ACTIVITY GUIDE

Caroline Pignat POETRREE

illusirated by François Thisdale

Curriculum Based Ideas for Exploring Poetree

A Guide for Teachers and Educators

By Caroline Pignat Illustrations by Francois Thisdale



Let Nature be your teacher. — William Wordsworth

A NOTE TO READERS

In his bestselling book, *Last Child in the Woods,* Richard Louv coins the term "nature deficit disorder" and encourages parents and educators to help kids reconnect to the wonder of nature.

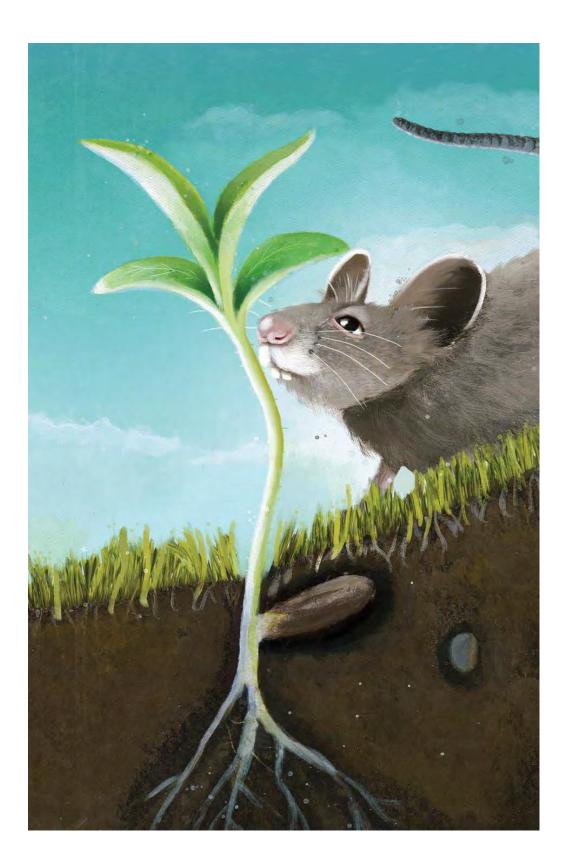
Stress reduction, greater physical health, a deeper sense of spirit, more creativity, a sense of play, even a safer life — these are the rewards that await a family when it invites more nature into children's lives. — Richard Louv, Last Child in the Woods

As adults and educators, we know the benefits of such engagement. Nature calms and refreshes. It heals and centers. A walk in the woods, a starry sky, a quiet morning by the lake, a bird at the feeder — nature's countless moments engage the senses and fill us with wonder. In a word, nature inspires. Nature Journaling and Poetry are two powerful ways people of all ages can explore and express that experience.

* This Guide for Teachers and Educators is downloadable free of charge at <u>www.reddeerpress.com</u>. It is located under the Teachers Guides tab. Please feel free to share it with your colleagues and other teaching professionals.

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Curriculum Links

Language Arts

Reading: using and developing comprehension strategies; visualizing; inferencing; extending understanding; making connections; identifying elements of style; reading poetry, fiction, and nonfiction.

Writing: brainstorming; organizing ideas; drafting with form and style for fluency and voice; revision; reflection; presentation in portfolios; writing poetry, fiction, and nonfiction.

Oral Communication: sharing their poems and journal entries with clarity, coherence, vocal skills, and presentation strategies.

Media Literacy: presenting their poems through media texts.

Visual Arts

Sharpen their powers of observation, imagination, and invention; developing creativity and expression through drawing, painting, printmaking, photography; brainstorming; planning; producing; refining; and presenting; building on fundamental concepts of line, shape and form, space, colour, texture, and value; observational drawing; mapmaking.

Science

Life systems, life cycles, biodiversity, ecosystems; growth and change of plants; growth and change of animals; habitats and communities; daily and seasonal change; water and the environment; pursuit of scientific inquiry: observing, identifying, recording; doing scientific research.

Math

Creating maps, charts, lists, graphs; developing skills of measurement and comparison.

Religion

Stewardship of creation.

Physical Education

Hiking; exploring; walking.



