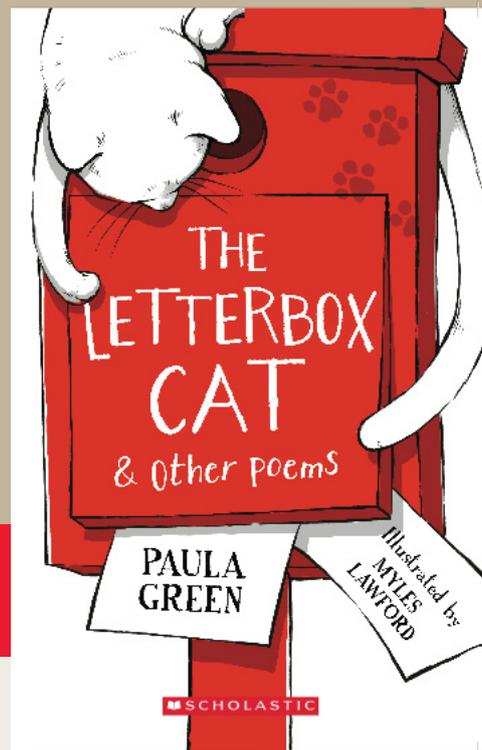


# The Letterbox Cat & Other Poems

By Paula Green

- Poetry • Reading • Writing • Listening
- Art • Speaking • Presenting



## About the Poems

*The Letterbox Cat & Other Poems* is a captivating poetry collection from the well-known New Zealand poet Paula Green. She has collated 44 of her own outstanding works as well as four impressive poems about poetry composed by children. While Paula's poems are appealing, fun and easy to read, they also contain many of the structures, devices and sound patterns commonly found in poetry, making them an ideal introduction to this genre of literature.

## About the Author

Paula Green is the author of a number of poetry collections for adults and children, including *Flamingo Bendaligo* and *Macaroni Moon*. She has also written a sophisticated picture book, *Aunt Concertina and Her Niece Evalina*, and a junior novel, *The Terrible Night*. Paula teaches creative writing at all levels, and is the poetry reviewer for *The New Zealand Herald*.

Paula visits schools and enjoys working with both primary and secondary school students. She lives near Bethells Beach, West Auckland, with her partner, artist Michael Hight, their two daughters, three cats and two dogs. Paula Green's children's poetry website is [www.nzpoetrybox.wordpress.com](http://www.nzpoetrybox.wordpress.com).

## About the Illustrator

Myles Lawford loved art as a child and grew up to study spatial design at Auckland University of Technology. His first book with Scholastic NZ was the popular picture book and CD *The 12 Days of Kiwi Christmas*. His most recent title for Scholastic was the humorous *Doggy Ditties from A to Z*. Myles is skilled at creating fun and lively illustrations using digital technology. *The Letterbox Cat* showcases a new, two-colour illustration style that will quickly attract the eye of young readers.

Myles is based in Auckland and works as both a graphic designer and an illustrator. He has created animated cartoons and also participated in children's sporting education programmes.

# Teaching Poetry

Some children naturally enjoy poetry, appreciating the different sounds, symbols and rhythms for the ideas and atmosphere they convey. Others with more literal or impatient minds can be frustrated by its frequent ambiguity, lack of obvious logic, and departures from the ordinary rules of grammar and punctuation. These students will need assistance to appreciate poetry. Help them realise that different types of writing have different purposes, and that poetry is about expressing feelings and ideas rather than conveying literal truths. Make it clear that they do not need to understand everything in a poem to enjoy it.

It can take more than one reading to gather meaning from a poem. There may be a hidden or an obvious message; the poem might tell a story; or it might be a playful arrangement of words designed to invoke a particular emotion.

Paula Green's poems are explored in more detail below. They have been grouped into types of poem, but keep in mind that many of them fit into several of the categories.

