believe that their work is unique and that it fills an important gap in the field in which they are creating. I am, however, under no illusions of grandeur. After what feels like a hundred trips to dozens of libraries and bookstores between Flatbush and the Upper West Side, I am humbled in realizing that I have not even scratched the surface in terms of what has been done already in any of these. Even in the relatively short period of time that I was able to devote to this review, I found books for children which followed the same spirit of my own book project in some way.

However, what I was able to accomplish in this review was to identify, through children's literature, the nature and shape of both the gaps and overlap between genres and subjects where my book lives. For example, I found there was spacious overlap between children's poetry and literature which communicates abstract ideas to young



readers—which, when I consider it, makes a certain beautiful sense. Abstract ideas need to be transformed into something else in order to be accessible to a child, and what better transformative magic with which to accomplish that than poetry? On the other hand, I found an interesting gap between children’s poetry and well-loved, classic books which authentically reflect a child’s logical and emotional worldview. Finding gaps and overlaps within the collection of books that I spent time with in this process did not necessarily show me where my book is needed, or what is missing in the field of children’s literature. Instead, these discoveries helped me better understand my own book, and to reflect more deeply on my own creative process.

THE ORIGINAL MATERIAL

# How To



By  
Morgan  
Wright

*If we define poetic as a letting go of the hard and fast rules of routinized reality so that objects, events, and experiences are placed in a different context, then the play of imagination is the activity that gives the initial impetus to an innate poetry of learning.*

~Richard Lewis, *Living By Wonder*

*To my family.*

## How to Say Hello

With a wink and a wiggle,  
A handshake or two,  
A high-five and a giggle,  
Or a "How do you do?"

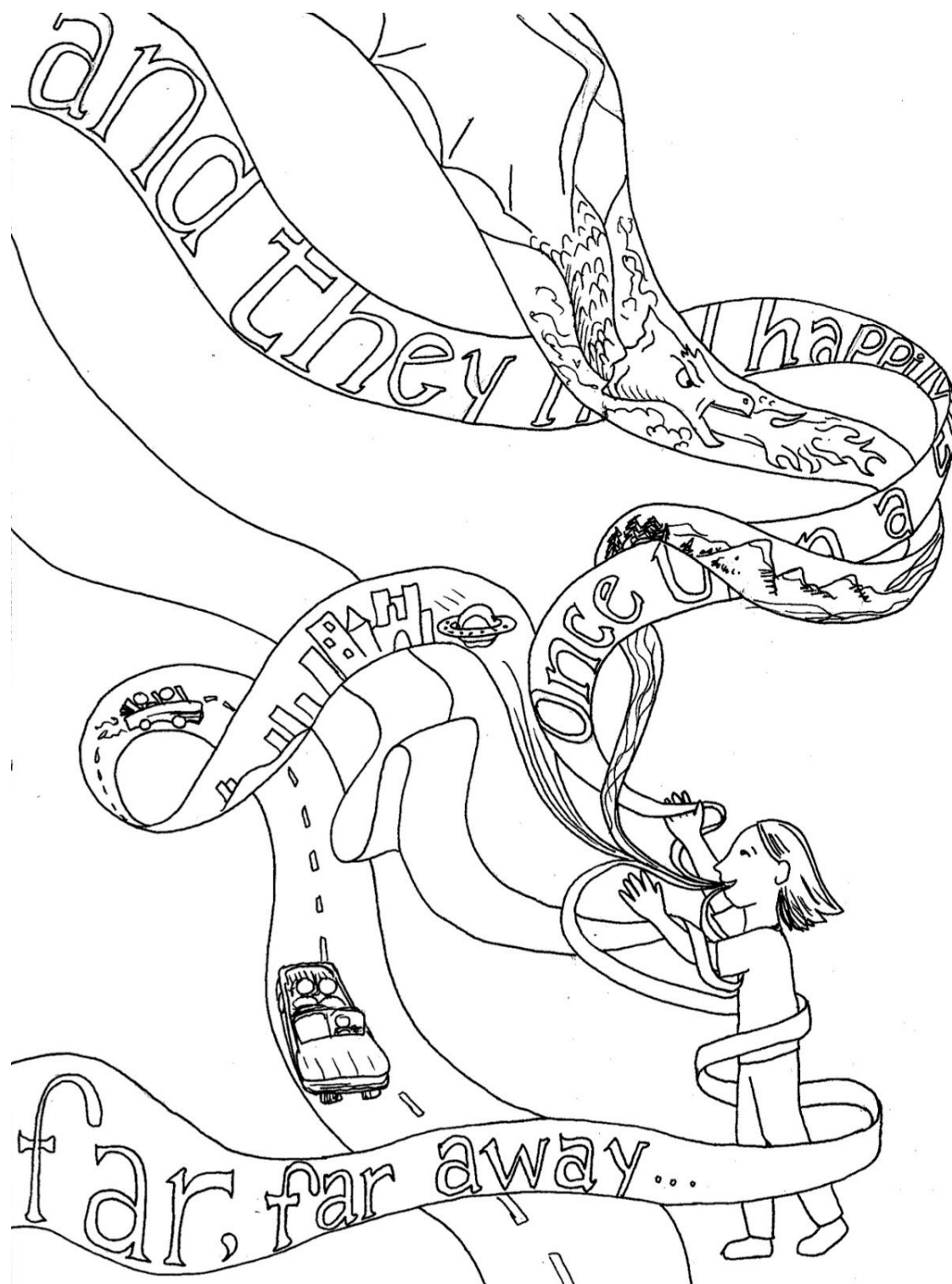
The sun knows how to say hello  
And start the morning right  
Watch her set the world aglow  
With a smile full of light.



