

Meet Our Authors: Michael Rosen

Developing poetry in the poetry-friendly classroom

Michael Rosen's 12 suggestions for creating a poetry-friendly classroom make an excellent start for teachers who want to begin to make more of poetry. Visit

<http://www.childrenslaureate.org.uk/show/feature/Poetry%20Friendly%20Classroom/Childrens-laureate-watch-the-video> to watch Michael's video or to view transcripts of his ideas.

The resource below has been developed especially for Scottish Book Trust by Cathrin Howells, of Creative Contexts education consultancy (www.creativecontexts.co.uk).

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1. Working with poems

The approaches below build on Michael's suggestions, and offer some links to Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence *Experiences and Outcomes for Literacy and English*:

a. Warming up

- **Think, pair, share** – this will work as an introductory activity to all of the poems we have included in this resource. Pupils start alone, thinking quietly, then talk to a partner, then share with the group any comments they have about the poem, anything they notice, any questions they want to ask, anything they like/dislike, anything that makes them think of anything else, any surprises; and try looking for Michael Rosen's "secret strings", too (clip 8 from the Michael Rosen's poetry friendly classroom website, above).

Listening and talking: *listen to and discuss the poem in pairs and as a group*
Enjoyment and choice; finding and using information; understanding, analysing and evaluating; creating texts

Reading: *identify relevant aspects of the poem linked to points raised in discussion*
Enjoyment and choice; finding and using information; understanding, analysing and evaluating

- **Quick on the draw** – pupils make quick sketches in response to a verse at a time – encourage them to be swift, to try to capture first images, not to worry about creating a perfect drawing. Pupils can add annotations or a quotation, too, if you wish.

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Reading: *identify aspects of the poem for illustration*

Enjoyment and choice; finding and using information; understanding, analysing and evaluating

Writing: *add a quotation or annotation to each illustration*

Enjoyment and choice; organising and using information

- **Still image 1** – choose a favourite moment from one of these poems and create a still image. If you are on your own, you can then team up with a partner who can advise as a director; then you can swap roles to help create their still image. Show your images to the class and see if they can quote the exact line/s from the poem that you are trying to show. Add sticky notes to say what your character is saying, thinking, feeling, and share these with the class too, or take a digital photo and annotate it/add speech and thought bubbles; quote a relevant line from the poem below the image and print it out.

Listening and talking: *identify a favourite part of the poem and develop the still image*

Enjoyment and choice; finding and using information; understanding, analysing and evaluating; creating texts

Reading: *identify chosen part of poem as basis for still image (and quotation)*

Enjoyment and choice; finding and using information; understanding, analysing and evaluating

Writing: *add a quotation or annotations to still image/photograph*

Enjoyment and choice; organising and using information; creating texts

- **Still image 2, poetry promenade** – chunk the poem and create a series of still images (one per group) to depict the whole poem in sequence. Present them in turn to accompany a reading of the poem.

b. Ways with words

Becoming curious about words and learning to play with them is an important part of enjoying and making poetry. The [poetic techniques](#) section below has ideas about ways with words, and there are additional ideas in the guidance notes for the poems in this resource. In addition you may want to explore calligrams:

- **Calligrams** – a calligram is a word made into a shape to show its meaning; pupils experiment by drawing or using Microsoft WordArt to create calligrams that bring out the meaning of some favourite words from poems.

Reading: *identify words that would make good calligrams*

Enjoyment and choice; understanding, analysing and evaluating

Listening and talking: *discuss how and why chosen words could be made into calligrams*

Enjoyment and choice; finding and using information; understanding, analysing and evaluating; creating texts

Writing: *create a calligram of a chosen word*

Creating texts

- **Synonyms** – what other words can you find for particular words in the poem? Use a thesaurus and collect them with their meaning. It may be possible to arrange them in a continuum of meaning (see [Hot Food](#)).

Reading: *collect synonyms*

Enjoyment and choice; finding and using information

Writing: *arrange them, with their meanings (perhaps in a continuum)*

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Creating texts

c. Digging deeper

- **Think about the title of the poem** – why did the poet choose this title? Does it work? What other title could the poem have? Why?

Listening and talking: *discuss the title of the poem, and alternatives, in pairs and as a group*
Enjoyment and choice; finding and using information; understanding, analysing and evaluating; creating texts

Reading: *identify relevant aspects of the poem to justify comments about title*
Enjoyment and choice; finding and using information; understanding, analysing and evaluating

- **Envoys** – as a group, pupils decide on two observations they want to make about a poem, and one question they would like to ask. Each group then sends an envoy to the next group to share the observations and question and discuss possible answers. The envoy returns to the home group with the new information.

