

Wallace Women Discovery Kit

Poetry in Motion

Best for Grades 4-8

Goal: to examine poetry in different ways

Needed supplies: copies of selected poems (printed on the following pages), 50 minutes

- 1) Teacher divides students into 4 groups and distributes one poem to each group. Groups will contain readers and actors. (2 minutes)
- 2) Students practice in groups reading the poem and coming up with actions that illustrate it. Teacher rotates among groups to assist as needed. (10 minutes)
- 3) One group at a time, students perform their interpretation of their poem with readers reading out loud and actors performing corresponding silent actions. (5 minutes each)
- 4) After each presentation, teacher uses discussion questions to explore basic meaning of the poem with the students in the audience, identifying what the speaker means, and how the poem may reflect real events in Susan's life. Answers are provided for the teacher after each question. (5 minutes each)

Adaptations and Extensions

- All groups perform the same poem, and discussion focuses around different ways to interpret the same material.
- Teacher reads one selected poem (and optional introductory material) out loud to students and then leads discussion.
- Selected student readers read one poem out loud, and teacher leads discussion.

English/Language Arts Standards

- **1. Reading World Recognition, Fluency, and Vocabulary Development**
- **2. Reading Comprehension**
- **7. Listening and Speaking Skills, Strategies, and Applications**

Social Studies Standards

- **1. History:** Historical Knowledge; Chronological thinking, comprehension, analysis, and interpretation
- **5. Individuals, Society, and Culture**

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Poem 1: “The Patter of Little Feet” was Susan’s most popular poem. It was published several times in different newspapers, and many people described it as the perfect song for parents to describe the way they feel about their children.

The Patter of Little Feet

by Susan Wallace

Up with the sun at morning, away to the garden he hies
To see if the sleepy blossoms have begun to open their eyes;
Running a race with the wind, with a step as light and fleet,
Under my window I hear the patter of little feet.

Now to the brook he wanders, in swift and noiseless flight,
Splashing the sparkling ripples like a fairy water sprite.
No sand under fabled river has gleams like his golden hair;
No pearly sea-shell is fairer than his slender ankles bare;
Nor the rosiest stem of coral that blushes in ocean’s bed,
Is sweet as the flush that follows our darling’s airy head.

From a broad window my neighbor looks down on our little cat,
And he watches the “poor man’s blessing.” I cannot envy his lot.
He has pictures, books and music, bright fountains and noble trees,
Flowers that blossom in roses, birds from beyond the seas;
But never does childish laughter his homeward footsteps greet;
His stately hall ne’er echo to the tread of innocent feet.

This child is our “speaking picture”, a birdling that chatters and sings.
Sometimes a sleeping cherub – (Our other one has wings);
His heart is a charmed casket, full of all that’s charmed and sweet,
And no harp strings hold such music as follows his twinkling feet.

When the glory of sunset opens the highway by angles trod,
And all seems to urban the city whose Builder and Maker is God,
Close to the crystal portal, I see by the gates of pearl,
The eyes of our other angel – a Twinborn little girl.

And I ask to be taught and directed to guide his footsteps aright,
So that I be accounted worthy to walk in the sandals of light,
And hear amid songs of welcome from messengers trusty and fleet,
On the strong floor of heaven, the patter of little feet.

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The Patter of Little Feet Discussion Questions:

1. **What is “the patter of little feet”?** (The sound of children running.)
2. **What do you think prompted Susan to write this poem? Is it based on her imagination or real life?** (The real life observations of her young son, Henry.)
3. **Why do you think the speaker does not envy the neighbor in the third stanza?** (The neighbor has all sorts of worldly things, but not children. The speaker calls children “the poor man’s blessing;” that is, even though parents may not have many material possessions, they are still blessed by their children.)
4. **Why does the speaker want to guide the child’s footsteps?** (So that she will go to heaven. The “messengers trusty and fleet” that she wants to welcome her are angels.)

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Poem 2: “For Mrs. Lane with a Silver Pie-Knife” was presented with a gift of a pie-serving knife made of silver in February 1870. Mrs. Lane was Susan’s sister Joanna Elston Lane.

For Mrs. Lane with a Silver Pie-Knife

By Susan Wallace

One night suppose I thought tonight
That your “dessert is small,”
And deem it best my little gift
Had not been sent at all.

