

Poetry Quests

Key Stage 3 English with Media Education



*Though I am old with wandering
Through hollow lands and hilly lands...*

*Snow is falling on Nagoya
And farther south
On the tiles of Kyoto*

Eelmen, gunmen, the long dead, the police.

*Sleep,
plump bottles,
bodies almost black*

The gossip is protected like it's gold...



*Little henhouse boy,
Sharp-faced as new moons*

Holding a poem up to the light...

Pressing an ear against its hive.....

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Introduction

Poetry Quests is a set of units of work on poetry which are suitable for teaching in Key Stage 3 English with Media Education. Teachers can dip in and out of the units, using and adapting the Suggested Learning and Teaching Activities in ways which will suit their own pupils. (For further guidance, see the Key Stage 3 Curriculum Support and Implementation Box and the *Key Stage 3 Non Statutory Guidance for English with Media Education* booklet.)

Aims

The overall aims of these units of work are to engage pupils in reading and appreciating poetry for pleasure, in and out of the classroom, and to enhance their understanding of a poet's craft.

The units also fulfil the statutory requirements for English with Media Education, allowing opportunities for pupils to:

- express meaning, feelings and viewpoints;
- talk, to include debate, presentations and group discussions;
- listen actively and report back;
- read for key ideas, enjoyment, engagement and empathy;
- write and present in different media and for different audiences and purposes;
- participate in a range of drama activities;
- develop an understanding of different forms, genres and methods of communication and an understanding of how meaning is created;
- develop their knowledge of how language works and their accuracy in using the conventions of language including spelling, punctuation and grammar;
- analyse critically their own and other texts; and
- use a range of techniques, forms and media to convey information creatively and appropriately.



Contexts for Learning

English with Media Education provides important contexts for the development of the Northern Ireland Curriculum skills and capabilities.

Cross-Curricular Skills

Communication is central to the whole curriculum. Pupils should be able to communicate in order to express themselves socially, emotionally and physically, to develop as individuals, engage with others and contribute as members of society.

Across the curriculum, at a level appropriate to their ability, pupils should be enabled to develop skills in:

Talking and Listening

Pupils should be enabled to:

- listen to and take part in discussions, explanations, role-plays and presentations;
- contribute comments, ask questions and respond to others' points of view;
- communicate information, ideas, opinions, feelings and imaginings, using an expanding vocabulary;
- structure their talk and speak clearly so that ideas can be understood by others;
- adapt ways of speaking to audience and situation; and
- use non-verbal methods to express ideas and engage with the listener.

Reading

Pupils should be enabled to:

- read a range of texts* for information, ideas and enjoyment;
- use a range of strategies to read with increasing independence;
- find, select and use information from a range of sources;
- understand and explore ideas, events and features in texts*; and
- use evidence from texts* to explain opinions.


Writing

Pupils should be enabled to:

- talk about, plan and edit work;
- communicate information, meaning, feelings, imaginings and ideas in a clear and organised way;
- develop, express and present ideas in a variety of forms and formats, using traditional and digital resources, for different audiences and purposes; and
- write with increasing accuracy and proficiency.

* Texts refer to ideas that are organised to communicate and present a message in written, spoken, visual and symbolic forms.

The activities in these units also provide opportunities for pupils to develop and demonstrate the Cross-Curricular Skill of Using ICT.



These units provide a wide range of opportunities for pupils to acquire, develop and demonstrate the Cross-Curricular Skill of Communication. They also include a variety of opportunities for teachers to assess pupils' performance in Communication.

ask questions experiment ideas communicate
 plan challenge opinions imagine
 role-play present ideas engage

Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities

Poetry Quests provides relevant contexts for the development of pupils' Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities. (For more information, see *English – Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities Progression Maps at Key Stage 3*.) Across the Key Stage, these units give pupils opportunities to progress towards:

Being Creative

- regularly challenging conventions and assumptions;
- experimenting and building on different modes of thinking;
- making new connections between ideas and information;
- following intuition and taking risks for success and originality; and
- valuing the unexpected or surprising;

Managing Information

- selecting, combining and synthesising information to meet the needs of the situation; and
- communicating confidently with a range of audiences and purposes and in a range of situations;

Thinking, Problem-Solving and Decision-Making

- analysing a range of viewpoints; and
- applying understanding and making connections across the curriculum;

Self-Management

- seeking out and acting on guidance and feedback;
- identifying and prioritising their own learning needs;
- prioritising the most important things to do;
- using time effectively and persisting with tasks in the face of frustrations; and
- being prepared to comment on the originality and value of work;

Working with Others

- taking increasing responsibility for work assigned in teams;
- being willing to critically evaluate and change the approach in a group if necessary;
- being willing to take the lead in demonstrating learning to others;
- being able to give and respond to feedback from peers and adults and understanding its importance for learning; and
- being willing and able to reach agreement through compromise.

