



A Nature Poet's Companion

A Charlotte Mason-inspired
guide to writing poetry
from the living world



Lynn Seddon

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*A Charlotte Mason-inspired guide
to writing poetry from the living world.*
by Lynn Seddon

*"We all have need to be trained to see, and to have our eyes opened
before we can take in the joy that is meant for us in this beautiful life."*

Charlotte Mason

For my beloved family.
I am forever blessed to live this life with you.

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Introduction:

Welcome to a Nature Poet's Companion

“A poem begins in delight and ends in wisdom.”

Robert Frost

Poetry belongs quite naturally in childhood, and long before a child knows the rules of verse, they know the pure joy of beautiful words woven together.

They enjoy the pleasure of repetition, the surprise of an unexpected comparison, the satisfaction of a rhyme, and the way a few carefully chosen words can suddenly help us to see something familiar in an entirely new way.

A Nature Poet's Companion has grown from the belief that poetry should first be heard and enjoyed, and before a child is ever asked to analyse how a poem works, they need time to listen, imagine, and respond to it. The child should hear beautiful poems read aloud, have the time to hear good language, copy it carefully, and allow its rhythms and images to become familiar, and belong to them. They need ample opportunities to go out of doors, to look closely at the living world, and realise that there is always something new to discover. Out of these rich experiences, their own words will naturally begin to bloom.

This guide is inspired by Charlotte Mason's understanding that children are born persons, capable of receiving rich ideas and worthy literature. Rather than reducing poetry to worksheets, comprehension exercises, or lists of literary devices to memorise, we will allow poetic ideas to arise first from living poems and real encounters with nature.

This is a very practical course; technical language is introduced gently, and only when it serves understanding.

The child first experiences an idea. Then comes the joy of discovering it for themselves. Finally, they are invited to experiment with it in their own writing.

Across twelve weeks and four seasons, the child will encounter imagery, colour, movement, sound, comparison, personification, active verbs, rhythm, rhyme, precise naming, accumulation, and poetic structure.

But these techniques are not the heart of the course; we are cultivating the deeper habit of attention, and a love for words, and the natural world.

How to Use this Guide

A Nature Poet's Companion contains twelve weeks of poetry study, divided into four seasonal chapters:

Autumn: Imagery as the Palette

Exploring sensory imagery, colour, and movement.

Winter: The Voice of Nature

Exploring sound imagery, simile and metaphor, and personification.

Spring: The Rhythm of Growth

Exploring active verbs, metre and cadence, and simple rhyme.

Summer: The Language of Abundance

Exploring precise nouns, accumulation, and the shaping of poems through lines, stanzas, and selection.

Each season contains three weeks of study.

You do *not* need to begin with Autumn, begin instead with whichever season you are currently in and work from there. Each seasonal chapter stands alone, and nothing assumes that the previous season has already been completed. If you eventually work through all four seasons, the child will experience a gentle progression of poetic ideas, but there is no need to wait for a particular month or starting point.

The Weekly Rhythm

Each week follows the same five-part rhythm, and the familiar pattern allows attention to remain on the poetry itself.

Day One: Feast on the Poem

The week begins with a carefully chosen poem to be read, heard, and enjoyed.

Read it aloud first for pleasure, without immediately explaining or analysing it. On a second reading, the child is gently invited to notice something connected with the week's focus: perhaps colour, movement, rhyme, rhythm, sound, comparison, or the way a poem is shaped on the page.

Day Two: Copywork & Word Treasury

The child returns to the poem and spends a little more time with its language.

A small Word Treasury explains any unfamiliar words that may otherwise prevent understanding, however, these are not vocabulary lists to be memorised, and a brief explanation is usually enough.

The child then copies a carefully chosen passage from the poem. Copywork should remain short and attentive, the aim here is the habit of looking carefully at excellent language and reproducing it accurately, rather than quantity.

A brief oral experiment may sometimes follow, allowing the child to play gently with the week's poetic idea.

Day Three: Nature Observation

Today we move from the book and into the living world.

