For Maxwell
M.H.

For my parents,
Rosemary and Terry Bolongaro,
and my much-missed
mother-in-law, Teresa Peacock.
All my love
L.P.

A WHALE OF A TIME



selected by
Lou Peacock

illustrated by
Matt Hunt

A Whale of a Time gathers poems from all over the world. Regional spellings and usage have been retained in order to preserve the integrity of the originals.

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INTRODUCTION

Hello!

Thank you for picking up this book. Before you do anything else, can I ask you to turn a few pages and read the poem on page 14? It's by Rita Dove and it's called "The First Book". Then, when you've read it, come back . . .

Hello again. What did you think? Did you see the big, bright ray of sun shining through the darkness? The amazement on the boy's face as the book opens? Now, you might say it's not an obviously "funny ha-ha" poem and I'd probably agree. But I love it because of what Rita Dove cleverly calls the "tingle". She's talking about the way words touch us, so much so that we sometimes respond in a physical way. And that's the wonderful thing about stories and poems—they make us feel things and, somehow, that can change us. What if the first poem you ever read made you laugh and maybe, just maybe, made you want to read another one? Wouldn't that be wonderful?

So "The First Book" is the first poem in this book because reading and feeling and laughing and sharing are what the funny, sad, surprising, beautiful world of words is all about. No matter where you read a poem—sun-drowsy in the garden or as you travel on a train—the words have the power to touch you. Not just what they say and what they mean (and, by the way, you don't always have to understand a poem word by word to get that magic tingle) but how they're arranged too. In a poem, the arrangements of words create lovely melodies through rhythm and rhyme or free verse. They might be slow, soft and soothing, like a lullaby, or quick-march to get your heart racing. And a really funny poem might give you the giggles.

But for me, the real beauty of all these feelings is that you can't easily keep them to yourself. You want to share, to make others feel this amazing, brilliant thing too. And a funny poem? Well, just like jokes —have you heard the one about?—they're made for sharing. When I was working on this collection, I remembered the time I took my son to a Christmas party when he was little. He was the only child there, but he had a little book of Christmas jokes and he read us all his favourites, finding a way to join in with the grown-ups by making everyone laugh. And isn't the gift of laughter a present we all want to give?

Of course, humour is a very individual thing. What makes one person laugh might leave another cold. So, I've done my best to find poems to tickle all sorts of readers. There are slapstick silly poems and tongue-twisters to get tangled in and nonsense poems full of riddles. Some poems are cleverly funny, and some are joyous and uplifting. Some might just make your lips twitch or raise a wry smile, while others might make you laugh out loud. There are poems about poems and poems about poets. Perhaps one of my favourites is Willard R. Espy's brilliant poem about the possibilities of mistaken punctuation on a notice at a swimming pool on page 180—look what happens when a full stop is placed just there! From socks to spaniels, eggs to elephants, there are all sorts of poems about all sorts of things. I hope you find lots that will make you laugh and lots you want to share.

And I'm sure you'll want to share the pictures too. As a picture book publisher, I often say that words only tell half the story, with the artwork completing it. It's the same in this book. Every time you turn the page you'll come to a new "story", where the group of poems has been selected because they share similar content or a mood or tone or feeling. Then Matt, the artist, has worked his magic—bringing his own brilliantly unique and quirky view of the world to every page. I love the library full of flying books on pages 128 and 129. I love Horace the monster who isn't monsterish at all on page 131. And I really, really love Matt's graphic design of the literary cats on pages 136 and 137, and how it makes us think about what cats are trying to say. A poem can take us somewhere unexpected and pictures can too.

At the beginning of this introduction, I talked about how poems can transform us. I hope in this collection you'll find poems you love, poems that bring you joy and laughter, and poems you want to share. I hope you have a whale of a time reading them all. One thing's for sure, as another brilliant poet, Tony Mitton, says on page 226, "you'll never be the same again".

Lou Peacock (aka Louise Bolongaro)
Anthologist and Publishing Director of Picture Books at Nosy Crow



1st

THERE WAS AN OLD MAN WITH A NOSE

There was an Old Man with a nose,
Who said, "If you choose to suppose
That my nose is too long,
You are certainly wrong!"
That remarkable Man with a nose.

Edward Lear

2nd

THERE WAS AN OLD MAN WITH A BEARD

There was an Old Man with a beard,
Who said, "It is just as I feared!
Two Owls and a Hen, four Larks and a Wren
Have all built their nests in my beard."

Edward Lear

3rd

NOSES

Nobody knows why noses grow to varying degrees,
so I suppose nobody knows why one grew big on me!

Coral Rumble





4th

WHO'S THERE?

If you hear a dinosaur
Knocking loudly on your door,
Through the keyhole firmly say,
"Nobody is home today."
If the bell should start to ring,
Tell the beast, "No visiting."
If you see there's more than one,
Turn around and start to run.

Max Fatchen

5th

HOW THE DINOSAUR GOT HERE

"Daddy, what's a dinosaur?"
Said my daughter Jane.
"The dinosaur was a giant beast
That will never be seen again."

"Where did they all come from?"
"Now that I cannot say."
And at this information
She turned and walked away.

She must have thought about it,
For later that afternoon
She said to me, "I know! I know!
They all come from the moon!"

"If that is true, my daughter,
Would you, pray, please tell
Exactly how they got here."
She said, "Of course—they fell!"

Spike Milligan

MARCH



6th

THE JUMBLIES
(EXTRACT)

They went to sea in a Sieve, they did,
In a Sieve they went to sea:
In spite of all their friends could say,
On a winter's morn, on a stormy day,
In a Sieve they went to sea!
And when the Sieve turned round and round,
And everyone cried, "You'll all be drowned!"
They called aloud, "Our sieve ain't big,
But we don't care a button! We don't care a fig!
In a Sieve we'll go to sea!"
Far and few, far and few,
Are the lands where the Jumblies live;
Their heads are green, and their hands are blue,
And they went to sea in a Sieve.

Edward Lear