

## Episode 419: Furnishing the Mind: Announcing Memory Mentor

### Transcript

**Julie Walker:** Hello, and welcome to the Arts of Language Podcast with Andrew Pudewa, founder of the Institute for Excellence in Writing or as many like to say, “IEW.” My name is Julie Walker, and I’m honored to serve Andrew and IEW as the chief marketing officer. Our goal is to equip teachers and teaching parents with methods and materials, which will aid them in training their students to become confident and competent communicators and thinkers.

**Julie Walker:** Happy April, Andrew.

**Andrew Pudewa:** April is a great month in so many ways.

**Julie Walker:** It's true. And one of them, of course, it's your birthday month.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Yeah, well, but that's kind of balanced out by the fact that all the taxes happen. Every possible thing you’ve got to pay is just hitting you right on the head. But the birthday presents never outweigh the tax bill.

**Julie Walker:** I don't suppose.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Probably not for anybody. But the spring is sprung and here in Oklahoma, it's just beautiful starting to warm up. Even the pool isn't terribly cold anymore.

**Julie Walker:** Well, I wouldn't know about that. Though I have been in your pool before with my grandchildren, and that was pretty fun.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Yes, well, in the middle of summer, it's warm, but I've been doing all year these early morning cold plunge in my pool, so now it's not so bad as it once was back in February.

**Julie Walker:** No breaking the ice this time to get in. Well, for us here at IEW, and for many places, we celebrate poetry. This is our month of poetry.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Oh, really? In April?

**Julie Walker:** Yes, it is.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Is that because it's just like spring showers and flowers, and that just makes you feel poetic? Why would April be Poetry Month?

**Julie Walker:** April showers bring May flowers. I don't know. Someone decided that this was a good month to celebrate poetry. And of course, here at IEW, we love honoring poetry

because it has a great place in the Furnishing the Mind theme that we're talking about this year. So I thought it would be good for you and me to have a conversation about poetry in general and specifically why it's so helpful in this Furnishing the Mind theme.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Okay, let's do it.

**Julie Walker:** Short of giving your entire talk *Nurturing Competent Communicators* or wait I got another one *Mastery Learning, Ability Development, and Individualized Education*; that's another talk you give; or *10,000 Times and then Begins Understanding*. We have a lot of opportunities for our listeners to learn more about the value of memorization generally and specifically the value of memorizing poetry. And we have a whole curriculum devoted to that called *Linguistic Development Through Poetry Memorization*.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Yeah, I mean, it's not the catchiest title in the world, but it is exactly what it is. And of all the things that we've done over the years, that's still maybe my favorite thing that I ever put together, just because there wasn't anything available that I knew of that was really going to help people undertake the memorization of a lot.

And I think too many people in kind of this modern educational environment, when you say poetry, they immediately go to, "oh! wild, free, creative, stream of consciousness, flow words on paper, have fun" kind of thing. And that doesn't work for every student. In fact, it fails many. I would argue that if you want a child to fall in love with poetry and want to write poetry, the most important thing you can possibly do first is have them memorize a lot of poetry. Because how do you know what something is if you haven't really taken it into yourself?

**Julie Walker:** Yes, and we've had many people who have gone through this course, and sometimes parents and teachers, well, parents in particular, they'll be doing this with their older children, and the younger ones are learning it too. And so we have little videos of two and three year olds reciting "Ooey Gooney," and, and so you can actually memorize poetry way before you're able to read poetry.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Yeah. One of the things I like to point out to people is this word memorization, which everyone understands what it means. It's kind of a new word in this regard. And it's kind of mechanical, right? And certain educators, progressive educators, modern educators began to look down upon memorization as somehow being kind of rote learning, drill and kill, anti-creative, and that's just certainly not the case.

The older term, the one which my mother used, and I would guess you heard it when you were young, is "learn by heart." Right? My mother never said, memorize this piece, memorize this thing. It was always, "You have to learn it by heart." And there is something amazing about when you commit a poem to memory, you take it into yourself in a way that you really don't in any other way.

The other thing that I've noticed about children is they're just wired to memorize stuff. They're just wired to imitate. If you give them beautiful things, they'll memorize it easily. If you don't give them beautiful things, they'll memorize whatever junk is in their environment--TV commercials, or rap songs, or whatever.