## How to Tell a Story

A story is a magic trick  
That anyone can do  
Making something out of nothing  
Using just your words as glue.

Weave together hopes and dreams,  
Your deepest fear or wish,  
These tales are yours to share and tell,  
Or to keep and cherish.





## How to Read a Book

A book can feel lonely  
up there on the shelf.  
Let it follow you  
to breakfast,  
on the subway,  
under the covers at night, with a flashlight.

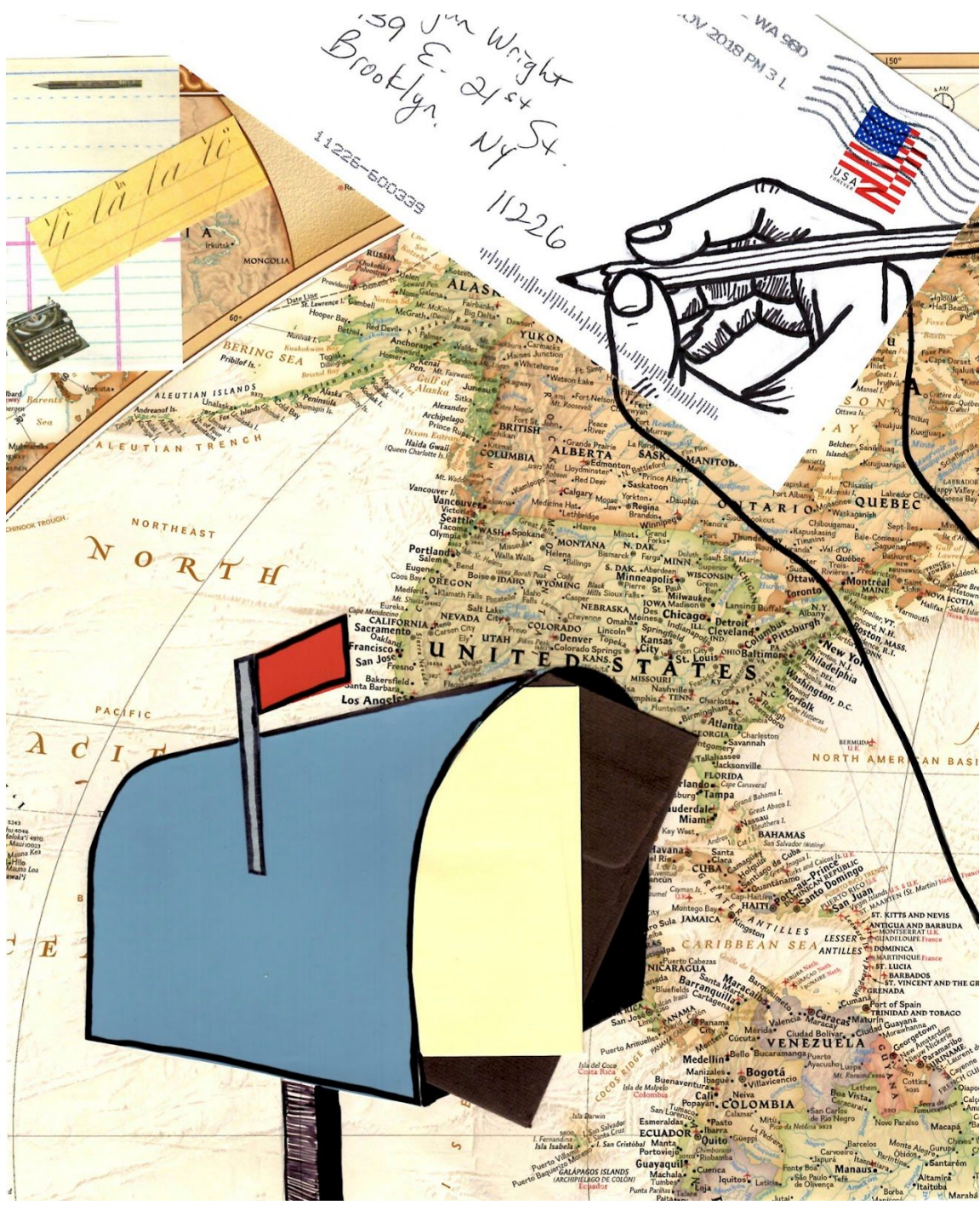
Make a book last,  
savor each word like dessert.  
Or finish it quickly,  
before the story grows wings  
and flies right off the page.



