

**Poems for children to recite, read aloud  
and perform**



# Primary English

*Education Consultancy*

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## **Poems to read aloud – in preparation for Mr Gove's new curriculum.**

It is a statutory requirement in the the National Curriculum for Key stages 1 and 2 that children learn to recite poems from heart. Reading 'performance poetry' is not new and in fact many of the rhymes, songs and hymns we sing in school can be construed as poetry recited from heart.

This collection of poems has been compiled to assist teachers in finding suitable poems for this purpose. Some are classic poems, others are more contemporary – all of them are suitable for children to perform and read aloud. Learning to retell a poem from memory is challenging and with this in mind the selected poems have been chosen for their use of rhythm and rhyme.

The collection of poems has been organised into three sections: KS1, lower KS2 (Y3/4) and upper KS2 (Y5/6). This ensures that there is progression in content, style and length of poems but also flexibility for schools to choose when they use the poems selected.

This is not an exhaustive collection; it is a guide to support teachers in choosing poems to recite. Personal choice is really important, if you love a poem and you think it would work as a poem to learn by heart then use it. Your enthusiasm will come through your teaching and inspire children to learn the poem. Some longer poems – such as The Highway Man have been left out of the selection, as it was thought that these were already being used in school and where this is the case these poems should continue to be used.

Rachel Clarke, Director – Primary English Education Consultancy Limited.

**The Morning rush**

Into the bathroom,  
Turn on the tap.  
Wash away the sleepiness –  
Splish! Splosh! Splash!

Into the bedroom,  
Pull on your vest.  
Quickly! Quickly!  
Get yourself dressed.

Down to the kitchen.  
No time to lose.  
Gobble up your breakfast.  
Put on your shoes.

Back to the bathroom.  
Squeeze out the paste.  
Brush, brush, brush your teeth.  
No time to waste.

Look in the mirror.  
Comb your hair.  
Hurry, scurry, hurry, scurry  
Down the stairs.

Pick your school bag  
Up off the floor.  
Grab your coat  
And out through the door.

John Foster

**The Witches' spell**

Double, double, toil and trouble;  
Fire burn, and cauldron bubble.  
Fillet of a fenny snake  
In the cauldron boil and bake;  
Eye of newt, and toe of frog,  
Wool of bat, and tongue of dog,  
Adder's fork, and blind-worm's sting,  
Lizard's leg and owlet's wing,  
For a charm of powerful trouble,  
Like a hell-broth, boil and bubble. Double, double, toil and trouble;  
Fire burn, and cauldron bubble.

William Shakespeare  
(from Macbeth)

### **On the Ning Nang Nong**

On the Ning Nang Nong  
Where the Cows go Bong!  
And the Monkeys all say boo!  
There's a Nong Nang Ning  
Where the trees go Ping!  
And the teapots Jibber Jabber Joo.  
On the Nong Ning Nang  
All the mice go Clang!  
And you just can't catch 'em when they do!  
So it's Ning Nang Nong!  
Cows go Bong!  
Nong Nang Ning!  
Trees go Ping!  
Nong Ning Nang!  
The mice go Clang!  
What a noisy place to belong,  
Is the Ning Nang Ning Nang Nong!!

Spike Milligan

### **Cats**

Cats sleep  
Anywhere,  
Any table,  
Any chair,  
Top of piano,  
Window-ledge,  
In the middle,  
On the edge,  
Open drawer,  
Empty shoe,  
Anybody's  
Lap will do,  
Fitted in a  
Cardboard box,  
In the cupboard  
With your frocks –  
Anywhere!  
*They* don't care!  
Cats sleep  
Anywhere.

Eleanor Farjeon

### **Daddy Fell into the Pond**

Everyone grumbled. The sky was grey.  
We had nothing to do and nothing to say.  
We were nearing the end of a dismal day.  
And there seemed to be nothing beyond,

*Then*

*Daddy fell into the pond!*

And everyone's face grew merry and bright,  
And Timothy danced for sheer delight.  
'Give me the camera, quick, oh quick!  
He's crawling out of the duckweed!' Click!

Then the gardener suddenly slapped his knee,  
And doubled up, shaking silently,  
And the ducks all quacked as if they were daft,  
And it sounded as if the old drake laughed.  
Oh there wasn't a thing that didn't respond

*When*

*Daddy fell into the pond!*

Alfred Noyes

### **The Small Ghostie**

When it's late and it's dark  
And everyone sleeps...shhh shhh shhh,  
Into our kitchen  
A small ghostie creeps... shhh shhh shhh.

We hear knocking and raps  
And then rattles and taps,

Then he clatters and clangs  
And he batters and bangs,

And he whistles and yowls  
And he screeches and howls...  
So we pull up our covers over our heads  
And we block up our ears and WE STAY IN OUR BEDS

Barbara Ireson

### **Song of the Train**

Clickety-clack,  
Wheels on the track,  
This is the way  
They begin the attack:  
Click-ety-clack,  
Click-ety-clack,  
Click-ety, *clack-ety*,  
Click-ety  
Clack.

Click-ety-clack,  
Over the track,  
Faster and faster  
The song of the track:  
Click-ety-clack,  
Click-ety-clack,  
Clickety, clackety,  
*Clackety*  
Clack.

