



Introducing Poetry in the Classroom

P4-7

CFE Levels 2

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About this resource

The aim of this resource is to give you tips and ideas to help you introduce poetry to your P4-7 pupils in the classroom in a fun and creative way. The resource will help you integrate poetry into your wider reading culture. The resource includes activities inspired by the works of children's poets Michael Rosen, Joseph Coelho, Joshua Seigal and James Carter. However, all the activities are adaptable and can be used with any poems you are exploring in class.

Quick activities to introduce poetry

What is a poem?

LIT 2-01a, LIT 2-02a, LIT 2-04a, LIT 2-07a, LIT 2-09a, LIT 2-10a, LIT 2-11a

Ask your pupils what they think a poem is. Traditionally we assume that poems must have rhythm and rhyme, but is that always the case? Do your pupils know of any poems or poets? Do they have any they like or dislike?

You can watch Michael Rosen's response to this question during our [Authors Live broadcast](#). Start watching at 37.07. His definition of poetry as "saying interesting things in a small space" is a good point to start discussing what poetry is and means to your pupils. See if they can come up with their own definition and display it in your classroom.

You can also show pupils [poems by James Carter](#). He sets the poems out as calligrams; poems that show their main theme or meaning in their shape. What do your pupils think of poems such as *What to say if you meet a ghost* or *Viking O'clock*? Does this challenge their ideas of what poetry can and should be?

Now show pupils John Henley reading his poem [What a Poem's Not](#). John has worked through the alphabet and used each letter to describe what he thinks a poem is not. Do your pupils agree with his definition? What about what a poem is? Can they come up with a similar style list, using the alphabet, to describe what they think a poem is based on this and their previous discussion?

Watch a poet perform their work

LIT 2-01a, ENG 2-03a, LIT 2-04a, LIT 2-07a

Like songs and plays, poems come alive when they are read aloud or performed. To help pupils understand that poems have a life beyond the paper they are printed on, watch or listen to poets performing their own work.

- You can watch [Joseph Coelho](#) and [Michael Rosen](#) through our Authors Live Watch on Demand library.
- You can watch [Joseph Coelho](#), [Michael Rosen](#) or [Joshua Seigal](#) perform their poetry on YouTube or on their website.
- You can watch children's' poets reading their work via the [Poetry Line](#) resource from the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education.
- You can listen to a variety of children's poets on the [Children's Poetry Archive](#) and read-along to each poem (poems are displayed below each clip). Some poets may be familiar already, such as Allan Ahlberg, Wes Magee and John Agard.

Ask your pupils what they thought of the reading or performance. What did they notice? Did the poet stand still? Both Michael Rosen and Joshua Seigal use actions

extensively when performing. What about the pace of the reading? Fast or slow? Did they understand the poem? What can they remember?

Compare and contrast

LIT 3-04a, LIT 2-07a, LIT 2-11a, ENG 2-12a, ENG 2-17a, LIT 2-11a, LIT 2-19a

Explain to pupils that, like stories or books, there is a vast range of poems out there and some they will like and some they won't. Give pupils two poems to look at in pairs. Ideally the poems would be quite different, but explore similar topics.

- Two poems you could compare on the theme of nature are [I Asked the River](#) by Valerie Bloom and [River Reflections](#) by Jackie Kay.
- Two poems on the theme of school are [Conquer](#) by Joseph Coelho and [What the teacher said](#) by John Agard.
- To choose your own poems to compare and contrast, you can use the [Children's Poetry Archive](#) or [Poetry Line](#) and search by theme or topic.

Read the poems aloud to pupils, or use video/audio clips of the poems. Give the pupils five minutes to discuss the poems in their pairs. What do pupils notice about the two poems? Can they spot any poetic devices such as repetition, alliteration, rhyme, similes or metaphors, or call and response? What do they like or dislike about each poem? Ask pupils to feed back their ideas to the class.

Introducing rhythm – sound games

LIT 2-10a, EXA 2-17a, EXA 2-18a, EXA 2-19a

Having watched or listened to a poet perform their work, use the clip as a starting point for discussion about rhythm (Wes Magee's poem [The Boneyard Wrap](#) is a good poem to look at). What did your pupils notice about the rhythm and pacing of the poem? Did it slow down or speed up at any point?

Explain that all poems have a rhythm or pace which is created by the words the poet has chosen, their use of punctuation and their use of rhyme.

Start with a simple clapping game, with pupils copying your claps. Begin with simple rhythms (long, long, short, short, long) and work towards more complicated ones. Next, clap out words following the beat of the syllables. After a few different words, move on to speak and clap a sentence from a poem you have recently listened to and ask the pupils to echo it back. Repeat this a few times with different lines. Finally, read a line from a different poem but don't clap. Ask your pupils to clap the rhythm back to you. You could expand this activity by clapping the rhythm of a verse or few lines of a poem.

