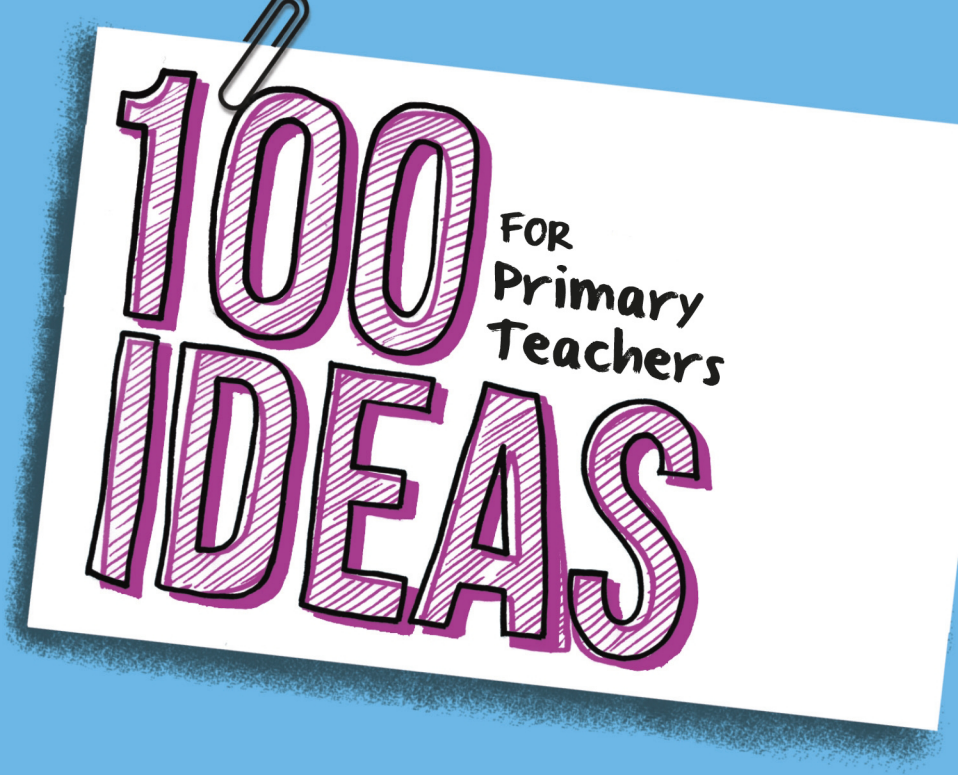


Poetry

Adam Bushnell and Frankie O'Reilly

BLOOMSBURY

100 Ideas for Primary Teachers

Poetry

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Contents

Acknowledgements	vii
Foreword	viii
Introduction	ix
How to use this book	xi
Part 1: The joy of poetry: Introducing young minds to verse	**1**
1 A poem that speaks to you	2
2 A visit from a poet	3
3 Hosting a poetry tasting	4
4 Animal poems	5
5 Nature poems	6
6 Celebration poetry	8
7 Collecting words and phrases	9
8 Pre-reading and predictions	10
Part 2: Building blocks: Understanding the basics of poetry	**11**
9 Rhythm	12
10 Rhyme	13
11 Imagery	14
12 Lines and stanzas	15
13 Exploring repetition	16
14 Mood and tone	17
15 Themes	18
16 How to analyse a poem	20
17 How to annotate a poem	22
Part 3: Playing with words: Creative writing exercises for young poets	**23**
18 Paint chip poetry	24
19 We're going on a haiku hunt!	25
20 Blackout poetry	26
21 Book spine poetry	28
22 Bio poems	29
23 Paper bag poetry	30
24 Poetry gallery walk	31
25 Dreamcatcher poems	32

Part 4: Exploring diverse voices **33**
26 'Caged Bird' by Maya Angelou 34
27 'Gitanjali' by Rabindranath Tagore 36
28 'In the Bazaars of Hyderabad' by Sarojini Naidu 38
29 'For Forest' by Grace Nichols 39
30 'Flame-Heart' by Claude McKay 40
31 'We Wear the Mask' by Paul Laurence Dunbar 42

Part 5: Developing rhythm, rhyme, and a poetic ear: The musicality of poetry **43**
32 'Night Mail' by W.H. Auden 44
33 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' by Alfred, Lord Tennyson 45
34 Pop music poetry 46
35 Mastering metre 47
36 Exploring assonance 48
37 'The Sound Collector' by Roger McGough 50

Part 6: Structured poetry **53**
38 Haiku: small moments, big feelings 54
39 Cinquain poetry 55
40 Question and answer poetry 56
41 Quatrain poetry 57
42 Exploring a sonnet 58
43 Ode to food 59
44 Kenning poetry: Playing with words 60
45 Limericks 61

