

# Poetry Pathways

A West Lothian Council Arts and Cultural Services poetry workshop programme for primary schools in association with the Scottish Poetry Library.

Continuing Professional Development worksheets created by Liz Niven and the Scottish Poetry Library



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Poetry Pathways

CPD

# Poetry Pathways

## Poetry in National Guidelines and National Priorities

There are many references to Poetry in the 5-14 National Guidelines for English Language. Apart from providing official support for the teaching of poetry, the statements are very useful reminders of the many delightful functions of poetry and its benefits for young people. Several areas of the curriculum can be supported through poetry and poetry also connects to several of the National Priorities, particularly NP1 for Literacy.

### Getting started

The following references can be useful as they identify and describe some of the relevant uses and functions of poetry in the curriculum (apart from the obvious sheer joy of reading it and creating it!) and a tick list of terminology, concepts expected at relevant stages.

### Vocabulary pupils should know:

poem  
verse  
author

(Reading: Knowledge about language. Levels B & C)

'Show that they know, understand and can use at least the following terms: soft, slow, loud, quick, clear, voice' (Talking KAL. Level B)

'rhyme and rhythm identify aspects of texts that pupils will hear. At this level, these will be mainly in poetry' (Listening: Listen in order to respond to texts. Level B)

'...poems may no longer always have rhymes but they will retain strong rhythms which no prose text is likely to possess' (Listening: Awareness of genre. Level B)

'In poetry they should expect the poem to develop through its verses; to feel the mood of the poem in its rhythm; and to expect vivid pictures to be painted by means of comparisons (in simile and metaphor)' (Listening: Awareness of genre. Level C)

'Linguistic formulas can be provided to instigate comments eg That poem made me happy because....' (Talking: Talking about experiences, feelings and opinions. Level B)

'The teacher will encourage pupils to bring to their experience of stories, poems and dramatic texts their awareness of self, their own emotions and attitudes; and to make comparisons between their own experiences and those depicted in the texts'

(Talking: Talking about texts. Level C)

'poetry will have simple imagery'

(Listen in order to respond to texts. Level B)

'effects of rhythm, verse length, sound can also be explored'

(Reading for enjoyment. Level C)

'attractive displays of posters, poems and short anthologies with work compiled by pupils, allow experience of variety in text and style. Ideas can be shared if, after group discussion, pupils' opinions are displayed for others to read' (Reading for enjoyment. Level B)

'...seeking clues that suggest it is fact, fiction, poetry or drama'  
(Reading: Awareness of genre. Level B)

'In poetry differences between narrative and description can be identified'  
(Reading: Awareness of genre. Level C)

'Poetry writing depends on wide experience of listening to and reading poems with discussion of structures and effects. At this stage content, rhythm and vocabulary are more important than rhyme' (Writing: Imaginative writing. Level B)

'Pupils writing of poetry will be aided by their reading aloud and occasional verse-speaking' (Writing: Imaginative writing. Level C)

'The teacher will take time to ensure that pupils lay out and present their writing in a neat, legible form....confidence through the use of wordprocessing'  
(Writing: Handwriting and presentation. Levels B&C)

### References to Scottish Literature

'To foster a sense of personal or national identity, pupils should encounter languages and texts of a specifically Scottish and regional character... The classroom use of dialects and languages other than Standard English can also reveal much about the nature of language generally.'  
Specific issues in English language teaching. p.7

'Repetitions, Rhythms and Rhymes; many of these will be of Scottish origin'  
Programmes of study: Listening. p.23

'fostering respect for and interest in each pupil's mother tongue and its literature, whether English, Scots, Gaelic, Urdu, Punjabi, Cantonese or any other' Diversity of Language and Culture. p.59

This worksheet was created by Liz Niven for the Poetry Pathways project run by West Lothian Council Arts and Cultural Services in autumn 2005 in collaboration with the Scottish Poetry Library.

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# Poetry Pathways

## What can we write about?

This is often the hardest part of getting started yet really the problem is there's so much. Narrowing down the possibilities can give pupils support and break down the barrier of the empty page.

Stimuli for poems can be external or personal.

### External stimuli

- External stimuli can help lessen that sense of 'exposing your soul' and can prevent cathartic outpourings
- Photographs, paintings, (from the perspective of the viewer and the viewed)
- Places (take them out of school),
- Objects, music, food, etc
- Collect words about the school environment. Print them out and cut them up. Select and rearrange some into a poem

### Voices & Vehicles

**Voices** : There are lots of sources: letters, phonecalls, speeches, scots, monologues, (see ma wee brother/sister/ma/da/ or The Excuses poems) ...see the world through a different set of eyes: be biased or mad or angry or sad or funny...

