



New Poetry Collections

Article Author:

[Clive Barnes](#) [1]

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Byline:

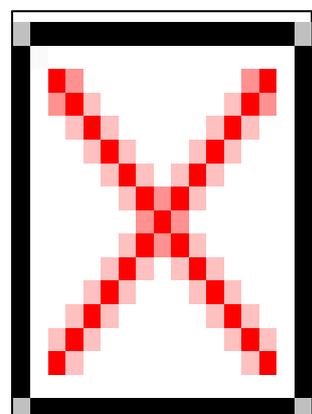
Clive Barnes selects new poetry collections for Christmas giving.

Books for Giving

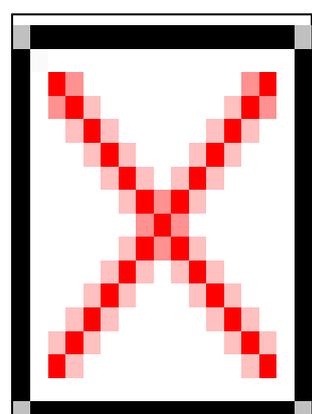
New Poetry Collections

From single poet collections to anthologies, **Clive Barnes** selects new poetry that will delight young readers of all ages.

Nursery rhymes come bite-size. So do Allan Ahlberg's rhymes for the youngest and their carers. **Everybody was a Baby Once** is the fourth of his picture book collaborations with illustrator Bruce Ingman. Ahlberg uses song and rhyme forms that might (to paraphrase another title) be heard in the playground, and restores a time when wash-days were still ?Put-in-the-tub day/Hang-on-the-line and let-it-dry day?. It's warm, it's funny, it's surreal, it's nostalgic; and no-one can fix feelings in the simplest words better than this. It's impossible, too, to imagine any other illustrator doing justice to the joy, affection, anarchy and pathos in these rhymes. Age 3+



Jackie Morris brings a particular sensibility to her collection of nursery rhymes in **The Cat and the Fiddle**. Closely observed and sensuous portrayals of beasts of all kinds, from flies to unicorns, are conjured in a magical world, part New Age and part faerie (definitely not fairy). Here languid ladies with flowing hair and flowing gowns ride or lead animals through mystic landscapes, sometimes Renaissance Italian, sometimes English gothic, sometimes Celtic. It's a potent mix of cultural associations realising, above all, the mysterious other-worldliness of the rhymes. Age 3+



There is no disappointment in the next double act. In **Sticky Ends**, Jeanne Willis and Tony

Ross serve up a nauseating mix of cautionary verse and other disgusting diversions, including Filthy Frankie who Refused to Use a Hankie ? cue a Ross illustration with Frankie and his father up to their ankles in a sea of green ? and an unnamed boy who blackmails Father Christmas. This is a collection that is as hilarious and ingenious as it is rude. Age 5+

The two collections by Michael Rosen offer an opportunity to compare the work of two illustrators. **Bananas in My Ears**, with long-time partner Quentin Blake, is a reissue in a single volume of four collections from the mid-1980s. It offers Blake space to realise Rosen?s comedies of family life, not only in dramatisation in individual poems but also in some spectacular double page spreads. There are even occasions when Rosen?s words become the dialogue for Blake?s illustrations. **Even My Ears Are Smiling**, illustrated by Babette Cole, suffers in comparison. Here is a selection of poems that span 1974-1992, with the addition of some from 2011. It?s a collection that doesn?t include what I think of as Rosen?s most memorable poems from the ?70s and ?80s; and Cole, restricting herself typically to a single illustration per poem, doesn?t seem to engage with the poems in the way that Blake does or bring a consistent vision to them. However, there is a CD of Rosen reading the poems, which makes the whole package a lot better value. Age 5+

Benjamin Zephaniah and Prodecepta Das have one previous collaboration to their names, the engaging **We Are Britain**, which celebrated Britain?s diverse children in verse and photographs. **When I Grow Up** is in the same vein, featuring the working lives of adults, described for children. It?s not perhaps as successful as its forerunner, since it?s not clear whether it is the individuality of each subject that is the focus or the job that they are doing, and both Das and Zephaniah seem to be sometimes struggling to find the balance. It works best with those jobs where the individual input is greatest, whether Julia, the corner shopkeeper, who ?serves them with a smile? or Anthony, the illustrator, who ?loves drawing chimps and gorillas?. Age 8+

Jacqueline Wilson?s favourite poems

The collection here that isn?t illustrated is Jacqueline Wilson?s **Green Glass Beads**. This is an anthology of Dame Jackie?s favourite poems with a charming introduction, remembering her own childhood experience of poetry and its connection with elocution classes, and explaining her choice of poems. It?s billed as ?Poems for Girls?; but if boys can get past section headings like ?Love? and ?Clothes?, and accept the absence of fighting and football, they will find a choice of poems that ranges widely, treats its readers seriously ? there is a section heading ?Birth and Death? ? and introduces them to some of the most memorable poets and poems in the English language: for instance, in the section ?Places?, Yeats, Frost, Kipling and Edward Thomas come in quick succession, followed by Carol Ann Duffy?s ?The Counties?, a poem celebrating the literary associations of English regional boundaries. Age 8+

The British countryside is also the subject of Celia Warren?s, **The RSPB Anthology of Wildlife Poetry**. A mainly adult collection, it includes poetry written for children, and is as accessible to young people as Wilson?s collection. The illustrations are provided by twenty modern wildlife and landscape artists, using a variety of media, techniques and styles which, taken with the poems themselves, produce a handsome book which expresses a love affair with the British landscape and its creatures in literature and art from Shelley to Heaney. Age 8+

John Agard and Satoshi Kitamura have been together for some time, and **Goldilocks on CCTV**, keeps up the standard. Agard offers some thought provoking updates of fairy tale characters, to which Kitamura provides a pictorial black and white commentary. This is poetry of some depth for older readers, in which, beneath the humour, Agard probes both traditional assumptions and modern mores, coming down now on one side and now on the other. Kitamura?s bold illustrations, sometimes full portraits facing the reader, sometimes silhouettes, produce a mood of challenge and mystery. Age 10+

Books discussed:

Everybody was a Baby Once by Allan Ahlberg, ill. Bruce Ingman (Walker, 978 1 4063 3000 7, £7.99 pbk)

The Cat and the Fiddle: A Treasury of Nursery Rhymes by Jackie Morris (Frances Lincoln, 978 1 8450 7987 1

£12.99 hbk)

Sticky Ends by Jeanne Willis, ill. Tony Ross (Andersen, 978 1 8493 9250 1, £9.99 hbk)

When I Grow Up by Benjamin Zephaniah, photographer Prodepta Das (Frances Lincoln, 978 1 8478 0059 6, £11.99 hbk)

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