

For Maxwell
M.H.

*For my parents,
Rosemary and Terry Bolongaro,
and my much-missed
mother-in-law, Teresa Peacock.
All my love*
L.P.

A WHALE OF A TIME



A Whale of a Time gathers poems from all over the world. Regional spellings and usage have been retained in order to preserve the integrity of the originals.

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Matt Hunt



CONTENTS

<i>INTRODUCTION</i>	10
JANUARY	12
FEBRUARY	38
MARCH	64
APRIL	90
MAY	116
JUNE	142
JULY	168
AUGUST	196

SEPTEMBER	222
OCTOBER	250
NOVEMBER	278
DECEMBER	304
<i>INDEX OF POETS</i>	332
<i>INDEX OF POEMS</i>	335
<i>INDEX OF FIRST LINES</i>	340
<i>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</i>	345



INTRODUCTION

Hello!

Thank you for picking up this book. Before you do anything else, can I ask you to turn a few pages and read the poem on page 14? It's by Rita Dove and it's called "The First Book". Then, when you've read it, come back . . .

Hello again. What did you think? Did you see the big, bright ray of sun shining through the darkness? The amazement on the boy's face as the book opens? Now, you might say it's not an obviously "funny ha-ha" poem and I'd probably agree. But I love it because of what Rita Dove cleverly calls the "tingle". She's talking about the way words touch us, so much so that we sometimes respond in a physical way. And that's the wonderful thing about stories and poems—they make us feel things and, somehow, that can change us. What if the first poem you ever read made you laugh and maybe, just maybe, made you want to read another one? Wouldn't that be wonderful?

So "The First Book" is the first poem in this book because reading and feeling and laughing and sharing are what the funny, sad, surprising, beautiful world of words is all about. No matter where you read a poem—sun-drowsy in the garden or as you travel on a train—the words have the power to touch you. Not just what they say and what they mean (and, by the way, you don't always have to understand a poem word by word to get that magic tingle) but how they're arranged too. In a poem, the arrangements of words create lovely melodies through rhythm and rhyme or free verse. They might be slow, soft and soothing, like a lullaby, or quick-march to get your heart racing. And a really funny poem might give you the giggles.

But for me, the real beauty of all these feelings is that you can't easily keep them to yourself. You want to share, to make others feel this amazing, brilliant thing too. And a funny poem? Well, just like jokes—have you heard the one about?—they're made for sharing. When I was working on this collection, I remembered the time I took my son to a Christmas party when he was little. He was the only child there, but he had a little book of Christmas jokes and he read us all his favourites, finding a way to join in with the grown-ups by making everyone laugh. And isn't the gift of laughter a present we all want to give?

Of course, humour is a very individual thing. What makes one person laugh might leave another cold. So, I've done my best to find poems to tickle all sorts of readers. There are slapstick silly poems and tongue-twisters to get tangled in and nonsense poems full of riddles. Some poems are cleverly funny, and some are joyous and uplifting. Some might just make your lips twitch or raise a wry smile, while

others might make you laugh out loud. There are poems about poems and poems about poets. Perhaps one of my favourites is Willard R. Espy's brilliant poem about the possibilities of mistaken punctuation on a notice at a swimming pool on page 180—look what happens when a full stop is placed just there! From socks to spaniels, eggs to elephants, there are all sorts of poems about all sorts of things. I hope you find lots that will make you laugh and lots you want to share.

And I'm sure you'll want to share the pictures too. As a picture book publisher, I often say that words only tell half the story, with the artwork completing it. It's the same in this book. Every time you turn the page you'll come to a new "story", where the group of poems has been selected because they share similar content or a mood or tone or feeling. Then Matt, the artist, has worked his magic—bringing his own brilliantly unique and quirky view of the world to every page. I love the library full of flying books on pages 128 and 129. I love Horace the monster who isn't monsterish at all on page 131. And I really, really love Matt's graphic design of the literary cats on pages 136 and 137, and how it makes us think about what cats are trying to say. A poem can take us somewhere unexpected and pictures can too.