**Vehicles** : Sometimes we just need to find a vehicle to tell our story... a mountain, a park bench, a pen. And two might talk to each other. eg 2 mountains

### Structures

Try days of the week or seasons or times or acrostics or haiku (7,5,7)

### Read lots of poems

Especially contemporary as they'll 'speak' to pupils in the voice of their own time. Encourage sessions of reading and discussing favourite new poems they've found. Pupils can do this without a teacher. Maybe start building up a bank of poems on loose A4 in an attractive box or file. Adding a short comment from pupils about why they picked it. These can be used for structure as well as content. Even simply copying out a favourite poem can be great for learning about poetry and how it's been made.

### Personal stimuli

If it's personal make it original and unique: remind them that it's the ordinary daily things that actually take us into the big themes. ie  
'Your Grannie's shoes matter'  
'not in ideas but in things'  
'poetry is a fresh look and a fresh listen'

### Map/journey/door poem

Go to a place in your mind. Work through it as you write.  
'I remember...' 'Here is...'  
'I smelt/touched/tasted/heard...'

### Responses to colours through the senses

Yellow is...  
daffodils in Holyrood Park that day you said you loved me, custard congealing on my plate in Primary 5, my wee sister's bath duck squeaking...

### Riddles and Questions

The descriptions are SO good the reader can work out what the poem is describing.  
Or Question poems: each line is a question.

### List poems

Explore syllable patterns: place names, people names, foods, colours etc

### Shape poems

Make shapes with words : a fish shape for a fish poem.

What can we write about?

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# Poetry Pathways

## Editing and crafting together

Usually children (and adults) find redrafting very difficult as well as dull. It can be fun to involve pupils with each others' new poetry. This can be done as a whole class but might be done in pairs or in groups. Encourage pupils to think about Content (what is in the poem) and Form (how has the poet decided to structure the poem).

Pupils can be asked to check their own poems for the following:

- Is every word in the poem doing a job? If not, is the word needed?
- Experiment with removing some wee words like I, and, he, the
- Is there a better choice of word? Can a word be replaced with a better one?
- Are there points where a comparison (simile/metaphor) would help describe?
- If there is repetition is it for a particular reason?
- How are the verses organised? Is each verse doing a new job?
- Listen to the **sound** of the poem. Does it have rhythm?

### Working in pairs

Pupils split into pairs and read each other their new poems. Ask them to concentrate on one poem at a time then concentrate on the second one.

Ask them to remember 2 stars and a wish:

- Tell your partner something you liked about the content of the poem.
- Tell your partner something you liked about the form of the poem.
- Tell your partner something he or she might do to improve the poem.

Pupils can then be given a length of time to look again at their poem in the light of this peer group discussion.

### Making changes to poems

Pupils might decide not to alter the poem very much. If so, encourage them to justify their choices and explain why they have chosen to write in a particular way, a certain form, or why they have discarded their partner's 'advice'.

This process serves to sharpen their critical faculties and make them verbalise their decisions. Depending on the stage of pupil involved this might be minimal or quite sophisticated.

### Additional motivation

If pupils know their work will appear in a book or a poster or be performed to an audience, the job of redrafting seems important to get the best possible work. Knowing that adult writers take a long time to write versions (years for one poem sometimes) is very helpful.

# Poetry Pathways

## Learning about rhyme

The essence of poetry has always been rhythm-not rhyme, and in many languages rhyme isn't used at all. English poetry didn't use rhyme until the time of Chaucer, when the fashion for rhyming verse was copied from French and Italian writers. Much of Shakespeare is written in blank verse... a great deal of Browning's poetry doesn't rhyme. Wordsworth too. Milton, in the 1660s, talked about 'this troublesome and modern bondage of rhyming'. However, children often want to write poems that rhyme and hear/learn poems that rhyme.

### Getting started

- Using published rhyming poems as models can be a useful trigger for pupils to write their own pieces.
- The danger is always that they insert a rhyming word just for the sake of the rhyme rather than for the meaning.
- Pupils might be encouraged to look at internal rhymes rather than end rhymes.

