

Combining Picturebooks and Poetry as Blended Genres to Teach Earth and Space Science

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ABSTRACT

Recent research introduces the innovative concept of blended genres, the combination of picturebooks and poetry to teach across the curriculum. In science, for example, blended genres are described as an effective instructional tool to teach important concepts in life science (Bintz, 2025). This article builds on and extends this emerging and exciting body of research by 1) presenting blended genres of picture books and poetry to teach earth and space science, 2) reviewing the value of integrating poetry and science, the important relationship between paired text and blended genres, and the connection between blended genres and Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) and Common Core State Standards (CCSS) Standards, and 3) sharing examples of blended genres and samples of instructional strategies that K–8 teachers can use to help students learn important concepts in earth and space science.

KEYWORDS

blended genres;
picturebooks and
poetry; science
literacy; earth
and space
science;
intertextual
connections

This article builds on recent research that introduces the innovative concept of blended genres, the combination of picturebooks and poetry to teach across the curriculum. In science, for example, blended genres are described as an effective instructional tool to teach important concepts in life science in life science (Bintz, 2025). This article builds on and extends this emerging and exciting body of research by presenting blended genres of picture books and poetry to teach earth and space science.

It begins by reminding readers about the important relationship between poetry and science, the fundamental differences between paired text and blended genres, and the connection between blended genres and Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) and Common Core State Standards (CCSS) Standards. Next, it shares examples of blended genres and samples of instructional strategies that K–8 teachers can use to help students learn important concepts in earth and space science.

Poetry and Science

According to McClure (2013), “There is much to be learned from both poetry and science, and when they are combined, the potential for learning grows” (p. 13). Among other things, “science is rich in content and poetry offers powerful language: together they can both inform and inspire” (Vardell & Wong, 2015, p. 15). Historically, science and poetry have been treated as dichotomies; that is, scientists do science and poets do poetry. Today, research continues to indicate that integrating poetry and science has many benefits for teachers and students (Rule et al., 2014).

Blended Genres, CCSS, and NGSS Standards

Blended genres consisting of poetry and science are consistent with the NGSS, which state that “literacy skills are critical to building knowledge in science” (NGSS, 2013, Appendix M, p. 1). Similarly, the CCSS identify skills for high proficiency in literacy, and the Common Core Reading Anchor Standards identify skills for high proficiency in reading (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). To ensure consistency, NGSS identifies connections between CCSS literacy and CCR reading skills and science content demands in grades 6–12. Blended genres are a curricular resource that can integrate NGSS, CCSS, and CCR standards when used with instructional strategies.

Paired Text & Blended Genres

Blended genres are rooted in the rich history of paired text (Bintz, 2015). Traditionally, a paired text consists of two conceptually related texts, e.g., topic, theme, genre, etc. (Harste et al., 1988). A blended genre is one way to pair text. It consists of two texts, each text representing a different literary genre. For example, a blended genre can include a picturebook and a poem. Like paired text, blended genres have much power and potential to support intertextuality, the process of creating intertextual connections across two texts.

The following section contains examples of picturebooks and poems as blended genres, along with samples of instructional strategies to teach and learn important concepts in earth and space science. For teachers unfamiliar, I share some practical guidelines for developing and using blended genres with instructional strategies that highlight intertextuality (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Guidelines for Teachers

I used the following guidelines to help students use blended genres and instructional strategies to create and record intertextual connections across both texts. I share these guidelines with teachers, especially those who are unfamiliar with blended genres and instructional strategies that highlight intertextuality. Teachers can put blended genres into practice using demonstration, engagement, and reflection (Smith, 1981).

Demonstration is “*Watch me do this,*” in which teachers are experts and students are apprentices. Teachers provide demonstrations of how they make intertextual connections across a blended genre, introducing this process with a prompt like, “*I wonder how these two texts are related?*” Then, teachers read aloud each text, identify, and record intertextual connections, and explain how each connection relates to both texts.

