



## Introducing poetry in the classroom

Activities to introduce poetry, rhythm and rhyme to upper primary

**Age 8-12**

**CFE Second Level**

**Resource created by Scottish Book Trust**

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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.

## Quick activities

### Activity 1: 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 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?

### Activity 2: 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 [Rachel Plummer](#), [Kate Wakeling](#), [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).

Ask your pupils what they thought of the reading or performance. What did they notice? Did the poet stand still? Some poets use actions extensively when performing. What about the pace of the reading? Fast or slow? Did they understand the poem? What can they remember?

### Activity 3: 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 when asked: What er we avin for geography, Miss?" 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.

#### Activity 4: 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. 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.

## 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, HWB 2-19a

### Activity 5: Planning a performance

Michael Rosen's [video on performing poems and stories with Penguin](#) (6 minutes, 15 seconds) contains lots of tips and inspiration for reading stories and poems aloud.

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.

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.

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.

## Creating a poetry friendly classroom

### Activitiy 6: 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. Pupils can prepare a poster on the poem and present to the class. The poster can be displayed in class and change each week.

### Activity 7: 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).

### Activity 8: 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.

### Activity 9: 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?

### Activity 10: 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.

For further ideas - 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.

## Poetry writing activities

### Activity 11: Word association game

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

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.

### Activity 12: 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.

### Activity 13: 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”.

### Activity 14: 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.

## Further resources

- See [the poetry topic on our website](#) for Authors Live broadcasts with poets
- Our learning resources on [How to make poetry stones](#) and [our Joseph Coelho resource on writing a rondel poem](#)
- [National Poetry Day](#) – for teaching resources and lesson plans and poems you can access online
- [The Poetry Society](#) – for resources and lesson plans
- [The Children's Poetry Archive](#) – a collection of children's poems you can access online
- [Poetry Line](#) – poems to download, resources, and a wide range of videos and audio of poets reading their work