Caroline Pignat is an award-winning author, poet, and teacher. Her love of nature has always inspired her writing. She won her second Governor General's Award for Children's Literature for her free verse novel, *The Gospel Truth. Poetree* is her first picture book. Caroline lives, teaches, and walks in the woods in Ottawa. Discover more about Caroline at www.carolinepignat.com



FRANCOIS THISDALE has been creating images for children's books for thirty years. His art consists of a unique blend of drawing, photography, and richly textured painting. Francois' work has won, among others, the TD Canadian Children's Literature Award and the Notable Books for a Global Society Award (*Missing Nimâmâ*), the IBBY Honour List (*The Stamp Collector*). That Squeak by Carolyn Beck was a finalist for the Amelia Frances Howard-Gibbon Illustrator's Award and was selected as an Honour Book for the Elizabeth-Mrazik Cleaver Canadian Picture Book Award. Francois lives near Montreal, Quebec.

Pt. 1 Nature Journaling

Nature Journaling is a powerful, yet simple, tool to help students become more aware of and engaged with the natural world. Just by observing, recording, and reflecting on their experiences in nature, students will become much more engaged and connected to their learning. They will be part of a long tradition of scientists, artists, inventors, poets, and naturalists who kept a nature journal, such as: Leonardo DaVinci, Queen Victoria, Aristotle, Henry David Thoreau, Robert Bateman, and Catharine Parr Traill.

> We forget to look up at the sky, to feel the warmth of the sunshine, or to really notice the birds on the roofs... often spend much of our time racing to and from the car, forgetting to take the time to just be and observe the world around us. — Clare Walker Leslie naturalist and author of *Keeping a Nature Journal*

Have each student choose a specific tree or square of space they will observe and record throughout the seasons. Encourage them to explore with all their senses and to be curious. They can record their observations and questions in a Nature Journal.

Nature Journal Entry

- 1. Go outside, select a spot and sit quietly for a minute or two.
- 2. Write down the Date / Place / Time at the top of a page in your Nature Journal.
- 3. Engage your senses. What do you notice? What's the weather like? What do you hear? Notice the plants, trees, animals, birds, and insects. How are they interacting with their environment today? If you don't see actual creatures, do you notice any signs of their presence such as bird calls, tracks, holes in leaves, nests, webs, or scat?

- After a minute or two of just observing, choose one thing and sketch it. It's not an art project it's a scientific observation. Don't judge what you draw, just record what you see. Include measurements, details, and notes.
- 5. Add one or two statements
 - I notice
 - I wonder...
 - This reminds me of...

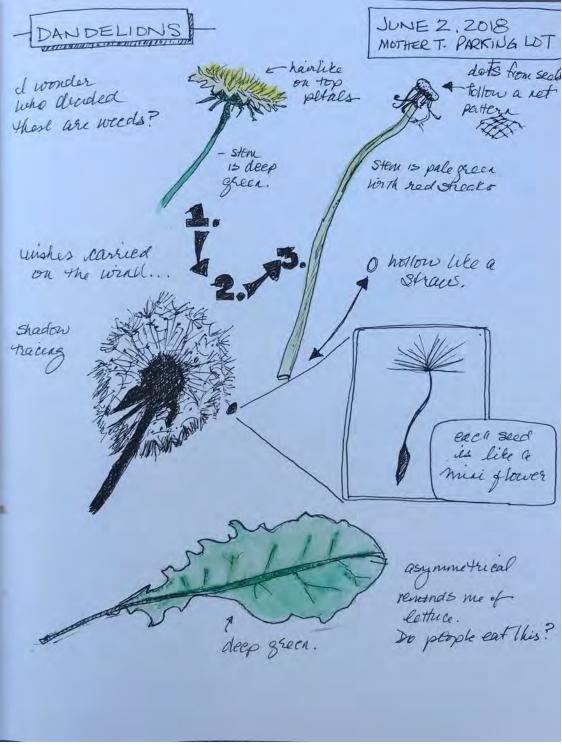
I use the prompts 'I notice', 'I wonder', and 'It reminds me of' to focus my observation and inquiry. This is my most essential practice. —John Muir Laws, naturalist, artist, educator, author of *The Laws Guide to Nature Drawing and Journaling*

- 6. Note your observations with measurements, estimations, labels, maps, and/or diagrams. After 5 minutes move on to the next sketch.
- 7. At the end of an entry, ask them to reflect on how they feel about the experience.

