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Off By Heart

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Roger Stevens has brought together a collection of poems for children to recite from memory and included a section of good tips for adults to help children both learn the poems and perform them before an audience. Stevens is a performance poet and musician. He runs poetry workshops in schools. He set up the *Poetry Zone* website to provide a space for children to publish their poems on the web, and, particularly pertinent here, has been a judge on the BBC schools **Off by Heart** competition. The poems, suitable for junior school children, are arranged from the shortest to the longest. The shortest, is by Stevens himself, and consists of the single word Sssh; although the title, which also has to be read out, is a good deal longer. The longest is Edward Lear's **The Jumblies**, but that really is much longer than most. In between are shortish poems, selected for their ease of memorising, whether by sense, rhythm, repetition or rhyme. A few are familiar; some fall into the category of nursery or playground rhymes; some are by dead poets like Christina Rossetti or Coleridge; most are by modern voices, some new to me. All have interesting themes and many are funny. Stevens stresses in his tips sections that, above all, to be motivated to learn the poems and to put them across, the children need to like and understand what they are reading. There should be no difficulty with that.

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