Many of the activities in these units incorporate various Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities.

develop *learning* *feedback* *share* *reflect*
take part *negotiate*

Assessment for Learning

Assessment for Learning focuses on the learning process: not to prove learning, but to improve it. These units incorporate many examples of Assessment for Learning, enabling you to integrate it into your classroom practice.

Teachers have opportunities to:

- share learning outcomes, explaining what pupils will be learning and why;
- share and negotiate success criteria;
- develop pupils' reflection on learning through use of peer - and self-assessment;
- give feedback to pupils that shows them how to improve through specific prompts or strategies; and
- practise effective questioning, eliciting good quality feedback from pupils.

Pupils have opportunities to:

- take part in peer assessment, giving and receiving constructive feedback;
- take greater responsibility for their learning and for aspects of assessment; and
- reflect on their learning, showing awareness of their strengths and areas for improvement.

Links to Key Stage 4

The framework at Key Stage 3 is flexible. It allows teachers to establish foundations for Key Stage 4 study by providing opportunities for pupils to demonstrate a deeper understanding. It also enables them to become more independent learners who will be more adept and experienced in managing their own learning.

We have designed the suggested learning and teaching activities in these units to provide a good foundation for a range of subjects and qualifications at Key Stage 4. These include:

- English;
- English Language;
- English Literature;
- Key Skills Communication; and
- Drama.

Using this Booklet

The aim of this booklet's activities is to instil in young people a love of poetry which they can turn to for inspiration or comfort throughout their lives.

Some teachers are worried and frightened by poetry, which can produce pupils who are worried and frightened by poetry. Further reading can help you to feel at ease with it, but you should read poetry outside the curriculum rather than books that will 'explain' it to you. No book can truly explain poetry to you and this can be a limiting way both to read and to teach. If you trust your own reading and allow pupils to make their own meanings everyone can come to love the form. This approach is a natural prerequisite to good learning and teaching. While there is some suggested reading to build your confidence listed at the end of the booklet, simply reading poetry is the best way to improve your own learning and teaching.

Use the great freedom of the Northern Ireland Curriculum to teach poems that will interest your pupils and that they can find a way into. Try not to simply use poems you know from GCSE or Key Stage 4 – these are often unsuitable. For example, Carol Ann Duffy's poem 'Valentine' isn't always suitable below Year 10.

Poems are about play – for the poet, who is playing with words and meanings, and for the reader. Unless the pupil is able to enjoy that play at some level they are not 'getting' poetry. Therefore it is often best to give up the idea of a poem as something that conveys single and simple meanings which you can 'translate' for a class.

A pupil's first experiences of poetry should be fun. If they enjoy it pupils are less likely to view the study of the concepts and methods of poetry as an anxiety-making puzzle in which they feel they have no chance of ever catching up with the teacher.

Therefore, if they are going to teach poetry well, teachers should be prepared to say to a class: 'I don't know what this line means. Do any of you have any idea?' Meaning in poetry can be complex, so pupils need to feel comfortable in not being able to understand every single thing. They must realise that it is fine to work at the level of many possible interpretations. Pupils need to see their teacher work like this if they are to feel comfortable doing it too.

It is important that pupils should have opportunities to write, as well as read, poetry right up to A Level. There are many opportunities to do this in these units of work.

When marking a pupil's essay on a poem, it is important that the teacher is open to a new reading by the pupil and is not narrowly looking for only one possible reading.

It is important to remember that the poems proposed here are suggestions only. You can use any poems that suit the age range. Suitability is not easy to assess, but it is not always about staying with children's poetry for the younger pupils: it is about choosing something they can find a way to be excited about and interested in, and they will often take their lead from you on this. At Key Stage 3, William Carlos Williams' idea of 'No ideas but in things'

Poetry Quests

is a good starting point. Poems dealing with 'things' rather than abstracts tend to work best with most Key Stage 3 pupils. The poems may point to ideas about love, death, fear or joy but they will be grounded in objects or actual people.

Most of the activities suggested here will focus on visual elements (imagery), and sound (rhyme and rhythm), since these take us back to the oral origin of poetry and its most imaginative aspects. Sometimes these can be lost in more traditional whole class readings.

The objective of these units of work is to provide a methodology of teaching poetry which:

- includes fun and speculation;
- encourages the pupils to bring their own experiences to the reading and understanding of a poem;
- helps them understand that there are always multiple interpretations; and
- allows them to feel confident in the reading they make without feeling the need to resort to a 'higher authority'.