Part 7: Figurative language and poetic devices **63**
46 Similes 64
47 Metaphor match 65
48 Exploring onomatopoeia 66
49 Alliteration 67
50 Exploring personification 68
51 Hyperbole 69
52 Idioms 70
53 Imagery: Beyond the senses 71
54 Symbolism 72
55 Figurative language 74

Part 8: A holistic approach to poetry **75**
56 Poetry and geography 76

57 Poetry and science 78
58 Poetry, dance and drama 80
59 Poetry and history 82
60 Poetry and music 84
61 Poetry and art 86

Part 9: Imagery and imagination: Crafting vivid poems 87
62 Stretching a sentence 88
63 Surrealism in poetry 89
64 Weather poetry 90
65 Nature's power 91
66 Fantastical creatures 92
67 'The Magic Box' by Kit Wright 93
68 'Amulet' by Ted Hughes 94
69 Playing with light and sound 96

Part 10: Narrative poetry 99
70 Rhyming couplets in 'Goblin Market' 100
71 Storytelling in 'The Owl and the Pussycat' 101
72 Exploring colour in 'The Highwayman' 102
73 Responding to 'The Listeners' 103
74 Weaving words in 'The Lady of Shalott' 104
75 Reflecting on 'In Flanders Fields' 105
76 Persuasion in 'The Spider and the Fly' 106

Part 11: Reading aloud: The power of performance in poetry 107
77 The importance of oracy 108
78 'Gran, Can You Rap?' by Jack Ousby 109
79 'Jabberwocky' by Lewis Carroll 110
80 Poetry soundscapes 112
81 Exploring tone 114
82 Anansi is... 115
83 Volcano poetry 116

Part 12: Fostering a love of poetry: Creating a poetic community in the classroom 119
84 Poetry detection 120
85 Poetry journalling 121
86 Build-a-poem 122
87 Magnetic poetry 123
88 A poet tree 124
89 Publishing poetry 125
90 Our favourite poets 126
91 National Poetry Day 128

Part 13: From the heart: Encouraging emotional expression through poetry **131**
92 Words with feeling 132
93 Exploring emotive vocabulary 133
94 Emotion jars 134
95 Crafting poems from photographs 136
96 Poetry on prescription 138
97 Memory poems 139
98 Exploring different perspectives 140
99 'My Heart Leaps Up' by William Wordsworth 141
100 Friendship poetry 142

Bibliography 143

Part 1

The joy of poetry: Introducing young minds to verse

IDEA 1

A poem that speaks to you

'A poem can be a mirror in which we can see our own reflection.'
– Anon

This lesson introduces children to the world of poetry. They will explore a range of poems, select one that 'speaks to them', illustrate it on a postcard and write about why the poem 'chose them'.

Bonus idea ★

Invite children to post their postcards into a class post box. Each day, pull one postcard out and share it with the class. This keeps the excitement alive throughout the unit and provides an ongoing opportunity for children to reflect on and share their connections to poetry.

Begin with a brief introduction to poetry, explaining its ability to evoke various emotions and thoughts. Show examples of diverse poems, highlighting their different styles and themes. Encourage children to think about how the poems make them feel. This sets the stage for their exploration of poetry.

Next, give children time to explore a selection of poetry books, anthologies or digital resources (such as audio clips or videos of poets performing their work). Adults can support by reading poems aloud and pointing out different themes or styles. The goal is for each child to find a poem that resonates with them, rather than reading all of them in detail.

Each child shares the poem they selected with the class, focusing on their favourite line or stanza. They should explain why the poem spoke to them – did it make them laugh, remind them of a particular experience, or convey a particular feeling? This encourages personal reflection and verbal expression.

Give each child a blank postcard. On the front, they illustrate the poem, reflecting its emotion or theme. On the back, they copy their favourite line or stanza and, in the address box, explain why that poem 'chose them'. For example: 'Smile' by Spike Milligan: 'It chose me because it made me laugh and feel happy. The line 'Smiling is infectious, you can catch it like the flu' made me think of when I see my friends smiling at school, and it always makes me smile too!'.

A visit from a poet

'A poem is a house inviting you to walk on in.' – Adisa the Verbaliser

A school visit from a poet offers a magical opportunity to make poetry come alive for children. This lesson focuses on preparation, interaction and follow-up activities to maximise the experience.

Introduce the poet and their work using multimedia resources like recordings of the poet reading their poems. Explore the poet's website and read their work. Discuss:

- What makes the poems unique?
- How do they use language, rhythm or imagery to create emotion?
- What questions might you ask the poet about their creative process?