Nature Journal Entry Variations

Page Themes

- Things that start with S
- Things that are red
- My Backyard
- My Tree
- Signs of Spring
- Comparisons (example, kinds of leaves)
- Change over Time (example, an amaryllis blooming or cocoon)



Journal Entry example

Changing Perspective

Spend 5 minutes journaling what you see at:

- · ground level
- · eye level
- · overhead
- · zoom in
 - draw something measuring a few inches
 - focus on a specific part of a plant or tree, for example draw a pinecone
- · zoom out
 - focus on the larger whole, for example draw the pine tree.
 - sketch the landscape. Hint: it's easier if you divide it into basic shapes or colour patches.
- · map
 - bird's eye view: sketch an arial view of where you are
 - sound map: sketch or note all of the sounds you hear where you are

Look for the edges between habitats: where the trees stop and a field begins; where rocks and earth meet water. Life is always at the edges. — Richard Louv, author of *Last Child in the Woods*

Through the Seasons

Visit the same location or tree several times throughout the seasons and bring your nature journals. How is this place changing? What specific things are you noticing? Track things like rainfall, temperature, plant growth and change, and animal or insect activities particular to that season.

Nature Walks

- Draw a map of your nature walk. Stop periodically to draw what treasures you see at that location on your map.
- Make a list of all the things you notice on your walk. Be specific.

Pt. 2 Poetry

The world is never the same once a good poem has been added to it. — Dylan Thomas

On a nature walk, in a nature journal, or just by being outside and aware of surroundings, our senses are engaged. Details are noticed. Connections are made. Simply put, wonder is stirred — and that is the beginning of creative expression.

> You never know what you will see when you go out in nature. — Robert Bateman.

Observations in nature naturally lead to poems inspired by our experiences because that is what a poem is — shared experience. If our observations are specific and detailed, if we make connections and comparisons that are personal and fresh, we have a rich trove of inspiration for evocative poetry.

The journal becomes a database from which the learners can mine material for creative writing, art, and science projects. — Clare Walker Leslie, naturalist and author of *Keeping a Nature Journal*

Sensory Expressions

For each "I notice" statement invite students to include a sensory observation or connection (it reminds me of) and then end with a wondering statement.

I notice....

I notice...

I notice...

I wonder...

For example:

[I notice] One purple pansy looks up today[I notice] its five petaled face like a wide smile[I notice it] grinning at the sunI wonder if its droopy friends will rise and shine tomorrow.

Sensory Writing Variations:

Focus each statement on a particular sensory observation:

I see I feel I smell I taste (as applicable) I hear

I wonder...

For example:

I hear a low buzz beside the tree I feel the dew upon the grass I smell the sweet apple blossoms I see the round bumblebee landing on a petal, drawn for a drink. I wonder if nectar tastes as sweet as flowers smell

More advanced poets may want to omit the "I hear/I feel statements" after brainstorming. For example:

A low buzz beside the tree, Cold dew upon the grass, Sweet apple blossoms bob As a round bumblebee lands on a petal, drawn for a drink, I wonder if nectar tastes as sweet as flowers smell.

They may also decide to tighten and focus on a specific observation. For example:

Called by their pink sweetness, she buzzes by and lands upon a petal drawn for a silent drink. I wonder if nectar tastes as sweet as apple blossoms smell.

> prose = words in their best order poetry = the best words in their best order. -- Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Poetic Devices

An artist has different tools to help him create his picture and so does a poet. Some of these poetry tools, or poetic devices, are things that help the poet play with words, sound, and meaning.

Rhyme: repetition of ending sounds in two words — gr<u>ow</u>/bel<u>ow</u> bre<u>eze</u>/b<u>ees</u>
Alliteration: repetition of the first sound of a word — <u>b</u>rown <u>b</u>askets
Consonance: repetition of consonant sounds within the words —qui<u>ck</u> chi<u>ck</u>adees
Assonance: repetition of vowel sounds within the words. reaching down deep

All that Alliteration

Give students a few alliteration examples from *Poetree* and then see if they can discover the others in the poems themselves:

SEED	<u>D</u> ark, rich <u>d</u> irt.
ROOTS	Reaching <u>d</u> own <u>d</u> eep
LEAVES	<u>S</u> oaking up the <u>s</u> un.
NEST	<u>N</u> ature's <u>n</u> ursery keeps / <u>T</u> ucked ' <u>t</u> il mother's return.
INSECTS	Ever <u>w</u> orking, always <u>w</u> atching
	<u>C</u> reepy- <u>c</u> rawly
	<u>S</u> tring their <u>s</u> ticky, <u>s</u> ilver, <u>s</u> trands.
APPLES	<u>P</u> lump/ <u>P</u> arcels
BUSHEL	<u>B</u> rown <u>b</u> askets / <u>l</u> aden <u>l</u> imb
NUTS	<u>h</u> arvest <u>h</u> ides
COLORS	<u>s</u> pill across each <u>s</u> lope and leafy canvas
KNOTS	<u>Kn</u> obs and/ <u>N</u> odes <u>m</u> ark <u>m</u> emories of/ <u>T</u> ales now <u>t</u> old
BARE	Brittle <u>b</u> ark
SNOW	<u>w</u> hite quilt/Of <u>w</u> inter

Revision Tip: Try to add some alteration to your poem.