Riding in front,  
Riding in back,  
*Everyone* hears  
The song of the track:  
Clickety-clack,  
Clickety-clack,  
Clickety - *clickety*,  
Clackety  
*Clack*.

David McCord

### **Sampan**

Waves lap lap  
Fish fins clap clap  
Brown sails flap flap  
Chop-sticks tap tap  
Up and down the long green river  
Ohe Ohe lanterns quiver  
Willow branches brush the river  
Ohe Ohe lanterns quiver  
Waves lap lap  
Fish fins clap clap  
Brown sails flap flap  
Chop-sticks tap tap

Tao Lang Pee

## Year 3 and Year 4

### **Slowly**

Slowly the tide creeps up the sand,  
Slowly the shadows cross the land.  
Slowly the carthorse pulls his mile,  
Slowly the old man mounts the stile.

Slowly the hands move round the clock,  
Slowly the dew dries on the dock.  
Slow is the snail – but slowest of all  
the green moss spreads on the old brick wall.

James Reeves.

### **Bed in Summer**

In winter I get up at night  
And dress by yellow candle-light.  
In summer, quite the other way,  
I have to go to bed by day.

I have to go to bed and see  
The birds still hopping on the tree,  
Or hear the grown-up people's feet  
Still going past me in the street.

And does it not seem hard to you,  
When all the sky is clear and blue,  
And I should like so much to play,  
To have to go to bed by day?

Robert Louis Stevenson

### **Ducks' Ditty**

All along the backwater,  
Through the rushes tall,  
Ducks are a-dabbling,  
Up tails all!

Ducks' tails, drakes' tails,  
Yellow feet a-quiver,  
Yellow bills all out of sight  
Busy in the river!

Slushy green undergrowth  
Where the roach swim –  
Here we keep our larder,  
Cool and full and dim!

Every one for what he likes!  
We like to be

Heads down, tails up,  
Dabbling free!

High in the blue above  
Swifts whirl and call –  
We are down a-dabbling  
Up tails all!

Kenneth Grahame

**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

**The River**

The River's a wanderer,  
A nomad, a tramp,  
He never chooses one place  
To set up his camp.

The River's a winder,  
Through valley and hill  
He twists and he turns,  
He just cannot be still.

The River's a hoarder  
And he buries down deep  
Those little treasures  
That he wants to keep.

The River's a baby,  
He gurgles and hums,  
And sounds like he's happily  
Sucking his thumbs.

The River's a singer,  
As he dances along,  
The countryside echoes  
The notes of his song.

The River's a monster,  
Hungry and vexed,  
He's goggled up trees  
And he'll swallow you next.

Valerie Bloom

### **Gran Can You Rap?**

Gran was in her chair she was taking a nap  
When I tapped her on the shoulder to see if she could rap.  
Gran can you rap? Can you rap? Can you Gran?  
And she opened one eye and she said to me, Man,  
I'm the best rapping Gran this world's ever seen  
I'm a tip-top, slip-slap, rap-rap queen.  
And she rose from the chair in the corner of the room  
And she started to rap with a bim-bam-boom,  
And she rolled up her eyes and she rolled round her head  
And as she rolled by this is what she said,  
I'm the best rapping gran this world's ever seen  
I'm a nip-nap, yip-yap, rap-rap queen.  
Then she rapped past my Dad and she rapped past my mother,  
She rapped past me and my little baby brother.  
She rapped her arms narrow she rapped her arms wide,  
She rapped through the door and she rapped outside.  
She's the best rapping Gran this world's ever seen  
She's a drip-drop, trip-trap, rap-rap queen.  
She rapped down the garden she rapped down the street,  
The neighbours all cheered and they tapped their feet.  
She rapped through the traffic lights as they turned red  
As she rapped round the corner this is what she said,  
I'm the best rapping Gran this world's ever seen  
I'm a flip-flop, hip-hop, rap-rap queen.  
She rapped down the lane she rapped up the hill,  
And she disappeared she was rapping still.  
I could hear Gran's voice saying, Listen Man,  
Listen to the rapping of the rap-rap Gran.  
I'm the best rapping Gran this world's ever seen  
I'm a -

tip-top, slip-slap,  
nip-nap, yip-yap,  
hip-hop, trip-trap,  
touch yer cap,  
take a nap,  
happy, happy, happy, happy,  
rap-rap-queen.

Jack Ousby

**Jim**

There was a Boy whose name was Jim;  
His Friends were very good to him.  
They gave him Tea, and Cakes, and Jam,  
And slices of delicious Ham,  
And Chocolate with pink inside  
And little Tricycles to ride,  
And read him Stories through and through,  
And even took him to the Zoo—  
But there it was the dreadful Fate  
Befell him, which I now relate.

You know—or at least you ought to know,  
For I have often told you so—  
That Children never are allowed  
To leave their Nurses in a Crowd;  
Now this was Jim's especial Foible,  
He ran away when he was able,  
And on this inauspicious day  
He slipped his hand and ran away!

He hadn't gone a yard when—Bang!  
With open Jaws, a lion sprang,  
And hungrily began to eat  
The Boy: beginning at his feet.  
Now, just imagine how it feels  
When first your toes and then your heels,  
And then by gradual degrees,  
Your shins and ankles, calves and knees,  
Are slowly eaten, bit by bit.  
No wonder Jim detested it!  
No wonder that he shouted ``Hi!"