Whenever possible, allow the child some free outdoor time before asking for focused observation, let them wander, play, explore, and become familiar with their surroundings first.

Then invite closer attention: the child may listen for sound, notice movement, gather colours, observe particular plants or animals, watch the effect of weather, or collect details connected with the week's focus.

The poetry journal may be used for a few words, phrases, or sketches, but observation always remains as the main work of the lesson.

If the child does not know the name of something, careful description is enough, and honestly, sometimes not knowing encourages us to look more closely rather than assuming that familiarity means we have already seen all there is to see.

Day Four: The Composition Prompt

Now the child draws upon the week's poem, conversations, and their nature observations to create something of their own. The composition prompts are structured enough to prevent the overwhelming instruction, "*Write a poem,*" whilst leaving plenty of room for the child's own voice.

The parent's role is to encourage, listen, ask helpful questions, and, when necessary, to act as a helpful scribe. We must always avoid supplying more sophisticated words simply to make the poem sound more poetic; If the child says something simply, let it remain theirs.

Original composition is not the time for correcting spelling, punctuation, handwriting, or grammar. If you notice something that needs attention, make a private note in your teacher's diary and return to it during a separate language lesson.

Day Five — Poetry Teatime, Illumination & Presentation

The week ends with celebration!

The child illuminates their poem with simple artwork and then shares it during Poetry Teatime. There is no need for anything elaborate at all; favourite drink, small treat, the poetry journal, and a little undivided attention are all that are required.

The child may read their own poem, or the parent may read it for them and we, practise specific admiration rather than correction.

Instead of:

“That was lovely.”

you might say:

“I could really picture the blackbird in that line.”

or:

“I loved the way you made the wind seem busy.”

or:

“That word helped me hear the rain.”

Let the poem be received as the gift that it is.

The Budding Poet & The Blossoming Poet

Each composition lesson contains two levels of guidance:

The Budding Poet (*Approx. Ages 6–8*)

The Budding Poet is encouraged to work primarily through oral composition while the parent acts as a helpful scribe.

At this age, their important work is noticing, imagining, choosing words, and learning that their thoughts can become poetry. Do not allow handwriting or spelling ability to limit what the child is able to express, however, if they would like to write independently, welcome that too.

The Blossoming Poet (*Approx. Ages 9–12+*)

The Blossoming Poet is offered more independence and slightly greater responsibility for choosing, shaping, arranging, and revising their work.

These age ranges are only a guide, as a ten-year-old who finds writing difficult may flourish with the Budding Poet instructions, whilst a confident eight-year-old may enjoy trying parts of the Blossoming Poet lesson.

Choose the level that allows the child to engage thoughtfully, and without unnecessary struggle.

The Poetry Journal & Materials

Each child will need a notebook or journal in whatever format they prefer.

Over time it will become a record of:

copywork

new words

nature observations

small sketches

first attempts

finished poems

illuminations

and the particular things the child has noticed through the seasons.

Please do not worry about making every page beautiful! Allow the journal to become an authentic record of a growing relationship with words and the living world.

The materials required are few:

a notebook or journal

pencils

coloured pencils or crayons

optional watercolours

supplies for Poetry Teatime

You do not need an idyllic woodland, a large garden, or uninterrupted countryside, as a local park, patch of grass, garden bird, puddle, weed growing through a wall, changing sky, or rain against a window can all become material for poetry.

The habit we are cultivating is not travelling somewhere spectacular but learning to notice where we already are.

A Thought for Your Journey

Children are instinctive naturalists and natural poets, having an enviable capacity for wonder that adults often must work quite hard to recapture. They notice the magic in an ordinary rock, the personality of an old oak tree, and the drama of a passing storm.

This book is simply a tool to help you to guide them as they capture that innate wonder and arrange it into words, and as you embark on this 12-week journey together, give your family the gift of time, allowing the outdoor observations to be joyous and unhurried, and allow the copywork and poetry writing to be exercises in beauty, not perfection.

