Helping your children choose books they will love

I reading

Lovereading4kids.co.uk is a book website created for parents and children to make choosing books easy and fun

opening extract from

New and Collected Poems for Children

written by

Carol Ann Duffy

published by

Faber Children's Books

All text is copyright © of the Author and/or the Illustrator

please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk



First published in 2009
by Faber and Faber Limited
Bloomsbury House, 77–79 Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3DA

Design by Mandy Norman
Printed in England by TJ International Ltd, Padstow, Cornwall

All rights reserved
Poems © Carol Ann Duffy, 1999, 2000, 2003, 2007, 2009
Illustrations © Alice Stevenson, 2009

The right of Carol Ann Duffy to be identified as author of this work, and Alice Stevenson as illustrator of this work, has been asserted in accordance with Section 77 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988

A CIP record for this book
is available from the British Library

ISBN 9–780–571–21968–1

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1



The Words of Poems

The words of poems are nails
which tack the wind to a page,
so that the gone hour
when your kite pulled you over the field
blows in your hair.

They're hand-mirrors, a poem's words,
holding the wept tears on your face,
like a purse holds small change, or the breath
that said things.

They're fishing-nets,
scooping sprats and tiddlers out of a stream
or the gleaming trout that startled the air
when you threw it back. The words of poems

are stars, dot-to-dots of the Great Bear,
the Milky Way your telescope caught; or breves
filled with the light of the full moon you saw
from your bedroom window; or little flames
like the tongues of Hallowe'en candles.

The words of poems are spells, dropping
like pennies into a wishing-well, remember
the far splash? They're sparklers,
scrawling their silver loops and hoops
on the night, again in your gloved fist
on November the Fifth.

They're goldfish
in their sad plastic bags at the fair,
you stood there. The words of poems
are coins in a poor man's hat; the claws of a lost cat.
The words of poems are who you were.



Meeting Midnight

I met Midnight.
Her eyes were sparkling pavements after frost.
She wore a full-length, dark-blue raincoat with a hood.
She winked. She smoked a small cheroot.

I followed her.
Her walk was more a shuffle, more a dance.
She took the path to the river, down she went.
On Midnight's scent,
I heard the twelve cool syllables, her name,
chime from the town.
When those bells stopped,

Midnight paused by the water's edge.
She waited there.
I saw a girl in purple on the bridge.
It was One o'Clock.
Hurry, Midnight said. *It's late, it's late.*
I saw them run together.
Midnight wept.
They kissed full on the lips
and then I slept.

The next day I bumped into Half-Past Four.
He was a bore.



Late

She was eight. She was out late.
She bounced a tennis ball homewards before her
in the last of the light.
She'd been warned. She'd been told. It grew cold.
She took a shortcut through the churchyard.
She was a small child
making her way home. She was quite brave.
She fell into an open grave.

It was deep. It was damp. It smelled strange.
Help, she cried, *Help, it's Me!* She shouted
her own name.
Nobody came.
The churchbells tolled sadly. Shame. Shame.

She froze. She had a blue nose.
She clapped her hands.
She stamped her feet in soft, slip-away soil.
She hugged herself. Her breath was a ghost
floating up from a grave.
Then she prayed.

But only the moon stared down
with its callous face.
Only the spiteful stars sniggered, far out in space.
Only the gathering clouds
threw down a clap of thunder
like an ace.
And her, she was eight, going on nine.
She was late.



Lies

I like to go out for the day and tell lies.
The day should be overcast
with a kind of purple, electric edge to the clouds;
and not too hot or cold,
but cool.
I turn up the collar of my coat
and narrow my eyes.

I meet someone –
a girl from school perhaps –
I like them shy.
Then I start to lie
as we walk along Tennyson Drive kicking a can.
She listens hard,
her split strawberry mouth moist and mute;
my weasel words
sparking the little lights in her spectacles.
At the corner of Coleridge Place
I watch her run,
thrilled, fast, chasing her breath,
home to her mum.