Although most questions focus on analysing the poems, equal emphasis should also be given to the **aesthetic** experience. Encourage students to express how the poems make them feel and what they like or dislike. Ask what the poems remind them of, and let them enjoy the humour for its own sake.

## Shared Learning and Discussion Points

### INTRODUCING POETRY

Introduce poetry and the book to your students by turning to the last page (p.96). It displays four poems about poetry written by children. Read and discuss them with your students. Some questions you could discuss include:

- What does Monica mean when she describes a poem as being 'somewhere between story and song'?
- How does the repetition in Daniel's poem help convey his message?
- What is Daniel's message? Why did he say 'heart' rather than 'mouth'?
- What does Freja's poem tell us about the nature of poetry?
- What is a metaphor? What is the metaphor in Freja's poem? What does it mean?
- What is a simile? What is the simile in Ewen's poem? How does it help us understand his message?
- Which poem did you enjoy most? Why?

### FIND OUT ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR

Ask the students if they have heard of the poet Paula Green or know of any of her poems. If they have, ask them to tell the class what they know.

Tell the students that many writers have their own website. Ask them why this might be useful? Then, using a projection device, show the students Paula Green's website ([www.nzpoetrybox.wordpress.com](http://www.nzpoetrybox.wordpress.com)). Explore her website together, paying particular attention to the homepage and the *About*, *Children's Poems*, *My Books* and *My Poems* pages.

Tell the students about the illustrator Myles Lawford using the information on page one above. Ask if any of them are familiar with *The 12 Days of Kiwi Christmas* or *Doggy Ditties from A to Z*. If possible, have copies of these books to show the students and read to them at a later time. Next, show the students some of the illustrations in the book, and encourage discussion about Lawford's style. Ask them:

- What words would you use to describe Myles Lawford's illustrations? (e.g., humorous, cheerful, lively, etc.)
- How much of the page do the illustrations take up? Is the background filled in? What is the effect of this?
- If you have copies of Lawford's other books, encourage a comparison of his different styles.

### SHAPED POEMS

*The Letterbox Cat* features several shaped poems, where the words form a picture of the poem's subject. Explore these playful and accessible poems together, and discuss how Paula Green created them by asking:

#### At Sea (pp.16–17)

- How did the poet create the boat's sail?
- How do the words and letters create a picture on page 17?

#### Kite (pp.18–19)

- How are capital letters and small letters used to create this picture?
- Why are some lines straight and some curved?

#### Snowboarding (pp.44–45)

- How has the poet linked the words to illustrate her ideas? What sort of word puzzle does this poem bring to mind?
- Some words and phrases are repeated? What effect does this have?
- How does the shape of each group of words match its meaning?



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### Pop Corn (p.46) and Nice Ice (p.47)

- Why do you think these two poems sit beside each other?
- Why did the poet use capital o's in *Pop Corn*?
- Why do you think she used rows of o's and x's in *Nice Ice*?
- Why are some words cut off before they are finished (e.g., boysenber)?

### Music (p.53)

- What shape did the poet use this time? Why?
- How does making the 'and' red help us read the poem?
- Why hasn't she used proper sentences? Why might this be allowed in poetry?

### The Rollercoaster (pp.58–59)

- How does the curvy line relate to a rollercoaster ride?
- How does the length of the sentences match the rider's feelings and thoughts at different stages of the ride?

### Animals (pp.82–83)

- How is each animal created? Look at the use of colour, letter size, mix of capital letters and small letters and the arrangement of the letters.

## CONCRETE POEMS

In concrete poems the meaning or effect is created graphically. Concrete poems include the shaped poems above and others where the typography helps create the desired impact. Investigate these concrete poems with your students.

### Night Cat (p.27)

- Which words did Paula Green choose to shape or change? Why did she choose these words?
- How do the different styles match the different words?
- How many sentences are there in this poem?
- Most texts are aligned with the left side, or margin, of the page. How is this poem aligned?

### This Poem (pp.34–35)

- Which words are repeated in every line of this poem?
- How do the shapes of the different shaped words match their meanings?