Rhyming Couplets

What repeating sounds are in the *Poetree's* seasonal rhyming couplets?

(Alliteration, rhyme, consonance, assonance)

A sleeping seed begins to grow Shoots and roots in ground below.

The sapling sways in summer's breeze As blossoms beckon buzzing bees.

Autumn bushels fill with red As leaves of gold are slowly shed.

Beneath a blanket, frosty white, The old tree sleeps long winter's night.

Answers:

A <u>sleeping</u> <u>seed</u> begins to grow Shoots and roots in ground below.

The <u>sapling</u> <u>sways</u> in <u>summer's</u> breeze As <u>b</u>lossoms <u>b</u>eckon <u>b</u>uzzing <u>b</u>ees.

Autumn bushels fill with red As leaves of gold are slowly shed.

<u>Beneath</u> a <u>b</u>lanket, frosty white, The old tree sleeps long winter's night.

Write your own couplets about the four seasons. Try to include repeating sounds.

Onomatopoeia

Do a sound map. Use those sounds and inspiration for a poem using onomatopoeia.

Making Connections

Making connections while observing enriches our understanding of each new experience. We compare and relate it to things which we already know. In poetry, we do that through symbolism. Use a Venn diagram to explore how these nature items from *Poetree* might also work as symbols. For example, a spider web could represent our connection to one another. Once you have brainstormed the connections write a poem about how the two relate.

Seed Roots Fruit Bees Spiderweb Leaves Buds Nest Eggs Puzzle Deciduous tree Evergreens Squirrel gathering nuts Tree rings Cycle of seasons

Extended Metaphor

Challenge the more advanced poet to write extended metaphors where the real meaning is implied. For example,

The Samurai Ant

The Samurai ant is large and strong. Its mandibles are smooth,

perfect for fighting,

but not for digging, carrying, or building.

A Samurai ant cannot even feed itself. Its colony would die if it did not enslave other ants.

They are its source of power, strength, and support.

Too bad the other ants don't know.

-- Above excerpt from the novel Egghead, by Caroline Pignat, p.64

In *Egghead*, Will's fascination with bugs gives him greater insight into the mysterious world of high school. What wisdom awaits you in nature? — Caroline Pignat

The First Day

Scurrying on the cold gym floor, it stops, antennae waving.

It will die in here.

One cannot survive alone.

It seeks its colony; a place filled with others just like it.

A place where it belongs.

In quiet corners it searches for a scent

that isn't there.

--Above excerpt from the novel Egghead, by Caroline Pignat, p.9

Personification

Another device we can use in writing is personification. It's when we give human characteristics to something that isn't human. For example, the sun is smiling. In *Poetree* we see it in the sleeping seed (SEED), and in the whispering sun (GERMINATE).

Use personification and try to add human feelings to something in nature, such as:

- dry grass
- rain puddle
- last leaf of autumn
- first snowflake
- bird's egg
- earthworm

Power Words

After the poem is drafted, let it sit before looking at it with new eyes. That is the point of re-VISION. Read it out loud. How does it sound? Does it flow well or is it clunky in some places? Do you notice words that accidentally repeat? Are you using the best words in the best order?

Super Synonyms

Some words are more powerful than others. Power words help us to picture what they really mean. Together, brainstorm synonyms for the following and discuss which ones are most powerful or evocative and why. Some suggested synonyms are included in italics.

- said shouts, whispers, mumbles
- looked stared, observed, spied, glanced
- walked trudged, raced, skipped,
- nice thoughtful, wonderful, kind
- tree oak, pine even better: rotted oak, snow-capped pine

Revision Tip: Take another look at your poem. Are there places you could use a super synonym?

Challenge your more advanced poets with the following revision strategies:

No Adverbs Allowed (— Iy) – can we make the verbs stronger, more concise and more specific?

- Walk slowly saunter, meander, stroll
- Run quickly *sprint, gallop, dash, fly, scurry*
- Pull quickly *jerk, tug, yank*

To Be' is not to be (is, am, are, was, were, been.)

These are the most commonly used verb and the least descriptive. Can we revise to avoid using passive voice?