The Honest Keeper heard his cry,  
Though very fat he almost ran  
To help the little gentleman.  
``Ponto!" he ordered as he came  
(For Ponto was the Lion's name),  
``Ponto!" he cried, with angry Frown,  
``Let go, Sir! Down, Sir! Put it down!"  
The Lion made a sudden stop,  
He let the Dainty Morsel drop,  
And slunk reluctant to his Cage,  
Snarling with Disappointed Rage.

But when he bent him over Jim,  
The Honest Keeper's Eyes were dim.  
The Lion having reached his Head,  
The Miserable Boy was dead!

When Nurse informed his Parents, they  
Were more Concerned than I can say:—  
His Mother, as She dried her eyes,  
Said, ``Well—it gives me no surprise,  
He would not do as he was told!"  
His Father, who was self-controlled,  
Bade all the children round attend  
To James's miserable end,  
And always keep a-hold of Nurse  
For fear of finding something worse.

Hilaire Belloc

## Year 5 and Year 6

### **Silver**

Slowly, silently, now the moon  
Walks the night in her silver shoon;  
This way, and that, she peers, and sees  
Silver fruit upon silver trees;  
One by one the casements catch  
Her beams beneath the silvery thatch;  
Couched in his kennel, like a log,  
With paws of silver sleeps the dog;  
From their shadowy cote the white breasts peep  
Of doves in a silver-feathered sleep;  
A harvest mouse goes scampering by,  
With silver claws, and silver eye;  
And moveless fish in the water gleam,  
By silver reeds in a silver stream.

Walter De La Mare

### **Daffodils**

I wander'd lonely as a cloud  
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,  
When all at once I saw a crowd,  
A host of golden daffodils;  
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,  
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine  
And twinkle on the Milky Way,  
They stretch'd in never-ending line  
Along the margin of a bay:  
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,  
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced, but they  
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:  
A poet could not but be gay,  
In such a jocund company:  
I gazed – and gazed – but little thought  
What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie  
In vacant or in pensive mood,  
They flash upon that inward eye  
Which is the bliss of solitude;  
And then my heart with pleasure fills,  
And dances with the daffodils.

William Wordsworth

### **The Tin Can Band**

Oh, the tin can band,

Oh, the tin can band!  
It's the dinniest band  
In the big bright land.  
It's a sing-song band, it's a bing-bong band.  
It's a miss-a-beat, have-a-treat, skippy-feet-band,  
As we march along with our pots and pans,  
And we bing and bong on our old tin cans.

We're a-singing and a-singing to the binging and the bonging.  
We're escaping and a-slipping out  
On every hand.

And it sounds like a battle  
When our tin cans rattle,  
When our tin cans rattle  
And our tin cans clang.  
Yes, it's sounding like the prattle and the tattle of a battle  
Like a merry monster cannon going  
BANG,BANG,BANG!

Though silence falls when the band's gone by,  
And the street is bare to the hills and sky,  
There's a nitter and a natter,  
And a tiny tnnny patter,  
Like a whisper (only crisper)  
Like a tine toy's sigh,  
And a flutter like a mutter,  
Like a sunny sort of stutter,  
Going giggling down the gutter  
Where the funny echoes die.

Margaret Mahy  
(published in "Exploring Poetry 8 – 13" Brian Merrick)

### **If**

If you can keep your head when all about you  
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;  
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,  
But make allowance for their doubting too;  
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,  
Or, being lied about, don't deal in lies,  
Or, being hated, don't give way to hating,  
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise;

If you can dream – and not make dreams your master;  
If you can think – and not make thoughts your aim;  
If you can meet with triumph and disaster  
And treat those two impostors just the same;  
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken  
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,  
Or watch the things you gave your life to broken,  
And stoop and build 'em up with wornout tools;

If you can make one heap of all your winnings  
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,  
And lose, and start again at your beginnings  
And never breathe a word about your loss;  
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew  
To serve your turn long after they are gone,  
And so hold on when there is nothing in you  
Except the Will which says to them: 'Hold on!';

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,  
Or walk with kings – nor lose the common touch;  
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you;  
If all men count with you, but none too much;  
If you can fill the unforgiving minute  
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run –  
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,  
And – which is more – you'll be a Man, my son!

Rudyard Kipling

### **Night Mail**

This is the night mail crossing the border,  
Bringing the cheque and the postal order,  
Letters for the rich, letters for the poor,  
The shop at the corner and the girl next door.  
Pulling up Beattock, a steady climb –  
The gradient's against her, but she's on time.

Past cotton grass and moorland boulder  
Shovelling white steam over her shoulder,  
Snorting noisily as she passes  
Silent miles of wind-bent grasses.  
Birds turn their heads as she approaches,  
Stare from the bushes at her blank-faced coaches.  
Sheepdogs cannot turn on her course.  
They slumber on with paws across.  
In the farm she passes no one wakes,  
But the jug in the bedroom gently shakes.