### Leaf (p.50) and Another Leaf (p.51)

- How do the shapes of these two poems match the action that is described?
- Why do you think Paula Green drew the star and the feather instead of writing the words?
- Which words are repeated in both poems?

### Autumn and Dandelions (pp.68–69)

- How does the shape of the word 'dandelion' relate to a real dandelion?
- How do the arrangement of the letters in 'scrap paper

storm' and the amount of space between the letters help convey the words they describe?

### Clouds (p.70–71)

- Have you ever looked up at clouds like this? What was it like? What did you see?
- What do you notice about the type in this poem?
- What simile, or comparison, is used in this poem?

## RHYMING POEMS

Most children know that some poems rhyme. Help them explore this concept in more detail with these poems.

### Cat Naps (p.23)

- This poem is about an everyday happening. Have you ever known cats like the one in the poem?
- Which words rhyme?
- Can you spot examples of **end rhyme**, where the rhyming words come at the end of a line.
- Can you spot an example of **internal rhyme**, where the rhyme falls in the middle of a line.
- Which words almost rhyme? (e.g., box, sock; hat, cap)  
Note: they are examples of **assonance**, where the words have same vowel sound but a different consonant.
- Which rhyming words have the same spelling pattern? Which ones have a different spelling pattern?

### Sand (pp.38–39)

- Why does the poet think sand is such a 'glorious thing'?
- What do you like or dislike about sand?
- Which words are repeated often in this poem?
- Which words rhyme? Do they form a regular pattern?
- Can you find any examples of assonance forming near-rhyme? (thing, ink; Dad, crabs; find, climb)

### Noses and Toeses (p.65)

- Why does the poet say 'toeses' instead of 'toes'? Why is this allowed in a poem but not in a report or a recount?
- Which words rhyme in this poem?
- How many sentences are there in this poem? How many stanzas?
- How has the poet swapped around the words to make this poem?

### A Family of Hungry Mice (p.67) and The Orange (p.87)

- These two poems are internally rhyming couplets. Can you work out what this means? (**Couplets** are poems two lines long.)
- What word is Paula Green pulling apart and playing with in *A Family of Hungry Mice*? (Note: mushroom is a pseudo-compound word derived from the Old French *mousseron*.)



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- What might the poet have been doing when she wrote *The Orange*? What clues are in the poem?
- Which words rhyme in each poem?
- Which line are they in? Where do they occur in the line?
- How many sentences are there in each poem? Where does the line break fall?

#### Anifables (pp.72–73)

- Which two words did the author blend to make the title of this poem? Why did she choose these two words?
- Which two creatures make up each animal? What might it look like?
- What is the rhyming pattern, or scheme, in this poem?
- Can you find a near-rhyme in the last stanza?

#### Faces (pp.84–85)

- What experience might have inspired this poem?
- How does the layout, type and illustration match the text?
- Which lines rhyme and which almost rhyme?

#### Cloudsville (p.89)

Note: this poem contains near-rhyme, rather than actual rhyme.

- What might the poet have been doing when she thought up this poem? How has she used her wild imagination to write a fun poem?
- Have you ever imagined you could play in the clouds? What did you think it would be like?
- Can you find two example of near-rhyme in the first stanza? (school, pools; cloudybuns, cloudyplums) What parts of the words sound the same? Why aren't they proper rhymes?

### POEMS WITH ONOMATOPOEIA

Onomatopoeia is the forming of a sound when pronouncing a word that resembles the noise made by that word. For example, *whisper*, *bang* and *crinkle* are all examples of onomatopoeia.

#### The Wood Pigeon (p.37)

- Have you ever seen a real wood pigeon? Have you heard the noisy sound of a wood pigeon in flight? How well does this poem describe it?
- Does a wood pigeon really have a pillow for a chest? Why do you think the poet described it this way?
- What word rhymes with chest?
- What vowel sound is repeated at the end of three lines in the last stanza?
- Which words are repeated in both stanzas? Are they all real words? How do they sound like their meanings?

