

A Kick In The Head

by Paul B. Janeczko • Candlewick Press 2005



Reviewed by
BethAnn Hepburn

What do baseball and poetry have in common?

"Knowing the rules makes poetry – like sports – more fun, for players and spectators alike," writes

Paul B. Janeczko in his introduction to this collection of playful poetry. The 29 poems in the book are a delightful mix by a variety of poets as disparate as Shakespeare, Blake and Farjeon. The collection progresses from a simplistic couplet to the complicated formula of a *pantoum*, making it an appropriate resource for any grade level student as well as for adults.

The anthology is designed to inform the reader about the rules of poetry. Janeczko gives clear examples of each form presented, provides advice on how to read the poem, offers brief, explanatory notes for each poem and lists further detail in the "notes on the form" included in the back of the book. The notes are valuable tools for teachers and students alike, clarifying the rules of each of the poems in the book. The explanations convey helpful information without becoming overly technical. So, if you need help telling a *tercet* from a *triolet*, or if you think a *roundel* is a ball, this section of the book will be a wonderful resource for you! The notes on the forms provide information about the poems from a variety of perspectives such as the cultural source of the poetic form, or the rhyme schemes. Your students may rise to the challenge of composing in *aaba* or *abaaabab* after reading poems that follow these rhyme patterns.

I especially appreciate Janeczko's witty comments and advice regarding how to capture the character of each poem. For example, to effectively convey the spirit of a limerick, he writes: "Read a limerick out loud and you'll

hear its rhythm bouncing along." He calls the poetic form *Senryu*, "haiku with an attitude." Also helpful in this collection are the icons located in the top corner of each page. The tiny, efficient reference tools represent the poem's form and aid the reader in finding that poem's information in the "notes on the form" section.

The whimsical illustrations by Chris Raschka are the perfect complement to the poetic forms in this collection. The mixed media illustrations are elemental in design, with

bold colors and patterns leaping from the white pages. The emphasis is on the poem, yet the art clearly responds to its meaning. The illustrator's style is heavily influenced by Japanese paper designs. Collages mixing colorful and intricate patterns capture the essence of each poem. The artwork alone makes this a book to own! The bold, playful cover, like a well-wrapped gift, will pique the curiosity of any student, making this a book each will want to open again and again.

