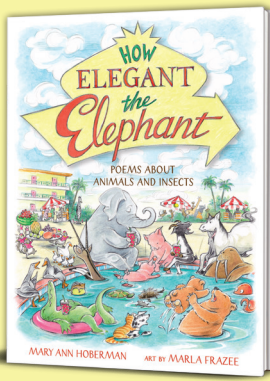


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How Elegant the Elephant

MARY ANN HOBERMAN & MARLA FRAZEE



SUMMARY

This collection of sixty poems by award-winning poet Mary Ann Hoberman features all kinds of insects and animals with fascinating details, hilarious humor, and clever wordplay. These poems are perfect for reading aloud, for using as mentor texts to encourage writing, and for connecting with the science curriculum.

READING POEMS ALOUD

Poetry is meant to be read aloud and Mary Ann Hoberman's poems are particularly perfect for reading aloud because they are full of sound, rhyme, rhythm, and wordplay. When students participate in reading poems aloud, they have the opportunity to develop their own oral fluency and confidence. Here are a variety of different approaches to reading poems out loud from *How Elegant the Elephant* with specific poem examples for each strategy.

ECHO READING

With echo reading, you simply read the poem aloud with students repeating you after each line. Keep the pace moving so the echo reading won't get monotonous. Here are three perfect examples for this approach: "Fish" (p. 21), "Horse" (p. 23), and "Rhinoceros" (p. 43).

REFRAINS: REPEATED WORD, LINE, OR STANZA

The adult reads the poem aloud, but students participate by joining in on a word, phrase, line, or refrain that is repeated. Hoberman has many poems that lend themselves to this approach, although in some cases, the refrain varies a tiny bit each time and you'll want to point that out. Try these poems: "Abracadabra" (p. 1), "Bandicoot" (p. 7), "Carpenter Ants" (p. 13), "One Two" (p. 39), "Silverfish" (p. 48), "Spiders" (p. 53), "The Splendid Lion" (p. 64), "Walrus" (p. 68), "Where in the World?" (p. 71), and "Zoogeography" (p. 79).

TWO VOICES

Two individuals volunteer to read the poem aloud in two parts. It may require practice to synchronize, but it's worth it. In the following poems, the indented lines and stanzas help signal the second reader: "Jumping Bean" (p. 26), "Lion" (p. 29), "Some Say" (p. 52), and "Swimming" (p. 60).

TWO GROUPS

Divide the class into two groups to read aloud stanzas or key parts of poems. For example, two groups read the alternating lines of "Monkey Business" (p. 32) or read the first half, then the second half of each stanza in "One Half of the Giraffe" (p. 36).

THREE OR MORE GROUPS OR VOLUNTEERS

Invite individual students to volunteer for solo lines or use three or more groups or pairs of students to read aloud together for a less intimidating option. This takes a bit of coordinating, but the many voices can make the lines and meaning of the poem come alive. You can use stanzas or indented sections or repeated phrases as clues for each group or volunteer. Try these examples: "Family Friends" (p. 18), "Stork Story" (p. 58), "There Once Was a Pig" (p. 63), "Vice Versa Verse" (p. 67), and "What Am I?" (p. 69).

SINGING POEMS

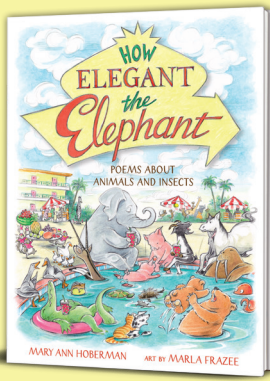
Perhaps the most entertaining form of reading a poem aloud is singing poems. It's not difficult and it's irresistible fun. You simply sing poems by matching those that have a strong, rhythmic beat to familiar tunes that have the same beat or meter, such as "Row, Row, Row Your Boat." Examples in this collection include: you can sing "Muskrat" (p. 34) or "The Spider's Web" (p. 64) to the tune of "Oh Tannenbaum" or "Seal" (p. 46) to the tune of "Three Blind Mice."

MOTION AND MOVEMENT

You read the poem aloud while students make the gestures suggested by the poem or students can read the poem in unison using simple motions or gestures. Motions can be as simple as alternating standing and sitting, clapping at key intervals, or gesturing with hands. Examples include: "Can You Copy?" (p. 12) (try to wash your eyes with your tongue!) and "Tarantula" (p. 61) (learn the tarantella dance).

