



Poetry Recitation & Copywork

Poetry Selections

Our featured poet for this session is Ogden Nash. We've included eight poetry selections for your kids and teens to read, listen to, memorize, and recite. They are:

- The Octopus
- The Ant
- The Fly
- A Flea and a Fly in a Flue
- Further Reflections on Parsley
- Morning Prayer
- The People Upstairs
- The Tale of Custard the Dragon

For copywork, we have included Zaner-Bloser style handwriting sheets for primary, elementary, and cursive, as well as college-ruled for older students. We have chosen six poems and two speech excerpts for copywork, listed below:

- The Octopus
- The Ant
- The Fly
- A Flea and a Fly in a Flue
- Morning Prayer
- The People Upstairs
- Excerpt from J.F.K.'s Inauguration Address
- Excerpt from M.L.K. Jr's "I Have a Dream" Speech

"Humor is the best means of surviving in a difficult world."

~ Ogden Nash



Ogden Nash

August 19, 1902 – May 19, 1971

Frederic Ogden Nash was a famous American writer beloved for his satirical, witty poetry. Born in Rye, New York on August 19, 1902, Nash quickly discovered a passion for rhymes. At just 6 years old, he was said to be already “thinking in rhymes” and making up his own verses.

After graduating from a private boarding school, he attended the prestigious Harvard University, but was forced to drop out after just a year of schooling due to the expensive tuition. Instead, he began working various jobs to support himself, finding work as a schoolteacher one year, a bond salesman the next, and eventually as an advertiser.

But everything changed for him in 1931 when he submitted a few of his poems to *The New Yorker*, a well-known newspaper. The editor, Harold Ross, was delighted with his rhymes, and asked him to send in more, telling him that they were the most original writing the newspaper had seen in recent times.

After this encouragement, Nash spent three months working as an editor for *The New Yorker*, which gave him the confidence he needed to publish his first collection of poetry, *Hard Lines*. The collection did enormously well, becoming a sensation nationwide, which allowed him to quit his job and focus on writing full-time.

His poetry became well-known and loved for its playful wordplay and distinctive rhymes, often using puns or made-up words in places the reader wouldn't expect. His work included a wide range of subjects, from children's poetry to satirical political poems. He even wrote stanzas to accompany Camille Saint-Saëns's famous orchestral work, *The Carnival of the Animals*, which are still read aloud at many musical performances today.

Beyond poetry, Nash also traveled the world, delivering lectures at colleges and starring as a guest on many different radio broadcasts and comedy shows. Additionally, Nash crafted the lyrics for several Broadway musicals, including *One Touch of Venus*, *Two's Company*, *Hey! Nonny Nonny*, and *The Littlest Revue*, which he wrote both the lyrics and music to.

Little did he know that just a few short years after he passed away in 1971, a Broadway musical, *Nash at Nine*, would be written as a tribute to him, setting many of his iconic poems to music.

The New York Times celebrated his career with a touching tribute to his works, proclaiming him the “best known producer of humorous poetry” in the country. The U.S. Postal Service even published a collection of stamps with his poems on them, showing how far his reach extended, even after his death. Ogden Nash’s playful sense of humor and unique way of seeing the world still live on through his writing, helping carry his legacy forward in the modern age.

Poetry Selections

The Octopus

Tell me, O Octopus, I begs
Is those things arms, or is they legs?
I marvel at thee, Octopus;
If I were thou, I'd call me Us.

The Fly

God in his wisdom made the fly
And then forgot to tell us why.

Morning Prayer

Now another day is breaking,
Sleep was sweet and so is waking.
Dear Lord, I promised you last night
Never again to sulk or fight.
Such vows are easier to keep
When a child is sound asleep.
Today, O Lord, for your dear sake,
I'll try to keep them when awake.

The Ant

The ant has made herself illustrious
By constant industry industrious.
So what? Would you be calm and placid
If you were full of formic acid?

A Flea And A Fly In A Flue

A flea and a fly in a flue
Were imprisoned, so what could they do?
Said the fly, "let us flee!"
"Let us fly!" said the flea.
So they flew through a flaw in the flue.

Further Reflections on Parsley

Parsley
Is gharsley.

Poetry Selections

The People Upstairs

The people upstairs all practise ballet
Their living room is a bowling alley
Their bedroom is full of conducted tours.
Their radio is louder than yours,
They celebrate week-ends all the week.
When they take a shower, your ceilings leak.
They try to get their parties to mix
By supplying their guests with Pogo sticks,
And when their fun at last abates,
They go to the bathroom on roller skates.
I might love the people upstairs more
If only they lived on another floor.

The Tale of Custard the Dragon

Belinda lived in a little white house,
With a little black kitten and a little gray mouse,
And a little yellow dog and a little red wagon,
And a realio, trulio, little pet dragon.

Now the name of the little black kitten was Ink,
And the little gray mouse, she called him Blink,
And the little yellow dog was sharp as Mustard,
But the dragon was a coward, and she called him Custard.

Custard the dragon had big sharp teeth,
And spikes on top of him and scales underneath,
Mouth like a fireplace, chimney for a nose,
And realio, trulio daggers on his toes.

Poetry Selections

The Tale of Custard the Dragon (continued)

Belinda was as brave as a barrel full of bears,
And Ink and Blink chased lions down the stairs,
Mustard was as brave as a tiger in a rage,
But Custard cried for a nice safe cage.

Belinda tickled him, she tickled him unmerciful,
Ink, Blink and Mustard, they rudely called him Percival,
They all sat laughing in the little red wagon
At the realio, trulio, cowardly dragon.