These units work from different levels of complexity and challenge. All introduce ideas about the indeterminacy of meaning and the possibilities and excitement of language. All the units provide the pupils with the opportunity to enjoy engaging with the text. This enjoyment should lead to pupils developing good analytical and interpretative skills.

Although you may be moving pupils towards comparative work on poems to prepare for more advanced work at Key Stage 4, Key Stage 3 is a good opportunity to take time over a single poem and make it, and a full reading of it, the focus of assignments.

Any Key Stage 3 year group can do the suggested activities but the choice of poem may change depending on age, ability or prior learning. Each activity builds on the previous one and the poems and the tasks become more challenging as the units progress. Where there are two or more poems, they are at increasing levels of sophistication and suitability for older and more advanced pupils depending on the exercise.

Where you teach a mixed ability class, differentiation will be through the outcome of the task because pupils will engage with the poem and the activity at different levels. As most of the tasks have a variety of outcomes all pupils should excel in some part of them.

Finally, it is important to remember that not all poems that find their way into a classroom need to be 'worked' on. There should be time and space in the classroom for the pupils to enjoy poetry and to share and hear it for its own sake.

In the spirit of this resource and the idea that poetry can speak volumes, all of the above is summarised in Billy Collins' wonderful poem, 'An Introduction to Poetry'.

An Introduction to Poetry

Billy Collins

I ask them to take a poem
And hold it up to the light
Like a colour slide

Or press an ear against its hive.

I say drop a mouse into a poem
And watch him probe his way out,

Or walk inside the poem's room
And feel the walls for a light switch.

I want them to water-ski
Across the surface of a poem
Waving at the author's name on the shore.

But all they want to do
Is tie the poem to a chair with a rope
And torture a confession out of it.

They begin beating it with a hose
To find out what it really means.

Credit: Billy Collins, "Introduction to Poetry" from
The Apple That Astonished Paris. Copyright © 1988,
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University of Arkansas, www.uapress.com

Empathising through Poetry

The World is Dark When All My Friends Go Cold

Coral Rumble

The world is dark when all my friends go cold,
And icy stares show no sign of a thaw,
And even Ben believes the lies he's told.

The gossip is protected like it's gold
And each will add to it a little more
The world is dark when all my friends go cold.

The hurtful lies soon grow a hundredfold.
I hear my name when passing by each door,
And even Ben believes the lies he's told.

Now all the fragile memories I hold
Of loyal friends are broken on the floor;
The world is dark when all my friends grow cold.

I realise my secrets have been sold,
My heart is rubbed with sadness till it's raw.
And even Ben believes the lies he's told.

Mum says that I must learn to be more bold,
Dad says life's tough, I have to know the score;
But the world is dark when all my friends grow cold,
And even Ben believes the lies he's told.

© From Breaking the Rules, Coral Rumble, Lion Children's Books 2004

Empathising through Poetry

Suggested Learning and Teaching Activities

This is a useful poem to help pupils empathise with a character experiencing betrayal and loneliness. They can do this through discussing the narrative and focusing on the vocabulary.

The Walking Debate

The walking debate technique (See CCEA *Active Learning and Teaching Methods for Key Stage 3*) is effective in helping pupils to actively consider and express personal views about aspects of friendship explored in the poem. You can use the statements in Resource 1 to introduce the themes of the poem before or after an initial reading of it.

Friendship and Loneliness

Read the poem aloud to the pupils and facilitate a class discussion about the theme and whether pupils recognise any of the emotions or events from their own experience.

Brainstorm or mind map vocabulary relating to friendship on the board. This can help pupils to articulate the essence of friendship by generating key words. This is a good way to initiate discussion of abstract nouns which will form part of the discussion at a later stage.

The following activity helps pupils understand how the relationship between the speaker and Ben has developed and been nurtured over time by allowing them to create a shared history between the two.

- Ask pupils to get into pairs or groups. Give them a set of three random objects and ask them to come up with a brief story outline around each which illustrates the extent/strength/trial/value of this friendship. It may be helpful to ask specifically for:
 - the age of the characters at the time;
 - the setting;
 - the event(s); and
 - what the story shows about friendship.

(Examples of stimulus objects could include a ticket, a sweet wrapper, a tree branch, a photograph or a school detention letter.)

- Encourage pupils to reference abstract nouns and other key words from the brainstorm/mind map.
- Ask each group to feed back their ideas, giving a description of their stories.

Next ask the pupils to brainstorm or mind map vocabulary relating to betrayal or loneliness on the board. Facilitate the discussion of abstract nouns, for example 'memories' or 'sadness' which pupils can explore further when looking at the poem.