Reading: *identify aspects of the poem for comment and questioning*
Enjoyment and choice; finding and using information; understanding, analysing and evaluating

Listening and talking: *agree items for comment and question; consider with envoys*
Enjoyment and choice; finding and using information; understanding, analysing and evaluating; creating texts

- **Community of enquiry** – A community of enquiry is a slowly evolving, thoughtful discussion about questions of interest. Some poems will lend themselves to this philosophical approach, but it cannot be hurried: you will need to allow at least an hour for the first session and subsequent sessions will be required.

First, read the poem twice through to the children. There is no discussion of the poem at this point. Let the children have quiet reflection time for a few minutes, without discussing or sharing any thoughts out loud. Then ask the children to jot down ANY questions the poem raises for them – these may or may not be directly linked to the text. Children then either decide individually on one of their questions, or turn to a partner to share their questions and then decide on one each to share with the class. The teacher writes the questions up on a class list. *No answers are offered as yet, and try not to make any evaluative comments about the questions as they are offered.* When all the questions have been collected, look at the list. Children can talk with a partner – which one would they like to explore? Choose a question to discuss as a class.

This approach creates space for some of life's deep or unexpected queries to be considered, and can prove a very valuable way to allow children to explore their beliefs and ideas.

Managing the discussion: try to encourage the children to respond to each other, rather than the teacher acting as a conduit for each contribution. Rules for respectful, collaborative class/group discussion will have to be established, but if they are, a thoughtful discussion should ensue. It will take several sessions to work through all the questions raised.

Listening and talking: *consider the poem and related ideas individually, in pairs and as a group; develop a free-flowing philosophical discussion around issues identified by pupils*
Enjoyment and choice; finding and using information; understanding, analysing and evaluating; creating texts

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d. Working towards writing

Poems can make an excellent springboard for ways into writing – discussion, drama and research stemming from the initial exploration of the poem can all help children prepare to create storyboards, narratives, playscripts or functional writing. See guidance on each poem for specific writing activities.

- **Poet/poem of the week** – give the responsibility to a different group each week (and give them dedicated class time to do it) – agree a poem, research the poet, write up some comments, recommendations, questions, etc.

Reading: *read a range of poems by a chosen poet*

Enjoyment and choice; finding and using information; understanding, analysing and evaluating

Listening and talking: *agree the poem and related information to be shared with the class*

Enjoyment and choice; finding and using information; understanding, analysing and evaluating; creating texts

Writing: *prepare the poem of the week and related information for display or presentation*

Enjoyment and choice; organising and using information; creating texts

Listening and talking: *present the poem of the week and related information to the class*

Enjoyment and choice; creating texts

e. Making poems

- **Jigsaw poems** – cut up a published poem into words and phrases and place in an envelope for each pair. Pupils work in pairs to create a poem from the words and phrases of their choice. Everyone should get the chance to go round and see what others have done with the same words. Then share the original text and allow pupils time to consider and compare.

Listening and talking: *consider the jigsaw pieces and agree the creation of a poem*

Enjoyment and choice; finding and using information; understanding, analysing and evaluating; creating texts

Reading: *identify words that would combine to make lines of verse*

Enjoyment and choice; finding and using information; understanding, analysing and evaluating

Writing: *create an original poem from the words and phrases given*

Enjoyment and choice; tools for writing; organising and using information; creating texts

Listening and talking: *consider and compare the poems of peers and the original text*

Enjoyment and choice; understanding, analysing and evaluating; creating texts

- **Model poetry** – use the structures and patterns of verses or whole poems as a model to mimic. Collect ideas and try them out, working towards a polished product.

Writing: *create your own poem using another poem as a model*

Enjoyment and choice; tools for writing; organising and using information; creating texts

- **Class poems** – support the children in their attempts to write their own poetry by starting with a collaborative effort to create a class poem, pooling and sifting ideas, honing and refining them as a class, modelling the thought processes that go with each of these stages so children can see it is not straightforward and there are no right answers.

Writing: *create a class poem, demonstrating the craft of the writer and voicing the inner dialogue a decisions are made*

Enjoyment and choice; tools for writing; organising and using information; creating texts

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Cross-curricular connections

- **Investigating illustrators** – find out more about the person who illustrated poems you enjoyed. Make your own illustrations in the same style of different aspects of the poems.

Reading: *research an illustrator*

Enjoyment and choice; finding and using information; understanding, analysing and evaluating

- **ICT: Performance podcast** – pupils make a recording of a poetic performance and upload it to the school web site for others to enjoy as a podcast.

Reading: *explore the text to identify performance potential*

Enjoyment and choice; finding and using information; understanding, analysing and evaluating

Listening and talking: *discuss the poem, plan and record a group performance*

Enjoyment and choice; finding and using information; understanding, analysing and evaluating; creating texts

- **ICT: Poetic slide shows** – find or make images to go with lines or verses of a poem and combine these to make a slide show for your class or for the school web site. You could add music or sound effects, too.