#### The Greedy Cat (pp.74–75)

- How does the poet create a feeling of a cat scoffing its food using the word 'scoff' and typography?
- How does she create a feeling of a cat sleeping? How and why is it different from the way she displayed 'scoff'?

#### Molly (p.78)

- Why is one word all in capitals but not the others?
- Why are some words larger than others? Why are some on an angle?
- Why do you think the poet chose these words to shape? Say these words aloud? Are they onomatopoeic?
- Which neighbouring words **alliterate**, or start with the same sound?
- Which words rhyme? Which word isn't a real word? Why did the poet use it?

### LIST POEMS

Lists can make fun and effective poems with striking rhythms. They are also useful for helping students with their reading and writing skills. Explore and discuss these list poems with your students. You could ask:

#### Shoes (p.9)

- Can you find any sensible shoes in this list? What about silly shoes? Which does Paula Green mention first? Why do you think she does this?
- Can you find some rhyming words in this poem? Where are they?
- Can you find any assonance or near-rhyme in this poem? (e.g., bike with kite; boat and goat with soap and rope)
- Why do you think the last line is in capital letters?

#### The Fantail (p.20)

- What are fantails like? How do the words chosen in this poem help describe these birds?
- What rhyming words can you find in this poem?
- Why do you think the last line is curved and bigger than the other lines?

#### The Gargle Bird (p.29)

- What do we usually call a gargle bird?
- Have you heard a tui's call? What does it sound like to you?
- What does a tui look like? (Remind your students that tuis are native to New Zealand, and show a picture if necessary.)
- This poem is broken into verses. How do the lists relate to the verses?
- What examples of alliteration can you find?



### Which Jack (p.77)

- What is a Jack-in-the-box? How does this poem play with the name of this toy?
- Which words are repeated in each line? Which line is repeated twice? Why?
- Can you find any rhyming words in this poem?
- Can you find any examples of assonance or near-rhyme in this poem? (grass, past; camel, flannel)

### Hiccups (pp.80–81)

- Paula Green broke up the word ‘hiccup’ and played with it to make this poem. Which part of the word stayed the same? Which part varied?
- How do the first words the poet adds to the list go together? How does the list get even sillier as it goes on?
- Which words in the list rhyme?
- Why do you think she put STOP! in capital letters and added an exclamation mark?
- How do the words on page 81 match the experience of having hiccups?

## POEMS WITH ALLITERATION

Alliteration is when the initial sound in a word is repeated within a line or stanza. Poets often use alliteration to create varied sound effects within their poems.

### A Snail Poem (p.11)

- Have you ever seen a snail’s silvery trail?
- What letter sound is repeated. Why do you think Paula Green used it in a poem about snails?
- Which initial two-letter blend appears twice in one line?
- Can you find a rhyming pair?
- Can you find an example of assonance in the last line?
- Can you find a simile in this poem? (Look for the word ‘like’.)

### The Letterbox Cat (p.24)

- Three place names rhyme, which ones are they?
- Where is the alliteration in this poem? How does this affect the sound of the poem?
- The list in this poem is indented further to the right than the rest of the poem. Why do you think it was set out this way? What effect does this have?

### Hello Spring (p.49)

- How does this poem make you feel about spring? Why?
- What examples of alliteration can you find in this poem?
- What examples of rhyme can you find?
- What examples of assonance can you find?

### Fire (p.55)

- Have you ever seen interesting shapes in flickering flames? What did you see?
- How is this like seeing shapes in clouds? How is it different?
- Which stanzas have alliteration in them? Which sounds are repeated?

## POEMS WITH SIMILES AND METAPHORS

A simile is a comparison of one thing with another using words such as ‘like’ or ‘as’. A metaphor is also a comparison, but the words ‘like’ or ‘as’ are not used, and the object is directly described as being the other object.