Ask pupils for (or provide them with) a list of the adjectives and nouns used in the poem which capture the speaker's experience. Use the key words from the title as a header and footer (as shown in Resource 2).

- Ask pupils in pairs to mix, match and add to words from the betrayal and loneliness vocabulary using the following format:
 - adjective/noun;
 - adjective/noun; and so on (See Resource 2 for examples).

This will help them to develop a description of the speaker's experiences. You can provide younger or less advanced pupils with suitable adjectives and nouns to join up.

- Encourage the pupils to come up with unlikely combinations to help them consider the emotions from different viewpoints.

Different Perspectives

You could use a 'Conscience alley' activity (See CCEA *Active Learning and Teaching Methods for Key Stage 3*) to help pupils consider the speaker's experiences from different perspectives. You can use the role cards in Resource 3 to encourage pupils to think about some different roles.

You could also do a rerun of the initial 'Walking debate' using the same statements as before. This might help pupils to actively reconsider and express personal views about aspects of friendship explored in the poem, having read and understood it.

Poetry for Inspiration and Comfort

Whatif by Shel Silverstein

This poem can be found online using a search engine or in *A Light in the Attic* by Shel Silverstein; Particular Books; ISBN 1846143853.

Teachers and pupils can also find fun poetry activities at www.shelsilverstein.com

Poetry for Inspiration and Comfort

Suggested Learning and Teaching Activities

This is a useful poem to study to help pupils appreciate that everybody worries about things that are likely/unlikely/matter/don't matter. As part of the study of the poem pupils can also explore ways to think more positively.

What Might Happen?

Read the poem aloud to the pupils. Follow this up by allowing them to have a quiet, more detailed reading themselves.

- As a class, agree the age, gender and broad circumstances of the speaker in the poem.
- Ask pupils in pairs to diamond rank the Whatifs (Resource 4), from the perspective of the agreed speaker in order of:
 - likelihood; and
 - seriousness.
- Using the diamond rank for seriousness, ask the pairs to draw a horizontal dividing line on their rank to illustrate those Whatifs that they think are worth worrying about (above the line) and those Whatifs that are not worth worrying about (below the line).
- Facilitate a class discussion about the levels of seriousness in the different things that happen in life. Talk about methods they could use when deciding what kind of things are not worth worrying about.

(Diamond rank activity guidance from CCEA *Active Learning and Teaching Methods for Key Stage 3*).

Creating Your Own Poem

This activity gives pupils experience in making decisions and justifying their choices.

- Ask pupils in groups to read the identity cards in Resource 5. These set out broad sets of circumstances for a diverse group of people. Match the new Whatif statements in Resource 6 to these characters. Each statement can be matched to more than one character and each character can have a range of Whatifs.
- Lead a class discussion about how much some of the concerns can vary depending on the context and how people cope with worries.
- As a class, agree on one of the characters given previously as a focus for class writing.

- Discuss what the concerns assigned to that character might mean in their specific context. Add other concerns. Collate and display these for class reference.
- Collate key words relating to the chosen character's worries. Identify rhyming words. It will be helpful to pupils if you display a number of single syllable key words for rhyming.
- Ask pupils to get into pairs and write a rhyming couplet. They should model the couplet on the poem. Each line should consist of a question beginning with 'Whatif...' Pupils might opt for/be assigned rhyming couplets which, for the character, are likely/unlikely/far-fetched.

For example, the couplet might be from the perspective of an elderly person:

Whatif on Thursday I run out of coal?
 Whatif my grandson can't get off the dole?
 Whatif a fairy appears from my shoe?
 Whatif a crocodile comes up the loo?

- Create a class poem using the rhyming couplets which the pupils have written.

Hopes and Dreams

To finish this exercise, the following activity should help pupils to appreciate that worries are countered by hopes.

- Encourage pupils to consider the premise of the poem from the opposite perspective: 'Why shouldn't...'

Facilitate a class discussion about optimism, hopes and dreams. Encourage pupils to articulate ideas which are far-fetched, ordinary, personal or unrealistic about the world around them.

- Model a/some rhyming couplet/s, using the pupils' ideas and tailoring the final words to ensure they rhyme. An example might be:

Whyshouldn't holidays be to the stars?
 Whyshouldn't I some day drive flashy cars?
 Whyshouldn't Africa have enough food?
 Whyshouldn't people just stop being rude?
- Finally, pupils can create their own 'Why Shouldn't' poem, either individually or in pairs, using some of the ideas they have come up with in class.