Dawn freshens, the climb is done  
Sown towards Glasgow she descends  
Towards the steam tugs yelping down the glade of cranes,  
Towards the fields of apparatus, the furnaces  
Set on the dark plain like gigantic chessmen.  
All Scotland waits for her:  
In the dark glens, beside the pale lochs  
Men long for news.

Letters of thanks, letters from banks,  
Letters of joy from girl and boy,  
Receipted bills and invitations  
To inspect new stock or visit relations,  
And applications for situations

And timid lovers' declarations  
And gossip, gossip from all the nations,  
News circumstantial, new financial.  
Letters with holiday snaps to enlarge in,  
Letters with faces scrawled in the margin,  
Letters from uncles, cousins and aunts,  
Letters to Scotland from the south of France,  
Letters of condolence to Highlands and Lowlands,  
Notes from overseas to Hebrides –  
Written on paper of every hue,  
The pink, the violet, the white and the blue,  
The chatty, the catty, the boring and adoring,  
The cold and official and the heart's outpouring,  
Clever, stupid, short and long,  
They typed and the printed and the spelt all wrong.  
Thousands are still asleep  
Dreaming of terrifying monsters,  
Of a friendly tea beside the band at Cranston's or Crawford's:  
Asleep in working Glasgow, asleep in well-set Edinburgh,  
Asleep in granite Aberdeen.  
They continue their dreams;  
But shall wake soon and long for letters,  
And none will hear the postman's knock  
Without a quickening of the heart,  
For who can hear and feel himself forgotten?

W.H. Auden

### **Sonnet 18**

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?  
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:  
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,  
And summer's lease hath all too short a date:  
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,  
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd:  
And every fair from fair sometimes declines,  
By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd;  
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,  
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st;  
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,  
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st:  
So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,  
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

William Shakespeare

### **In Flanders Fields**

In Flanders fields the poppies blow  
Between the crosses, row on row,  
That mark our place; and in the sky  
The larks, still bravely singing, fly  
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the dead. Short days ago  
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,  
Loved and were loved, and now we lie  
In Flanders fields.

Take up your quarrel with the foe:  
To you from failing hands we throw  
The torch; be yours to hold it high.  
If ye break faith with us who die  
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow  
In Flanders fields.

John McCrae

## How to read a poem

### 1. Reading with your eyes.

Look at any poem laid out on a page. The presentation invites you to read it with your eye on the line length, the gaps between the stanzas, the spaces around the words. We read poems differently from the way we read fiction. Most poems we see as a whole.

Try to look at a poem as you might be looking at a painting, a CD cover, a sculpture, a photograph...be aware that your view of the layout and associations of the words is what is really important.

### 2. Reading with your ears.

Choose a poem that you think is interesting and read it aloud. Poems invite us to speak them with an ear to the rhythm of the lines, the pace of delivery, the sounds of the words. We listen to poems in a different way, much nearer to the way we listen to music.

### 3. Responding to what is unique.

Each poem is highly individual. It needs to be read at least twice. When you have read a poem with your eye and then with your ear try to find its heart. It might be an idea, an emotion, a focal point of a description. At this point it helps to jot down your first thoughts about the poem and its distinctive character.

### 4. Thinking about what is general.

Although each poem is unique, all poems have features in common. They are:

- Made of words, "the best words in their best order"
- Shaped into a particular form
- Concentrated in their attention
- Concerned to keep thinking and feeling together

Try to consider all four of these features as you delve into a poem.

*Adapted from Examining Poetry by Michael and Peter Benson. Published 1986 ISBN 0 340 32572 0*

## **Teaching the Learning and Recitation of Poetry**

### **Breathing and relaxation exercises**

Stress the value of deep breathing before any vocal work and point out that this is good not only for the voice but as a way of ‘centring’, calming nerves and focusing on a performance.

#### **Breathing**

Ensure that the children are standing comfortably. You might ask them to close their eyes so that they can concentrate better. Ask them to begin to become aware of their breathing and slowly take deeper and deeper breaths: “Think about getting the air right down deep into your lungs, a little deeper with each breath.” You’re encouraging them to breathe from their diaphragms, not to take the shallow ‘top of lung’ breaths that we often do. Ask them each to put a hand on their diaphragm so that they can feel it move as they breathe. You can give a count such as: “Breathe in 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and hold 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and out 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8” – repeating this a few times.

To aid concentration, ask them to listen to and identify sounds outside the room: “How many different sounds can you hear? Where are they coming from? What sort of sounds are they?” If you know the group well enough, you can bring the focus to sounds inside the room but be ready for disruptive bodily noises that could so easily ruin your calming atmosphere!

Appropriate calming music can also be used.

#### **Relaxing**

When they are comfortably breathing in a slow, regular and deep fashion, move on to relaxation exercises. Start with the toes and work through the whole body to the head, asking the children to tense and then relax each set of muscles a couple of times, so: “Tense your toes, then relax them”, and repeat this before moving on to the tops of the feet, calves and so on. When you get to the face, there are lots of muscles to experiment with!

At the end of your breathing and relaxation session, ask the children to open their eyes and shake out their fingers and toes. They should feel relaxed and ready for vocal work.

