

BookSpeak! Poems About Books

by Laura Purdie Salas, illustrated by Josée Bisailon
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About the book:

Poet Laura Purdie Salas is back with a collection of wild and weird, wacky and winsome poems about all the magic to be found on a single bookshelf. In *BookSpeak!*, each poem gives voice to a group that seldom gets a voice . . . the books themselves! Characters plead for sequels, book jackets strut their stuff, and we get a sneak peek at the raucous parties in the aisles when all the lights go out at the bookstore! Illustrator Josée Bisailon's mixture of collage, drawings, and digital montage presents page after page of richly colored spreads filled with action and charm. Together, Salas and Bisailon deliver a unique collection brimming with ideas as much about adventure and imagination as they are about spines and dust jackets.



About the author:

Laura Purdie Salas set out to write a simple poem about books to submit for a poetry anthology. You can hardly blame her, since books and poems are two of her very favorite things! As she imagined the personality and voice of each part of a book, every book she read started whispering to her. The Beginning, Middle, and End bickered a lot like Laura's daughters. The Character who wanted to come to life for the reader begged just like Laura's beagle, Captain Jack Sparrow. And every book at the bookstore gossiped about the wild after-hours parties. So Laura got her laptop out and wrote. And wrote. And wrote. She got carried away and wrote an entire book's worth! And the result was *BookSpeak! Poems About Books*. Laura is the author of several other poetry and nonfiction books for children. She lives with her family in Minnesota, and you can learn more about her at laurasalas.com.

About the illustrator:

Josée Bisailon grew up in St-Hyacinthe, Québec, Canada. Rather than follow in her father's footsteps as a veterinary surgeon, she chose to cut animals from paper: they were colorful, low maintenance and always in fine health. You can visit her online at joseebisailon.com.

These questions and activities are aimed at 2nd-5th graders.

Pre-reading:

1. What are some parts of a book?
2. If you could be any part of a book, what part would you be? Why?
3. If you were the cover of your favorite book, what would you say to a person walking by?



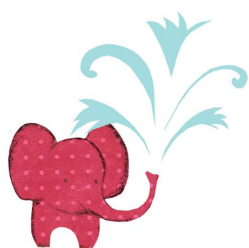
Reading suggestions:

1. For each poem, read the title out loud and then ask kids to predict what the poem might be about. Sometimes it's obvious, but sometimes it isn't.
2. If a poem is about or is written in the voice of a certain part of a book, gather a selection of books to show the different ways that book part can look. Show examples from picture books, novels, fiction, nonfiction, etc.
3. Choose 3 volunteers to read "The Middle's Lament." Each student gets one color of dialog bubbles. They read in order, following the bubbles down the page.
4. "This Is the Book" also works well for multiple readers. Each student can read one stanza.
5. Students learn a lot about poems by reading them aloud and trying different voices. Have several volunteers read "The Sky Is Falling." One could read it in an annoyed voice, another in a sweet voice, another in a panicked voice, etc.

Questions to consider:

1. Do you like to read? When and where are your favorite reading times? What are things you choose to do instead of read? How can a book be a friend?
2. Flocks of birds remind Laura of words on a page in "Skywriting." What do flocks of birds remind you of?
3. Do you think a story cares if you read it or not?
4. If you were a character in a book, what would you say to a reader? What would you promise in order to get someone to read about you?
5. Do you keep a diary or journal? Has anyone ever found it and read it?
6. Does it seem weird to feel sorry for the "perfect book" in "On the Shelf and Under the Bed"?

7. Why does the index think he's so cool? What can he do that no other part of the book does?
8. The poem "Paper Sky" is about how a tree's branches used to wave and "write" against the sky. Now the tree has been made into paper, and you can write on it! Do you ever write on things besides regular paper? What do you write on?
9. A cliffhanger ending is when an author ends a chapter (or sometimes a whole book!) with a character in big trouble. Do you like cliffhanger endings? Why or why not?
10. Do you ever fall asleep when you read? What do you do to your books that your books might be kind of annoyed with?
11. If the stories on your shelves could tiptoe out of the house, where do you think they would go? What kinds of adventures would they have?
12. Do you have book plates in any of your books? Do you like to keep books? Or would you rather borrow them from friends or the library?
13. The book in "Hydrophobic" says its biggest fear is water. What other things would a book be afraid of?
14. What things make you notice a book's cover? Do you like photographs or illustrations? Do you like glitter and shine? What's your favorite book cover?
15. How would you describe the pictures' personality in "Picture This"?
16. How can a conflict be good and bad at the same time? What's the conflict in a book or story you read recently?
17. In "The Middle's Lament," the three parts of the book have different personalities. Which part do you think you're most like? Why?



18. Did you know that so many different people are involved in getting a book to the shelf? And "This Is the Book" doesn't even include all of them! What is something you do that a lot of other people actually help with? Think about your sports, good grades, etc.
19. Can you tell which words in the poem "Lights Out at the Bookstore" are the titles of different sections in the bookstore? Where would you go if you could spend the night in a store?
20. Do you take books on vacation with you? Do you read magazines or library books or books on e-readers?
21. How do you feel at the very end of a good book? Some people want to know how a book ends before they get there—do you?

Projects:

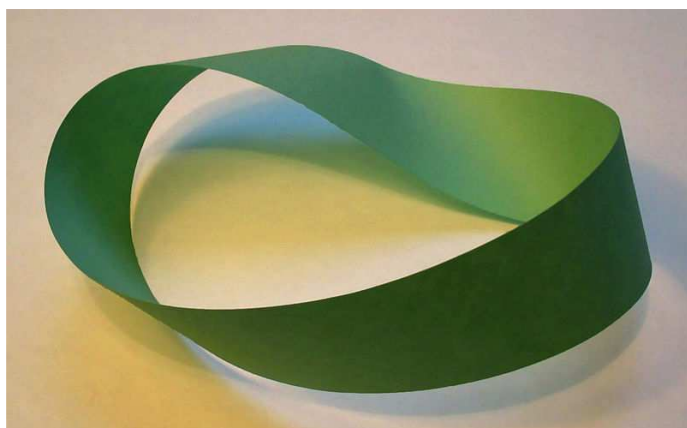
Language Arts: Think of the last story or book you read that you loved. Now imagine that you ARE one of the characters in that book. Write a poem using “I” in the voice of that character.

Art: Look at how the illustrator, Josée Bisailon, uses lots of words in her art. Take some old newspapers and magazines and cut out shapes. Use them to create a picture.

Science: Make a Möbius strip like the one in “The End.” Take a long strip of paper. Hold both ends. Make a half twist in the strip.



Tape the two ends together so that B and C overlap and A and D overlap. Congratulations! You’ve made a creation with one continuous side and one continuous edge.



Now make another one, but before you build it, write a poem about something that never ends on the strip of paper. Continue it on both sides of the strip. For an extra challenge, make the first word and the last word of the poem the same. Then tape it together for your infinite poem!

Reading: Practice reading the poems out loud. Give them personality and mood! Read loudly! BE the book!

MOST IMPORTANTLY, JUST READ AND TALK ABOUT THE POEMS. ASK QUESTIONS THAT HAVE NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWER AND ENCOURAGE KIDS TO FIND CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE POEMS AND THEIR OWN EXPERIENCES!