So, part of this whole idea of furnishing the mind is let's attend to vocabulary, syntax, grammar, artistic use of words—all of that that makes for better speakers and writers down line. But the other part is let's furnish with beautiful ideas and imagery and the sound of it. And so those are the two areas that I'm trying to help people understand. Now what's different about our approach in poetry memorization as to any other poetry book you could pick up and buy?

**Julie Walker:** I should ask you that although I know the answer.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, you tell the answer.

**Julie Walker:** All right, the answer is we don't just encourage students to memorize a poem and then forget it while they're learning another one. We want them to have this whole repertoire of poems that they can maybe do ten, twenty at a sitting. I mean, this whole course has eighty poems to memorize, some of them are very long, as well as twenty famous speeches. Wow, that's a lot of content that you can actually work through in a systematic way to memorize and retain it.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, and certainly there's historical and empirical evidence to support the fact that young children can memorize and retain huge chunks of verbal information, whether it's a couple of the curriculums out there have these timelines and the kids will learn these things over a couple of years, and they're reciting this thing and go on for a couple of hours.

And then of course, if you read books about children in the 1800s, things like *Anne of Green Gables*, *Laddie*, *Little House on the Prairie*, *Little Britches*, usually it will give you some window into the school life of children then. And almost always, there will be this idea of you have to say your lessons. Well, nobody today would ever go to school and say your lessons. You'd go to school and take a multiple guess test on a tablet these days. Some schools. But to prepare and recite a poem, that is a level of, I don't know, a fortitude, perseverance, working toward a goal, maybe, you are a little nervous if you have to stand in front of your peers or other people to recite the poem. So many, so many good things happen. It can unlock a child's opportunity to be a little dramatic. I think most children have a natural flair towards being dramatic. And then whether they kind of take that into a trained area or they just stay dramatic, but don't train it, or they lose their dramatic flair. But poetry is such a good, safe way to do that.

**Julie Walker:** You talk about, in the *Teaching Writing: Structure and Style* teacher training course, how to teach our writing method. And one of the things you say there is you can't get something out of a brain that isn't in there to begin with. And you talk about the value of poetry. And I would like for you to tell the story that you tell in *Nurturing Competent Communicators* when you were a preschool teacher and one of your students.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Oh, little Rose. So I ran a preschool. I mean, technically it was a group home daycare legally. So it was a very small thing, but it was a very glorified daycare. And so I had 12 children, age 3 ½ to 5 ½ for, well, six and a half hours a day, just me and about a 600 square foot convertible garage with a little bit of help, but it was pretty much, my, my lab school, I was doing all sorts of things. I was actually out to kind of prove to the world you could do Suzuki method. It was called Bozeman Talent Education. I was in Bozeman,

Montana, and I decided that we were going to do poetry memorization along with things like kinder music and violin basic reading. I used the Blended Sound Sight from which our PAL program is derived.

I had a lot of time to fill up with these kids.

**Julie Walker:** Six hours with preschoolers. Wow, Andrew.

**Andrew Pudewa:** So we started with the first poem the first week. My idea was add a poem a week, but say every poem every day so that no one would ever forget any of the poems. So we learned the first little poem and it, I mean, you might not like it, but I kind of liked it.

Theologically it might be in question, but it's called "The Fly" by Ogden Nash. And it kind of goes like this. Well, it does go like this, not kind of.

The Lord in his wisdom made the fly  
and then forgot to tell us why.

Now that's it. That is the entire poem. So two lines, but remember my clientele—four year olds. So we said this at morning circle time, afternoon circle time, end of the day circle time, every day, five days in a row. So at the repetition of 15 times by the end of the week, almost all the kids knew this poem and could recite it with me. But I didn't test them, nor did I care to test them, because it didn't really matter, knowing that we were going to continue to recite this poem every day while we learned another poem.

So the next week, I tried this one.  
There was a young lady named Bright  
who traveled much faster than light.  
She left one day in her relative way  
and returned the previous night.