### **Vocal warm-ups**

#### **Tongue twisters**

Children may well know some tongue twisters such as “Red lorry, yellow lorry...” or its evil twin – “Red lorry, yellow lorry, red leather, yellow leather...”; “Unique New York”, or, if you’re feeling very brave, “Peggy Babcock”. This last phrase really gives the tongue and lips a workout and it is very hard to keep repeating it, especially if you speed up.

#### **Chewing gum**

Something that is usually banned in the classroom, but ask the children to imagine that they are chewing some magic gum that gets bigger as you chew so that eventually your mouth and tongue are working overtime just trying to contain it. Finish with it magically disappearing with a pop or, if you’re so inclined, ask the children to remove it and all throw it to stick on the ceiling!

## **Mouthabet**

Ask the children to put their tongues against the back of their lower front teeth and recite the alphabet. This gives the vocal chords and lips a good workout! It can be messy, though, so tilting the head back slightly helps to keep the floor clean...

## **Singing**

Singing is a good vocal warm-up. Simple songs are best so that children can enjoy singing and open up their lungs. Rounds are an enjoyable way to start a vocal session.

## **Rhythm and pace exercise**

Take the first verse of William Blake's poem, *The Tyger*:

*Tyger! Tyger! burning bright  
In the forests of the night,  
What immortal hand or eye  
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?*

Teach it to the children so that they can all deliver it clearly and on beat. Use a percussion instrument to mark time. Display the words on a whiteboard or flip chart – an interactive whiteboard is best for this activity.

Once the children know the poem off by heart, remove the second line so that they recite the poem without it, keeping to time. Do the same with other lines. Then include only the last word of each line so that the children mark time and just say "bright... night... eye... symmetry". Once the children have mastered this, use just a few words from different parts of the poem so that children say, for example: "bright... forests... night... What... symmetry".

You could develop this into a performance of the whole verse (or the whole poem if you can) with different groups of children spread around the room, each delivering only some of the words, thus creating a spatial, choral work.

Point out to the children how this approach fits the nature of the poem with its sense of magic and mysterious power, and how the sound coming from all around matches the idea of the forest where sounds can startle and surprise.

## **Understanding what you're saying**

This exercise is based on *Matilda* by Hilary Bell but can work equally well with any narrative poem.

Either in groups or individually, ask the children to read the poem and then create a storyboard version of it – like a simple comic strip with images showing the action and brief descriptions. This will help children to understand the events of the poem and to order them correctly.

You can create a drama version of this using still pictures (also known as frozen pictures or tableaux) in which children 'freeze' into different positions to tell the story.

A third approach is to mime the story as it is read, thus linking an understanding of the action to the words of the poem.

## **Learning the words**

The best way to learn a poem off by heart is by repetition, becoming so familiar with it that you don't have to think about it: the words and their order become as familiar as the alphabet or counting to 100. However, there are dangers and limitations in this approach:

- Rote learning can kill meaning as children become over-familiar with the words and they are 'just words' with as much significance as a shopping list.
- Some children become quickly bored and the project loses focus and impetus.
- Children learn at different rates and have varying abilities; your star performer may be a slow learner and your fastest learner may bring little in the way of understanding or vocal interpretation.

Fortunately there are some simple techniques that can aid learning and bring some variety to the process. You can adapt these tips so that they can be used individually, in small groups or for a whole class learning the same poem.

- As children become familiar with a poem, let them use cue cards with reminders on, perhaps of the first line of each verse or of particular lines or words that they find difficult to remember. In time, they won't need these cards but, often, just the fact of having them if needed boosts confidence.

- Vary your practice times

Slip in unannounced practices when the children least expect it, taking just a few moments to run through the poem a couple of times. Make this fun and don't labour the need to get it right. You can use all sorts of odd times in the day for this – recite as you walk to the swimming pool, or when queuing for lunch, for example. Why not take five minutes out in the middle of doing something else: down pens or calculators and recite the poem twice, then go straight back to what you were doing. You will probably find that this quick change of focus is actually beneficial to what you were doing – how often have you got stuck on a crossword or Sudoku-type puzzle only to find that, if you go and do something else, on your return you know the answer?

- Give each child a copy of the poem and ask them to read it before they go to sleep as this is a good time to learn things.
- Picture it

Teach the children to associate particular parts of the poem with a striking image so that for "...who can defy the Law..." in *Macavity – the Mystery Cat* by T S Eliot, for example, they may think of a strong image of a cat telling off a police officer.

Encourage them to use this technique for hard-to-remember sections.

### **Using the voice effectively**

Help children to appreciate the power of the voice to convey meaning, not just by what is said but also by the way it is said.

Take the first verse of *Macavity – the Mystery Cat* by T S Eliot:

*"Macavity's a Mystery Cat: he's called the Hidden Paw –*

*For he's the master criminal who can defy the Law.*

*He's the bafflement of Scotland Yard, the Flying Squad's despair:*

*For when they reach the scene of crime – Macavity's not there!"*

And ask the children, working all together, to recite it with different emotions:

Unhappy (quiet, flat, even intonation)

delighted (lively, bouncy – smile as you speak)

mysterious (questioning, pausing to think – imagine there's someone out of sight just behind you).

Ask them which is the most appropriate feeling for the words of the poem.