## How to Send a Letter

First, you need someone – a grandma, a friend.  
Second, you need something to send.  
A story? A wish? What will it be?  
Perhaps an invitation, with an RSVP?

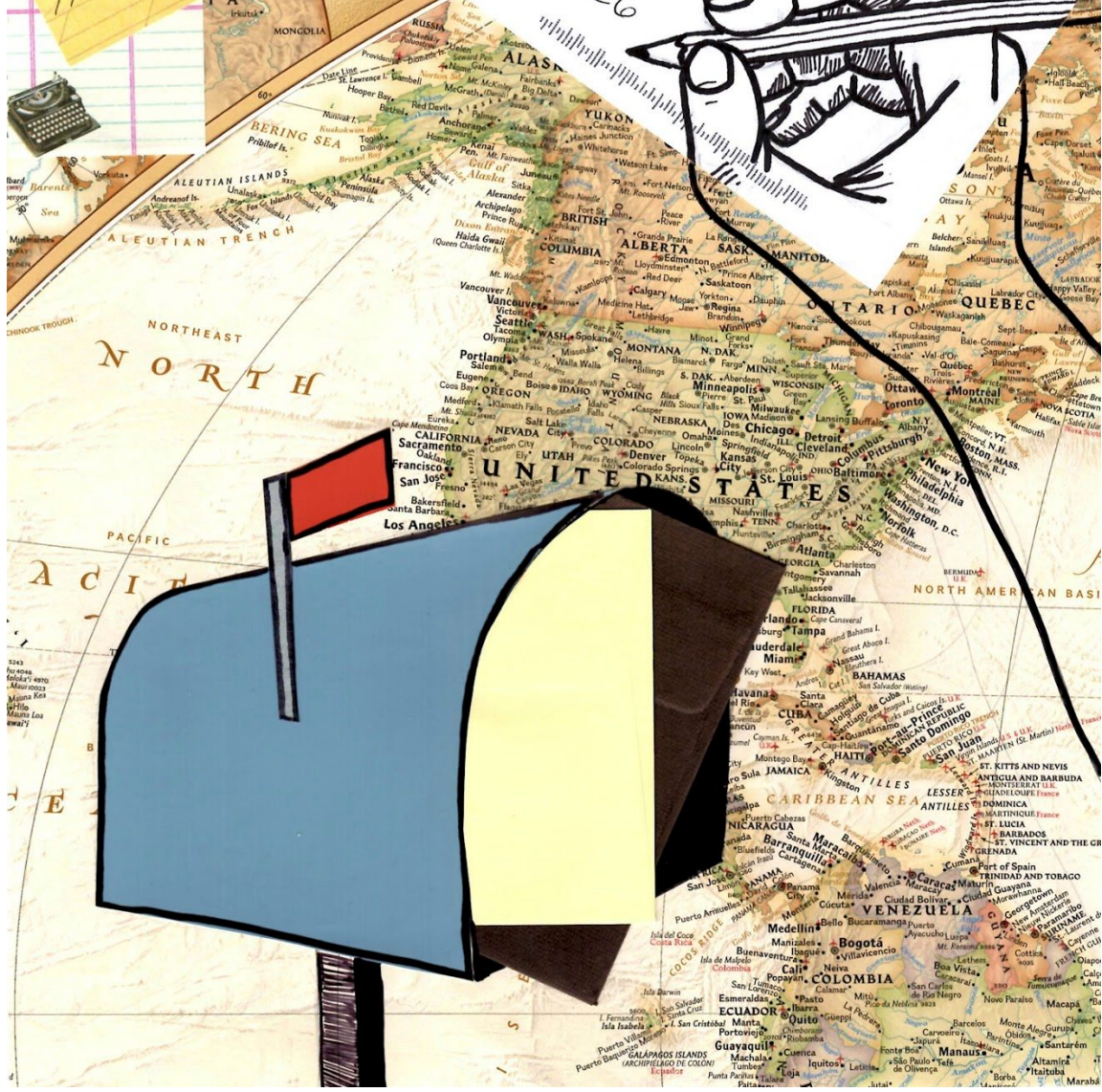
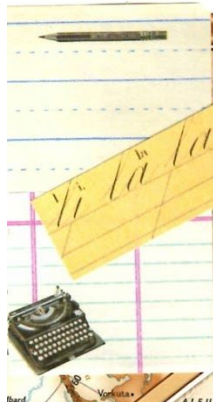
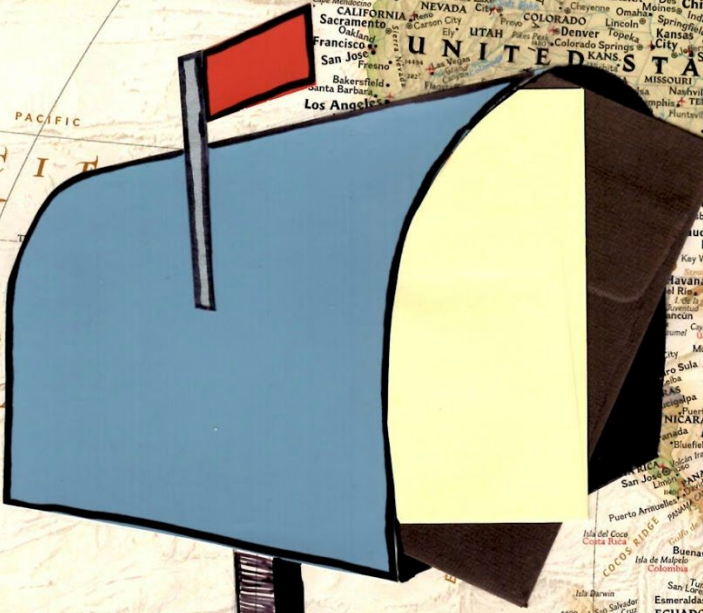
Sealed and stamped, addressed with care,  
A fine paper treasure, exceedingly rare:  
This letter from you, written by hand,  
Traveling miles across the land!



159 Jun Wright  
 Brooklyn, NY  
 11226

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## How to Win at Hide-and-Seek

Make yourself small,  
And think tiny, quiet thoughts.

Or make yourself large,  
Like a blank brick wall.

Or hide in plain sight,  
Walking in the shadow  
of the seeker.