Another quick sound game is rhythm whispers. The principles are the same as Chinese Whispers, except that this time pupils tap, stomp or clap out their chosen rhythm. If, like in Chinese Whispers, the rhythm or beat changes part way through, can pupils identify what the change is and where/how it might have occurred?

Performing poetry

EXA 2-01a, LIT, 2-02a, ENG 2-02a, EXA 2-13a, EXA 2-14a, EXA 2-15a, LIT 2-10a, HWB 2-11a, HWB 2-12a, HW 2-19a

As pupils will have realised from earlier activities watching performance poets, poems are most enjoyable when performed. Performing poetry as a class is a great way to develop communication skills and confidence, as well as encourage pupils to become more familiar and comfortable with poetry.

Planning a performance

Look again at videos of poets performing their work. Encourage pupils to be critical of their performance by giving each poet 'two stars and a wish'. What do they notice about the performance? What actions or sounds are used? Is there music? What about props, costume, setting? Once you have chosen together the poem your class want to perform, ask pupils to work in groups to plan these different aspects of the performance. Allow time in later classes to make any props or costumes.

As pupils learn the poem, encourage them to think critically about their own and again about the poets' performance. Did the poet speak really fast or slow down? Was this a deliberate choice? Where did they pause, what effect did this have? How could they apply this to their own performance?

Pupils can perform their poetry to the rest of the school in a special assembly, or to parents/carers and the local community at a celebration event.

Performing poetry- resources

While was Children's Laureate, Michael Rosen developed the website [Perform a Poem](#) to support and provide resources for teachers performing poetry in school. You can download resources, find poems that are suitable for class performances and watch clips of other schools' performing.

Julia Donaldson has created a collection of [Poems to Perform](#), with suggestions for how each poem can be performed. These are all suitable for upper primary, and relatively short, so you could select a few.

The cover image of this resource shows pupils from Darnley Primary School using puppets to perform their chosen poem from *Poems to Perform*. The school ran sessions with volunteers from the local community to help create these puppets for their performance.

Creating a poetry friendly classroom

Michael Rosen has twelve suggestions for creating a [poetry friendly classroom](#); a classroom in which pupils are familiar with and enjoy reading poetry, and in which creative writing can flourish. The activities in this section have been designed to

accompany Michael's twelve top tips, and give you quick ideas for integrating poetry into your classroom and embedding it as part of your wider school reading culture.

Poem of the week

LIT 2-02a, LIT 3-06a, LIT 2-09a, LIT 2-11a, LIT 2-14a, TCH 2-01a, TCH 2-02a

Feature a poem of the week somewhere in your classroom. Give the responsibility for selecting the poem to a different group each week– ask them to read some poems and agree on a poem, research the poet, write up some comments, recommendations etc. You could keep the scope broad, and encourage pupils to select a poem from a class anthology or by searching sites like the [Children's Poetry Archive](#) or the [National Poetry Day archive](#). Or you can select a poet for them to research, and pupils choose their favourite poem by that author. Pupils can prepare a poster on the poem and present to the class. The poster can be displayed in class and change each week.

Daily poem

LIT 2-01a, LIT 2-10a, LIT 2-11a

Read a poem daily to your pupils, or ask them to take it in turns reading aloud. Choose a time such as first thing in the morning, before break, or at the end of the day to encourage pupils to just enjoy the poem (and not worry about any associated work). There are a host of "Poem a day" poetry collections and anthologies available, as well as online resources you can use. Collections such as *I am the Seed that Grew the Tree* are especially accessible for pupils, as most of the poems are quite short.

Jigsaw poems

LIT 2-02a, LIT 2-09a, LIT 2-10a, LIT 2-14a, LIT 2-20a, LIT 2-26a, ENG 2-27a, ENG 3-31a

Ask pupils to work in pairs. Cut up a poem into words and phrases and place in an envelope for each pair. Pupils then work together to create a poem from the words and phrases of their choice. Pupils can leave their new poems on their tables and walk around the classroom reading each other's work. They can see the variety that can be produced with the same words. Then share the original text and allow pupils time to consider and compare the original to theirs. You could run this activity using your daily poem or poem of the week.

Quick on the draw

LIT 2-11a, LIT 2-14a, ENG 2-19a, EXA 2-05a, EXA 2-07a

Read aloud a poem to your pupils. Ask them to make quick sketches in response to a verse (reading one verse at a time) – encourage pupils to be swift, to try to capture the first thing that comes to mind. You could combine this with the continuous line drawing technique- pupils can't take their pencil off the page! The drawings can be

discussed as a class. Did they all draw the same thing or different? Why do they think they chose to draw similar or different things?

Poetic slide shows

ENG 2-19a, LIT 2-20a, LIT 2-24a, TCH 2-01a

Ask your pupils to find or make images to go with lines or verses of a poem, and combine these to make a slide show for your class. You could assign each pupil a line or verse to create images for. You could add music or sound effects too.