Of course, now, I love that poem, but the kids didn't quite get it. Even though I tried to explain international dateline and the theory of relativity as to how time could be variable, but four year olds—just whoo over their head completely. Now one thing I kind of knew and had that confirmed it a little more and more, and over the years, I've had it fully confirmed. Children don't have to understand everything they memorize, right? There's poems that I don't really understand. That doesn't mean it's not valuable to read them, to contemplate, or to memorize them.

So I didn't, I didn't stop saying the poem, even though they didn't really know what it meant, but I did come back to kind of four year old reality. The third week, we did this one.

Down, down,  
yellow and brown,  
the leaves are falling  
all over town.

And then we got into “Celery” and so, but what happened was we were saying every poem that we learned every day.

So this particular poem, “The Fly,” I don't know, we're probably eight weeks into the school year. I think it was snowing in Bozeman and cold, so probably around late October, November. I had one little girl in my class, Rose. She was the oldest, she was almost six years old. She was super smart; she could read really well because her mommy had taught her. And she was kind of like my assistant in this world of four year olds. She was top of the crop, head of the group. And so I could count on her to, to do things. So we had a good relationship. Well, one morning she came into the classroom there and she. Walked right over to where I was sitting working on some stuff or whatever. She looked at me and she said, “Teacher, I have a problem.” That's what they called me, teacher.

I kind of felt like I was getting set up for something. Okay, Rose, what's your problem? And she said, Teacher, my mother in her busyness forgot my lunch. And what to do? I haven't a hunch. So she had taken this little poem, “Lord in his wisdom made the fly and then forgot to tell us why.” She changed all the words that needed to be changed, but she kept the form of it. She kept the grammar of it to some degree to say what she wanted to say in a more sophisticated (and she knew it) and a more humorous (and she knew that too) way than she otherwise would have said, Teacher, my mom forgot my lunch. I don't know what to do.

So, and that's just one of many examples I could give of how I have seen memorized language patterns come out in various forms in both the spoken and written communication of children. We also see this historically that people would, not even borrow, they would just use from what was kind of called the common stock, of expressions and vocabulary and patterns and grammar and illusions, and everything.

I just finished reading the book *How to Think Like Shakespeare* for the fourth time, and if people missed our podcast with the author of that book, Scott Newstok, I recommend it so highly. But one thing that popped out of me this fourth time that I kind of didn't notice before was a phrase from the “Gettysburg Address,” which really had come from a literary source— “It is fitting and proper.” So it's not like Lincoln invented that little combination of words, but it was swirling around in the great stock pot, and I love that term stock the way he uses it because it means soup? And what do you do? You add things to your stock? So you have your, your chicken stock or whatever, and then you can put in more vegetables or more herbs or whatever. But you've got that stock as a base to work with.

And then we also look at it as stock as an inventory. So here's the collection of stuff, the stock of stuff that we have to make things from, to build things from, and in *How to Think Like Shakespeare*, he points out that this was just common. Everybody knew that you had this stock available, you would draw from it, you would use it, and then you could contribute to the stock so that other people could use things that you came up with in this kind of gradual enrichment over generations, centuries of language. And I think we see that best in the great poetry, going all the way back to Homer and Virgil, but also what we see in our English language tradition.

And of course, in our poetry memorization programs, every poem, except for one, is in the public domain, which means they're all old, all of them have a little antiquated language, but that's good. That enriches the capacity for students to understand language.

**Julie Walker:** Yes, so I know that most of our listeners that are listening to us right now are convinced. Great! Okay, but Andrew, what should I memorize besides this poetry memorization course? And how should I memorize it? How do I do that? And so we have actually, and I know you know this, but listener, we're going to let you in on a little secret here.

We have been working on an app for that. There's an app for that, or there will be, we hope this summer. And this was an idea that had been marbling around, I think, in a lot of people's minds of how to do this, but it was actually your daughter Genevieve who codified it. And I'm going to read to you, Andrew, and to our listeners, kind of her vision of what this app is going to do. So here we go. I picture a homeschooling mom, and I'm going to qualify this and say, we totally have a plan for teachers and college students and all different. Who wants to memorize stuff? Well, everybody wants to memorize stuff.

**Andrew Pudewa:** And if they don't, they should want to memorize stuff.

**Julie Walker:** So, so just to paint the picture. We'll just focus right now on this...avatar, we call them... a homeschooling mom.