Writing: *create a poetry slide show for the class*

Enjoyment and choice; tools for writing; organising and using information; creating texts

- **Making music** – pupils make music to accompany a poem; try finding a rhythm accompaniment first, then add some melody, perhaps just using two or three notes that combine and repeat in different ways through the poem.

2. Poetic techniques

As a reader – and ultimately writer – of poetry, you need to understand the craft of the writer. You need to understand how a poet is working with words to guide you towards a range of sounds and images and ideas and feelings. And to really understand the craft of the writer, you need to be supported in your own attempts to try out these techniques, both in short burst practice activities and in fully crafted poems of your own.

There are lots of different techniques that poets draw on to add interest to their poems, and the more you read, the more you will notice these and become comfortable with them. Above all, a love of words will help – how they sound, how they work, how you can arrange them and play with them and make them work on more than one level.

Here are just some of the more common techniques that you might want to look out for and try incorporating into your writing. When you come across them, think what their purpose in the poem might be, how they add to it in some way, then enjoy exploring and experimenting with them for yourself.

- **Rhyme schemes** – look at the way a poet uses rhyme. It might be in a regular pattern at the ends of groups of lines, repeated throughout the poem, or it might be occasional, just here and there. Look for different types of rhyme schemes.
- **Half-rhyme** – this is when two words almost rhyme. A poet might do this for fun, or to make you notice, or to make you think, or simply to add to the sound texture of the poem. Michael Rosen uses half rhymes in *Boogy Woogy Buggy*: “*I’m an easy, speedy baby*” and “*I streak down the street*”.

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- **Blank verse** – many poets don't use rhyme at all, but they might draw on other techniques to create a poetic feel, such as rhythm, line length, repetition or playing with the sounds of words.
- **Line length, rhythm and placing of words** – these can be used to draw the reader's attention, to create an effect, to add emphasis. Look out for them and think in each instance what the poet might be trying to convey.
- **Repetition** – this can give structure to a poem, it can add emphasis, or it can be done just for fun! It might be whole lines or verses that are repeated, it might be words or sounds that are repeated, it might be an idea. Look out for repetition and try to work out why it is there.
- **Alliteration and assonance** – alliteration happens when words begin with the same letter. It can be fun to do, but it can also be used to create an effect – think carefully about why a poet might be using the technique. Assonance is the repetition of similar or identical vowel sounds and gives rise to internal rhyme, rhyme within the line rather than at the end. Michael Rosen uses assonance to create internal rhyme in *Boogy Woogy Buggy*, e.g. “*I glide as I ride*”, and “*between the feet that I meet*”.
- **Onomatopoeia** – poets often use words that sound like their meaning, such as “*plip*” and “*sqeeeeeesh*” in Michael Rosen's *Washing Up*. It's good fun to make a collection of onomatopoeic words.
- **Simile** – a simile uses the words “*like*” or “*as*” to link two completely different things to help bring out a characteristic of an object or a person or an action, e.g. *The setting sun was as red as a water melon as it slipped below the horizon* or *The thought slid through her mind like a snake through long grass*.
- **Metaphor** – a metaphor is a sort of poetic lie, really. It allows you to say that something actually *is* something else that it really couldn't possibly be – but when you stop to think about it, the “something else” is usually connected, makes sense, or is a good idea. A metaphor allows a new and powerful way of thinking about the object, e.g.: *The setting sun **is** a slice of red watermelon in the sky's blue bowl* or *Her thoughts **are** snakes sliding through the long grass of her mind*.
***The Furniture Game:** If you want to help your children get more out of metaphor, try playing the Furniture Game, as explained by Sandy Brownjohn in her book on teaching poetry, “Does it have to rhyme?” published by Hodder Stoughton.*
- **Personification** – poets sometimes make inanimate objects seem as if they are alive, or even real people, by giving them human/animate attributes or behaviours: *the dark, **brooding** mountain **crouched menacingly** on the horizon* or *the sun **smiled** on the shore, its warm rays **caressing** their winter-pale skin*. This is called personification, and it is a type of metaphor.

3. Poetry links

This section was compiled with the help of Lorna Irvine, Education officer at the Scottish Poetry Library. Contact Lorna to find out about visits to SPL and the resources that SPL can offer to support poetry in the classroom: e-mail education@spl.org.uk or tel: 0131 557 2876.

a. Poems and poets

If you liked these Michael Rosen poems, you might also like:

- Elspeth Murray: <http://www.elspethmurray.com/poems.htm> - try Flip Flotsam, and Flip Flop Fact File
- Jez Alborough: *Shake Before Opening*, Red Fox
- Brian Patten: *Gargling with Jelly*, Puffin

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- Roger McGough: *An Imaginary Menagerie*, Viking Kestrel
- : *Sensational*: poems chosen by Roger McGough, Macmillan Children's Books
- Matthew Sweeney: *The Flying Spring Onion*, Faber

