

Mary Amato weaves stories and songwriting together in Lucy McGee series

Author and her ukulele will be at the National Book Festival for a talk and singalong.

By [Christina Barron](#)

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When author Mary Amato thinks about her childhood, she says she thinks about singing.

“As a family we sang in the car all the time,” Amato said. “It was one of the most fun experiences because it wasn’t

alone. I was singing with my sisters and with my mom and dad. It was a way to connect.”

So it makes sense that Amato would weave music into her books. In her latest series, main character [Lucy McGee](#) sings, plays the ukulele and writes her own music. Readers can see the lyrics in the book, but they can also hear the songs, thanks to [SoundCloud recordings](#) Amato made with the help of several kids.

“I wanted readers to have the fun of being able to hear the songs and to learn them, to be able to sing along,” she said. “I think singing is best when you’re singing with someone.”

Amato will sing with visitors at the National Book Festival on Saturday at The Washington Post’s booth. She promised to bring her ukulele and a friend. Juliet Wade, who is the voice of Lucy on the recordings, will be there to sing along. Visitors might even write a song with Amato. To help KidsPost readers flex their creative muscles, Amato shared her advice below on how to write a funny song.

— **Christina Barron**

You can write a funny song by taking a familiar song and writing new words for it. That's called a parody. Song parodies are great for singalongs, because everybody already knows the tune.

Here's a familiar song:

Row, row, row your boat

Gently down the stream

Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily

Life is but a dream.

And here's a parody of it:

Smell, smell, smell my socks

Gently with your nose

Terribly, terribly, terribly, terribly!

Oh, my socks smell gross.

A parody follows the pattern of the original song and exchanges new words for the old words.

To write your own song parody, first you have to decide what your song will be about. Let's do one about eating bugs. Follow the pattern and fill in the blanks. The original lines are underneath the fill-in-the-blank lines to help. Some of the blanks are filled for you.

_____, _____, _____ *your bugs*

[Row, row, row your boat]

_____ *with your spoon*

[Gently down the stream]

_____, _____, _____, _____

Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily

Let's eat some bugs soon

[Life is but a dream]

Want a bigger challenge? Try writing one on your own. Pet, pet, pet the dog? Blow, blow, blow your nose? You decide. Take it line by line and have fun. Notice in the original that “stream” and “dream” rhyme. You don’t have to rhyme, but it can be fun to try.

_____, _____, _____, _____

Row, row, row your boat

Gently down the stream

_____, _____, _____, _____

Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily

Life is but a dream.

When you’re done, don’t forget to teach it to your friends and family. Sing in the car! Sing in the bathtub! Sing around the campfire! Just don’t sing while you eat, because that’s disgusting.

If you go

What: The National Book Festival. Talks and book signings by authors for all ages. The children’s stages and Washington Post booth are on the Concourse Level.

Where: Walter E. Washington Convention Center, 801 Mount Vernon Place in Northwest Washington.

When: Saturday, 8:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. Amato will be at The Post’s booth from 1 to 1:45 p.m.

How much: Free.

For more information: Visit loc.gov/events/2019-national-book-festival.