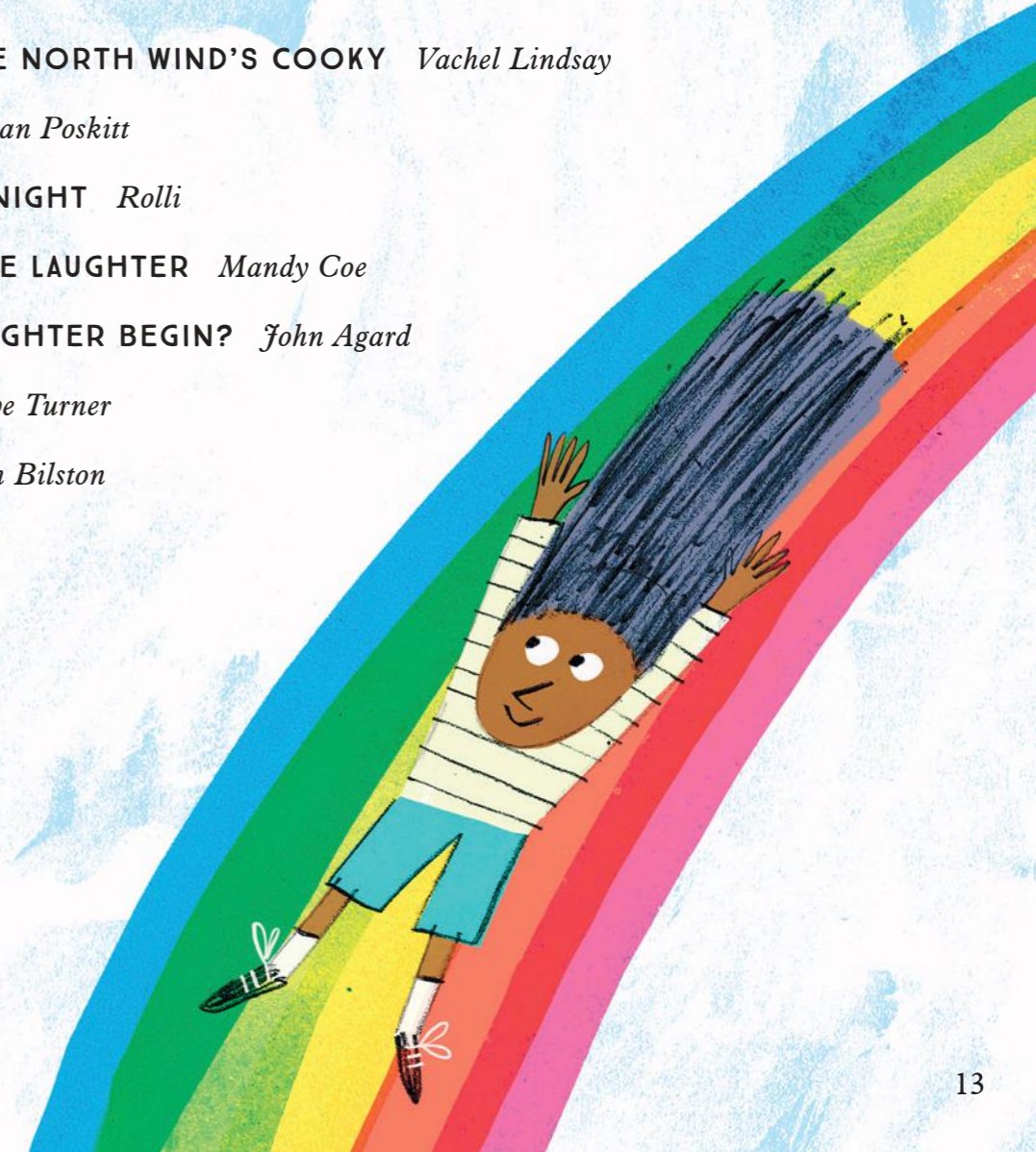
At the beginning of this introduction, I talked about how poems can transform us. I hope in this collection you'll find poems you love, poems that bring you joy and laughter, and poems you want to share. I hope you have a whale of a time reading them all. One thing's for sure, as another brilliant poet, Tony Mitton, says on page 226, "you'll never be the same again".

Lou Peacock (aka Louise Bolongaro)
Anthologist and Publishing Director of Picture Books at Nosy Crow



JANUARY

- 1st THE FIRST BOOK *Rita Dove*
- 2nd ALTHOUGH *Tony Langham*
- 3rd A HAPPY KENNING *Clare Bevan*
- 4th THE HAIRY DOG *Herbert Asquith*
- 5th MOBILE HOME FOR SALE *Roger Stevens*
- 6th I'VE GOT A DOG *Anonymous*
- 7th THE FLEA *Kobayashi Issa, translated by R. H. Blyth*
- 8th IT'S RAINING PIGS AND NOODLES *Jack Prelutsky*
- 9th OUR HIPPOPOTAMUS *Colin West*
- 10th NOISE *Anonymous*
- 11th LEWIS HAS A TRUMPET *Karla Kuskin*
- 12th BIG DREAMS *April Halprin Wayland*
- 13th IF NOT FOR THE CAT *Jack Prelutsky*
- 14th MY MOUSE IS RATHER FOND OF CHEESE *Kenn Nesbitt*
- 15th SPELL TO BRING A SMILE *John Agard*
- 16th LEMONS AND APPLES *Mary Neville*
- 17th I'M GLAD *Anonymous*
- 18th GIVE YOURSELF A HUG *Grace Nichols*
- 19th I RAISED A GREAT HULLABALOO *Anonymous*
- 20th MARY HAD A LITTLE LAMB *Anonymous*
- 21st THERE WAS A YOUNG LAD OF ST. JUST *Anonymous*
- 22nd A FISHY THOUGHT *Vivian French*
- 23rd MY FOLKS *Heidi Fish*
- 24th BROTHER *Mary Ann Hoberman*
- 25th THE MOON'S THE NORTH WIND'S COOKY *Vachel Lindsay*
- 26th THE MOON *Kjartan Poskitt*
- 27th THE MOONLESS NIGHT *Rolli*
- 28th IF YOU COULD SEE LAUGHTER *Mandy Coe*
- 29th WHERE DOES LAUGHTER BEGIN? *John Agard*
- 30th TOMORROW *Steve Turner*
- 31st MNEMONIC *Brian Bilston*



19th

I RAISED A GREAT HULLABALOO

I raised a great hullabaloo
When I found a large mouse in my stew,
Said the waiter, "Don't shout
And wave it about,
Or the rest will be wanting one, too!"

Anonymous

21st

THERE WAS A YOUNG LAD OF ST. JUST

There was a young lad of St. Just
Who ate apple pie till he bust;
It wasn't the fru-it
That caused him to do it,
What finished him off was the crust.

Anonymous

22nd

A FISHY THOUGHT

A kipper
With a zipper
Would be neater
For the eater . . .

Vivian French

20th

MARY HAD A LITTLE LAMB

Mary had a little lamb,
A lobster, and some prunes,
A glass of milk, a piece of pie,
And then some macaroons.

It made the busy waiters grin
To see her order so,
And when they carried Mary out,
Her face was white as snow.

Anonymous



25th

THE MOON'S THE NORTH WIND'S COOKY

The Moon's the North Wind's cooky.
He bites it, day by day,
Until there's but a rim of scraps
That crumble all away.

The South Wind is a baker.
He kneads clouds in his den,
And bakes a crisp new moon *that . . . greedy*
North . . . Wind . . . eats . . . again!

Vachel Lindsay

26th

THE MOON

The moon is just a big potato floating in the sky
And little men from outer space are often passing by.
If they're feeling hungry they can eat a bit for dinner.
That's why the moon is sometimes fat,
but other times it's thinner.

Kjartan Poskitt

27th

THE MOONLESS NIGHT

Oh, please.
Oh, *please!*
The moon's not cheese.
It's golden-crumbling
tummy-rumbling
crispy-flaking
hungry-making
butter-fluffy
oven-puffy
rich and tasty
PASTRY!

How do I know?
Where'd the moon go?
Well . . .

You're right to be suspicious—
it was *delicious!*

Rolli



1st

THE GIGGLES

Alexandra Daunton-Diggle
Was swallowed by a giant giggle
Which started gently at her toes
And finished just above her nose

No one saw, no one heard
It came and went without a word
Gobbling her whole (plus party frock)
It spat out one white cotton sock

All the sniggerers should have a care
That giggles take you unawares
And that no matter what you do
They always get the better of you

Lindsay MacRae

2nd

TICKLERS

Can you keep a secret?
I don't suppose you can.
You mustn't laugh or smile
When I tickle your hand.

Anonymous

3rd

TICKLE BREATH

My breath in your ear may delight and tickle
May make you squirm, and laugh and wiggle
As I get uncomfortably near

But I have something lovely to say
A little thought to brighten your day.
Your smile makes everyone cheer.

Joseph Coelho



25th**ELETELEPHONY**

Once there was an elephant,
 Who tried to use the telephant—
 No! No! I mean an elephone
 Who tried to use the telephone—
 (Dear me! I am not certain quite
 That even now I've got it right.)

Howe'er it was, he got his trunk
 Entangled in the telephunk;
 The more he tried to get it free,
 The louder buzzed the telephee—
 (I fear I'd better drop the song
 Of elephop and telephong!)

Laura E. Richards

26th**ELEPHANTASY**

"There's been an elephant in my fridge,"
 I heard an old man mutter.
 "How can you tell?" I asked him.
 "Footprints in the butter!"

"The elephant's still in there."
 The old man gave a "Tut!"
 "How do you know?" I asked him.
 "Look, the door won't shut!"

Celia Warren

4th

WHO'S THERE?

If you hear a dinosaur
Knocking loudly on your door,
Through the keyhole firmly say,
"Nobody is home today."
If the bell should start to ring,
Tell the beast, "No visiting."
If you see there's more than one,
Turn around and start to run.

Max Fatchen

5thHOW THE DINOSAUR
GOT HERE

"Daddy, what's a dinosaur?"
Said my daughter Jane.
"The dinosaur was a giant beast
That will never be seen again."

"Where did they all come from?"
"Now that I cannot say."
And at this information
She turned and walked away.

She must have thought about it,
For later that afternoon
She said to me, "I know! I know!
They all come from the moon!"

"If that is true, my daughter,
Would you, pray, please tell
Exactly how they got here."
She said, "Of course—they fell!"

Spike Milligan

18th

HORACE THE HORRID

The day that baby Horace hatched
his proud mum gave a ROAR,
then stomped around to show him off
to her monster friends next door.
She named him HORACE THE HORRID—
she was sure he'd be quite a lad—
but soon it was clear, to her horror,
that Horace just wasn't bad.

*You're supposed to EAT children, Horace,
not ask them out to play!*

*You're HORACE THE HORRID, Horace,
PLEASE put that teddy away!*

*Those feet are for kicking, Horace;
don't hide your claws under the mat!
That playpen's your BREAKFAST, Horace,
You're a MONSTER, remember that!*

*I'm sorry, said Horace, bowing his head.
I'm sorry to be such a bore,
but I'd rather eat carrots than children
and I really don't know how to roar.
And he carried on humming his quiet hum
till his mother grew quite wild,
but Horace the Horrid just opened his mouth
and smiled and smiled and smiled.*

He opened his gummy, grinny mouth
and smiled
and smiled
and smiled.

Judith Nicholls



29th

LOST AND FOUND

LOST:

A Wizard's loving pet.
Rather longish.
Somewhat scaly.
May be hungry or upset.
Please feed daily.

P.S. Reward.

FOUND:

A dragon
breathing fire.
Flails his scaly tail
in ire.
Would eat twenty LARGE meals daily,
if we let him.
Please
come and get him.

P.S. No reward necessary.

Lilian Moore



30th

JOCELYN, MY DRAGON

My dragon's name is Jocelyn,
He's something of a joke.
For Jocelyn is very tame,
He doesn't like to maul or maim,
Or breathe a fearsome fiery flame;
He's much too smart to smoke.

And when I take him to the park
The children form a queue,
And say, "What lovely eyes of red!"
As one by one they pat his head.
And Jocelyn is so well-bred,
He only eats a few!

Colin West





27th
MY SPANIEL

I've been teaching my spaniel to play
 The piano this many a day,
 But his Mozart's a curse
 And his Bach is much worse
 Than his bite, I am sorry to say.

Gerard Benson

28th
MY DOG

My dog is such a gentle soul,
 Although he's big it's true.
 He brings the paper in his mouth.
 He brings the postman too.

Max Fatchen



31st

TRAINEE WITCH WANTED

WANTED!

One trainee witch,
not very old,
with a nasty laugh
but a heart of gold.

With pointy nails,
who wouldn't hurt a flea,
just to stir the pot
of the witches' tea.

Andrew Collett

30th

WHICH WITCH?

"Two witches flew out on a moonlit night.
Their laughs were loud and their eyes were bright.
Their chins and their noses were pointed and long.
They shared the same broom and they sang the same song.
Their hats and their cloaks were as black as pitch,
And nobody knew which witch was which."

Julia Donaldson

4th

BABY CHANGE

I tried to change my brother
for one that didn't yell,
wake me every morning
or make an awful smell.
But they didn't have another,
there were not any there—
just a plastic table
and a little baby chair.
I tried to swap my brother
for one that didn't cry
but the changing place
was empty
and there wasn't one to buy.

Peter Dixon

5th

MY BROTHER

My brother's worth about two cents,
As far as I can see.
I simply cannot understand
Why they would want a "he."

He spends a good part of his day
Asleep inside the crib,
And when he eats, he has to wear
A stupid baby bib.

He cannot walk and cannot talk
And cannot throw a ball.
In fact, he can't do anything—
He's just no fun at all.

It would have been more sensible,
As far as I can see,
Instead of getting one like him
To get one just like me.

Marci Ridlon

6th

PUZZLER

I am ten and you are two—
I am five times older than you.
So, my little sister, Jessy,
How come you're ten times as messy?

Philip Waddell