Trust that as you feast on these living words together, your children's minds will naturally absorb the beauty of the natural world, and the music of language.

From my home to yours,
Lynn

Winter Week Three: Day One

Feast on the Poem



Frost, the Winter-Sprite
By Hannah Flagg Gould (1789–1865)
Selected Stanzas

*The Frost looked forth on a still, clear night,
And whispered, “Now I shall be out of sight;
So through the valley, and over the height
I’ll silently take my way.*

*I will not go on like that blustering train,
The wind and the snow, the hail and the rain,
That make so much bustle and noise in vain.
But I’ll be as busy as they!”*

*He flew up, and powdered the mountain’s crest;
He lit on the trees, and their boughs he drest
With diamonds and pearls;—and over the breast
Of the quivering Lake he spread
A bright coat of mail that it need not fear
The glittering point of many a spear
That he hung on its margin, far and near,
Where a rock was rearing its head.*

*He went to the windows of those who slept,
And over each pane, like a fairy crept;*

*Wherever he breathed—wherever he stepped—
Most beautiful things were seen
By morning's first light!—there flowers and trees,
With bevvies of birds, and swarms of bright bees;—
There were cities—temples, and towers; and these,
All pictured in silvery sheen!*

Notes for Parents:

At a Glance

This Week's Skill: Personification: treating an element of nature as though it has thoughts, actions, or character.

This Week's Poem: “Frost, the Winter-Sprite” by Hannah Flagg Gould (1789–1865)

This Week's Composition: A short personification poem in which the child imagines one winter element as a character.

You Will Need: Poetry journal, pencil, coloured pencils or crayons, optional watercolours, simple Poetry Teatime supplies.



Meet the Poet: Hannah Flagg Gould (1789–1865) was an American poet whose work often appeared in children's collections. Many of her poems give familiar parts of the natural world a lively, story-like quality, making them especially useful for young readers learning to notice character and action in nature.

Enter the Landscape: In this poem, Frost is not merely cold weather. Gould imagines Frost as a secretive winter sprite who moves silently through the landscape while everyone sleeps. He powders the mountains, dresses the trees, protects the lake with a shining coat of mail, and creeps across windowpanes leaving delicate pictures behind.

This Week's Focus: This week is all about Personification.

Personification happens when a poet writes about something non-human as though it has human actions, feelings, intentions, or personality. Gould gives Frost a character of his own. He looks out, whispers, travels, works busily, dresses the trees, creeps over the windows, and leaves mysterious beauty behind. This week, the child will learn to notice how poets can give the winter world a voice, a will, and a sense of character.

Gather your family together, and read the poem aloud with a sense of quiet mischief, as though Frost is slipping through the dark whilst the household sleeps. Before you begin, invite the child to listen for what Frost does; what actions make him seem like a character rather than simply a kind of weather?

Today is simply for receiving the poem as a feast, and there is no need to explain every image. Let the child enjoy the secret movement of Frost through the winter night, the sparkle of diamonds and pearls, and the strange delight of waking to find the windows covered in silvery pictures.

Feast on the Poem

Read Hannah Flagg Gould's "*Frost, the Winter-Sprite*" aloud once from beginning to end.

Allow the child to enjoy Frost as a character before discussing how Gould creates that effect.

On the second reading, invite the child to listen for the things Frost does.

You might say:

"This time, listen to Frost as though he were a character in a story. What does he do?"

Read the poem again.

The child may notice Frost travelling, decorating, touching, working, or behaving in ways that make him seem almost human.

Afterwards, ask:

“What kind of character does Frost seem to be?”

Perhaps the child thinks he is playful, busy, mischievous, beautiful, mysterious, or something entirely different.

You might then ask:

“What did Frost do in the poem that made you think that?”

There is no need to introduce the word *personification* immediately; let the child first experience the delight of nature being given character, intention, and personality.

The important discovery today is that a poet can sometimes make part of the natural world feel almost like a living character, with actions, moods, and a personality of its own.