Engagement is “*Now, let me watch you do it,*” in which teachers use a gradual release of responsibility (Fisher & Frey, 2021) by inviting students to demonstrate their current understanding of and ability to make intertextual connections across a blended genre. Teachers can read aloud each text, pausing during and after each reading, and students record and share intertextual connections.

Reflection is “*What do we now know about making intertextual connections that we didn’t know before?*” and highlights the notion that moving forward also means looking backward. Students reflect on the whole experience and share their new understandings about blended genres and intertextuality. Teachers use reflections to make next-step curricular and instructional decisions and continue providing students with a gradual release of responsibility.

Blended Genres and Instructional Strategies

Earth Science

Snowflake Bentley (Martin, 2009) and “Snowflakes” (McCord, in Hopkins, 2002) are a blended genre in earth science. *Snowflake Bentley* is a picturebook biography of Wilson Bentley, a young boy who studied snowflakes with a microscope. Later, his parents purchased a camera with a microscope so he could photograph snowflakes and study their intricate designs. Bentley shared

his photographs and designs with the world. After his death, he was honored with a monument in tribute to Snowflake Bentley. “Snowflakes” is a poem combined with Snowflake Bentley to create a blended genre.

Snowflakes

Sometime this winter if you go
 To walk in soft new-falling snow
 When flakes are big and come down slow
 To settle on your sleeve as bright
 As stars that couldn't wait for night,
 You won't know what you have in sight—
 Another world—unless you bring
 A magnifying glass. This thing
 We call a snowflake is the king.
 Of crystals. Do you like surprise?
 Examine him three times his size:
 At first you won't believe your eyes.
 Stars look alike, but flakes do not:
 No two the same in all the lot
 That you will get in any spot
 You chance to be, for everyone
 Come spinning through the sky has none
 But his own window-wings of sun:
 Joints, points, and crosses. What could make
 Such lacework with no crack or break?
 In billion billions, no mistake?

Interlocking Spheres of Intertextual Connections is an instructional strategy that invites students to create and record intertextual connections between two texts. Figure 1 illustrates this strategy using the blended genre of the picture book *Snowflake Bentley* and the poem “Snowflakes.” Students read each text and record a significant intertextual connection in each sphere, using “Both texts...” to introduce each connection.

Figure 2: Interlocking Spheres of Intertextual Connections



Space Science

Maria's Comet (Hopkinson, 2003) and "The Comet" (Florian, 2007) are a blended genre in space science. *Maria's Comet* is a picturebook biography of Maria Mitchell. Born in 1818 on Nantucket Island, Massachusetts, Maria became America's first woman astronomer. As a young girl, she learned much about stars from her father, an astronomer who used his telescope to study flickering stars and mountains on the moon. He also searched for comets. Inspired by her father, Maria read about early astronomers such as Copernicus and Galileo while aspiring to be an astronomer herself. She hoped to see a comet. One night, Maria joins her father on the rooftop to peer through her father's telescope. Suddenly, she sees a star bursting into view, a bright spark. One star very far away but it seems so close. It lights her heart. "The Comet" (Florian, 2007) is a short but informative poem about the characteristics of a comet.

The Comet

Ice, rock, dirt,
Metal and gas—
Around the sun
A comet may pass.

A dirty snowball
Of space debris,
The biggest snowball
That you'll ever see.

A *Z-Map* is another instructional strategy that invites students to create and record intertextual connections between two texts. Figure 2 illustrates this strategy with the blended genre of the picturebook *Maria's Comet* and the poem "The Comet." Students read each text and record a significant intertextual connection in the middle of the alphabetic letter Z, using "Both texts..." to introduce each connection.