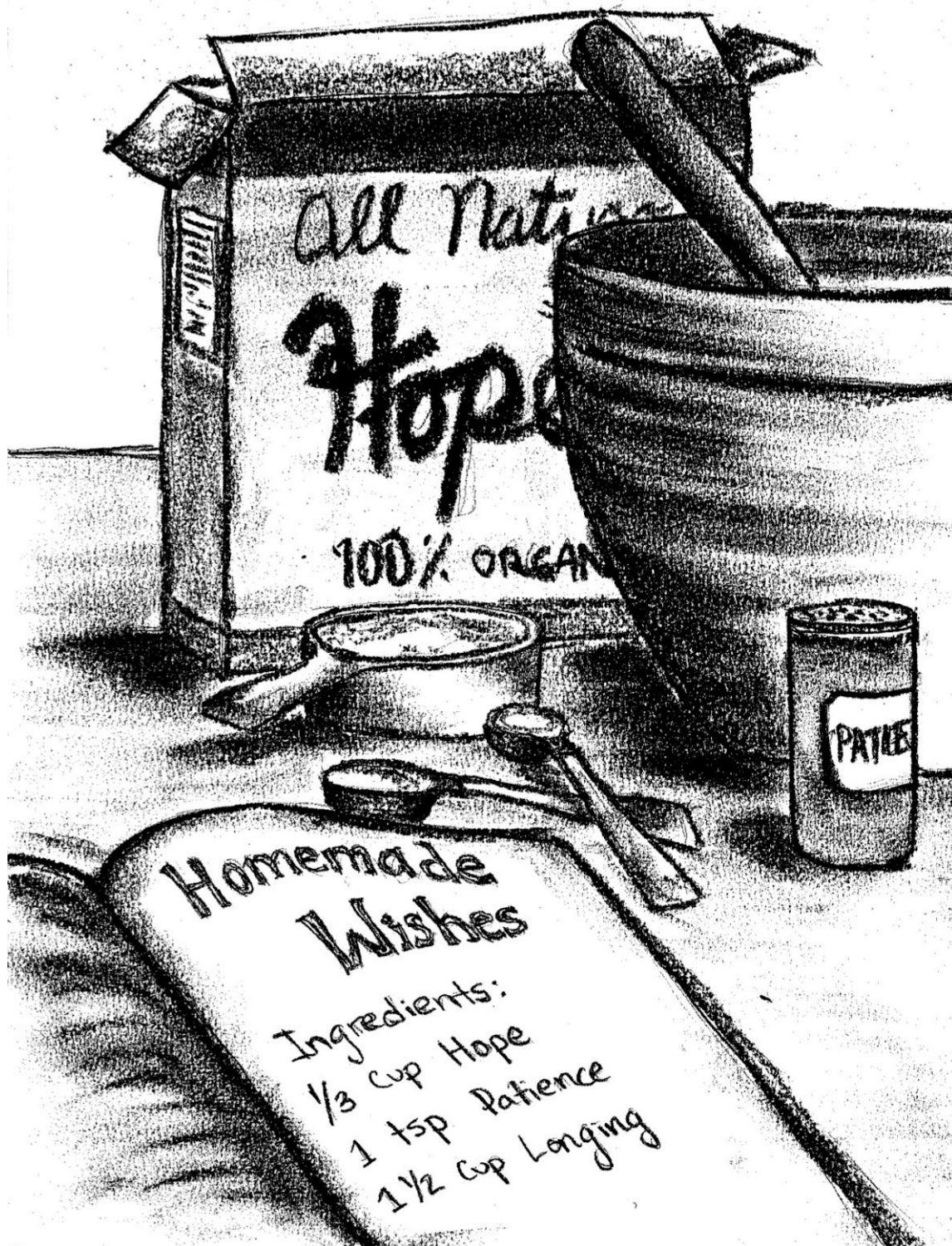
## How to Make Wishes

A handful of hope  
A pinch of patience  
A ladle full of longing.

Mix it all thoroughly and set it aside,  
And now wait.

And wait  
And wait.

Wishes  
taste better  
with time.





## How to Find a Lost Cat

The best thing to do  
is pretend you are searching  
for something else.

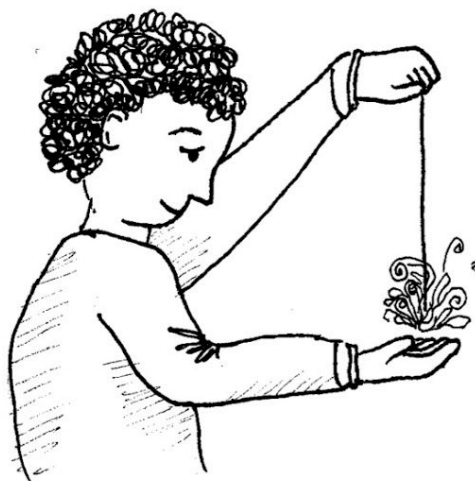
Make loud noises  
About losing your favorite hat.  
Go out looking for it,  
and let the shadows come to you  
out of the corners of your eyes.

