

A Letter to Teachers

Dear teachers,

The goal of the Mississippi Poetry Project is to help students experience the joy and accomplishment that can come from writing poetry, and from sharing their own voices, words, and experiences. The first two years of the Mississippi Poetry Project saw students from all across the state writing incredible poems about where they live and who they are. This year, we invite students to write about what they hope for the future.

Along with this letter, you'll find the poem prompt and tips for you to share with your students. We know that days are tightly scheduled, and our hope is that this project can be done in whatever way best fits your class: in as little as 30 minutes on one day or, if time allows, spread out over multiple days; as a standalone activity or as part of an existing lesson plan. Most importantly, we hope that this project will provide a joyful and creative outlet for students and teachers alike.

As you work on this project with your students, please feel free to share updates on social media with the hashtag #mspoetryproject, and to look for creative ways to celebrate the work your students are doing! Poetry displays, in-class writing “parties,” and readings where everyone shares their work are just a few possible ways to have fun and build community around poetry (we’ve included some more ideas, too).

Poetry is for everyone. There’s no wrong way to write a poem, and words can be a tremendous source of delight, play, and comfort. Thank you so much for your help in making this initiative a success, and for all you do in helping to bring the joy of writing to your students.

With deep thanks,



CATHERINE PIERCE

Poet Laureate of Mississippi



Poem Prompt

Poems offer us a chance to express ourselves--to share who we are, where we're from, and what we think. Sometimes poems also help us to figure out some important things, and that's what this year's Mississippi Poetry Project is about.

For this year's poem prompt, you'll think about your dreams and wishes. What do you hope your future will look like? What do you dream for the world, or for Mississippi, or for your own backyard?

Poems are most powerful when they're specific. In the poem you write, be as specific as you can. For example, instead of saying "I want to be happy," you might write, "Someday I want to own three Great Danes and a pink house on the Gulf." Instead of writing, "I want to be successful," you might write, "I want to be a marine biologist" (or a chicken farmer, a brain surgeon, a YouTuber, etc.). Think about YOUR dreams (which might be very different from someone else's).

Think as small ("I want to eat a perfect red strawberry") or as big ("I want to be the first person to live on Mars") as you want. Feel free to write about both the possible ("I want to learn to play the piano") and the not-so-possible ("I want to be able to breathe underwater and talk to dolphins").

Don't forget to give your poem a title. You might call it something straightforward, like "What I Want" or "[Your Name's] Dreams," or something else entirely--it's up to you!

Here's a short example:

Dreams

What I want is to pet every dog in the world.
To invent a new color.
To catch a hundred-pound catfish.
I want to spend an entire day eating chocolate cake.
I want to go to the beach with my grandmother,
and be a zookeeper, and fly,
and keep every person safe.
I want to travel into space
and look back at the glowing
blue marble of Earth.



Timeline

Overview:

The Mississippi Poetry Project is a **statewide poetry initiative for students in grades K-12**. All students across Mississippi are invited to participate. Each participating school will select three winning poems per grade, which will be sent on to the statewide competition. All schoolwide winners will have their winning poems published in a contest anthology and be invited to attend the Mississippi Young Writers Poetry Festival in April.

Timeline:

1. **During the fall, students will write poems using the attached “Dreams and Wishes” prompt.** There is no minimum length; poems should be no more than 30 lines.
2. **By December 10, schools will select three winning poems per each grade.** There is no official contest rubric, but judges (selected by each school) should consider the poem’s use of specific detail and overall creativity/originality. Each of these schoolwide winners will have their poem published in the contest anthology.

Winning poems should be emailed to mypoetryproject@gmail.com by December 10.

Requirements for submission:

- Each poem should include a title and the author’s name below the title.
 - Each poem should be submitted as an individual Word doc (feel free to send multiple files in one email).
 - Each poem should be saved as [Grade Number]_[School]_[Student’s Last Name]. For example: 5_South Elem_Johnson.
3. The winning poems from each school will be entered into the statewide poetry contest. **Statewide winners will be announced by February 7, 2025, and will be invited to give a reading of their winning work at the April festival.**



Some ways to share and celebrate students' creative work:

Poetry Display

A poetry display is a great way to help students feel pride in the work they've done. Choose a section of the classroom or the hallway and hang your class's poems up for all to read and enjoy.

Poetry Readings

Listening to poetry really helps it come alive. Invite students to share their work out loud (and encourage the rest of the class to clap when each poet is done reading).

In-class Poetry Parties

There's something wonderful about writing in a community with others. Turn this project into a community-building exercise by making writing a festive experience--depending on students' ages, anything from snacks to colorful markers to the opportunity to sit in groups or outside can help students experience writing as something exciting.

School-Wide Sharing

Invite students to share their poems during morning announcements--a way to start the day by celebrating student creativity!

Social Media

If your school or class has a social media profile, share the work you and your students are doing with the hashtag #mspoetryproject.

Have other ideas for ways to celebrate your students' poems? Let us know at mspoetryproject@gmail.com!