Figure 3: Z-Map

Maria's Comet

Maria's Comet (Hopkinson, 2003) is a picturebook biography of Maria Mitchell, America's first woman astronomer. As a young girl, she learned about stars from her father, an astronomer who used his telescope to search for comets. Maria aspired to be an astronomer, too. One night, she peered through her father's telescope and saw a distant star bursting into view. It lights her heart

Metaphor: Both texts use the metaphor of a dirty snowball to describe comets.

Properties: Both texts describe the properties of comets as consisting of frozen gases, including water, ice, and dust particles.

Scientific Instruments (telescopes): Both texts highlight the picturebook directly and the poem indirectly, that telescopes were used by astronomers to discover, track, and analyze comets.

Pathway: Both texts describe comets as traveling around the sun.

"The Comet"

Ice, rock, dirt,
Metal and gas—
Around the sun
A comet may pass.

A dirty snowball
Of space debris,
The biggest snowball
That you'll ever see.

Final Thoughts

Combining picturebooks and poems as blended genres is an innovative and exciting way to pair text. This article shared examples of blended genres and samples of instructional strategies using blended genres. It also provides a curricular resource of additional examples (Table 1) of blended genres to teach various essential topics in Earth and space science. K–8 teachers are encouraged to use this resource to collaborate on developing and implementing blended genres in both English Language Arts (ELA) and science classrooms.

Combining picturebooks and poems as blended genres can ignite teacher interest in exploring more innovative ways to pair text. For example, recent research has advanced the idea of developing paired texts using expanded formats of texts (Lupo et al., 2019; Tracy et al., 2016).

Expanded formats of texts include newspapers, cartoons, field guides, websites, tweets, blogs, songs, podcasts, etc.

Similarly, recent research has advanced the idea of developing paired text using linked texts (Cappiello & Dawes, 2021; NWESD Communications, 2019; Pytash et al., 2014; Cummins, 2017). Linked texts consist of non-traditional texts like multimodal and multi-genre texts, including, among others, digital texts, YouTube videos, news articles, and podcasts. These non-traditional texts offer students different formats to read, voices to hear, and perspectives to consider.

This article aims to spark new thinking for teachers who are unfamiliar or inexperienced with combining picturebooks and poems as blended genres or using inked texts, including multimodal and multi-genre texts, to teach across the curriculum. Either way, let the new thinking begin!

Table 1: Additional Blended Genres in Earth and Space Science

Picturebook	Poem
<i>Zoo in the Sky</i> (Mitton, 2006)	"The Constellations" (Florian, 2007)
<i>Hurricane</i> (Weisner, 1992)	"Hurricane" (Lewis, 2007)
<i>Why Do Leaves Change Color?</i> (Krupinski, 2015)	"Why Leaves Change Color in the Fall" (Lewis, 2007)
<i>The Island That Moved: How Shifting Forces Shape Our Earth</i> (Hooper, 2004)	"The Lithosphere" (Lewis, 2007)
<i>Pass the Energy, Please!</i> (McKinney, 1999)	"Sun's Busy Day" (Scholastic, n.d.)
<i>Drop: An Adventure through the Water Cycle</i> (Moon, 2021)	"Water Cycle" (Hayley, n.d.)
<i>The Incredible Water Show</i> (Frasier, 2004)	"Water Cycle" (Hayley, n.d.)
<i>Nature Did It First</i> (Ansberry, 2020)	"Counting on the Woods" (Lyon, 1998)
<i>The Pebble in My Pocket: A History of Our Earth</i> (Hooper, 2015)	"Geology" (King, 2005)
<i>Tsunami!</i> (Kajikawa, 2009)	"Tsunami" (Lewis, 2007)
<i>It Started with a Big Bang: The Origin of the Earth, You, and Everything Else</i> (Bal, 2019)	"Twas the Night" (Scieszka & Smith, 2004)
<i>There was a Black Hole that Swallowed the Universe</i> (Ferrie, 2021)	"Cosmology and Scientists on My Mind" (Deo, 2022)
<i>Waiting for High Tide</i> (McClure, 2016)	"Danceline at High Tide" (Esbensen, 1995)
<i>Born with a Bang: The Universe Tells Our Cosmic Story</i> (Morgan, 2002)	"The Big Bang" (Lewis, 2007)
<i>No One Walks on My Father's Moon</i> (Curtis, 1996)	"Quarrel Between Truth and Falsehood Forever" (Reza, 2008)
<i>Sector 7</i> (Weisner, 1999)	"Cloud Watching" (Reeve, 2024)
<i>Lessons from Mother Earth</i> (McLeod, 2010)	"Nature's Way" (2024)
<i>Pluto and the Planets: Children's Storybook about the Solar System</i> (Awa, 2022)	"The Great Beyond" (Florian, 2007)
<i>There was a Black Hole that Swallowed the Universe</i> (Ferrie, 2021)	"The Black Hole" (Florian, 2007)
<i>Maria's Comet</i> (Hopkinson, 2003)	"The Comet" (Florian, 2007)
<i>Pluto's Secret: An Icy World's Tale of Discovery</i> (Weitkamp, 2015)	"Pluto" (Florian, 2007)

