

What do poems *do*?

by [Brian Doyle](#) in the [February 4, 2015](#) issue

I was, no kidding, a visiting writer in a *kindergarten* recently,  
And the children asked me many wry and hilarious questions,  
Among them *is that your real nose?* and *can you write a book  
About a ruffed grouse, please?* But the one that pops back into  
My mind this morning was *what do poems do?* Answers: swirl  
Leaves along sidewalks suddenly when there is no wind. Open  
Recalcitrant jars of honey. Be huckleberries in earliest January,  
When berries are only a shivering idea on a bush. Be your dad  
For a moment again, tall and amused and smelling like Sunday.  
Be the awful wheeze of a kid with the flu. Remind you of what  
You didn't ever forget but only mislaid or misfiled. Be badgers,  
Meteor showers, falcons, prayers, sneers, mayors, confessionals.  
They are built to slide into you sideways. You have poetry slots  
Where your gills used to be, when you lived inside your mother.  
If you hold a poem right you can go back there. Find the handle.  
Take a skitter of words and speak gently to them, and you'll see.