Can they identify other parts of the poem where they might add to the feeling by the way that they say the words, for example:

'Mystery Cat' – mysterious

'master criminal' – exaggerated like a film trailer

'bafflement' – confused (accompanied by head scratching)

'Macavity's not there' – mysterious

The children could mark up their copies of the poem, picking out a few key words or phrases to deliver with a particular inflection.

You can encourage them to go over the top initially, putting in as much emphasis as they can, then, as they rehearse, they can refine their performances so that there is a good balance between the meaning, the emotional impact and the rhythm of the poem.

### **Dealing with nerves**

Most children and adults become nervous at the thought of performance and this may be exacerbated for those who take part in the competition with its requirement for solo performances of the poems. Here are some tips to tell the children:

- Prepare well with more rehearsal than you think you need, then, when you get nervous, think back over all the work you've done and tell yourself that you're as ready as you possibly can be.
- Remember your breathing and relaxation exercises and make a conscious effort to breathe deeply before the performance so that your body is ready.
- Think back to a previous successful performance, perhaps in front of the class or in an assembly, and remind yourself how well it went – if it worked then, there's no reason why it shouldn't work now!
- If you can, get to the venue early and stand on the performance space, work out how many steps there are from the 'offstage' area to your 'spot' – one less thing to worry about when the big moment comes!
- Decide where you will look while you perform the poem. A good tip is to find something on the far wall which is just above your eyeline so that you are looking slightly up (such as a clock or exit sign), but this will vary from venue to venue so, again, check it out in advance if you can.

### **Group performances**

When the children have run through a few of the workshop exercises, ask them to work in groups to deliver a group performance of one of the poems (or an extract).

They will need to think about:

Rhythm

Clarity

How they will split the words between speakers

Which parts will be solo voice and which choral

Tone of voice

Emotion

They could also think about adding sounds such as the sound of the forest for Tyger, the meows of cats or things being broken for Macavity.

Ask them to rehearse their poem (or extract) so that they are ready to perform it to the rest of the class and use this as an opportunity to develop critical skills, asking everyone what worked well and why.

*Adapted from Off By Heart: Teacher's Notes BBC Education*

## Short writing opportunities for poetry

### Inspiration

Activities to give children experiences, to inspire language, followed by some form of recording responses e.g. collection of words – word list, post-its, mind-map, short paragraph, writing frame, picture, journal, notebook etc:

- first-hand experience – looking at a candle flame, observing mini-beasts, using a magnifying glass
- drawing pictures, patterns, shapes before writing
- using postcards, posters of paintings, music, sculptures, film clips, photos
- dance – short writing opportunity to capture thoughts, feelings, experience of dance
- sounds – play excerpts of sounds
- locations – pictures, film clips etc - eg seafront, churchyard, building site, deserted house
- collections of items eg buttons, shoes, stamps, coins, fruit, leaves etc to investigate
- recalled, common experiences eg darkness at night, snow falling, bonfire night
- seasons, weather – wintry days, storms, frost on the window pane, celebrations
- playful ideas – masks, looking through coloured lenses, magical windows
- relationships – things granny says, old people, my mum, our teacher is, my cat; make rapid lists of what people say
- memories – secret places, details, strange events, old dreams, things I used to do
- feelings – anger, sadness, elation, memorable incidents
- listen to suitable music and write comments, notes
- poetry journey – local walk, sit, look, write what you see, visual journey
- take a photo – describe what you see, what happened before, after...
- recreation of closely observed experience
- create a treasure trail of words used to describe areas in the classroom, school
- play games to explore senses etc, record thoughts, feelings.

### Collection

Activities to improve word power, to encourage the collection of words and phrases:

- give children simple structures/frames which act as a coat hanger for children's own ideas, use these to support independent writing. Independent/paired work/response partners
- collect descriptions/reactions to experiences (visual, sound etc)
- write at speed, time limited task – write for a minute or so, any topic, then swap words over to create surprising combinations of words

- paired discussion – read the poem then work in pairs to annotate poem with first impressions, feelings, responses, likes, dislikes, puzzles, patterns. Explore ideas verbally before writing – could record the talk as a vehicle for sharing/reviewing
- notebook, journal, working wall to collect words, phrases
- select the five most important words – if you had £1 and words cost 20p, which words would you buy and why?
- magnetic poetry – real or on web (<http://home.freeuk.net/elloughton13/scramble.htm>)
- labelling pictures - interesting words, similes
- mind map, start with one word, branch off with more words etc
- cut-up poems – old magazine, cut up lines of text, stick them down, no idea how the poem will turn out
- make up funny/nonsense sentences
- post-it notes on a poem/picture/photo
- choose images (including moving images) to match poems and annotate with descriptive words, phrases, show whilst performing
- create a group poem that grows everyday, a few lines each morning
- activities based around a dictionary/web-based rhyming dictionary, to support collection of vocabulary
- word of the week – choose an adventurous word from the children's reading. Display it, brainstorm ways to use it in a sentence. How many times can it be used in the week?
- articulate – provide children with a selection of pictures or objects. Children work in pairs, one describes object without naming it, the other guesses what it is. Encourage use of descriptive language to improve visualisation
- Synonym Race – choose a common word from children's writing such as 'look'. Give children one minute to think of as many different alternatives for that word as possible
- Power of Words – give children set of cards with synonyms for the same word. Can they order the words according to their strength eg big, huge, massive, colossal?
- Metaphor Maker – give children Metaphor Maker frame – choose a subject / choose something to compare it to / find special words that belong to your metaphor / describe your subject using your special words.