### An exercise

Here's a short poem written out as prose. Ask pupils to read it and explain why they think it might be a poem (hopefully!) Next ask them to arrange the poem into line lengths and verses.

#### Turtle to Tea

One night a turtle came to tea, he ate so slowly, dearie me. The chips got cold, the ice-cream dripped, while turtie calmly, sipped and sipped. In came Mum who took one look, and shouted, 'Can't you quickly sook? If this is just how long it takes, I'm going to bring some cornflakes!'

Discussion can then take place about

- Line length and why/when we have them
- Stanzas and what they're for
- End rhymes

#### Turtle to Tea

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# Poetry Pathways

## Syllable poems

Poems are about patterns and rhythms and one way of providing a pattern is through syllables.

### Working with names

- Ask pupils to consider their first names.
- Listen together to the sound of the names and consider how many syllables are in their names. They might clap out the beats.
- There are opportunities for movement if you want to get the class to stand up and arrange themselves into groups on one, two, three, four syllable names.
- Marching to the sound of their names can be fun, chanting their names to keep the rhythm
- This works well with place names too. Repeat this with lists of local names, street names etc

### Orkneying a saga: using place names

Here is a poem made up of places to be found on Orkney.

Luckily, two places were like **far** and **home** which prompted the writing of this poem.

There might be local names which provide unexpected extra opportunities, but, if not, you'll probably still get a satisfying new poem based on familiar sounds.

### Orkneying a saga: Far from home

Fara  
Honda  
Flotta  
Swona  
Stroma  
Balfour  
Toab

Deerness  
Westness  
Stromness  
Westray  
Rousay  
Stronsay  
Aith

Ronaldsay  
Copinsay  
Shapinsay  
Wasbister  
Melsetter  
Otters wick

Holm.

Liz Niven

# Poetry Pathways

## Door poems

Miroslav Holub's poem 'The Door' can be used as a model for new writing.

### Writing a door poem

- Read the poem carefully with the pupils and ask them to look at each verse.
- Discuss what the writer has chosen for each verse: a place, an animal, an object, the weather, a sound followed by a conclusion, an end verse.
- Ask them to write their own poem modelled on this: to write a poem starting with the first line: Go and open the door.
- They must write of things they really can/could see then something possible then something unusual.
- You might base the poem around their home or school. It might be much more personal than this model.
- They must include the sounds they might hear, smells if relevant.

### The Door

Go and open the door.  
Maybe outside there's  
A tree, or a wood,  
a garden,  
or a magic city.

Go and open the door.  
Maybe a dog's rummaging.  
Maybe you'll see a face,  
or an eye,  
or the picture  
of a picture.

Go and open the door.  
If there's a fog  
it will clear.

Go and open the door,  
even if there's only  
the darkness ticking,  
even if there's only  
the hollow wind,  
even if  
nothing  
is there  
go and open the door.

At least  
there'll be  
a draught.

Miroslav Holub  
from *Poems Before and After* (Bloodaxe, 1990)  
translated from the Czech by Ian Milner

# Poetry Pathways

## Nature encore

This poem lists some flora and fauna and observations from nature.

### Writing the poem

- Pupils can work their way through a sequence of events for another seasonal poem.
- Ask pupils to match actions and verbs to various animals, plants, birds etc
- The simple present participle at the line end gives a strong rhythmic and rhyming structure to the poem.
- The poem is in Scots. If your pupils have Scots or their own variation of English, you might ask them to use some of it in their poem.

### nature encore

ladies an gents, boys an lassies,  
please pit yer hauns thegither, fir -  
the yella daffie keekin,  
chookie burdie chirpin,  
gowden sun shinin,  
wuid pecker drummin,  
bumbees hummin,  
siller salmon dreepin,  
green leaves broonin,  
lum smoke reekin,  
waxt moon wanin,  
lift sterns skinklin,  
white snaa fawin,  
human beins lovin,  
new wean smilin,  
aw ower again,  
an again,  
an again.

Liz Niven

# Poetry Pathways

## Animals and birds

Writing poems in the voice of an animal or a bird can be a fun and powerful way of releasing imaginations.

### Getting started

Study 'Seagull' and discuss how the writer has constructed his poem. What did he observe about seagulls?