The Living Thought: Charlotte Mason reminded us to offer the child living ideas rather than dry comprehension questions. Use this short prompt to spark wonder, conversation, and the child’s own relationship with the poem, rather than as a test of understanding:

“What kind of character does Frost seem to be in this poem: quiet, busy, mischievous, artistic, powerful, or something else?”

Summer Week One: Day Three

Nature Observation



Today, the child will step outside to notice *what is actually present* in one small part of their summer landscape.

This week's work is about precise nouns, but nature study should not become a naming test, our aim is to look closely enough to recognise the particular: not simply *a bird*, but perhaps *a blackbird*; not merely *a flower*, but *clover* or *foxglove*; not just *an insect*, but *a bumblebee*, and when the exact name is not known, careful description is enough.

A Note from Charlotte Mason

Allow time for free outdoor play and exploration first, giving the child time to become familiar with their surroundings before gathering for closer observation.

Then choose one small area to observe, rather than trying to survey everything at once. A patch of verge, the edge of a pond, a garden bed, a hedgerow, the ground beneath a tree, or even a few square metres of grass can hold plenty to see.

Take the poetry journal and a pencil with you, but keep observation as the main work of the lesson.

The Invitation

In "*June Sunset*," Sarojini Naidu fills her landscape with particular names: *quail, bulbul, tamarisk, gentian, fawns, bees, pipal-trees*.

Today, invite the child to make a short collection of names from their own summer landscape.

"What can we find here?"

Give the child time to look and explore.

They might notice:

a daisy
a blackbird
a sycamore seed
a snail shell
a bumblebee
a clover flower
a feather
a hawthorn leaf
a beetle
a grass seed head

There is no need to gather a great number, five or six carefully noticed things are plenty.

Three Ways of Naming

As the child looks, encourage three kinds of naming.

1. Something You Know

Choose one living thing the child can name confidently.

Perhaps:

daisy

oak

robin

buttercup

Look closely and notice the features that help you to recognise it:

What colour is it?

What shape are its leaves or petals?

Where is it growing or moving?

The name becomes so much richer when it is joined to close observation.

2. Something You Can Name More Precisely

Find something the child might first describe in more general terms.

Perhaps they say:

"There's a bird."

Look again.

Can they tell whether it is a blackbird, sparrow, pigeon, swallow, or something else?

Or perhaps:

“There’s a flower.”

Can it become:

daisy

clover

poppy

foxglove

Don’t rush to supply the answer, give the child ample time to notice first.

3. Something You Do Not Know

Now find one thing whose exact name is unfamiliar.

Instead of guessing, describe it carefully:

a tiny red beetle with black spots

a tall grass with purple seed heads

a small brown bird with a pale chest

If curiosity remains after the observation, the child may choose to identify it later with a field guide or other reference. Not knowing the name of something is not a failure of nature study, as in fact, unfamiliarity can sharpen attention, and avoid making assumptions: when we think we already know what something is, we can easily stop looking closely. Sometimes a nameless flower, bird, or beetle invites the child to notice more carefully before deciding what it is.

In the Poetry Journal

Invite the child to make a short *Summer Naming List*.

It might look like:

I noticed:

blackbird
white clover
bumblebee
sycamore seed
snail shell
a small blue flower I do not know

The child may add a sketch, colour note, or any descriptive details beside any item that especially caught their attention.

For example:

bumblebee - yellow pollen on its legs
clover - pale pink at the tips
sycamore seed - turning in the breeze

Look Again Before Naming

Before leaving the spot, choose one item from the list and look at it for another moment.

Ask:

“What do you notice now that you did not notice at first?”

Perhaps the child sees a stripe on the bee, a ragged edge on a leaf, a colour hidden beneath a petal, or the way a seed head bends differently from the grass around it. Precise language begins with precise attention.

Today, the child has begun building a summer vocabulary from the living world itself: looking closely, naming accurately, and allowing the particular details of a place to remain specific.

Tomorrow, these gathered names will become the raw material for a summer poem.