But will it seem in festive hours
Like this dear night, to be
A Silver link that binds your heart
To memory, and to me.

“Silver Wedding”

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For Mrs. Lane with a Silver Pie-Knife Discussion Questions:

1. **What occasion do you think prompted the gift of the silver pie knife?** (Possibly Mrs. Lane's silver wedding anniversary to Henry Lane; that is, they had been married for 25 years.)
2. **If Mrs. Lane's "dessert is small," why do you think it might be better not to have sent the gift?** (It may call attention to the fact that they don't have as much as they used to, and Susan may be afraid that will make Mrs. Lane feel bad.)
3. **What is the "Silver link" that Susan mentions in the last stanza?** (the silver pie-knife)
4. **How do you think the two sisters' hearts are linked together?** (The gift will remind Mrs. Lane fondly of her sister, and so by remembering each other they will keep connected.)

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Poem 3: “Santa Claus to Amy Gould” was a gift Susan gave to Amy Gould, the daughter of her friend Mrs. Gould. The Gould family lived in Paducah, Kentucky, and let Susan stay with them during the Civil War. The poem was enclosed in a copy of the book *Red Riding Hood*. She wrote it in the starlight of Christmas Eve 1864. The blank in the first stanza is a word that was illegible in the original.

Santa Claus to Amy Gould
With a Copy of *Red Riding Hood*
By Susan Wallace

My fairy car is on the roof my fairy steeds at rest
And by the dim light of the five stars I _____ to her loved best.

I've brought with me this little book for one as fair and good
A maid as full of life and hope as was Red Riding Hood.

These folk pretend this fierce old wolf who kills but makes no noise
Is Love - who prowls about the world to eat up girls and boys

I don't believe that tale - not I. If Love more earthly mold
It would not take such fearful shape as the gray Wolf grim and old.
It would come as a bird with starry eyes and silver wings
Who'd sing and say the sweetest things that mortal ever heard

This bird should follow thee, dear child where'er thy footprints be
To make thy path a fairy track with magic minstrelsy

Should hover round, on noiseless wing through all the livelong night.
And never fail, with wondrous song to cheer the morning light.

Ah, what were life if Love were flown and never more should sing?
He would take our sunshine with him when he spread his silver wing;

And leave us, as in robber-paths at night in lonesome land.
Where the haunted dark is far before the Wolf on either hand.

Love's viewless spirit brought one here and still it leads me on
There's many a stocking yet to fill. And so I must be gone.

Merry Christmas now, and many such as merry winters fly
And troops of friends be yours - and peace and Love - Good bye, Good bye

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Santa Claus to Amy Gould Discussion Questions:

1. **Who is the speaker in this poem?** (Santa Claus)
2. **According to the speaker, if Love had an earthly form, what would it be?** (a bird with starry eyes, silver wings, etc.)
3. **How would we feel if Love flew away?** (dark, lonely)
4. **Why does Santa Claus continue to fill stockings?** (The spirit of Love leads him)

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Poem 4: “My Father’s House” is formatted more like a song with a chorus that repeats after each stanza. At the end of the poem, Susan wrote that it should be sung to the tune of “Oft the Stilly Night,” a song that is unknown today. She wrote it in January 1874.

My Father’s House

By Susan Wallace

From out my Father’s House there many mansions be
I almost hear the songs across the Silent Sea
I’m weak and blind I scarce can find
The path along whose way the morning star
Shines faint and far From out the perfect day

Chorus

That fills my Father’s House where many mansions be
I almost hear as songs across the Silent Sea

I do not ask to stand high in the hosts of heaven
Enough the lowest place among the dear forgiven
Of every cross and every loss
I’ll find again some token of day dreams fled
And hopes long dead and idols thou hast broken

There in my Father’s House

The shadow of Thy wings is round it evermore
And Love’s own banner waves a welcome to the shore
No chill no blight no shade of night
Can dim that house so fair I’ll wake from sleep
So sweet, so deep, O would that I were there!