### **Extend**

Activities to extend children's thinking around a poem:

- character profiles
- thought bubbles and speech which could have come from character
- play script/conversation/dialogue/gossip about characters
- internal monologue of a character's thoughts and feelings at different parts of the poem
- narrative poem – write a diary for character, record entries, use voice and sound effects

- think, say, feel – draw a cartoon strip of the character's day, showing what he says, feels, thinks at each event
- use dramatic strategies to explore characters in depth. Freeze frame a scene from poem – consider emotions, feelings, and facial expressions, gesture. Take digital photo, display on IWB and annotate. Devise questions to ask main characters, work in role, answer questions, hot seat – write questions on white boards and work in groups
- role on the wall – draw an outline of a character, note facts about him around the outside of the outline. Note feelings and opinions about him on the inside.
- horoscope/crystal ball – write the character's horoscope, predict the future for him.
- character profile – hobbies, age, address, favourite things, friends, family
- make a timeline of a narrative poem
- write a guide book on the subject of the poem eg monsters, seasons
- create a 'world' for the subject of the poem, where they live, their name, family, ...
- newspaper article about events; official report by character or authorities
- create a new type of poem by mixing up two sorts, create new name
- write jokes and try them out on others
- likes and dislikes about a poem – write around a copy of the poem
- two poems around the same theme – compare, contrast
- visualisation – visualise scene from description in poem, draw picture
- find some sounds or a piece of music to match the poem and perform
- storyboards of poem, comic strip. Give a limited amount of boxes to draw in – what would the main scenes/images be?
- draw illustrations to go with poem
- question hand – use it to discuss and record responses to poem
- research wider theme - other literature, non-fiction
- cut up a poem and ask the children to reassemble into their own version
- give the children a poem with key words omitted – can the children suggest suitable replacements?
- extend or substitute lines in poems, keeping to the poet's style
- exploring a scene – working in pairs, read description of scene from a poem. Imagine being 'in' the scene, consider movements, what they might see, touch, smell, how they might feel. Record ideas
- Mystery Poem Sack – give children the sack, which holds items mentioned in a poem as yet unread. What clues do they give about the text, characters, setting etc? Record predictions, share and justify ideas
- use zones of relevance boards – in pairs, place words from the poem and justify reasons for doing so
- rainbow technique – set groups of children different tasks eg exploring different characters/images/events, report back to others.

## **A-Z of Poetry Reading Ideas**

**Assembly** – hold a poetry assembly where each class performs poems.

**Buy words** – which words would you buy or borrow from a poem? Keep a notebook and store tasty words.

**Cut up and close reading** – cut up a poem for someone else to reassemble – by word, line or verse. Or, cut out words and leave spaces to be filled.

**Drawing** – illustrate a poem – create poem posters.

**Enthusiasm** – discuss what you liked in a poem, what you didn't like – draw up a desert island list of top ten poems or poets, hold a vote across the school.

**Feelings** – read and discuss what poems make you feel and think. Write down or share your first impressions.

**Gossip** – chat about poets and poems. Hold regular 'recommendation' sessions where you promote a poet or poem that you think others will enjoy.

**Highlights** – which are the highlights of a poem? Which is a poet's best poem and why? Use a highlighter to identify key words or lines.

**Imitate** – imitate poetic ideas or patterns and write a poem yourself.

**Journals** – keep a poetry journal – each week stick in a new poem that you like.

**Know it by heart** – learn poems by heart. Chant, perform and sing poems out loud.

**Letters** – write to poets...or to characters in their poems.

**Memories** – what memories does a poem stir – what do you see in your mind, what does it remind you of?

**Newspaper headlines** – create a newspaper headline and article about a poem or what is happening in a poem, especially narrative poetry.

**Organize** – a poetry reading or poetry day. Invite poets into school for book weeks or arts festivals.

**Performance** – perform poems – make tapes and videos, Send these to other classes or schools.

**Questions** – ask questions about poems – what puzzles you? What are you not certain about? Discuss mysteries. Remember – not everything makes sensible sense – sometimes poems have to be experienced and not just understood.

**Reread** – keep rereading a poem to let its meaning creep up on you – and to let the words sink forever into your mind.

**Swap** – swap poems over. Find one you think your partner would enjoy.

**Title** – hide the title of a poem – what might the poem be called?

**Underline** – use a coloured pencil to underline, star or circle parts of a poem that are of interest – likes, dislikes, puzzles or patterns.

**Video** – video a reading or class performance of a poem. Put on a poetry show.

**Weekly** – have a poet of the week or month – read their poems each day.

**X-ray** – put on your X-ray vision when reading – try to see and listen the heart of a poem.

**Yardstick** – collect a few poems that act as your poetic yardstick – what is a really good poem by which all others have to be judged – which ones are the great ones...And why?

