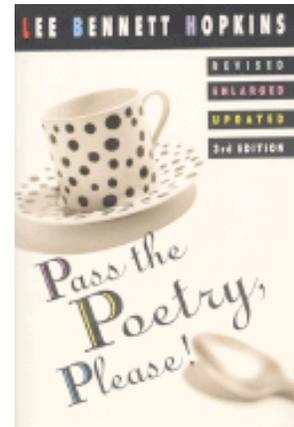


Poems and Picture Books for the Very Young

An interview with author *Marion Dane Bauer*

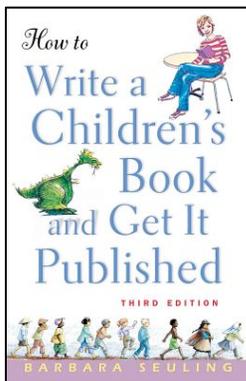
“... a fine poem
combines the elements of
measuring music,
with a form like a
living frame
that holds
it all together.” (31)

Arnold Adoff, *Pass the Poetry, Please*



In books for the young, it is often the picture book that forms the frame upon which the child is introduced to poetry. Lullabies for the youngest “reader” and concept books for the toddler and preschool child frequently serve as the child’s first introduction to the sense and song of story.

“First books,” writes Barbara Seuling, in *How to Write a Children’s Book and Get it Published*, “are probably heard more than seen, as they are read to the baby over and over again, often crooned at bedtime for a soothing transition into sleep. Many of these come from the oral tradition of nursery rhymes, lullabies, and simple lap games shared between reader and baby.” (11)



Lee Bennett Hopkins in *Pass the Poetry, Please* adds to these thoughts when he writes about the influence Mother Goose rhymes have had on generations of young children:

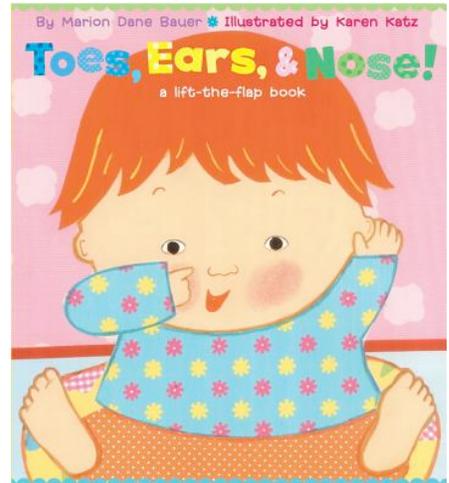
The powerful rhythm and highly imaginative, action- filled use of words, the wit, ideas and compact structure of the rhymes, aid children in developing a lifelong interest and appreciation of verse. (206)

As Seuling and Hopkins have suggested, poetic qualities are essential to the effect lullaby books have on the young child. The *music* of the lullaby--rhythm, rhyme, and repetition--must communicate the mood of story characters and lull the child to sleep. The *meaning* of the lullaby must reflect the bond between the adult reader and the child listener. In this way the lullaby eases the child into sleep in an atmosphere of safety.

Dianne White

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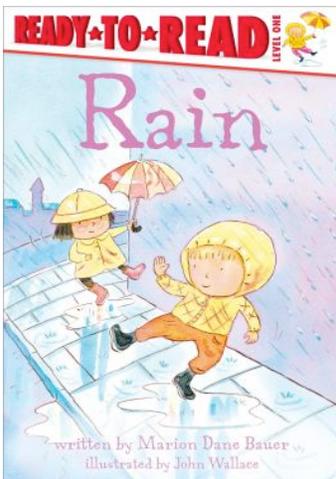
Marion Dane Bauer is one of those rare authors who write across genres, from lullabies for the very young, to picture books, non-fiction easy reads to middle grade and YA. She is an award-winning author, and an intuitive and sensitive teacher.



In this interview from 2008, Marion talks about the process of writing for the very young:

Dianne: Poetry and poetic language infuse all of your work – from lullaby books such as *Sleep, Little One*, *Sleep* and *Toes, Ears, and Nose* to picture books like *Why do Kittens Purr?* to your EZ read collection about weather. How has poetry/poetic prose influenced the types of books you create?

Marion: In all of my writing, for whatever audience, I concentrate on the sound of the language, sounding it in my ear as I write, but, of course, I pay particular attention to the read-aloud sound of picture books. In fact, I can't begin writing any kind of piece, but especially a picture book, until I first find the rhythm of it in my head.