### The Rainbow (p.13)

- What are bright ribbons a metaphor for in this poem?
- How do bright ribbons make you feel? Why do you think Paula Green chose this metaphor?
- What does the poet mean by ‘a blue day’? Does she mean a blue-sky day or a day when we feel blue, or low? Does it matter that we don’t know for sure?

### Stars (p.15)

- What is the metaphor in the first stanza?
- What similes can you find in the second stanza?
- Have you ever seen the Milky Way? Why is it described as a creamy smudge?
- Paula Green knows what the sky and the stars are really made of, so why do you think she described them this way?

### Rain (pp.30–31)

- Can you find three different similes for rain in the poem? How do they help you connect with the sounds made by raindrops?
- What simile is used in the last stanza? Have you ever felt this way on a rainy night? What was it like?

### Winter (p.33)

- Can you find two similes in this poem?
- How do the similes help us picture the trees and the cat in our minds?

### A Bookcat (p.61)

- What sort of person is called a bookworm?
- If bookworms aren’t real worms, do you think bookcats are real cats? What are they?
- How is the poet comparing reading a book to a cat doing its daily activities?
- What might the poet mean by ‘the mysterious night and the shining day of the pages’?
- What does the simile in the last stanza mean? Have you ever had this feeling when you were reading a book?

### The Library (pp.90–91)

- What metaphor does the poet use for the library? Why do you think she chose this metaphor? How do you think she felt when she walked into the library?
- Does writing poems really take Paula Green to new places and allow her to travel back in time? What does she mean she when she says this?
- What simile does she use for a book? In what way is a book like a suitcase?

### A Slow Sky Tonight (p.93)

- What do you think the poet means by 'a slow sky'? How can a sky be slow?
- Can you remember experiencing an evening like this one? How did you feel?
- Paula Green says that the trees 'whisper tiny secrets'. What does this metaphor mean?
- How is the word 'slow' like its meaning? Can you say this word quickly?

## Poetry Writing Activities

When your students are ready to write their own poems, you may wish to:

- choose a topic relating to current social studies or science projects
- choose a topic relating to their interests or backgrounds
- allow the students to choose their own topics.

First read and discuss the poems with your students. Next, model writing a sample poem in the chosen style, thinking aloud as you do so. Then use shared writing to create another poem with your students. When most students are ready, encourage them to write their own poems while you continue to provide assistance to those still needing it.

When you are satisfied with a child's efforts, let him or her create a final version and illustrate it. The finished poems should be read aloud by the students to an audience of their classmates or others. The poems could then be displayed or collated into poetry collections.

### ACTIVITY 1: WHAT IS POETRY?

This activity is best used early in your investigation of this book. Divide the students into groups, and ask each group to write *What is poetry?* in the centre of a large sheet of chart paper. Help the groups explore what they already know about poetry by discussing the question and creating a word web. Allow them to include terms such as 'metaphor' and 'rhyme' if they mention them, but do not focus on this sort of terminology at this stage. When they are finished, ask each group to present their chart to the class.

### ACTIVITY 2: CONCRETE POEMS (INC. SHAPED POEMS)

While studying the concrete poems, jointly create a list of the techniques Paula Green uses (e.g., curved lines, a mix of capitals and small letters, etc.). Display the list prominently and refer to it as you model writing a concrete poem.

Some students will find the wide variety of concrete poems overwhelming, and it will help them if you choose the structure of a particular poem for them to emulate. For example, discuss and display *Animals* from pages 82 and 83, and then assist the students to create similar animal poems.

### ACTIVITY 3: RHYMING POEMS

A chart of common rhyming words may help your students compose rhyming poems. You could provide a list, but it may be more helpful to compile the list together. Begin this process as you read *The Letterbox Cat*, and allow the students to add to the list themselves. Discuss which words have the same spelling patterns and which do not.

- a. Read and discuss *Noses and Toeses* with your students (see the questions above). Then assist them in writing their own rhyming poem in the same style. They will need to choose two nouns that rhyme. This example uses 'cat' and 'hat'.

