

# Schoolroom Poets



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As recently as the 1960s, children across America continued to recite in schoolrooms or on auditorium stages poems of strong emotional resonance such as "Paul Revere's Ride," "Little Orphan Annie," and "The Song of Hiawatha." Many still remember poems with soft rhythmic cadences such as "Wynken, Blynken, and Nod" as bedtime verse read to them by their parents. According to Angela Sorby, these and hundreds of other child-oriented poems, written less for individual introspection than for public performance, became central components of American culture in the period between the Civil War and World War I. She identifies a "schoolroom canon" that some older Americans will still recognize, composed of poems by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, John Greenleaf Whittier, Eugene Field, James Whitcomb Riley, and others whose work was read, memorized, and repeated in pedagogical institutions nationwide. These poems, transmitted through schools, museums, lyceums, and theaters, as well as by newspapers and magazines, accrued cultural power through repetition; as they circulated, they functioned as mnemonic devices that established affective bonds between individuals, institutions, and the nation. Sorby's final chapter, on the child-voice poems of Emily Dickinson, argues that her reception history in the 1890s should be linked to the discourse of infantilization and pedagogy that dominated American popular poetry of the period and, to a great extent, continues to do so today.

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