

Table of Contents

- Introduction: How to Use This List
- Tier 1: "On-Ramp" Collections (Fun, Easy, Non-Scary)
- Tier 2: Core Selective Poetry Canon (Rich but Accessible)
- Tier 3: Stretch & Visual (For Kids Who Are Already Hooked)
- How to Turn This List Into Selective Prep
- Conclusion

How to Use This List

Parent Quick Guide

Aim for 1–2 poems a night, 3–4 nights a week.

Rotate books so they see:

- fun / humorous poems
- nature & environment
- Australian identity / place
- deeper, "thinky" pieces

For any poem, ask just one question:

- "What is this poem really about?"
- "Which line did you like and why?"
- "How does this poem make you feel?"

Tier 1 – "On-Ramp" Collections

Fun, Easy, Non-Scary

These are for kids who think "poetry is boring" or only know nursery rhymes.

1. A Boat of Stars: New Poems to Inspire and Enchant

edited by Margaret Connolly & Natalie Jane Prior (AUS, HarperCollins)

Best for: Y3–Y5 (great entry point in Year 4)

Why it matters:

- Modern Australian anthology with short, musical poems about family, animals, feelings, nature, school.
- Specifically created because teachers/parents struggled to find engaging children's poetry — it's exactly the on-ramp you want.
- Lots of visual support (colour illustrations) so it doesn't feel "text heavy".

***How to use:** 1 poem at bedtime → no "analysis", just ask: "What picture did this poem put in your head?"*

2. Guinea Pig Town and Other Animal Poems

Lorraine Marwood (AUS, Walker Books)

Best for: Y4–Y6

Why it matters:

- Every poem is about animals; tone ranges from funny to tender.
- Great for practising imagery, personification and sound devices without heavy themes.
- Very accessible language, but still strong craft — perfect "bridge" between picture-book rhyme and more complex poems.

3. A Ute Picnic and Other Australian Poems

Lorraine Marwood (AUS, Walker Books)

Best for: Y4–Y6 (especially kids from/curious about rural life)

Why it matters:

- Poems about farm life, drought, bushfires, animals, everyday rural experiences.
- Anchors poetry in Australian landscape and culture, which is exactly what NSW exams love to test.
- Several pieces link well to themes like resilience, family, environment.

4. Michael Rosen's A to Z: The Best Children's Poetry from Agard to Zephaniah

ed. Michael Rosen (Puffin)

Best for: Stronger Y4–Y6 readers (interest age 9+, reading age ~8+)

Why it matters:

- British anthology of really child-friendly poems by top children's poets (Agard, Zephaniah, Rosen, etc.).

- Huge range of styles: silly, serious, performance pieces – great for teaching voice and tone.
- Many are perfect models for Selective creative/persuasive openings.

Tier 2 – Core Selective Poetry Canon

Rich but Accessible

These are the ones I'd treat almost as set texts for Y5–Y6 Selective / Scholarship prep.

5. The ABC Book of Australian Poetry: A Treasury of Poems for Young People

compiled by Libby Hathorn (AUS, ABC Books)

Best for: Y5–Y7 (read selectively in Y5–6)

Why it matters:

- 80+ poems by Australian poets from 1885–2010, from Banjo Paterson & Dorothea Mackellar to Judith Wright, Les Murray, Steven Herrick etc.
- Organised around an Australian "river" metaphor and landscape – brilliant for place, identity, seasons, ANZAC, bush, city vs country.
- Very close in feel to poems often used in NSW exam passages.

How to use: *Don't read cover-to-cover. Pick: 1 "classic" (Paterson / Mackellar / CJ Dennis), 1 modern, 1 nature / landscape each week and talk about: "What's Australian about this poem?" "What picture of Australia is the poet showing?"*

6. I Am the Seed That Grew the Tree: A Nature Poem for Every Day of the Year

selected by Fiona Waters, illus. Frann Preston-Gannon (National Trust)

Best for: Y4–Y7 (dip in & out)

Why it matters:

- Lavishly illustrated anthology of 366 nature poems (classic + contemporary) – one per day.
- Builds comfort with dense imagery, metaphor and seasonal themes in very small daily doses.
- Great for environmental / descriptive passages in comprehension and writing.