Safe in my Father’s House

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My Father's House Discussion Questions:

1. **Who is the father in the poem?** (God) **Where do you think the house is?** (heaven)
2. **How does the speaker feel at the beginning of the poem?** (weak, blind, lost)
3. **Where does the speaker want to be in the house?** (In the lowest place; she doesn't need to be in among the highest hosts of heaven.)
4. **What is it like in the house?** (warm, light, without sickness, loving)

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Poem 5: “A New Year’s Gift” was published in the magazine *Home Journal* April 10, 1867, which was her husband Lew’s birthday. Since it is a poem about love, it is reasonable to conclude that she wrote it for him to celebrate their love for each other.

A New Year’s Gift

By Susan Wallace

As I watch the old year out, I remember that sweet May
Whose bloom and perfume linger about my path today.
Fleeting years since then have swept some joy away from me,
Yet each one brought me nearer, nearer, love, to thee.

My heart in even currents beats echo to thy name;
They pulses leap to answer the bugle call of Fame.
All the colors of my being have taken richer tone,
And deepened into stronger tints in blending with my own.

Our morning dreams are broken, and castles day by day,
With far and floating banners in distance fade away.
Dim arcade and airy tower I never more may see,
But all my lost ideals are found again in thee.

The tinder spell of starry sky, the charm of summer night,
Soft pictured dreams, and visions that haunt the misty light
Of the shadowy Borderland twixt youth and childhood free
Can never fade from out my hearth for they are part of thee.

But rosy morning blushing, to wake the world from rest,
And lily fair, and fairest rose upon her glowing breast,
And evening’s balm and beauty, and birds’ sweet minstrelsy,
And all earth’s summer loveliness are nothing without thee.

Ah! Were but mine the minstrel’s hand, the minstrel’s heart of song,
How would I sing, beloved years whose memories round me throng!
The past so dear – the future a dread unbounded sea,
Is neither dark, nor drear, unless, it parts me, love, from thee.

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A New Year's Gift Discussion Questions:

1. **At the beginning of the poem, who has the speaker grown closer to through the years?**
(love, her husband)
2. **What has happened to hopes and dreams through the years?** (They are broken or lost.)
3. **In the speaker's opinion, what is it that makes morning and flowers lovely?** (The person that she loves.)
4. **What would make the past or future dark and dreary?** (If the speaker and her love were parted.)

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Poem 6: “Christmas Song for Children” was published in the *Crawfordsville Journal* in 1868. Susan wrote it on Christmas Eve. Since she and her husband only had one child, she could be talking about children in general, or her son with relatives and friends.

Christmas Song for Children

By Susan Wallace

Oh, could I have my wish this Christmas night,
Some fairy should fly through the cold starlight.
And bear you away on her gentle breast
To gardens enchanted, where all that's best,
Sweetest and best, from every clime,
Should blossom in endless summer-time
Of myrtle and rose should our garden be,
For the children only, their friends and me.

Built round it a wall, with towers high,
Should shut out all but the clear blue sky,
And circle a palace where banners bright
Float far and free in the soft sunlight.
And violet eye, lifted meekly up,
And the tulip, bearing her golden cup
Of perfume, should greet the morning sun,
As the beautiful days come one by one,
With never a cloud, and never a tear,
From summer to summer, year to year.

And every path in that garden sweet
Should bear the light print of baby feet,
And ring with shouts of children at play
By babbling brooks that merrily stray
Through beds of lilies, away and away.

Where murmuring water, and bee, and bird,
Make the sweetest music ear ever heard.
There would we live and never grow old;
There measure the years with sands of gold;
In the rose garden whose gates are free
To children only, their friends and me.

It cannot be so – the wishes I bring
Are but the longing of Winter for Spring,
One fairy only haunts this world of ours;
His path is crowded with fadeless flowers
And the spell that lies in his rosy wings

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Is strange as the wonderful songs he sings
To charm away sorrow – 'twill pass you by,
While the fairy Love is hovering nigh.

The Christmas eve, oh, guard them well,
True Love, thou sleepless sentinel!
Beneath thy wings, warm lands and fair
Lie sheltered in enchanted air;
And circling walls to thee belong,
And mystic bars, unseen, but strong,
Oh, guard them, Love, with magic key,
The children dear, their friends, and me.