Summer Week One: Day Four

The Composition Prompt



Today, the child will return to yesterday's *Summer Naming List* and begin forming those observations into a poem.

Open the poetry journal and look again at the particular things the child noticed: perhaps a blackbird, clover, a bumblebee, a sycamore seed, a shell, a grass head, or a flower whose name is still unknown.

Sarojini Naidu's "*June Sunset*" feels so rich because she does not write vaguely about "nature", but she names what belongs to the landscape around her, and today, the child will do the same.

The aim is not to fit as many nouns as possible into one poem, but to choose a few precise, well-observed things and let them create a clear sense of place.

The Budding Poet (Approx. Ages 6–8)

Today's composition may be entirely oral, and you will act as the child's helpful scribe, allowing attention and language to take the lead.

1. Choose Three Summer Treasures

Look back at yesterday's list and invite the child to choose three things that they particularly remember.

Ask:

"Which three things from yesterday's nature observation do you remember most clearly, and would you like to include in your poem?"

For example:

blackbird

clover

bumblebee

Or:

puddle
sycamore seed
tall grass

Allow the child to choose freely, and don't worry, there is no need to select the most unusual items.

2. Say What Is There

Begin with very simple statements.

Perhaps:

"There was a blackbird."

"There was clover."

"There was a bee."

Now return to yesterday's observation and ask one question about each:

"Where was the blackbird?"

"What colour was the clover?"

"What was the bee doing?"

The child might say:

"A blackbird sat on the fence."

"Pink clover grew in the grass."

"A bumblebee crawled over the flowers."

These are already the beginnings of a poem.

3. Build a Short Naming Poem

Now help the child to turn their three chosen observations into lines, taking them one at a time.

Start with the first thing the child chose and ask:

"What would you like to say about it?"

If the child says:

"A blackbird."

gently ask:

“Where was the blackbird?”

or

“What was the blackbird doing?”

The child might answer:

“The blackbird sat on the fence.”

Write that down as the first line, then move to the second thing:

“What did you notice about the clover?”

Perhaps the child says:

“It was pink and growing in the grass.”

Repeat their words back to them:

“You said, ‘It was pink and growing in the grass.’ Would you like to keep it just like that, or shall we try starting with pink clover?”

The child might choose:

Pink clover grew in the grass.

Or they may prefer their first words:

It was pink and growing in the grass.

Either is perfectly acceptable, as the important thing is that the child chooses the wording. Your role is to help them hear the possibilities, not to rewrite the line for them.

Then repeat the same process for the third observation.

For example:

A bumblebee crawled through the flowers.

If the child wants to add a fourth detail, you may do so:

A sycamore seed spun past my feet.

Once you have gathered the lines, read them aloud in order.

You might ask:

“Does this sound like the place that you remember?”

If the child wants to change the order, then allow them to do so. Perhaps the poem feels better beginning with the ground, then moving upward; or perhaps they prefer to begin with the thing they noticed first.

A finished poem might look like:

A blackbird sat on the fence.

Pink clover grew in the grass.

A bumblebee crawled through the flowers.

A sycamore seed spun past my feet.

Or the child might prefer a repeated opening:

I found a daisy by the path,

A snail beneath a leaf,

A feather beside the gate,

And one blue flower I did not know.

There is no requirement for rhyme or a particular rhythm as the purpose today is to help the child to build a poem from *real things that they noticed and named carefully*.

The important sequence is:

choose one thing → say something accurate about it → write the line → move to the next thing.

That makes the task very concrete and should help you in supporting the child.

The Blossoming Poet (Approx. Ages 9–12+)

Today, the child will use yesterday’s nature observations to create a short summer poem built from carefully chosen, precisely named details.

The aim is not to include everything that they noticed, but instead, the child will select a few details from one specific area and use them to give the reader a clear sense of that particular place.

1. Choose One Summer Scene

Return to yesterday's nature notes and choose one small area that the child observed closely.