- The feathers are soft. The feathers tickled.
- My sweater is scratchy. My scratchy sweater itches.
- Tony and John were walking. Tony and John walked.
- The sun is yellow. The yellow sun blazed.

Read the following excerpts from Pignat's Governor General's Award winning novel in free verse, *The Gospel Truth.* What poetic devices has she used to help enrich her poems?

I climb way up the white trunk of the tremble-tree and get Birdman another nest I seen amongst the flutter-leaves, a tiny cup of twig and straw. A home once. It empty now, but he thank me and draw it just the same.

--Above excerpt from The Gospel Truth, by Caroline Pignat p.90

In *The Gospel Truth*, the ornithologist, "Birdman," often does Nature Journal entries. Although Phoebe doesn't know the names of the birds or trees, she too, is a naturalist in how she wonders and deeply relates to the natural world. Nature gives her peace, comfort, connection, and insight. It helps her become her true self.

— Caroline Pignat

To See a Bird

When I was little, Momma used to walk with me on the woods to the Big House. *To see a bird,* she say, *you gotta be still as a dusk pond; quiet as a moth;*

and as patient as a grub snug in a cocoon.

Root yourself in the dirt, she say,
and I draw all the wide blue I could
into my tiny chest.
Hold it deep inside your heart, she say, smiling.
And wait.

We'd stand there in the dawn light, Momma and me, fingers to our lips, Listening to the leaves shush my heartbeat until all was still. Then come the morning song of that bright red bird, perched high in the branches above.

Birdie-birdie-birdie

Momma was right. 'Cause you gotta think you's part of the woods if you want that bird to believe it, too.

--Above excerpt from The Gospel Truth, by Caroline Pignat p.60

A Song for Me

... Then a small bird hover over us, flitting this way and that, deciding if we belong. I stays as still as stalk, watch his wings flutter, watch him swoop down, grip my pinkie like a perch in his little black claws.

Head tilting,

he watch me with that black bead eye, ruffle his brown tail, settle his wings.

Up close, I see he ain't just bird, he a million perfect little feathers, a curious mind, and a tiny soul pitter-patting in his cotton-bowl chest. He peck that peanut, pinch it in his black nib beak and, just like that, he gone, swooping back to the branch of the hollow tree.

Wide-eyed, I look at Momma. We watch that little brown bird eat that peanut, and before he go, he sing for us.

Fee-bee! Fee-bee!

"He saying my name, Momma," I whisper, sure my soul about to burst out my small chest. "Did you hear?"

Momma smile at me, tears in her eyes. And I know she heard it, too.

All these years I been sifting through Master's shells and saving up the peanuts. Sure the birds like them. But the truth is, I'd dig through a thousand shells for just one nut to hear Momma's birds sing my name.

--Above excerpt from The Gospel Truth, by Caroline Pignat p.115

Pt. 3 Additional Activities

Inquiring Minds

Science encourages observation, inquiry and exploration. As you read through *Poetree*, encourage the class to wonder and ask. Brainstorm a list and then select a few to research together. Examples:

What makes a seed start to grow? How long do the roots need to grow? Why do some trees have flowers? What do bees do when they visit flowers? How long does it take for a bird's egg to hatch?

Bird Watching

- Scientists are good observers. Look back through *Poetree* and see if you can find:
 - Barred owl
 - · Black-capped chickadee (there are three)
 - · Canada geese
 - · Cardinal
 - · Common grackle
 - · Groundhogs
 - · Lazuli bunting
 - · Swallow
- Go birdwatching on a nature walk. List or sketch the feathered friends you see. Use a Field Guide to help identify them.

Scavenger Hunt (*See the Scavenger Hunt handout at the end of this guide*)

- Look back through *Poetree* and see if you can find:
 - Bees (four of them)
 - Beetles (three of them)
 - · Cat
 - · Caterpillar
 - · Deer
 - Earthworm (three of them)
 - · Grey squirrel
 - · Ladybug
 - · Mouse
 - · Racoon
 - · Red Fox
 - · Spider
- Go on a nature walk what creatures do you see? List or sketch them. What are some clues or signs left by creatures you didn't see? (i.e. nests, tracks, scat, webs, or chewed leaves)

Answers to Birdwatching and Scavenger Hunt

- Seed tree sparrow, earthworm
- · Roots mouse
- · Leaves lazuli bunting
- Summer bees, black-capped chickadee
- · Nest swallow, swallow's nest
- · Insects racoon, ladybug, spider, caterpillar, beetles
- · Harvest cat
- Nuts Canada geese, grey squirrel, common grackle
- · Winter barred owl
- · Snow deer
- · Quick chickadees
- · Rings red fox
- · Seeds groundhogs

Wildlife Photographer

Take photos of things on your nature walk. Try to get as many as you can for each colour of the rainbow. Arrange them in rows by colours in a rainbow photo collage.

