

100
IDEAS FOR
Primary
Teachers

Poetry

Adam Bushnell and Frankie O'Reilly

BLOOMSBURY

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**The joy of poetry:
Introducing young
minds to verse**



Part 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.

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.