Bonus: You can also combine poems with pantomime, puppetry, and props. Find objects or items mentioned in the poem to use as a visual cue or physical prop to make the poem become concrete for students. You can even try performing a poem using signing (American Sign Language).

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MARY ANN HOBERMAN is a former Children's Poet Laureate and recipient of the National Council of Teachers of English Excellence in Poetry for Children Award. Hoberman's poetry often targets our youngest audience with rhythm and repetition and is usually published in picture book form or as read-aloud rhyming stories such as in her *You Read to Me, I'll Read to You* series. Other inviting collections include *The Llama Who Had No Pajama: 100 Favorite Poems* and *All Kinds of Families*, among many others.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

WRITING

Hoberman's poems can serve as wonderful mentor texts for students to imitate as they try writing their own poems. They can try building a poem with repetition as she does with "Fish" (p. 21) or "Opossum" (p. 40), for example. Or they can try to create a riddle poem like her examples "Riddle" (p. 43) or "What's Their Name" (p. 70). Or they may want to experiment with the classic five-line limerick form as she does with "Yaks" (p. 74). As a whole class, it could be fun to create your own collaborative alphabet book of animal and insect poems from A to Z.

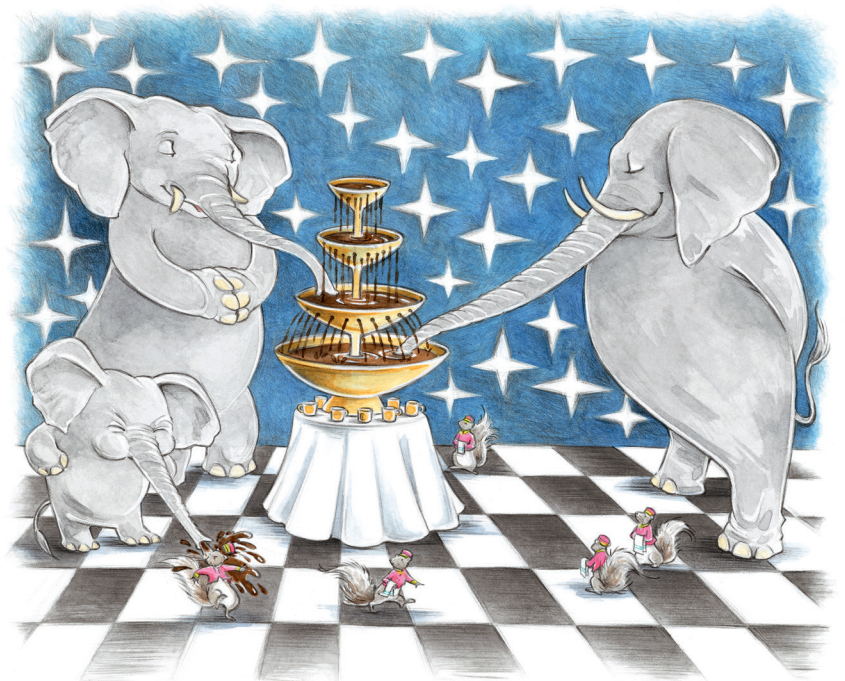
PAIR WITH NONFICTION

Hoberman weaves lots of facts into her poetry with details about the walrus or the octopus, for example, making each poem interesting and funny at the same time. Encourage students to "fact check" any of their favorite poems to investigate those details, find more information, and to inspire follow-up poems.

EXPLORE ART

This collection includes five different poems that incorporate information about ants in "Ant Play" (p. 4), "Ants" (p. 5) "Doodlebug" (p. 15), "If an Ant" (p. 26), and "Praying Mantis" (p. 41). Read the poems together and talk about the ant facts that are highlighted. Then, use fingerprints (three finger or thumb prints in a row) to create ant characters, adding six legs and two antenna to each. Display these along with their favorite (or original) ant poems.

MARLA FRAZEE'S illustrations depict the animal characters in Hoberman's poems in a hotel setting as if on vacation, as they are each having different adventures. Students may enjoy talking about that unusual context and what that adds to the poems. What other animals might they imagine at this hotel or on vacation? Challenge them to work in pairs to draw those possibilities and draft accompanying poems.



These Teaching Tips were created by Sylvia Vardell, Professor Emerita of literature for children and young adults, Texas Woman's University.