

## CHILDREN'S BOOK REVIEW

Reviewed by Erin Elliott

**Firefly July: A Year of Very Short Poems**

Poems selected by Paul Janeczko

Illustrated by Melissa Sweet

Candlewick Press, 2014



Poetry and music have been linked since the ancient Greeks used both art forms interchangeably. Each is independent of the other, yet the connection between the

two is notable everywhere. In the Orff Schulwerk classroom, poetry can be a launchpad for creativity; it lends itself easily to exploring the natural flow of rhythmic text, expressing emotions, and working towards cross-curricular understanding in the school setting.

Although there is no shortage of children's poetry anthologies, the collection in *Firefly July: A Year of Very Short Poems* features an accessible and imaginative exploration of poetry—compiled by

Paul B. Janeczko and illustrated by Melissa Sweet—that captivates elementary students. Organized by season, these poems correspond to weather events and also delve into aspects of what children might see and do during those months. For adult readers, they pull at the heart strings and stir our own memories.

Many of the works Janeczko selected come from well-known poets such as Carl Sandburg, Langston Hughes, and Robert Frost. The poems are all very short (between 11 and 34 words), but their brevity does not indicate a lack of richness. Each one creates a vivid story or image to which students can connect, such as describing fireflies as “baby stars that leapt among the trees” or moonlight as “a silver spoon hanging below the clouds.”

Poetry is abstract and can sometimes be challenging for our more “concrete-thinking” students. In addition, many anthologies lack vibrant illustrations. In this book, each poem (or two) is accompanied by one of Sweet’s colorful illustrations to aid students’ explorations and stimulate their imaginations.

*Firefly July* can launch cross-curricular collaboration with grade-level teachers in a poetry study unit. An option is to have students review different forms of poetry in their classroom, and then write their own to bring to music class to use as the basis for soundscapes. Older students working in collaborative groups in my music classroom turned selected poems into performance pieces with pitched and non-pitched percussion to highlight certain words and emotions. Simple props, such as scarves, LED finger lights, and

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bucket drums, encouraged creative movement to bring the poems to life. During this activity, they learned how to work cooperatively with their peers and chose roles based on their different strengths. Their classroom performances led to discussions regarding proper audience etiquette, how to overcome stage fright, and how best to support each other. In addition, these performances set the stage for a variety of future musical performances featuring small groups of students. *Firefly July* can serve as the starting point for a musical performance based on the seasons as well, with songs corresponding to selected poems.

Bringing poetry into the music classroom has many benefits for both teachers and students. If you have not yet had the opportunity to do so, or are looking for a fresh resource, the collection presented in *Firefly July* is an inviting gateway for students into the realm of poetry. ■

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