<i>Come See the Earth Turn</i> (Mortensen, 2010)	"Scientific Method at the Bat" (Scieszka & Smith, 2004)
<i>Mr. Archimedes Bath</i> (Allen, 1998)	"Scientific Method at the Bat" (Scieszka & Smith, 2004)
<i>Archimedes and His Numbers</i> (Professor, 2017)	"Bring Back Archimedes" (Smith, 2006)
<i>Papa, Please Get the Moon for Me</i> (Carle, 1991)	"Moon-Catchin Net" (Silverstein, 1981)
<i>The Little Dipper</i> (Stanley, 2015)	"Little Dipper" (Bager, 2007)
<i>Dinosaur Lady</i> (Skeers, 2020)	"Dinosaur Bone" (Schertle, in Hopkins, 2002)
<i>Galileo Galilei</i> (Munoz, 2020)	"Galileo's Universe" (Lewis, 2005)
<i>Stars</i> (Simon, 2006)	"Stars" (Sandburg, in Hopkins, 2002)
<i>When I Heard of the Learn'd Astronomer</i> (Whitman, 2004)	"Stars" (Sandburg, in Hopkins, 2002)
<i>Feel the Wind</i> (Dorros, 2000)	"What Are You, Wind?" (O'Neil, in Hopkins, 2002)
<i>The Relationship of the Moon and the Tides</i> (Professor, 2017)	"Strictly for the Birds" (Fatchen, 1987)
<i>Telling Time: How to Tell Time on Digital and Analog Clocks</i> (Older, 2000)	"Tide Talk" (Fatchen, 1987)
<i>The Waterhole</i> (Base, 2001)	"A Cliché" (Merriam, 1964)
<i>I Am the Solar System</i> (McDonald, 2020)	"Spinning Song" (Shields, 1995)
<i>Maria's Comet</i> (Hopkinson, 2003)	"Halley's Comet" (Lewis, 1998)
<i>A Birdwatcher's Guide to Chickadees</i> (Harasymiw, 2015)	"Chickadee's Song" (Smith, 2014)
<i>When Cloud Became a Cloud</i> (Hodgson, 2021)	"Water Cycle Poem" (Mr. R., 2002)
<i>Feel the Wind</i> (Dorros, 2000)	"Wind On the Hill" (Milne, 2022)
<i>The Sun: Shining Star of the Solar System</i> (Perdew, 2021)	"Voice of Unnamed Star" (Bagert, 2006)
<i>Super Stars: The Biggest, Hottest, Brightest, Most Explosive Stars in the Milky Way</i> (Aguilar, 2010)	"The Brightest Star" (Bagert, 2006)
<i>Round the Garden</i> (Glaser, 2000)	"Photosynthesis Poem" (Mr. R., 2002)

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