Belinda giggled till she shook the house,
and Blink said Weeek! which is giggling for a mouse,
Ink and Mustard rudely asked his age,
When Custard cried for a nice safe cage.

Suddenly, suddenly they heard a nasty sound,
And Mustard growled, and they all looked around.
Meowch! cried Ink, and Ooh! cried Belinda,
For there was a pirate, climbing in the winda.

Pistol in his left hand, pistol in his right,
And he held in his teeth a cutlass bright,
His beard was black, one leg was wood;
It was clear that the pirate meant no good.

Belinda paled, and she cried Help! Help!
But Mustard fled with a terrified yelp,
Ink trickled down to the bottom of the household,
And little mouse Blink strategically mouseholed.

Poetry Selections

The Tale of Custard the Dragon (continued)

But up jumped Custard snorting like an engine,
Clashed his tail like irons in a dungeon,
With a clatter and a clank and a jangling squirm,
He went at the pirate like a robin at a worm.

The pirate gaped at Belinda's dragon,
And gulped some grog from his pocket flagon,
He fired two bullets, but they didn't hit,
And Custard gobbled him, every bit.

Belinda embraced him, Mustard licked him,
No one mourned for his pirate victim.
Ink and Blink in glee did gyrate
Around the dragon that ate the pirate.

But presently up spoke little dog Mustard,
I'd been twice as brave if I hadn't been flustered.
And up spoke Ink and up spoke Blink,
We'd have been three times as brave, we think,

And Custard said, I quite agree
That everybody is braver than me.

Belinda still lives in her little white house,
With her little black kitten and her little gray mouse,
And her little yellow dog and her little red wagon,
And her realio, trulio little pet dragon.

Belinda is as brave as a barrel full of bears,
And Ink and Blink chase lions down the stairs,
Mustard is as brave as a tiger in a rage,
But Custard keeps crying for a nice safe cage.

Speech Selections

Excerpt from **President John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address (1961)**

In the long history of the world, only a few generations have been granted the role of defending freedom in its hour of maximum danger. I do not shrink from this responsibility—I welcome it. I do not believe that any of us would exchange places with any other people or any other generation. The energy, the faith, the devotion which we bring to this endeavor will light our country and all who serve it—and the glow from that fire can truly light the world.

And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.

My fellow citizens of the world: ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man.

Finally, whether you are citizens of America or citizens of the world, ask of us here the same high standards of strength and sacrifice which we ask of you. With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth God's work must truly be our own.

Speech Selections

Excerpt from **Marting Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" Speech (1963)**

Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity.

But 100 years later, the Negro still is not free... There are those who are asking the devotees of Civil Rights: "When will you be satisfied?" We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality. We can never be satisfied as long as our children are stripped of their selfhood and robbed of their dignity by signs stating "For whites only." ...

No, no we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream...

Let us not wallow in the valley of despair, I say to you today, my friends.

So even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today.

Speech Selections

“I Have a Dream” Speech (continued)

I have a dream that one day down in Alabama with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of interposition and nullification, one day right down in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers. I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.

This is our hope. This is the faith that I go back to the South with. With this faith, we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.

This will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with new meaning: My country, 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing. Land where my fathers died, land of the pilgrims' pride, from every mountainside, let freedom ring.

And if America is to be a great nation, this must become true.

And so let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire!
Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York!
Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania!
Let freedom ring from the snowcapped Rockies of Colorado!
Let freedom ring from the curvaceous slopes of California!
But not only that, let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia!
Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee!
Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi!
From every mountainside, let freedom ring!

Speech Selections

“I Have a Dream” Speech (continued)

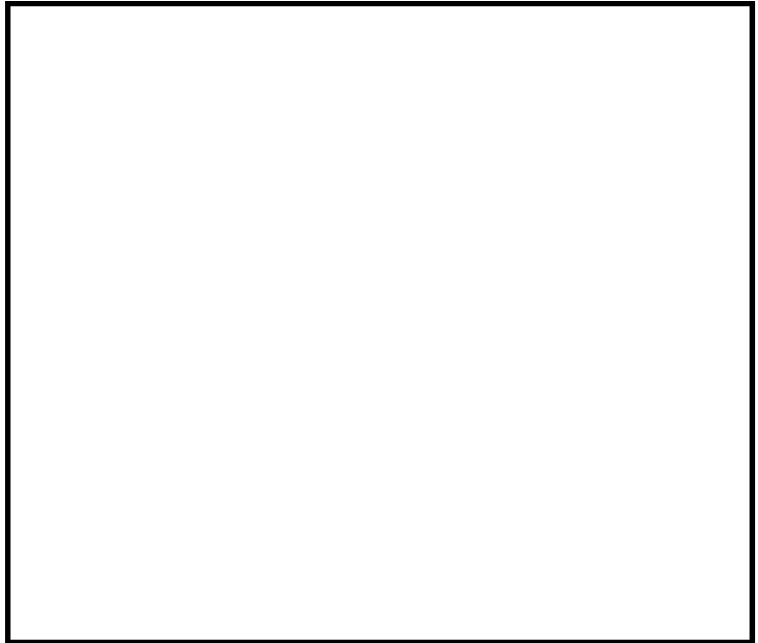
And when this happens, and when we allow freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, Black men and White men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual: Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!

Poetry Study

Title:

Type of Poem:

Use the box to at right to draw a picture of what the poem brings to mind.



Write one thing you liked and did not like about the poem:

Write three adjectives about the poem.

Compose a few lines of your own poem inspired by this work