I picture a homeschooling mom opening Memory Mentor. That's the name of our app Memory Mentor. And actually if you go to our website [IEW.com/memory](http://IEW.com/memory), you can sign up to be notified when it's available. This will be something that is available on your mobile device Smartphone on your mobile device. We actually have a web interface, but primarily it's something that's going to be portable that you can take with you. Because as you know, homeschooling often takes place in the car,

**Andrew Pudewa:** On the go.

**Julie Walker:** On the road. Off we go. Home, it should be in there. Okay. Starting over again. I'm so sorry. I get distracted. Spider webbing here.

I picture a homeschooling mom opening Memory Mentor during breakfast and just hitting play, knowing that everything is prepared for her. She doesn't have to read everything aloud, but she can enjoy listening along with her children. As an individual item is memorized, she can easily bump it to a lesser frequency and quickly select a new piece of memory work to replace it.

She did some work at the beginning of the year to choose and upload the memory work for the year, but now it is automated and easy. She knows that a store of facts and definitions will make her future educational efforts so much easier and a rich selection of scripture and poetry learned by heart will provide the language for future thought and expression, a treasury of inspiration, and a store of beauty and depth of thought that will allow her children to stand firm and speak to a world badly in need of truth, beauty, and goodness.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Genevieve wrote that?

**Julie Walker:** Genevieve wrote that.

**Andrew Pudewa:** That's well written.

**Julie Walker:** It is very well written. She must have had a father as a writing teacher.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Oh, well that is, that is beautiful. I mean, right there is copy for the thing to explain it to everyone. One of the things about our poetry memorization program is that I put into it a plan, which I used when I was teaching violin, because I was teaching Suzuki method violin. And one of the keys there is that kids learn pieces, but they play their pieces often enough that they never forget a piece of music that they've learned, which is the Japanese style.

So when I lived in Japan, every kid could play every piece they ever learned, on demand, and nobody ever forgot a piece. We Americans are not quite so good at doing that. And if you take it to the opposite extremes, like you learn a piece, you play it, and now you go learn another piece, and you play that, but you never play the pieces you used to know. So gradually you can't play them anymore. So the idea is build a repertoire. So the concept with the poetry memorization was the same one I use with violin students, which I called EPED. Every piece, every day.

**Andrew Pudewa:** So, up through book one, which is 17 pieces of music, takes about 22 and a half minutes if you play it at the tape speed or recorded speed.

So you play every piece that you had learned every day. Now, at a certain point, you start into book two, you don't have that much time necessarily. So then we move Book 1 to every other piece every other day, and Book 2 is on every piece every day. So you're only spending about 11 minutes rotating every other piece of Book 1, but you're getting better and easier and smoother, and hopefully you can play them even more musically.

And so you're spending about 11 minutes on Book 1, and then you're gradually learning Book 2, and you're doing every piece every day of Book 2. So by the time you finish Book 2, you've got about a half an hour's worth of pieces that you can play totally from memory. Now you've got to get more time.

So Book 1 goes to every third piece every third day. Book two goes to every other piece every other day, and then book three is every piece every day. And by the end of book three, technically you could go every fourth, every third, every other, and every, but by then you kind of just don't have enough time to do all that.

So then the strategy is you take all the pieces you've learned, write them on a little slip of paper, throw them in a hat or a bowl, and pull out as many as you have time for, and then once they're all out of the bowl, throw them all back in. That way there's a constant review cycle going on. So, that was the system I described in the poetry memorization program, but the app is going to make that automated so that you can put something on a review frequency.

And say, well, I want this group of things once a week, or I want this group of things every three days, or I want this thing every day.

**Julie Walker:** And I want this thing three times a day.

**Andrew Pudewa:** You could do that too, couldn't you?

**Julie Walker:** We have that as an option. So the scheduling is a big part of the complexity of the app and working through all of that. The other thing that we're wanting to do for the app is make content readily available. And so we are recording. Obviously, we have the poetry already recorded, but some other things that we've included in there. And then we have a free version of the app and a paid version where it's like a subscription. And so some of these features and benefits we're still working out. But we just want it to be something that every homeschool mom, every classroom teacher, every—I'm thinking of your daughter who's in med school—we want her to be, (not Genevieve, another daughter) we want her to be able to learn inserts, origins, and actions of muscle groups, right? These things that you have to learn to be a med student.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Yeah. She's in neurology.