Before the visit, ask the children to write their own short poems inspired by a theme the poet explores. Display them in the classroom to welcome the poet.

During the visit, encourage the children to ask questions such as:

- What inspired you to start writing poetry?
- Do you have a favourite poem that you've written? Why is it your favourite?
- How do you deal with writer's block?

Invite the poet to lead a writing workshop giving the children the opportunity to experiment with the poetic techniques they've learnt, guided by the poet's expertise. For instance, they might explore sensory imagery, rhyme or free verse to craft poems about their own lives or interests.

Teaching tip

Remember your role is to support the poet during the visit and to be as involved in the session as the children are.

Taking it further

After the visit, ask the children to create a 'poetry reflection journal'. They can write about their favourite part of the session, what they learned, and how it inspired their writing.

Bonus idea ★

After the visit, create a 'poetry time capsule'. Get each child to write a poem inspired by what they learned during the poet's visit, seal it in an envelope, and place it in a decorated box. Set a date to reopen the time capsule – perhaps at the end of the school year – to reflect on their growth as poets.

IDEA 3

Hosting a poetry tasting

Set menu: Starter: 'On the Ning, Nang Nong' by Spike Milligan; **Main:** 'Cosmic Disco' by Grace Nichols; **Dessert:** 'The Sound Collector' by Roger McGough

Holding a 'poetry tasting' is an engaging and non-threatening way to introduces children to a variety of poetry. It mimics the format of a food tasting, but instead of sampling food, pupils 'sample' poems.

Teaching tip

Transform your classroom into a café. Add tablecloths, fairy lights or pretend menus to create an inviting atmosphere. Choose fun and accessible themes, such as seasons, animals, friendship or magic.

Taking it further

After the event, pupils can report on the poetry tasting in the form of a newspaper article. Who attended? What poems were on offer? Where was the event held? Can they incorporate a quote from a participant?

Bonus idea ★

Can children curate their own poetry menu around a given theme?

Start by welcoming children enthusiastically, explaining that they'll be 'tasting the flavours of words' through a variety of poems. Prepare a creative 'poetry menu' featuring different styles like rhyming poems, acrostics, haikus and limericks, ensuring they're age-appropriate and engaging. Set up three to five poetry stations, each with a 'set menu' (see example above) or dedicated to a specific type of poem (e.g. haikus) or a chosen theme (e.g. weather). Divide the class into small groups and guide them through station rotations, allowing 10 minutes at each station to quietly read or listen to poems. Consider which stations may require an adult or student helper for guided reading support. Children write reflective notes about the poems on 'poetry placemats' (see example below). Conclude with pupils sharing their favourite poems and discussing what they enjoyed.

Poetry placemat (reflective sentence stems):

Before reading the poem, I thought...; The author is...; I would give the poem ... stars because...; My favourite word/phrase is...; I enjoyed/didn't enjoy this poem because...; It reminded me of...; One question I have about the poem is...; If I had to sum up the poem in one word it would be...; I wonder if...; The poem left me feeling....

Animal poems

'Tyger Tyger, burning bright / In the forests of the night'
– William Blake, 'The Tyger'

In this activity, pupils will immerse themselves in the vivid and imaginative world of animal poetry. They will explore different poetic forms and create their own animal-inspired pieces.

After reading an animal poem such as 'The Eagle' by Alfred, Lord Tennyson or 'The Spider and the Fly' by Mary Howitt, discuss the following questions as a class or in small groups:

- What animals are featured in the poem?
- How does the poet describe the animal?
- What feelings or images does the poem evoke?
- Why do you think the poet chose this particular animal?
- How does the poem's rhythm or form reflect the animal's movements or traits?

Introduce the children to a structured poetry activity using the five senses. Ask them to pick an animal and write sensory details:

- **See:** What does the animal look like?
- **Hear:** What sounds does it make?
- **Feel:** What textures are associated with it?
- **Smell:** What scents might it carry or inhabit?
- **Taste:** What might it eat?

Using their notes, the children craft a descriptive free verse or a rhyming couplet poem.

Teaching tip

Before reading, select key vocabulary from the poem (e.g. prowl, majestic, flutter) and explore their meanings as a class. Display the words on a working wall or word mat, pairing them with images to aid understanding.

Taking it further

Explore shape poetry by having the children shape their poems like the chosen animal (e.g. a butterfly-shaped poem or a towering giraffe).

Bonus idea ★

Listen to audio recordings of animal-inspired poems or watch animated readings on YouTube to bring the verses to life.