



Books by Mary Quattlebaum Teaching and Writing Activities

The following activities can be guided by teachers, librarians, or parents, used by book groups, or tried by kids on their own.

About the Author: Mary Quattlebaum grew up in rural Virginia with three brothers, three sisters, and lots of pets (horses, hamsters, turtles, dogs, cats). One of her earliest memories is of her dad reading nursery rhymes aloud, which sparked a life-long love of poetry. Mary has worked as an 18th century costumed waitress for Colonial Williamsburg, directed a poetry and family folklore program for the elderly, and been a medical writer for a children’s hospital. The author of 15 award-winning children’s books, Mary now lives with her family in Washington, D.C., where she writes frequently for the *Washington Post* and teaches creative writing.

Visit www.maryquattlebaum.com for information on school presentations and writing workshops.

Poetry

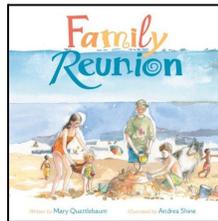


Winter Friends by Mary Quattlebaum, illustrated by Hiroe Nakata (Doubleday/Random House, ages 2 to 7). There’s a mystery to be solved in 18 poems! The young narrator finds a lost mitten in the snow and traces clues in the lively pictures by Hiroe Nakata to find the owner. Then the fun begins—with sledding, snowman building, and a cocoa party.

A variety of forms (haiku, rhymed and free verse, concrete poems) help increase children’s awareness of different types of poetry. And there’s plenty of onomatopoeia, from the loud *BRRR* of the snow plow in “After the Storm” to the soft “s” falling-snow sound of “More Snow.”

Seasonal Poems: The little girl describes some of her favorite winter activities in “Snow Angel,” “Baby Jo,” “Sledding,” and “Pigeons.” Write a poem or description of what you like to do in the snow. Use your senses of sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell to give readers a good sense of that activity. For example, ask yourself “What do I hear?” “What things am I touching and how do they feel?” Write a poem about a favorite activity or thing associated with one of the other seasons (spring, summer, or fall).

Shaped Poems: “Yellow Crocus” and “Sledding” are shaped or concrete poems—poems with written shapes that look like the object or activity explored in the poem. Write your own shaped poem, perhaps about a winter boot or snowflake (object) or jumping or skating (activity).



Family Reunion by Mary Quattlebaum, illustrated by Andrea Shine (Eerdmans, ages 4 and up). Through 15 poems, 10-year-old Jodie tells of her extended family coming together for a reunion. Young cousins eat watermelon, catch fireflies, and listen, wide-eyed, to their

parents’ tales of childhood. Different poetic forms—sonnet, free verse, villanelle, ballad, haiku—help expand children’s awareness of poetry.

Writing about Family Reunions: Have you ever been to a family reunion? What did you like most about the experience? What made you feel most uncomfortable? What foods did you eat? What did you do? Write a poem or description of the reunion or of some small part of it. Choose a grandparent, aunt, or uncle to interview about previous family reunions. Where were reunions held? What was the place like? What was a favorite activity? How have things changed? Write down their answers and share with other family members.

Haiku: “Lightning Bugs” is a small poem (a haiku) about a very small thing. Write a haiku (3-line poem, with 5 syllables in first line, 7 in second, and 5 in third) about a small thing (for example, a button, pebble, or tadpole).

Creating Collage Pictures: Look carefully at the illustrations by Andrea Shine and notice how she weaves leaves, flowers, scraps of patterned paper, and words into her watercolors to create pictures rich with hidden treasures. Draw or paint a picture to go with one of your stories or poems and look in your backyard or house to find treasures (acorn tops, leaves, words or letters cut from magazines, etc.) to add.

Folktales and American History



Sparks Fly High: The Legend of Dancing Point by Mary Quattlebaum, illustrated by Leonid Gore (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, ages 4 and up). In this lively re-telling of a colonial American folktale, Colonel Lightfoot enters a dance contest with the devil for a bit of Virginia land along the

James River. Only when the colonel recognizes his own bragging words in the devil's boasts is he able to outsmart his fancy-stepping opponent.