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Christmas Song for Children Discussion Questions:

1. **What is the Christmas wish at the beginning of the poem?** (For a fairy to come and take the speaker and the children to a summer garden.)
2. **What kinds of things are in the garden?** (Towers, a palace, banners, tulips, sun, baby footprints, shouting children, brooks, lilies, birds, bees, roses, golden sand.)
3. **How does Susan describe the fairy?** (Traveling on a path of flowers, rosy wings, singing a song, charming away sorrow, hovering, haunting.)
4. **What guards the children?** (Love)

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Poem 7: “My Song” was published in the Crawfordsville *Journal* January 13, 1870, but it was written about the Civil War which ended 5 years earlier. Because her husband was a Major General in the Army, Susan sometimes traveled with his regiment of soldiers.

My Song

By Susan Wallace

We lay in camp five dreary months, when the war was at its worst;
No change from weary week to week, the land was all accurst.
Our flag was down, and wet with blood, its stars hung dim at even;
‘Twas after Fredericksburg, and peace seemed further off than Heaven.

One winter day a wandering bird perched on our cheerless tent,
And sang in timid, brooding notes when evening light was spent.
The idle soldiers stopped their games, and gazed as in a spell;
A tender look stole in the face of our sullen sentinel.

My homesick eyes were full of tears ‘twas like a joyful psalm;
Upon my bruised and bleeding heart the music fell as balm.
A transient lay – the bird flew on; yet in that passing strain
A hundred songs of love and peace mingled in the glad refrain,

And hope came back with healing wing; death’s shadow turned to day;
From out my heart that melody has never died away.
And so, it may be, whisperings that shape uncertain lays
May pass into some sorrowing soul, and murmur change to praise;

Perchance a weary march be cheered with sound of rhyming words,
Or children’s voices make them sweet as songs of Summer birds.
For this I sing, not hope of fame; far in the enchanted gate
Whose golden hinges music turns when bay crowned singers wait.
From happy heights I dimly see, their symphonies I hear;
They faint like far off bugle notes upon my eager ear,
And never breathe the magic words that move the bar so strong,
Yet will I sing and dream some life is sweeter for my song.

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My Song Discussion Questions:

1. **Describe the setting in the first stanza.** (dreary, weary, dim, wet, bloody, war-torn)
2. **How do the soldiers react to the song of the bird?** (They stop and stare, look less unhappy)
3. **How does the song affect the speaker?** (It gives healing, joy, hope, and inspires praise.)
4. **How do you think music affects the soldiers' spirits?** (Cheers them up)

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Poem 8: “With a Wine Cup” was written in August 1871 to go with the gift of a wine cup to a woman she knew, Mrs. Worden. She was the wife of Commodore Worden, an officer in the Navy during the Civil War. The phrase in the last line, “give a behight draught,” means to drink while thinking of a certain person, like a toast.

With a Wine Cup By Susan Wallace

My gift, dear friend, is valueless save that I fill it up,
With pleasant words for sunny wine, accept them with the cup.

A little song will seem to crown its brim with fragrant flowers
And hint of beauty and of bloom that come with summer hours.

May every future year find you secure from war’s alarms;
Peace to yourself and daughters dear – the jewels on your arms.

And for the dearer one whose name runs through our country’s story –
My simple harp has never learned the sounding chord of glory –

I only ask that happiest age may unto him belong;
A rosy garland for his sword makes not the blade less strong.

O power is good, and fame is sweet, but love leads all the rest;
Among the stars that light our earth the star of love is best.

Bright shining on your pathway now and brightening till its close,
In purer rays, and softer skies, than when at first it rose.

So calm and blest be later years, that evening balmy air
Shall mellow cares and dangers past in purple distance fair.

We never more may meet again, I pray you then do not forget;
Even in your rounded, perfect life let me be something yet.

And sometimes, when the wine goes round, and hearts beat high with glee.
Give one behight draught, one tender thought, to memory and to me.

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With a Wine Cup Discussion Questions:

1. **Why do you think Susan included the poem with the cup?** (She thought the gift was valueless without a personal note.)
2. **What does the speaker wish for the Worden family?** (Peace, security, and happiness as they grow older)
3. **According to the speaker, what is the best thing someone can have?** (Love)
4. **How does the speaker want to be remembered?** (gleefully, tenderly, happily)