You feed a cat  
and wear a hat,  
but do you wear a cat  
and feed a hat?

- b. Read and discuss *Anifables* with your students (see the questions above). Then assist them in writing another two stanzas that rhyme and follow the same pattern. (They could do this individually, in pairs or in small groups.) Collate the finished stanzas to create your own class version of the poem.

- c. Read and discuss *A Family of Hungry Mice* and *The Orange* with your students (see the questions above). Then assist the students in writing poems in the same style. That is:

- a poem that is only one sentence long
- the rhyming words fall halfway along the line and at the end of the first line
- the last phrase falls on a separate line.

- d. Assist able students in emulating the structure of other rhyming poems within the book.

### ACTIVITY 4: POEMS WITH ONOMATOPOEIA

While studying the poems with onomatopoeia, jointly create a list of examples, such as *crash*, *scoff* and *flap*. Prompt the students to provide other examples from the book, such as *whistle*, *pop* and *hiccup*. Then brainstorm examples from elsewhere, such as *whisper*, *zoom*, *splat*, *zip* and *fizz*.

Choose a suitable poem from the book and assist the students in writing their own poem in the same style while including examples of onomatopoeia.



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### ACTIVITY 5: LIST POEMS

While studying the list poems, jointly create a list of the different techniques Paula Green uses (e.g., repetition, rhyme, playing with words and phrases, etc.). Display the list prominently. If you have done the rhyming activities, also display your chart of rhyming words.

- a. Read and discuss *Shoes* with your students (see the questions above). Then assist them in writing their own list poem in the same style. They could write about other items of clothing, such as hats or coats. Alternatively, they could use any suitable nouns, such as dogs, houses, bags or balls.
- b. Read and discuss *The Gargle Bird* with your students (see the questions above). Then assist them in writing their own list poem in the same style, using another native animal. They will find this activity easier if they are familiar with the animal's appearance, calls and habitat.

### ACTIVITY 6: POEMS WITH ALLITERATION

Create a class chart of examples of alliteration as you read the poems.

- a. After reading and discussing *A Snail Poem* (see the questions above), list words that begin with the 's' sound. Discuss how the use of alliteration helps give a sense of a snail slowly sliding along. Next, discuss the alliteration in the title of *A Slow Sky Tonight*, and consider why Paula Green chose to use the simile 'like tiny snails' in this poem. Together add other s-words that give a sense of slowness or sliding to your list. Then assist your students to write their own poems using these words. They could, for example, write a poem about snakes, sea turtles or a slow boat ride.
- b. After discussing *Hello Spring* (see the questions above), assist your students in writing similar poems for the other seasons.

### ACTIVITY 7: POEMS WITH SIMILES AND METAPHORS

Create class charts of examples of similes and metaphors as you read the poems.

- a. After reading and discussing *Winter* (see the questions above), assist your students in creating similar poems using similes. They could write poems on the other seasons or on any suitable topic, such as one they are currently studying. Older or more able students could do the same thing using *Rain* as a guide.
- b. Read and discuss the poems by Ewen Wong and Freja Meulengracht-Madsen on the last page. Focus on the examples of metaphor and simile. Assist your students to write their own poems about poetry using either a simile or a metaphor. Ensure the students understand that there is no right or wrong and that each genuine attempt has validity.

c. After reading and discussing *The Library* (see the questions above), assist your students in writing a poem that contains a similar metaphor. For example, they could write about how a computer is a door to the world.

### ACTIVITY 8: A POETRY CHALLENGE

Read and discuss *A Poetry Challenge* (pp.56–57) with your students. They could then take up the challenge presented by Paula Green and write a poem about a fox, a whistle and a box. Allow the students to share their finished poems and help them notice that many different poems can be created using the same three objects.

Alternatively, your students could write their own poetry challenge poem by playing with three other nouns, such as:

- a cat, a hat and a hot dog
- a pig, a wig and a bicycle
- a bug, a rug and a boot.

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