Poetry is an art form that appeals to all ages and, in its simplicity, finds a particular fan base with children. Georgia Heard’s school-themed anthology bears the names of writers my students were familiar with, and this made it more fun for them. Add in the colorful cover and fun layout of the compilation and this book becomes a natural in classrooms.

We read the poems over the course of a week and then, the following week, students wrote list poems of their own about childhood items they hold dear. Focusing on concrete details, we then turned those into a springboard for a narrative about childhood.
It is a great writing exercise for teenagers because artifacts are a large part of their lives and their culture, not just in school. Their social agendas revolve around a lot of details and items that are important in their lives. While the poems are reflections from people who are looking back on the vestiges of their lives, my students viewed these as cameras on the worlds they inhabit and have for as long as they can remember.

The book provided brainstorming tools. Many of the youngsters were reminded of items from their own childhoods that they were able to use in their own poetry. The common complaint that when they sit down to write nothing comes to them did not happen this time around. Students found the book was a rich "campground" of memorabilia that they discovered is shared by people across generations. This was an eye opening experience for many who perceive anyone over twenty as having nothing in common with them.

Poems like "What is Earth?" by J. Patrick Lewis or "Show and Tell Rocks" by Terry Webb Harshman are perfect for teaching young students to appreciate the art of poetry. The easy rhythm of Lewis’s poem has a cadence to it that children could easily sing as a response song.

What is earth, whale?
A sea where I sing.
What is earth, robin?
A thing I call Spring. (31)

Harshman’s poem has enough concrete detail to be a science lesson in geology. It holds a pattern of repetition that teaches details of the earth’s makeup. This poem chants, “...fossil rocks, lava rocks, mica and shale ... fool’s gold and geodes and flint arrowheads ...” (18) By the end, it is not hard to picture a resourceful teacher running with it while teaching chemistry or a host of other science lessons. Students could follow Harshman’s example, but branch out into their own ideas as they memorize chemicals or plants to study for quizzes. Several skill sets are hit and young writers have the fun of creating while studying.

Sara Holbrook’s “Skateboarder” (40) is a good selection for middle school both because of the subject matter and the magical qualities caught up in details of the elusive perfect trick. Georgia Heard’s “Oak Tree” (31) is perfect for teaching manipulation of form to all ages. Its simplicity will work with both younger and older students. I used Jane Yolen’s “In My Desk” (16) for teaching concrete details to freshmen. While the poet is from a different generation than my students, her words are universal as she talks about “braces that were much too tight,” (16) and notes from friends next to tests marked in red. It is a perfect piece, as is “Creativity” (22) by Eileen Spinelli. The beauty of this one is the simplicity of the items: a seashell, woolen sock, paper heart, or a rusty screw. My advanced placement students enjoyed Valiska Gregory’s “Just Look” (31) for its rich details. As one student put it, “The first stanza snatches you from the classroom out to a nature walk.”
They also enjoyed orally presenting David Harrison’s “Chorus of Four Frogs” (39). Rhythm is difficult to understand, but these students are often in band, orchestra, and choir so cadence is familiar. By performing the poem, rhythm became more than an elusive definition; it became a skill in a writing arsenal they are developing.

One of the exciting things about Heard’s choice of list poems is that he identifies some of the difficulties of teaching poetry to young people. While children are open to poetry, teenagers find its form and rules intimidating. Rhyme schemes, meter, even structure throw them into “I can’t write poetry” mindsets. However, poetry is rich with possibilities for teaching the craft of writing. These list poems provide a great way to teach diction, poetic layout, and cadence. Teachers, who are always looking for ways to make poetry more student-friendly, will find a book like this the perfect antidote to poetry fears. Or in Harrison’s words, Ribbet!

### About the Author

**Dawn Allen** is a teacher with fourteen years experience teaching high school English and Pre-Advanced Placement. She holds a BSED in English Education and an MFA in Writing. As lead teacher, she mentors other teachers as well as presents at district in-services, and edits the district student literary magazine.