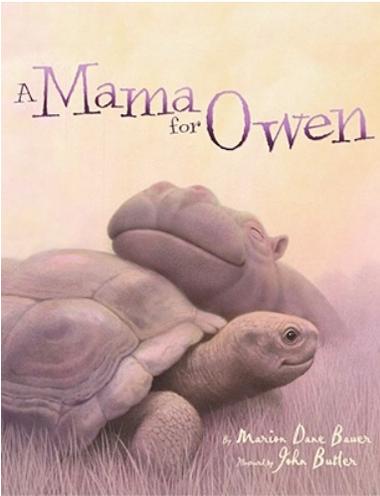


Dianne: What do you do to nourish the poet within?

Marion: One of the things I do is to read poetry myself, especially just before bed. Even though a poem may slip away as soon as I turn the page or put it down, I believe the sound of it, the significance of it impresses itself on the brain, gives me an inner sense for how things should sound and what words can mean.

Dianne: It's been said by some poets that the basics of poetry must be "planted" in ones' bones. Do you feel your work comes intuitively or is there something particular to your process that allows you to continue to create poetry?

Dianne White
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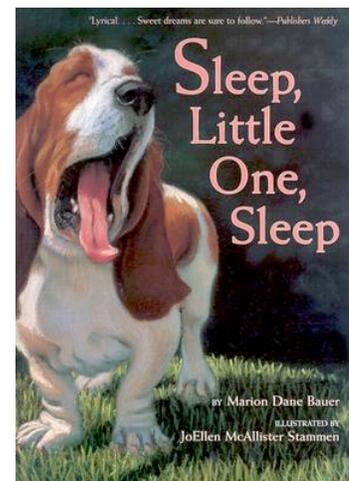
Marion: I think much of it does come intuitively. I seem to have been born loving language—and story—in a family that loved neither. My family was articulate and educated, but no one but me had any special appreciation for language and literature. In fact, my father, who was a brilliant man but a concrete thinker, a chemist, couldn't figure out how a person could *study* literature in college. He asked what there was to study once you had the story. I do believe, though, that no one's intuition is enough. We have to build our sense of language, of poetry, of literature through constant reading and appreciating, inside and outside the realm of the genre in which we write.

Dianne: What suggestions can you offer the writer who would like to grow the poetic side of his/her prose?

Marion: Read poetry. Read, read, read. Write poetry, too. And read prose masters whose language sings. Look for writers whose rhythms and underlying meanings somehow propel you back to your own work.

Dianne: You've written a number of lullaby books. Can you speak to the unique structure and voice of the lullaby and the significance of these books for the youngest "reader?"

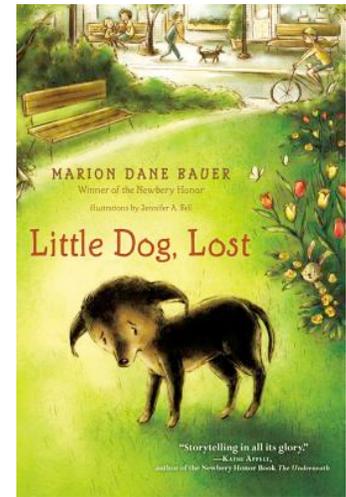
Marion: Lullabies have to speak to two audiences, the adult reader and the young listener, both in terms of meaning and of language. Ideally, the book strengthens the bond between the two, simply by being shared and, one can hope, loved. As to structure, even a lullaby should be moving toward a payoff for the young listener. The payoff may be nothing more than a contented, sleepy feeling. Or it may be circling back from the larger world out there to the small intense world of the child's own self. Or it may be coming back to the utter certainty of being loved. But the end of the lullaby needs to draw everything together into a quiet, all-right place that satisfies the young listener, a place the young listener will want to return to again and again.



Dianne White
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Dianne: Do you find yourself drawn to a particular genre? How does the influence of poetic language and rhythm spill into your writing?

Marion: What I find myself drawn to at this time in my career is variety. When I've finished writing something very short, I love turning to the entirely different rhythm and different sensibility of something long, when I've been working hard on fiction, the just-the-facts-ma'am satisfaction of nonfiction is strong. What I don't want to do is to begin to repeat myself. At every level and in every kind of work, fiction and nonfiction, for a very young listening audience or for first readers or for young adults, I love to hear the sound of the words, to feel the flow, to allow the meaning to rise up through the words without being stated. In that sense I'm always writing poetry, whatever the final product may be.



To learn more about Marion and her books, visit her website at www.mariondanebauer.com.