If you are ready for poems to take you in new directions, you might like these:

- *The Midnight Forest*, Judith Nicholls, Faber
- *The Thing That Mattered Most*, edited by Julie Johnstone, Scottish Poetry Library, Black and White Publishing
- *This Poem Doesn't Rhyme*, edited by Gerald Benson, Puffin
- Ted Hughes: *Collected Poems for Children*, Faber
- *Madtail, Miniwhale and Other Shape Poems*, selected by Wes Magee, Puffin
- *Minibeasts, A Book of Poems*, edited by Robert Fisher, Faber
- *Earthways, Earthwise*, Poems on Conservation, selected by Judith Nicholls, Oxford
- *Poems United, A Commonwealth Anthology*, edited by Diana Hendry and Hamish Whyte, Scottish Poetry Library, Black and White Publishing – and visit the SPL site for lots of cross-curricular teaching ideas to go with this anthology (http://www.spl.org.uk/ed_resources/poems_united.html)

If you are looking for poems in Scots, you might like these:

- *Doh Ray Me, When I Was Wee*, Ewan McVicar
- Itchy Coo publications, e.g. *King O' the Midden*, *Blethertoun Braes*, *Katie's Coo*, *Sweetieraptors*, *Animal: a Scots Alphabet* and *A Moose in the Hoose*.

b. Teaching resources for poetry

Useful books for teaching poetry include:

- *Did I Hear You Write?*, Michael Rosen, Scholastic
- *The Practice of Poetry: Writing Exercises From Poets Who Teach*, Twichell Chase & Behn Robin, Harper Collins
- *Does It Have to Rhyme?* Sandy Brownjohn, Hodder and Stoughton
- *Thirteen Secrets of Poetry*, Adrian Mitchell, Simon and Schuster
- *Exploring Poetry 5-8*, Brian Merrick with Joan Balaam, NATE (National Association of Teachers of English)
- *Exploring Poetry 8-13*, Brian Merrick, NATE (National Association of Teachers of English)
- *There's a Poet Behind You*, edited by Morag Styles and Helen Cook, Black
- *Read My Mind*, Fred Sedgwick, Routledge Falmer
- The U.S. Teachers & Writers Collective 'bibles': *Alphabet of the Trees*, *Poetry Everywhere*, *Rose, Where Did You Get That Red?*, and *Educating the Imagination*. Also, their *Moving Windows: Evaluating the Poetry Children Write*
- *The Poetry Book for Primary Schools* edited by Anthony Wilson with Sian Hughes, Poetry Society

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- *Jumpstart: Poetry in the Secondary School*, Cliff Yates, Poetry Society

c. Poets in the classroom

- *Our Thoughts Are Bees*, Mandy Coe and Jean Sprackland – a very helpful guide to working with poets and other writers in the classroom <http://www.wordplaypress.com/bees.htm>
- Contact Lorna Irvine, Education Officer at the Scottish Poetry Library to find out about the SPL education workshop programme and the possibility of funding for poetry projects and poet sessions in the classroom. Enquire also about class tours, visits, and reading-writing sessions at SPL: e-mail: education@spl.org.uk tel: 0131 557 2876 <http://www.spl.org.uk>
- Contact Clare Rodgers at Scottish Book Trust to find out about Live Literature Funding and the possibility of funding for writers in the classroom: e-mail: clare.rodgers@scottishbooktrust.com tel: 0131 524 0166 <http://www.scottishbooktrust.com/learning-and-inclusion/sbt-learning-and-inclusion-projects/live-literature>

d. Poetry web links

The following web sites and organisations offer ideas, information and support for reading and writing poetry:

- **Scottish Poetry Library**, www.spl.org.uk: see their ideas bank for ideas to get you started, (http://www.spl.org.uk/ed_ideas/index.html), and their resources section (http://www.spl.org.uk/ed_resources/index.html) for helpful teaching packs, as well as their National Poetry Day area (http://www.spl.org.uk/ed_npd/index.htm) which has teaching ideas and information to help get poetry going in your classroom. You can also borrow poetry books for your school by post, or get advice about poems on a particular theme or subject (http://www.spl.org.uk/library_spl/index.html).
- **Children's Poetry Bookshelf**, <http://www.childrenspetrybookshelf.co.uk/>: part of the Poetry Book Society, this site has lots of information and ideas for children.
- **Poetry Class**, <http://www.poetryclass.net/>: the Poetry Society's resource area for teachers in England who want to develop poetry in their classrooms, with lots of excellent ideas and information.
- **The Children's Poetry Archive**, <http://www.poetryarchive.org/childrensarchive/home.do>: most of the poets you can see and hear on this web site are alive today. A great collection of poems for children on a wide range of themes.