Remember:  
Sometimes lost cats  
are not  
actually  
lost

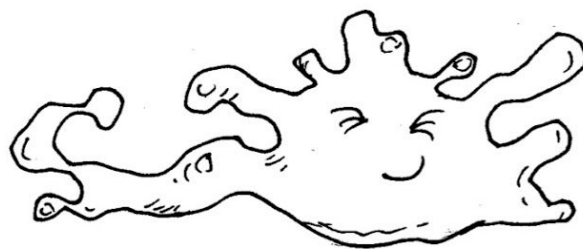


## How to Keep a Secret

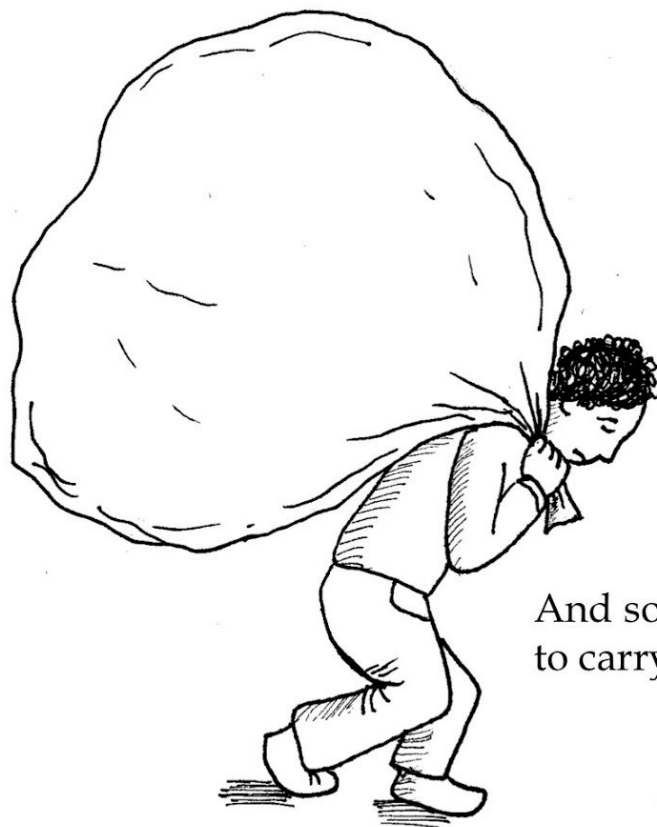
Some secrets are thorny,  
With points that  
poke and prick.



Others are fragile  
and precious,  
and need special care.



Some are terribly tricky,  
or like to be tickled,



And some are too heavy  
to carry alone.

## How to Make a Friend

The truth is  
No one actually knows  
How to do this.  
Not even grown ups.

But here are some things to try:  
Wear the same socks by accident.  
Laugh until you snort.  
Have a huge fight over something silly,  
and then apologize.  
Let them choose what they want to be in your  
    game of Alien Invasion  
(even though you are obviously the Boss Alien).  
Give them your third-favorite rock  
    from your collection.  
Say hello.  
Just ask.



## How to Fall Asleep

Each breath out  
turns a light off  
in the city.

Each breath in  
turns a star on  
in the sky.

Leave the window open,  
just a crack,  
for dreams to slip inside.

Don't forget  
to say "Good night"  
to the Moon.







## How to Say Goodbye

One hug,  
Two hugs,  
And a third for good luck  
(Extra special).  
Blow a kiss  
Make sure they catch it.

It's okay  
To look back.



## APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

I first shared my book with a class of first grade students, which was a wonderful and eye-opening experience. After that, I was hoping to do a read aloud for a kindergarten class because I was curious how the younger students would react to it. However, my plans with the kindergarten class fell through at the last minute in the pre-Spring break frenzy. I ended up reading it aloud to my fourth grade students instead—which turned out to be a valuable learning experience for me as an author.

The first grade students appeared quite transfixed by the book, although it may have also been due to the sheer novelty of a teacher from fourth grade coming to their class to read aloud a strange new book. I was also pleasantly surprised by how engaged and intrigued my fourth grade students seemed to be during my read-aloud. I had initially thought that, with my focus on the younger grades as an audience, the fourth graders might find the book too young, too simple, or even boring. In reality, they connected to the themes of the book just as readily as the seven-year-olds, if not more so. I should have realized, in hindsight, that issues of friendship, play, and learning are just as poignant and salient for fourth graders as they are for kindergarteners and first graders.