Anyway, the idea though, for the full app functionality is that anyone could add anything that they own. So if you had purchased audio files from some curriculum that had something that you wanted to memorize, of which there are a few different things, you could add that in yourself, or you could record yourself whatever you wanted to record into it. So the flexible functionality of the full app, I think, is going to be just fantastic.

**Julie Walker:** And let me just add two more pieces to that. One that I'm personally using with my granddaughter, of course, is there's a YouTube video that I can upload, not upload, but I can, there's a link to it that is now part of her repertoire. So every day she listens to this little piece that is on YouTube. And then the other thing that I'm working to have her do, haven't quite figured out exactly how to do that because I need an accompanist, but she can sing. And so I can upload music.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Don't you have a son who's like really good at

**Julie Walker:** And, yes, my son, who's the guitar player, who we hear on our TWSS and SSS video products, he absolutely has given me what I needed, but now I just have to put it together with her so that she can sing the songs.

And so she's got poetry that she's memorizing, a little walk through the Old Testament recitation that she's doing with hand motions. 'cause that's what the YouTube does. It shows the hand motions. And then she's got a song that she's singing and then math facts. So all these different things and just a little bit every day.

**Andrew Pudewa:** And so easy for the mom.



One thing I'd like to say, because I know we're getting close on time, I've been contemplating this a lot, is the power of memory on imagination. And I want to give you an example here. So there's a poem that I have known as long as I can remember. I've known this poem for decades. I've always liked the poem. It was just a poem that I liked and would read and read to people, but I never committed it to memory. I never learned it by heart. So last Christmas, one of my daughters suggested that everyone in the family could memorize something and prepare it. And then we would recite whatever we had memorized in kind of a family festive thing, something to do on Christmas evening.

**Julie Walker:** I love that idea.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Because you've opened all the presents, you've broken half the stuff, the game pieces are already missing, the place is a mess, and you all just ate too much, so what do you even do? So anyway, I thought, I will memorize this poem that I have loved, but never memorized, for this Christmas event.

**Andrew Pudewa:** And it is "The Children's Hour" by Longfellow. And it was a very interesting experience for me, because of course, I'm older, so memorizing takes a little longer. And I worked on it. I spent a good 15 minutes a day for many days in a row getting this poem solid, and then I would find various people to practice it on.

But here's what I noticed. Reading it and reciting it from memory have an entirely different effect on the imagination. So when I'm reading it, it's almost kind of a passive thing, and I'm still distracted by the process of looking at the words on the page. When I'm reciting it from memory, I am visually not distracted by that, so what happens is in my mind's eye, in my imagination, in the visual part of my memory, I'm seeing everything with much greater intensity than I did before when I hadn't memorized it. In fact, in order to memorize and recite it well, I have to see all of the little details in the right sequences. And I never really thought about this before—how the committing to memory, that process, builds so powerfully. A more vibrant, a more active, a more delight filled, imaginative experience. And what I'm wondering, and I'm trying to figure out some way to test this out. I'm wondering if the fact that I can tell the poem from memory, if the listeners are actually having a different imagination experience than if I were reading it to them.

**Julie Walker:** Yes. Yes.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Because is it moving the images from my mind kind of almost supernaturally, through the words into their mind more effectively than if I were just reading it aloud? So I don't know, it'd be an interesting experiment to read a poem and record it and then recite a memorized poem. Try to keep the level of inflection and dramatic influence about the same and see if anyone could tell which is which.

**Julie Walker:** Yeah. That is a great experiment. Well, as you say, we are out of time, but listener, I do invite you to go to [IEW.com/memory](http://IEW.com/memory) and sign up if you want to hear notifications about when this app is to be released. Our goal is to have this out so that you can start preparing it for your classroom or for your homeschool or getting ready for the fall.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Or something to do over the summer.

**Julie Walker:** We want it to sparkle, so we're not exactly sure when this will be out, but sometime this summer is when we're going to have it out.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Memory Mentor. Memorize a lot.

**Julie Walker:** Exactly. Thank you, Andrew.

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