

Crocs, Acrostics and Math

by Carol-Ann Hoyte



Crocodiles Play!

written by Robert Heidbreder

illustrated by Rae Maté

Tradewind Books, 2008

978-1-896580-89-0 (hc) \$16.95

for Preschool to Grade 1

Poetry – Animals

With a pencil, pen, computer or even a typewriter, children's poets paint word pictures which often prompt us to think of ordinary people, places and things in surprising and refreshing ways. Tiffany Stone, Lori Sherritt-Fleming and Kari-Lynn Winters give arithmetic a rhyming and rhythmical makeover. Through the anthropomorphization of crocodiles, Robert Heidbreder removes a young child's real-life fear of these creatures. Avis Harley discusses African wildlife in a new and markedly different format.

Math and poetry may seem like strange bedfellows, but the two converge in *aRHYTHMetic*, a clever collection of seven rhyming poems which introduce basic mathematical concepts.

Tiffany Stone wrote three of the book's poems. The title poem can be read by two voices – with one child/group reading the first column and a second child/group reading the second one. This rhythmic response continues until they reach the last line of the poem which they read together. In Stone's "Third in the Herd," a bison ruminates on the perks of being number three: "*I'm third in the herd./It's second to none./Third in the herd is/NUMBER ONE!*" In "Princess Estimation," the title character wants to know how many spots her dalmatian pup sports on its fur. Using the skills of counting, estimation, and multiplication, she comes up with an answer.

Like Stone, Kari-Lynn Winters has penned three selections. Furry, four-legged housemates noshing on treats star in her "Teacup Pups" and "Kitty Chat" – two poems which introduce the concept of counting by twos. In "The Shape of Things," she describes two-dimensional shapes found in nature: "*Undersea./There they are./Oval shell/and five-point star.*"

"*If you look v-e-r-y closely,/when they think you've left home,/you can count rot-TEN dragons/that sneak out to roam.*" In Lori Sherritt-Fleming's "Rot-TEN Dragons," a child left home alone spies 10 dragons as they emerge from their hiding places. The number of creatures increases by tens until there are 100 of them. The dragons retreat to their hiding places, ten by ten, when they detect the child's parents nearing home. This 72-line poem, presented across 18 pages, is the book's longest poem.

This lighthearted collection offers a subtle and innovative way to turn number-loving kids onto poetry and poetry-loving kids onto numbers. Youngsters will delight that animals, a perennial favourite, appear in five of the seven poems. Scot Ritchie's playful artwork makes the poems come alive and fills the pages with action without overwhelming the eye.

Ritchie's art has previously graced the pages of poet Robert Heidbreder's *See Saw Saskatchewan* and *Eenie Meenie Manitoba*. In Heidbreder's new collection *Crocodiles Play!* illustrated by Rae Maté, the author returns with more reptilian romp. Here, Heidbreder hosts a rhyming croc-o-block celebration of sports. His seven poems double as riddles as they each describe a sport without naming what it is.

Readers use clues presented in the text and those found in the artwork to guess which sports the croc jocks are playing. Can you guess which sport the following excerpt describes? "*...They're snappy Crocs/in cool outfits –/blue caps, new shoes/and well-worn mitts./They pick a bat./No more delay!/.*" You probably guessed "baseball" and kids will likely do the same. But when readers turn the page to check their guess... what do they find? They discover a surprising answer and silly scenario in which crocs don baseball garb and use baseball equipment to play a sport that's not baseball.



aRHYTHMetic

written by Tiffany Stone,

Kari-Lynn Winters,

and Lori Sherritt-Fleming

illustrated by Scot Ritchie

Gumboot Books, 2009

978-0978435158 (pb) \$11.99

for Kindergarten to Grade 3

Poetry – Math

Heidbreder's choice of strong verbs – “clamber,” “strut,” “dash” and “dodge” – are fun to say and exude the physicalness of athletics. His poems offer an accessible and entertaining way to introduce sports vocabulary to the six-and-under set. Rae Maté's vibrant cartoon-style illustrations portray the silly yet affable crocs in all their toothy glory.

The book has earned the North Vancouver author a spot on the 2010 Chocolate Lily Book Award shortlist. (He won the award in 2006 for his picture book, *Drumheller Dinosaur Dance*.) In honour of the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics, **Gold Medal Reading!** has been designated the theme for TD Canadian Children's Book Week 2009. So with that in mind, remember that: *Crocodiles Play!* is an ideal way to celebrate Olympic fun with kids from preschool to Grade 1.

You haven't seen the last of crocodiles. One appears in Avis Harley's *African Acrostics: A Word in Edgeways*. Her ode to the reptile called “A Croc Acrostic” reads: “Crackerjack-attacker/Reptile in-my-dream/Old-mythmaker/Carnivore-supreme/Open-opportunist/Dragon-eye-agleam/Inner-grinner/Lizard-wizard/Enemy-extreme!”

The poet opens the collection with a clever entry: an acrostic in which she explains how to write one and invites kids to write their own. In each of the remaining 18 poems, she introduces readers to a different animal from the dark continent.

Most people recognize acrostics in their traditional version in which the first letter of each line spells a word or phrase when read downward. Harley raises the acrostic to new heights and expands her audience's knowledge of the form by including three of its lesser-known versions. There are two *double acrostics* (the first letters of each line spell a word and so do the last letters); a *cross acrostic* (the hidden word appears diagonally); and a *multiple acrostic* (the vertical words appear in several places throughout).

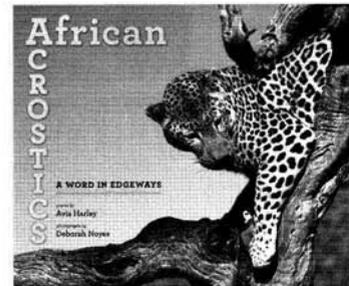
The book's closing pages contain three sections of supplemental information. In “More About Acrostics,” the poet discusses various aspects of the acrostic including its etymology. “Nature Notes” offer short, factual snippets about the animals and show thumbnails of the book's photographs. In “A Note from the Photographer,” Deborah Noyes shares details of her experience of taking the photos and the circumstances in which she shot them.

Noyes' striking photographs snapped in Namibia illustrate Harley's tightly-written, thought-provoking and gently humorous text. When I look at this book, I can't help but describe it as a series of wildlife documentary photo stills presented with lyrical narration.

By the way, both author and photographer possess talent in other area of kidlit publishing. Harley has illustrated three of her own books: *The Monarch's Progress: Poems with Wings*, *Leap Into Poetry: More ABCs of Poetry* and *Fly with Poetry: An ABC of Poetry*. Noyes also works as an editor and writes young adult novels.

With this autumnal crop of poetry books, plus the other titles written by these poets, there's no need to wait until National Poetry Month in April to get your poetry groove on. So let's fall into poetry, everyone!

Carol-Ann Hoyte, an emerging children's poet, is assistant librarian at Selwyn House School. Since 2002, she has served as Quebec coordinator for TD Canadian Children's Book Week.



African Acrostics:
A Word in Edgeways
written by Avis Harley
photographs by Deborah Noyes
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Poetry – Animals – Africa