### Writing a poem

- Using this as model, pupils can imagine they are an animal or bird.
- Make sure it's one they know well.
- Best of all if it's something they can go outside and see easily.
- Observe and discuss its appearance, habits, habitat, actions, what they eat, sounds they make etc

### Extra activities

- There's good opportunities for art and craft work here too.
- Mobiles can be made, Origami models of the birds or animals.
- If you're really adventurous and have equipment and skills or can borrow somebody with them, you can photograph and animate the models. It's great!

### Seagull

We are the dawn marauders.  
We prey on pizzas. We kill kebabs.  
We mug thrushes for bread crusts  
with a snap of our big bent beaks.  
We drum the worms from the ground  
with the stamp of our wide webbed feet.  
We spread out, cover the area –  
like cops looking for the body  
of a murdered fish-supper.  
Here we go with our hooligan yells  
loud with gluttony, sharp with starvation.  
Here we go bungee-jumping on the wind,  
charging from the cold sea of our birth.  
This is invasion, This is occupation.  
Our flags are black, white and grey.  
Our wing-stripes are our rank.  
No sun can match the brazen  
Colour of our mad yellow eyes.

Brian McCabe  
from *Body Parts* (Canongate, 1999)

# Poetry Pathways

## Riddle poems

Riddle poems can be great fun to write in class.

They also sharpen pupils' powers of observation and description.

### Getting started

You can write riddle poem on all sorts of themes: animals, birds, places, colours, people – the pupils will no doubt suggest others. It's a bit like charades but with words and no movements.

### Writing a riddle poem

- While a very detailed physical description is needed, the object/animal's function can be included.
- The description must be so good that the rest of the class can work out what is being described.
- For example, if an animal is being written about, ask pupils:
  - What does it look like?
  - Where does it live?
  - What does it eat?
  - What sound does it make?
  - How does it move?
- Add a reminder that a simile or metaphor will help the description.

### What am I?

From the tip of my toes to  
the top of my head,  
I'm dark inside.  
My poisonous thoughts  
could kill you.  
Look at me in my slick blue coat  
straight from the saw mill.  
See how tall and slim I am?  
And, oh yes, I'm sharp all right,  
for now that is, though sometimes,  
to be quite blunt,  
I lose it. Soften right up.  
So, be gentle,  
for you could break my heart.  
And I won't be around forever.  
Right, I'm drawing a line  
under this conversation.  
What am I?

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# Poetry Pathways

## Postcard poems: Wish you were here

This approach encourages pupils to take a fresh look at their surroundings.

### Getting started

- Give every pupil a plain white postcard.
- They will write their poem on this on one side and draw their locality on the other.

### Discussion

- Discuss with your class what it's like to live 'here'.
- Ask them to imagine they were sending a Postcard to a Martian or a friend in a completely different continent etc

You might discuss:

- ⇒ The physical/natural surroundings at the school: buildings, landscape view from the school, playground furniture, what today's weather/season is doing
- ⇒ The interior of the school: colours, neighbours and best pals, listening corner, dinner hall etc
- ⇒ Subjects, activities they love or hate: maths, PE, art, music, language etc

*Encourage pupils to be very specific and personal, to pick examples of tiny details, colours, sounds, and textures.*

### Writing the poem

- Finish the discussion by asking pupils to suggest something they'd offer to do with the penpal.  
eg 'If you were here we could climb the climbing frame out in the playground.'
- This pattern can give a 3 or 4 verse structure to the poem.

*Outside school is...* (Arthur's Seat, far in the distance)

*Inside school there is/I can see...* (Mrs. O'Neill, the Dinner Lady in her white hat)

*I hate Tuesdays...* (when we give out the small blue number jotters)

*I love Fridays...* (when we get out the paint bottles, red, green, blue)

- You might suggest 2 or 3 lines to each verse.
- Maybe you have twinning or links with other countries and you can actually send the Postcards.

# Poetry Pathways

## Route poems

These poems trace routes taken to school.

### 1. The Walk to School

Down Barking-dog Lane  
Past the street with the boat  
    Clouds rush by  
    Sometimes it rains

Up Old-lady-waving Road  
Past the field with the car  
    Clouds hang still  
    Aeroplanes drone

Down Skateboard Steps  
Past the shop with the cat  
    Clouds make shapes  
    Reflect in window panes

### 2. The Drive to School

radio shouts  
Mum shouts  
belt tight  
window steam  
Dad shouts  
feel hot  
feel sick  
radio, Mum,  
Dad shout  
shout shout  
every day  
same shout  
same hot  
same sick  
same same  
same same

Ian Mcmillan  
from *The Very Best of Ian McMillan*  
(Macmillan's Children's, 2001)

# Poetry Pathways

## Scrivein or writin in Scots

The issue of writing in Scots can be problematic if we've only ever learned to write in English.