Making music

ENG 2-31a, EXA 2-16a, EXA 2-17a

If your class is musical, ask pupils to 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. You could use instruments you have in class, or use junk modelling to create your own instruments. Before this activity, you could look at poems that have been turned into carols or songs as a starting point. For example, *In the Bleak Midwinter* was originally a poem by Christina Rossetti and *Auld Lang Syne* was originally a poem by Robert Burns before being adapted into a song.

Envoys

LIT 2-02a, ENG 2-03a, LIT 2-09a, LIT 2-14a, ENG 2-17a, LIT 2-19a

Choose a poem that you are looking at together as a class. In pairs or small groups, pupils write one observation they have made about the poem and two questions. Each group then sends this 'envoy' to the next group to share the observations and questions. This group then discusses possible answers, write them down and sends them back. This activity can be repeated until all the groups have seen each other's questions and observations. At the end of the activity, ask each group to feed back to the class. What did they want to ask and why? What did they find out? Have their questions been answered? Do they agree with the answers?

Poetry toolkit for writing

Word association game

LIT 2-20a, ENG 2-31a, LIT 2-24a, ENG 2-27a

A blank page can be daunting, but getting a few words down can help spark ideas to begin a poem. Stand in a circle with your pupils and begin by saying a word. Go around the circle asking each pupil to say one word they associate with the previous one. Words cannot be repeated, so they need to listen carefully to their peers. You

could start with broad themes like nature, science, history and so on. Play this game a few times.

Then ask pupils to write all the associated words as a spider diagram on the whiteboard or a large piece of paper. The class now have a bank of words they can use to compose a poem. Pupils can repeat this task individually to create their own word bank.

Now watch [Joseph Coelho's Authors Live](#) event to see how pupils can turn this bank of words into a poem following a creative writing activity based on his poem *If all the world were*.

M.O.R.E.R.A.P.S

LIT 2-20a, LIT 2-23a, LIT 2-26a, ENG 2-27a, ENG 2-31a

To help pupils enhance their poems and develop their writing skills, watch Joseph Coelho's perform his poem [M.O.R.E.R.A.P.S](#). The poem explores these different poetic devices:

- Metaphor
- Onomatopoeia
- Rhyme
- Emotion
- Repetition
- Alliteration
- Personification
- Simile

You can use M.O.R.E.R.A.P.S to build on the word association game above. Using the word bank, ask pupils to think of a sentence or phrase for each poetic device. At the end of the activity, they will have a collection of phrases, words and sentences that can be used to build a poem.

You can also use M.O.R.E.R.A.P.S as a starting point for pupils to edit their work. Pupils do not need to include all these devices in one poem, but you could set a target of four or five to encourage them to include more poetic devices in their work.

Senses

LIT 2-20a, LIT 2-26a, ENG 2-27a, ENG 3-30a, ENG 2-31a

The senses are a great way to introduce poetry writing, and to encourage pupils to add more detail to their poems.

To start writing, ask pupils to pick a memory, then describe it using each of the five senses. They can write their ideas down as sentences initially. To turn this piece of writing into a poem, remind pupils to use short sentences, and the structure "I smell...; I taste...; I hear...; I see...; I feel".

To add detail to an existing poem, ask pupils to pick one word from their poem and consider it in relation to each of the senses. For a quick activity, give each pupil five sticky notes or squares of paper. Ask them to write taste, smell, hear, see, feel on the five notes. Then allow them 30 seconds per sense to write down as many ideas as they can as quickly as possible. Encourage pupils to be descriptive. These notes can then be incorporated into their poem.

Class poem

LIT 3-20a, LIT 2-23a, LIT 3-25a, ENG 2-31a

Creating a poem alone can be overwhelming, and is something that many pupils struggle with. To help pupils overcome their fears, run a collaborative creative writing activity and create a class poem. You can use the activities in this toolkit for to encourage idea creation, using the class spider diagram from the word association game as a starting point. Pupils can pool and sift ideas together, hone and refine their poem as a class. Working collectively will give pupils confidence when they move on to their own creative writing. Showing them the different stages involved and the redrafting process, allows pupils to see that it is not straightforward and there are no right or wrong answers.

Other resources

There are plenty of resources available to support you to introduce poetry to your pupils. Here are a few good starting points:

- [Scottish Poetry Library](#)- the Scottish Poetry Library is a great place to start if you are planning a project on Scottish poets or poetry. You can find poems as well as resources.
- [National Poetry Day](#)- has teaching resources and lesson plans to help you plan activities around each year's theme and featured poems. It also has an archive of poems for your pupils to explore.
- [The Poetry Society](#)- the Poetry Society offer a range of excellent resources and lesson plans in their Poetry Class section of the website.
- [The Children's Poetry Archive](#)- this archive hosts a great collection of poems by children's poets.
- [Poetry Line](#)- the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education has a fantastic poetry section called Poetry Line. It hosts poems to download, resources, and a wide range of videos and audio of poets reading their work.