Perhaps:

- *beside a hedge*
- *beneath a tree*
- *near a pond*
- *along a garden path*
- *in a patch of long grass*
- *beside a stream*

Now ask the child to choose four or five details from that place that they remember most clearly.

For example:

Beside the hedge

hawthorn

blackbird

white clover

bumblebees

sycamore seeds

Or:

Beside the pond

reeds

duckweed

dragonfly

water snail

willow

Ask:

"Which details help you to remember this place most clearly?"

There is no need to choose the most unusual things, as ordinary details, carefully noticed, are perfectly valid.

2. Look Again at the Names

Before beginning the poem, look at the child's chosen words.

Ask:

"Can any of these be named more precisely?"

Perhaps *bird* can become *blackbird*.

Perhaps *flower* can become *clover*.

Perhaps *tree* can become *hawthorn*.

However, do not force greater precision than the observation supports. If the child does not know the exact species, a truthful description such as *a small brown moth* is better than an uncertain identification.

The aim is not to use impressive vocabulary, but to name what was actually there as clearly as possible.

3. Create a "Summer Scene" Poem

The child will now turn those chosen observations into a short poem, working through the details one at a time.

Choose the first observation and ask:

"What do you remember about this?"

Then follow with a simple question if needed:

"What was it doing?"

"Where was it?"

"What did you notice most clearly?"

"How would you say that in one line?"

Allow the child to offer their own words first, and if they are unsure, help them by returning to what they actually saw rather than suggesting a more poetic phrase.

Suppose the child has written:

blackbird - inside the hawthorn

They might first say:

"There was a blackbird in the hawthorn."

Read their words back to them.

You might then ask:

“Would you like to keep that line as it is, or would you like to make the action or place a little clearer?”

The child might decide on:

A blackbird hid among the hawthorn.

Or they may prefer their first wording. Either is perfectly acceptable.

Move to the next observation and repeat the process.

For example:

bumblebees - bramble flowers

The child might say:

“Two bumblebees were on the bramble flowers.”

After hearing the line aloud, they might choose to keep it, or change it to:

Two bumblebees visited the bramble flowers.

Continue until the child has created their lines.

A finished poem might look like:

*Along the hedge,
white clover grows underfoot,
a blackbird hides among the hawthorn,
two bumblebees visit the bramble flowers,
and sycamore seeds turn through the air.*

Or:

*Beside the pond,
reeds stand in the shallows,
duckweed covers the still water,
a blue dragonfly passes above the bank,
and one water snail moves slowly over a stone.*

The lines do not need to begin in the same way, and there is no need for rhyme or a particular rhythm. This week, the important work is careful observation and precise naming.

4. Choose What Belongs in the Poem

Once several lines have been written, read the whole poem aloud.

Ask:

“Which details help us see this place most clearly?”

The child may decide that every line belongs, or they may find that one detail feels unnecessary, that two lines are doing almost the same job, or that the poem would be clearer if the order changed. Let the child decide, as this is an important part of composition: discovering that a poet does not have to include everything they noticed.

5. Read for a Sense of Place

Read the finished poem aloud once more.

Ask:

“Could someone who was not there begin to picture this place?”

If one line feels too general, the child may return to the nature notes and look for a more precise noun or one observed detail, as always, any changes should remain the child’s choice. Avoid supplying more elaborate vocabulary simply to make the poem sound more poetic, as the parent’s role is to prompt, listen, read the child’s words back, and help them return to what they actually observed.

Once the child is satisfied, close the journal there.

Avoid correcting spelling, punctuation, or handwriting during original composition. Those matters can be noted quietly in the Teacher’s Diary and returned to separately. Today’s work has been about learning that a poem can become vivid and rooted in place simply by looking closely, naming carefully, and choosing which details to keep.

Thank you for downloading this sample.

If you would like to keep in touch, I can be found at the following places:

The Raising Little Shoots community Facebook group
We have a thriving and encouraging community who will support you on your journey

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/294271207955449/>

My website:

<https://raisinglittleshoots.com>

My Instagram:

<https://www.instagram.com/raisinglittleshoots/>