7. A Boat of Stars (again, now as "core")

Why it moves into "core" for Selective:

- The language is deceptively simple but often layered; you can practise inference and tone on a short poem.
- Works beautifully when paired with short visual/writing tasks (e.g. "write the next 4 lines", "draw the image in your head").

8. A Laureate's Choice: 101 Poems for Children

chosen by Carol Ann Duffy (Faber)

Best for: Strong Y5–Y7 readers

Why it matters:

- Selected by former UK Poet Laureate; mix of classic & modern poems for ages 5–14.

- Great training for handling non-Australian voices (UK/US) that appear in exam papers.
- Many short, punchy pieces ideal for timed "cold read" practice.

Tier 3 – Stretch & Visual

For Kids Who Are Already Hooked

These are more "beautiful and deep" than "easy" – use selectively with strong readers or as shared reads.

9. Tales from Outer Suburbia

Shaun Tan (AUS – stories + prose-poetry + art)

Best for: Y5–Y8

Why it matters:

- Technically short stories, but many pieces are extremely poetic and metaphorical, blending text + art.
- Brilliant for inference, symbolism, "weird" texts – exactly what upper-level comprehension likes to use.
- Use a single piece like a poem: read, then ask "What might this really be about?"

10. The Lost Words

Robert Macfarlane & Jackie Morris

Best for: Y5–Y8 nature / art lovers

Why it matters:

- "Spells" (poems) that bring lost nature words (acorn, otter, kingfisher) back into children's vocabulary.
- Strong cross-over with environment, language, visual literacy.

11. Revolting Rhymes / other Roald Dahl verse

Best for: Y4–Y6

Why it matters:

- Twisted fairy-tale poems – fun way to explore tone, parody, point of view.
- Very useful for exam questions about "How does the poet feel about...?" when the answer is mischievous / sarcastic.

12. Digital bonus: The Twinkl Poetry Collection (KS2 eBook)

60 original poems for primary; split by theme

Best for: classroom / screen reading in Y4–Y6

Why it matters:

- Ready-made set of short poems grouped by topic (feelings, nature, funny, etc.).
- Perfect for fast "cold read" practice – give a poem, ask 2–3 comprehension questions.

How to Turn This List Into Selective Prep

Without Killing the Joy

For each poem (or mini-set of 2–3 poems), do one tiny Selective-style move:

"What's the main idea?"

One sentence only.

"Which line is your favourite and why?"

Trains evidence + interpretation.

"What feeling does this poem give you? Which word/phrase creates that feeling?"

Trains tone and effect.

If you do that with:

- ✓ A Boat of Stars
- ✓ Guinea Pig Town / A Ute Picnic
- ✓ ABC Book of Australian Poetry
- ✓ I Am the Seed...
- ✓ One "big" anthology (Rosen / Duffy)

...over Years 4–6, your child will have:

- ✓ heard hundreds of quality poems
- ✓ built comfort with rhyme, free verse, imagery, personification, tone
- ✓ and developed the exact skills needed to survive OC / Selective / Scholarship poetry passages without getting smashed by dense, random adult verse.

Conclusion

That's precisely how the **Selective Poetry Starter List™** delivers on its promise: parents stop guessing and just work through a proven, age-appropriate canon of poetry that actually prepares kids for the exams.

This curated collection removes the overwhelming choice paralysis that many families face when trying to build poetry appreciation and exam readiness simultaneously.

By following this three-tier system – from fun "on-ramp" collections through to rich core texts and beautiful stretch materials – you create a natural progression that builds both competence and genuine love for poetry.

The result? Children who approach poetry passages in exams not with fear, but with the confidence that comes from having heard, discussed, and enjoyed hundreds of quality poems across their primary school years.