Reading my book to both groups of children helped me see that in many ways I had actually achieved my goal of connecting emotionally to experiences and sensations of childhood. There were certain pages where both the first graders and the fourth graders smiled and nodded with looks of recognition, or did the silent “me too” hand signal that is common in many school settings. This was especially evident at the “How to Keep a Secret” page, when one of the first graders whispered “Yeah, that’s hard.” There were

also many knowing nods and laughter at the “How to Make a Friend” page. Many of the other poems elicited laughter and smiles from both groups of children, like when a first grader pointed to the hidden cat on the “How to Find a Lost Cat” page and said excitedly, “Look, it’s right there!” However, the Secret poem and the Friend poem both seemed to resonate the most with the children during the read-aloud. I wonder if this is because these two pages most explicitly addressed social-emotional themes. The questions that came after, however, were mostly about the process of making it—how I got my ideas, whether or not I would try to publish it, and how I created and copied the illustrations.

Regardless of the age group, I imagine this book would be used to support social-emotional work happening in a classroom. The brevity of my book, with its 11 very short poems, is a strength in early elementary school settings, particularly with learners who have issues around attention span. I would recommend it as a read-aloud first, because some of the figurative language may be more effectively unpacked with the help of a grown-up. When I read my book to the first grade class, I introduced it by explaining how I am a graduate student in the evenings, studying to be a better teacher. This is not a strange concept to the children, as many other associate teachers at our school are also graduate students. Next, I led a brief discussion about poetry, and how it is different from other types of books and reading that they may have seen. I feel that this was an important discussion to have before reading the book because it primed the students for the short phrases, abstract language, and non-narrative format.

Unsurprisingly, it is difficult to summarize and reflect on the almost year-long process of bring this seed of an idea to fruition. One important point of growth and

learning for me has been the realization that the academic writing associated with this project—the rationale, the child development section, the literature review—all were essential elements to creating a final piece that feels successful. While I was in the midst of research and writing (on top of full time teaching and other Bank Street coursework), I sometimes could not help but feel a little resentful about having to do all of it! I wanted to spend more time and energy on the creative parts, the poetry and the art. But now, after reading my book aloud to real children in a real school, I realize that all of the research, thought, and writing helped me enormously. It pushed me to understand and articulate exactly why I was making all these choices in the creation of the book. It pushed me to produce creative, original work that was authentic to my purpose and audience.

I also recognize some of the limitations and weaknesses that are evident in my work, especially around issues of race, class, and ability. I tried to select “How to” topics which could be universal childhood experiences, but there are still people who are left out of the world created and depicted by my poetry and illustrations. I was more comfortable drawing and painting people who looked like me, and so many illustrations of both adults and children are mostly of White or racially ambiguous subjects. Activities that are referenced in my poetry and illustrations, like playing hide and seek, riding the subway, or writing a letter, are not universally accessible to people with a disability of some kind. Things and experiences that I take for granted, such as owning a pet, cooking from a recipe, or even reading with a flashlight, are actually dependent on a certain level of material and financial security that may not be shared by everyone who might read my

book. Reflecting on my work, I realize that, because this was my first experience creating a project like this, I took few risks in the content and subject matter.

After working on a project like this for almost ten months, by the end of it I was, in some ways, simply ready to be done. After reading my own poetic and academic writing over and over again, it started to lose the magic and excitement that I felt earlier in the process. However, bringing my finished project into a classroom and sharing it with children reignited my passion and showed me that I had, in fact, accomplished so much of what I had set out to do. I wonder how my experience would have been different if I had involved real children earlier in my process. For example, what if I had asked kindergarten and first graders what they would like to talk about when it comes to the “how tos” of being six? What if I had shared some of my earlier drafts of poetry, and used their feedback in addition to that of my advisor? Doing so may have pushed me in an entirely different direction, and may have brought a different energy and perspective to my creative process.

Finally, I end this project feeling deeply grateful to Bank Street as an institution for recognizing that teachers are their best selves when they bring their full identities into their work with children. There were many points during my project when I doubted the utility of this work. Would it not have been more professionally useful, I thought, to focus my IMP on a more practical area of teaching? Should I have considered doing a curriculum-related project that built and highlighted my repertoire of skills in math instruction, or literacy, or social studies? However, carving out this piece of my degree to

nurture and challenge my creative self has been an incredible experience which will live on in my work both within and outside of the classroom.

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