Exploring America's Colonial Past: Colonel Philip Lightfoot (1689-1748) was a prosperous gentleman with several homes in or close to Williamsburg, Virginia, now a restored historic town. Check Colonial Williamsburg's website www.history.org to see how people of that time lived, dressed, ate, and entertained (dancing was a favorite pastime).

Tall-Tale Characters: American folktales abound with larger-than-life protagonists such as Paul Bunyan, Davy Crockett, and John Henry. Read a few of these folktales and identify the characters' exaggerated abilities and accomplishments. What is Colonel Lightfoot's exaggerated talent? His greatest fault? How does he become aware of it and change? Write your own tall tale about a modern hero (for example, spelling-bee champ or sports star) or family member.

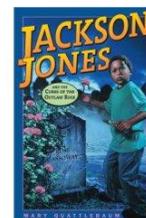
Finding History Around You: People often believe that history "is made" by famous figures and located in the distant past and at "historic spots" with admission fees. Actually, history is all around us. Search out and write down the answers to questions such as, When was my house or apartment building built and who lived there before? How did my grandparents meet? How and when did my family come to the United States? What legends or unusual spots are connected with my neighborhood?

Novels



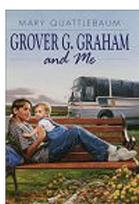
Jackson Jones and the Puddle of Thorns, Jackson Jones and Mission Greentop, and Jackson Jones and the Curse of the Outlaw Rose by Mary Quattlebaum (Random House, ages 7 to 11).

Given a plot in the city's community garden (once a World War II victory garden), Jackson involves his friends in schemes to make money by selling the flowers (*Puddle*), save the historic garden from being bulldozed by developers (*Mission Greentop*), and foil the trouble-causing ghost of an antique rose bush (*Outlaw Rose*). Fast-paced and funny, the books highlight urban children's awareness and care of the natural world and explore ways to deal with a bully.



The Power of Place: In *Puddle* (pages 106-107), Jackson describes the garden using many of his senses. How does he feel about it? Using your senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch, write a description of a place special to you. How does being in that place make you feel?

Kids Creating Change: In *Mission Greentop*, Jackson and friends organize a protest because they want to increase awareness of something they consider wrong or unfair—the destruction of their community garden by developers. Is there something you want to draw attention to (for example, an endangered animal) or protest (for example, a school sports policy)? Figure out a plan for action. What do you hope to accomplish or change? What people might you write letters to or talk with? How might you get other kids and grown-ups involved?



Grover G. Graham and Me by Mary Quattlebaum (Random House, ages 9 to 13). Eleven-year-old Ben Watson has been shuffled around from foster home to foster home in the last six years. He's gotten used to blanking folks out, leaving them behind, watching out for himself. In his eighth foster home, Ben finds himself starting to care about Grover, another foster child about fourteen months old. Grover was abandoned by his teenage mother, just like Ben. When Grover's mother tries to take back her child, Ben is convinced she will abandon the baby again. So when he gets a chance to escape from the system, Ben takes it. And he takes Grover with him.

Metaphor: Ben compares himself and other foster kids to prickly gumballs, the pesky, unwanted seed balls from sweetgum trees. If you were a plant, what would you be? A tall pine? A daisy? A cactus? List traits you and this plant have in common. Write a poem comparing yourself to that plant. How is Ben surprised by the sweetgum tree in the end?

Exploring Ethics: Ben does something he knows is wrong (kidnaps a baby) for what he believes are the right reasons (he fears the baby is being neglected). Have you ever been in a situation like that, where you did something wrong for the right reasons? Or did something right for the wrong reasons? Write a story about the incident. How did everything turn out? Looking back, would you change anything you had done?