Make an Impression

Foil Imprints

Put a leaf on a piece of cardboard, lay a large piece of foil over it and tuck it around the edges of the board. Rub down the leaf until all the veins and outline appear. Trace and colour with marker.

Leaf Rubbings

Place a leaf between two sheets of paper and rub with side of crayon Can you identify your leaves by their shape and size? Notice symmetry and patterns. Where else in nature do you notice this?

Bark Rubbings

Place a paper on the tree trunk and rub the side of the crayon over the page. What patterns does this bark have? Can you identify the tree by its bark?

The Circle of Life

Tree Rings

Explore the rings inside of a trunk. Are they all the same thickness and colour? Each ring is one year's growth. A year of good growth would be wider. Did this tree have many years of good growth? If not, what might have affected its growth? Record it in your Nature Journal.

Twig Rings

Twigs have ringmarks left by last year's buds. The space between a ringbark and a bud is how much the branch grew that year. Compare it to previous years. Has this branch grown the same amount each year? Record it in your Nature Journal.



Pt. 4 Suggested Resources

Nature Journaling

Clare Walker Leslie. <u>http://www.clarewalkerleslie.com</u> Keeping a Nature Journal by Clare Walker Leslie The Nature Connection by Clare Walker Leslie Nature Journal worksheets: <u>https://www.storey.com/the-nature-connection-worksheets/</u>

John Muir Laws <u>https://johnmuirlaws.com</u>

The Laws Guide to Nature Drawing and Journaling by John Muir Laws <u>http://sdchildrenandnature.org/wp/wp-</u> <u>content/uploads/2013/05/CNPS NatureJournaling JMuirLaws 96p 2012.pdf</u>

http://beetlesproject.org/resources/for-program-leaders/field-journaling-withstudents/#1449353906589-0eaf37a4-c482

Educational Resources

Last Child in the Woods - Saving our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder by Richard Louv

The Big Book of Nature Activities by Drew Monkman and Jason Rodenburg

Ontario ECOschools <u>https://www.ontarioecoschools.org/best-practice/outdoor-</u> classrooms/?gallery=154

Canadian Forestry Teaching Kits

http://www.canadianforestry.com/kits/english/index.html

Jane Goodall Institute of Canada: Roots and Shoots <u>https://janegoodall.ca/our-work/roots-and-shoots/</u>

Leaf Snap http://leafsnap.com

Life of the Forest Posters <u>http://www.internationalpaper.com/company/publications-and-resources/life-of-the-forest-posters</u>

Nature Poems for Kids

Selections from: https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/text/nature-poems-kids

- Trees by Joyce Kilmer https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/po
- Clouds by Christina Rosetti. <u>https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/clouds</u>
- The Eagle by Alfred Lord Tennyson https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/eagle
- The Caterpillar by Robert Graves. https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/caterpillar

Spring

- To the Thawing Wind by Robert Frost. <u>https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/thawing-wind</u>
- First Green Flare. By Sidney Wade <u>https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/first-green-flare</u>
- Spring Storm by William Carlos Williams. <u>https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/spring-storm</u>

Summer

- Summer in the South by Paul Laurence Dunbar <u>https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/summer-south</u>
- Knoxville Tennessee by Nikki Giovanni <u>https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/knoxville-</u> <u>tennessee</u> * Lesson Plan
- Bed in Summer by Robert Louis Stevenson. https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/bed-summer

Autumn

- After Apple Picking by Robert Frost <a href="https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/p
- Blackberry Eating by Galway Kinnell <u>https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/blackberry-eating</u>
 *Lesson Plan
- Hoar Frost by Amy Lowell. <u>https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/hoar-frost</u>
- The Wild Swans at Coyle WB Yeats https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/
- Fall by Edward Hirsch https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/fall

Winter

- Dust of Snow by Robert Frost <u>https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/dust-snow</u>
- Woods in Winter by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. <u>https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/woods-winter</u>
- Winter by Walter de la Mare <u>https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/winter</u>
- On Snow by Jonathan Swift <a href="https://www.poets.org/poetsorg
- Winter Trees by William Carlos Williams <u>https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/winter-trees</u>

As you read Poetree, can you find:

