

NMAAHC Kids

POEMS THAT EMPOWER

Lessons on Poetry and
African American Poets

This resource was designed by the
National Museum of African American History and Culture's
Early Childhood Education Initiative Team.



Smithsonian

Life Doesn't Frighten Me

by Dr. Maya Angelou

Read

Read or watch an online read-aloud of *Life Doesn't Frighten Me*.

Poem by Maya Angelou

Paintings by Jean-Michel Basquiat

Edited by Sara Jane Boyers

Listen to Maya Angelou recite *Life Doesn't Frighten Me*.



Kid-Folks Touching by Joe Schwartz

Discover

Look at Maya Angelou's portrait by Ross R. Rossin in the National Portrait Gallery collection.

Sing along with Maya Angelou and Sesame Street friends!

Share this special lesson from Maya Angelou. Then, think about and discuss, "What can I do to be a rainbow in someone's cloud?"

Write

In *Life Doesn't Frighten Me*, Maya Angelou uses words to express her bravery, confidence and choices she makes when she faces a challenge. Her words empower us to be daring and strong in moments where we may feel afraid or uncertain.

Write a story or a poem about a time that you felt brave, overcame a challenge or persisted to reach a goal.

Life Doesn't Frighten Me

by Dr. Maya Angelou

**Shadows on the wall
Noises down the hall
Life doesn't frighten me at all
Bad dogs barking loud
Big ghosts in a cloud
Life doesn't frighten me at all.**

**Mean old Mother Goose
Lions on the loose
They don't frighten me at all
Dragons breathing flame
On my counterpane
That doesn't frighten me at all.**

**I go boo
Make them shoo
I make fun
Way they run
I won't cry
So they fly
I just smile
They go wild
Life doesn't frighten me at all.**

Continue to the next page.

**Tough guys in a fight
All alone at night
Life doesn't frighten me at all.
Panthers in the park
Strangers in the dark
No, they don't frighten me at all.**

**That new classroom where
Boys pull all my hair
(Kissy little girls
With their hair in curls)
They don't frighten me at all.**

**Don't show me frogs and snakes
And listen for my scream,
If I'm afraid at all
It's only in my dreams.
I've got a magic charm
That I keep up my sleeve,
I can walk the ocean floor
And never have to breathe.**

**Life doesn't frighten me at all
Not at all
Not at all
Life doesn't frighten me at all.**

Hey Black Child

by Useni Eugene Perkins

Read

Read or watch an online read-aloud of
Hey Black Child.

By Useni Eugene Perkins
Illustrated by Bryan Collier

Listen to Useni Eugene Perkins read
excerpts of the poem, *Hey Black Child*.



Portrait of three children by Jack Mitchell

Discover

We are all unique, strong and loveable in our own special ways! Watch *The Reflection In Me*, created by Fable Vision. Then, think about and discuss, "What makes you you?"

Sing about what makes you special with *Sesame Street*!

Check out the *NMAAHC Joyful ABC activity book*, *A is for Amazing*, to celebrate who you are with fun activities.

Create

Create a word portrait. Start by drawing a self-portrait (a picture of yourself) on a piece of paper with markers and crayons.

Then, fill the empty space around your self-portrait with colorful words. What words can you use to describe who you are? What do you love about your mind and body? What makes you unique?

Hey Black Child

by Useni Eugene Perkins

Hey Black Child

Do you know who you are
Who you really are
Do you know you can be
What you want to be
If you try to be
What you can be

Hey Black Child

Do you know where you are going
Where you're really going
Do you know you can learn
What you want to learn
If you try to learn
What you can learn ▶

▶ Hey Black Child

Do you know you are strong
I mean really strong
Do you know you can do
What you want to do
If you try to do
What you can do

Hey Black Child

Be what you can be
Learn what you must learn
Do what you can do
And tomorrow your nation
Will be what you want it to be

Introducing Poetry to Young Children

Poetry is for everyone, including young children! There are so many different types of poetry, from rhyming and free verse to haikus and sonnets, and each kind offers young children a playful and unique way to develop important literacy skills. With poems, children learn:

- **Rhyme and rhythm**
- **Phonemic awareness (the sounds letters make)**
- **Syllables**
- **Sentence structure**
- **Vocabulary**
- **Imagination and creativity**
- **Storytelling skills**

Use the children's books below to introduce your little one to the concept of poetry, rhyming and important African American poets.

- **All Because You Matter** by Tami Charles, illustrated by Bryan Collier
- **My People** by Langston Hughes, photographs by Charles R. Smith Jr.
- **Hip-Hop Lollipop** by Susan Mantanari, illustrated by Brian Pinkney
- **Green on Green** by Dianne White, illustrated by Felicita Sala
- **I, Too, Am America** by Langston Hughes, illustrated by Bryan Collier
- **Daniel Finds A Poem** by Micha Archer
- **Lullaby for a Black Mother** by Langston Hughes, illustrated by Sean Qualls
- **Honey, I Love and Other Love Poems** by Eloise Greenfield, illustrated by Diane and Leo Dillon
- **A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood** by Fred Rogers, illustrated by Luke Flowers
- **Lift Every Voice and Sing** by James Weldon Johnson, illustrated by Bryan Collier