Bus-stops I like,
with long, bored, footsore, moaning queues.
I lie to them
in my shrill, confident voice,
till the number 8 or 11 takes them away
and I stand and stare at the bend in Longfellow Road,
alone in the day.

At the end of the darkening afternoon
I head for home,
watching the lights turn on in truthful rooms
where mothers come and go
with plates of cakes,
and TV sets shuffle their bright cartoons.
Then I knock on the door of 21 Wordsworth Way,
and while I wait
I watch a spaceship zoom away overhead
and see the faint half-smile of the distant moon.
They let me in.
And who, they want to know, do I think I am?
Exactly where have I been? With whom? And why?
The thing with me –
I like to come home after a long day out
and lie.



Prior Knowledge

Prior Knowledge was a strange boy.
He had sad green eyes.
He always seemed to know when I was telling lies.

We were friends for a summer.
Prior got out his knife
and mixed our bloods so we'd be brothers for life.



You'll be rich, he said, and famous;
but I must die.
Then brave, clever Prior began to cry.

He knew so much.
He knew the day before
I'd drop a jamjar full of frogspawn on the kitchen floor.

He knew there were wasps
in the gardening gloves.
He knew the name of the girl I'd grow up to love.



The day he died
he knew there would be
a wind shaking conkers from the horse-chestnut tree;



and an aimless child
singing down Prior's street,
with bright red sandals on her skipping feet.



Know All

I know something you don't know.
I know what you mean.
I know what's going on round here.
I know what I've seen.
I know the score.
I know a lot more
than folk give me credit for.
I know what's what.
I know a lot.
I know all that.

I know the lay of the land.
I know it like I know
the back of my own hand.
I know enough.
I know my stuff.
I know what you're saying.
I know which way the wind
is blowing.
I know what to do.
I know who's who.

I know the ropes.
I know the ins and outs.
I know my onions.
I know what folk are on about.
I know beyond a shadow of a doubt –

I DON'T KNOW NOWT.



The Oldest Girl in the World

Children, I remember how I could hear
with my soft young ears
the tiny sounds of the air –
tinkles and chimes
like minuscule bells
ringing continually there;
clinks and chinks
like glasses of sparky gooseberry wine,
jolly and glinting and raised in the air.
Yes, I could hear like a bat. And how!
Can't hear a sniff of it now.

Truly, believe me, I could all the time see
every insect that crawled in a bush,
every bird that hid in a tree,
individually.
If I wanted to catch a caterpillar
to keep as a pet in a box
I had only to watch a cabbage
and there it would be,
crawling bendy and green towards me.
Yes, I could see with the eyes of a cat. Miaow!
Can't see a sniff of it now.

And my sense of taste was second to none.
By God, the amount I knew with my tongue!
The shrewd taste of a walnut's brain.
The taste of a train from a bridge.
Of a kiss. Of air chewy with midge.
Of fudge from a factory two miles away
from the house where I lived.
I'd stick out my tongue
to savour the sky in a droplet of rain.
Yes, I could taste like the fang of a snake. Wow!
Can't taste a sniff of it now.

On the scent, what couldn't I smell
with my delicate nose, my nostrils of pearl?
I could smell the world!
Snow. Soot. Soil.
Satsumas snug in their Christmas sock.
The ink of a pen.
The stink of an elephant's skin.
The blue broth of a swimming-pool. Dive in!
The showbizzy gasp of the wind.
Yes, I could smell like a copper's dog. Bow-wow!
Can't smell a sniff of it now.

As for my sense of touch
it was too much!
The cold of a snowball
felt through the vanishing heat of a mitt.
A peach like an apple wearing a vest.
The raffia dish of a bird's nest.
A hot chestnut
branding the palm at the heart of the fist.
The stab of the thorn on the rose. Long grass, its itch.
Yes, I could feel with the sensitive hand of a ghost. Whooo!
Can't feel a sniff of it now.

Can't see a
Can't hear a
Can't taste a
Can't smell a
Can't feel a bit of it whiff of it niff of it.
Can't get a sniff of it now.