**Zodiac** – create a zodiac of poems – one for each star (or month) sign.

*From: The Works Key Stage 2: Every kind of poem you will ever need for the Literacy Hour  
(Chosen by Pie Corbett) Macmillan Children's Books 2006*

## Poetry Slams

Some schools hold an annual poetry slam. Children can perform in groups or individually. Time will need to be given to practising and the children should think about the fundamentals of performance:

- Speak your poem clearly
- Make sure the volume is loud enough to be heard
- Use expression and rhythm
- Vary volume, pace and expression for effect
- Use dramatic pauses
- Use simple movement or percussion

To judge the slam you will need a panel of judges who mark out of a hundred, each focussing on one of the following elements:

- The performance
- The quality of the poem (if written by the performers)
- The volume of the audience's response

Performance poems, rapid rhymes and rapping lend themselves to slams.

*From: The Works Key Stage 2: Every kind of poem you will ever need for the Literacy Hour  
(Chosen by Pie Corbett) Macmillan Children's Books 2006*

### **Books used in the compiling of this resource:**

- I like this poem (Ed) Kaye Webb Puffin 1979 ISBN0-14-031295-1
- Read Me: A Poem a Day for the National Year of Reading (Chosen by Gaby Morgan) Macmillan Children's books 1998 ISBN 0-330-37353-6
- Read Me 2: A Poem for Every Day of The Year (Chosen by Gaby Morgan), Macmillan Children's Books 1999 ISBN 0-330-39132-1 *Currently out of print*
- The works: Every kind of poem you will ever need for the Literacy Hour (Chosen by Paul Cookson), Macmillan Children's Books, 2000. ISBN 0 – 330-48104-5
- The Works Key Stage 2: Every kind of poem you will ever need for the Literacy Hour (Chosen by Pie Corbett)Macmillan Children's Books 2006 ISBN 0-330-43949-9 *Currently out of print*
- Noisy poem (Collected by Jill Bennett) Oxford University Press1995 ISBN 9780192763259
- The Orchard Book of Funny Poems (Compiled by Wendy Cope) Orchard, 1993 ISBN 1-86039-101-X *Currently out of print*

### **Other resources:**

Films of well-known faces reciting some poems are available online at the BBC Schools site: [bbc.co.uk/schools/teachers/offbyheart](http://bbc.co.uk/schools/teachers/offbyheart)

The poems can be found at: [bbc.co.uk/schools/teachers/offbyheart/poems.shtml](http://bbc.co.uk/schools/teachers/offbyheart/poems.shtml)

Other relevant sites

For helping children to make sense of poetry, see:

[bbc.co.uk/schools/ks2bitesize/english/revision\\_bites/poetry.shtml](http://bbc.co.uk/schools/ks2bitesize/english/revision_bites/poetry.shtml)

For more interactive poetry ideas, see:

[www.talkingteaching.co.uk/resources/show\\_resource.cfm?id=107](http://www.talkingteaching.co.uk/resources/show_resource.cfm?id=107)

### **BOOKS**

#### **Poetry KS2: Key Stage 2 (Curriculum Bank)**

**by Moira Andrew**

**ISBN: 978-0590537872**

Structured and progressive activities for poetry at KS2/Scottish levels C–E.

Sections on reading and shared poetry, writing poetry, using a pattern and playing with forms. Many poems are provided as photocopiable, and there are also photocopiable worksheets.

#### **Mind Your Own Business KS2 (Literacy Hour Units)**

**by Alison Kelly**

**Illustrations by Quentin Blake**

**ISBN: 978-0439016285**

Lesson plans for using poems within the Literacy Hour structure and photocopiable activity sheets for pupils. An overview grid gives at-a-glance information about the word, sentence and text-level work covered. Each teacher's book has an A1, double-sided, text-based poster in the middle for use as shared text for whole-class teaching.

#### **Mind Your Own Business**

**by Michael Rosen**

**Illustrations by Quentin Blake**

**ISBN: 978-0590542388**

This collection of poems is used by Alison Kelly as the stimulus for her book above. These poems reflect the experiences of children and portray their feelings in authentic, everyday language.

**Speaking, Listening and Drama: KS2 Years 3–4**

**by John Airs and Chris Ball**

**Illustrations by Cathy Gilligan**

**ISBN: 978-1902239972**

**The Confidence Book**

**by Gordon Lamont**

**ISBN: 978-1847090010**

Aimed at adults but with many ideas applicable to children who perform in front of others, the book covers: breathing, relaxation, body language, learning speeches, keeping calm and much more.

Jumpstart! Poetry: Games and Activities for Ages 7-12 Pie Corbett Routledge ISBN 978-0415467087

Ofsted Poetry in schools: A survey of practice, 2006/07 Reference no. 070034  
We addresses – poetry day etc

**Websites:**

[www.childrenslaureate.org.uk](http://www.childrenslaureate.org.uk)

[www.poetryarchive.org/childrensarchive/home](http://www.poetryarchive.org/childrensarchive/home)

[www.poetrysociety.org.uk](http://www.poetrysociety.org.uk)

<http://pinterest.com/covprienglish/poetry/>

[www.bbc.co.uk/learningzone/clips/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningzone/clips/) - search under literacy and poetry for audio-visual files to support the teaching of poetry.

This collection of poems is provided free of charge and is intended for use in schools attending training led by Primary English. It should not be shared or transmitted with other schools as this may impair copyright.....



# Primary English

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