- There is no standard form as yet. Various dialects exist and, unlike English, there has not yet been a time when a set of standard rules were set down in dictionary form. The nearest Scotland came to a standard form was in the 16th century when many writers, royalty and politicians wrote in Scots. It was a national language at that time.
- However, the many excellent Scots dictionaries reflect the speech of various parts of the country and the main spelling variations. These are good aids and spelling guides. They are descriptive dictionaries, describing the language of the Scottish people whereas the English dictionaries are prescriptive ie they prescribe rigid spelling rules made up, mainly, in the 18th century by grammarians.
- For folk wanting to start writing in Scots, they might start by asking themselves 'what Scots do I have?' and use this language and grammar to start with. Reading all sorts of writing in Scots, poetry, prose, novels, will help to build up their word bank and enrich their vocabulary for future writing. Translating English texts is another interesting task which makes us question spelling choices and make decisions. However, translating, as with any language, is not merely a case of word for word swapping. Scots, like all languages, has its vocabulary, its grammar and its idiomatic phrases.
- Introducing young folk to the sight of written Scots is the best way to become familiar with it. The earlier the better. Signs, posters, nursery rhymes, poems, songs on wall displays is a gentle introduction. Suddenly finding Scots words in a book won't be such a strange thing.
- Apart from using your own Scots or the Scots you hear around you, the drop-in method of writing in Scots is also worthwhile. Because Scots and English are both Germanic languages, they are very similar and sometimes even share words in 20th century Scots. A piece of writing might be mainly in English with some Scots words scattered through it. Words like wee, feart, weans etc can sit comfortably in an otherwise English text but give the writing a Scottish feel to it and the writer (perhaps not a Scots speaker at all) the first experience of Scots writing.
- You might make up your own word bank or glossary and decide upon a consistency of spelling that you prefer. As mentioned above, the dictionaries supply the most commonly used forms (although there isnae a standard form, there isnae anarchy either!) The Scots Thesaurus is also a good reference for vocabulary.
- It may be the case, if many people start to write more frequently in Scots, that we need and want to create a Standard form of the language. This happened with English. It needn't mean, however, that writers will stop recreating people's real speech and all the dialect variations. There is room for both/baith.

# Poetry Pathways

## Writing haiku

The Haiku is a form of poetry which originated in Japan. Four of the most famous poets were Basho, Issa, Shiki and Buson.

### Getting started

- Each haiku contains an image, often about the natural world, although there are many variations on the themes.
- Read some examples of haiku to the pupils. Here are two autumn haiku by Alan Spence from *Seasons of the Heart* and one from *Glasgow Zen*.

the door bangs back  
on its hinges  
and in come the leaves

autumn cold  
the cat's rough tongue  
on the back of my hand

nights draw in  
patchin ma auld claes –  
dae me another year

### Discussion

- Discuss the poems with the pupils and encourage them to consider how compact and concise the haiku form is, saying so much in such an economic way.
- There are different types of haiku but one of the most traditional forms has three lines with five syllables in the first line, seven syllables in the second and five also in the third line.
- Make sure the class understand what a syllable is. You might use their own names or place names nearby to demonstrate this. Clapping out the rhythm is fun.
- Analyse the syllable count in the haiku to show how the pattern is quite consistent each time.

Alan Spence  
from *Seasons of the Heart* (Canongate, 2000)  
and *Glasgow Zen* (Canongate, 2002)

Here are some examples using local information from West Lothian places involved in the Poetry Pathways Project.

the Five Sisters sleep  
waken to a bright new day  
school bell rings loudly

hear the distant hum  
traffic on the motorway  
the mouth of the city sings

the Curling Pond's gone  
smart new houses being built  
Longridge is growing

### Writing a haiku

- Create a new haiku altogether on the blackboard before the class try their own.
- Ask the pupils to look at their poetry jotter of field notes. Pick one topic or word to start with. Take the word, write it on the blackboard and ask pupils how many syllables it has. How many syllables is there room for on the line?
- Now work around this word, adding descriptions, and two further lines, until you have three lines with the 5,7,5 pattern.
- If pupils enjoy this form of poetry, they might write a series of connected poems. For example, three on a similar theme. Or four seasonal poems.

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