Using Language for Effect

Alphabet Stew by Jack Prelutsky

The poem can be found online
using a search engine or in
The Oxford Book of Children's Poetry;
Oxford University Press; 0192762761 .

Teachers and pupils can also find fun poetry
activities at www.jackprelutsky.com.

Using Language for Effect

Suggested Learning and Teaching Activities

Words for Effect

This is a useful poem for helping pupils understand that everyone has the power to shape language and how it can sometimes be interesting to look at the ordinary in unusual ways.

Read the poem aloud to the pupils. They may like to hear it more than once.

- Discuss what the poet is trying to convey with the class. Pupils should understand that language can be chosen by a poet for very specific purposes and that it can create many different effects on a reader.
- Explain to the pupils that this is what they are going to do in this unit – deliberately choose particular language to create the effects they want.

Verbal Tennis

You could begin by asking pupils in pairs to play 'Verbal tennis' in which they play a word association exercise (See *CCEA Active Learning and Teaching Methods for Key Stage 3*). This helps to make pupils aware that all words have a number of associations.

Taboo

You can play 'Taboo' with the class to help pupils draw on a range of vocabulary. (See *CCEA Active Learning and Teaching Methods for Key Stage 3*).

Where in the World is the...

To help pupils think about creating original ideas through arbitrary connections create a class poem called 'Where in the world is the...'

- Put the title on the board.
- Split the class into three groups:
 - Ask one group to come up with abstract nouns.
 - Ask another group to come up with adjectives.
 - Ask the third group to come up with common nouns.

- Select one person from each group. Ask them to pick one of their group's words to use on the board. Each person should write their chosen word clearly on a page, large enough to be seen by the class. They should then put blu-tac on the top corners of their page on both sides so that they can stick it on the board face down, so that the class can't see what it is. Meanwhile, their group should score this chosen word off the list so as not to use it again.
- Ask the three people selected to stick their page face down on the board in the following order: abstract noun/adjective/common noun. Between the spaces for the abstract noun and the adjective, write the words 'of the'.
- Repeat the above process until all words have been used.
- Turn over the words to reveal the poem's arbitrary connections, for example: 'Where in the world is the...' 'anger of the beautiful wheelbarrow/wealth of the dizzy cake'.

Nonsense Words

Pupils can use the following activity to improve their confidence in working with letter and sound combinations.

- Read and explore some examples of nonsense poems with pupils, for example Michael Rosen, Spike Milligan or Edward Lear.
- Give pupils some nonsense words and ask them to come up with a definition for each within the context of school. Examples could include:
 - a fruzzlewhaf (an old teacher with a lack of patience);
 - Droomp (PE outside when it's raining);
 - Popclink (holidays);
 - Bazinsk (detention); or
 - a Grushel (soft chair).

Discuss with the class why they have chosen these definitions; is it the sound of the words that create an association for example?

If you want to give each individual in a group the opportunity to feed back, ask for the same number of words as there are people in a group.

Continued overleaf

- Ask pupils to come up with some nonsense words to do with school. Ask for three words for each of the following school-related categories:
 - Place
 - People
 - Events
 - Sounds
 - Feelings
- Allow pupils the opportunity to feed some of their words back to the class. Facilitate a class discussion about the sounds and meaning of the words. Roald Dahl can give interesting examples of nonsense words, especially in novels such as *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *The BFG*.

Nonsense Verse

The following activity can bring together pupils' experiences of making arbitrary connections and of creating nonsense words.

- Ask pupils, in pairs, to pick an everyday event or object as their focus, for example 'dinner' or 'television'. Use this word as a stimulus for word associations. Pupils could write their words down in any order, or they could place this word at the centre of a mind map and work outwards. If the pupils decide on a mind map, create a model for them before they begin. Encourage pupils to include less obvious and more imaginative ideas and vocabulary.
- Ask pupils to include at least three nonsense words which they can give the meaning for if asked.
- Ask pupils to use a number of their noted words by:
 - selecting and placing side by side words which do not have obvious connections;
 - including the nonsense words;
 - developing lines in which the word order is deliberately unusual; and
 - avoiding obvious or literal meaning.

Pupils can use small words to bridge key words where necessary. Resource 7 shows examples of how this can be done.

- Finally, pupils could use the words and phrases they have been creating to write a nonsense poem about school or an event or day in school. They could do this individually or in pairs.

Writing Poetry by Example

You're by Sylvia Plath

This poem is available to view in the printed version of this book.

Please contact the
CCEA Distribution Team
for a copy
Tel: 028 9026 1242

Writing Poetry by Example

Genetics

Sinead Morrissey

My father's in my fingers, but my mother's in my palms.
I lift them up and look at them with pleasure -
I know my parents made me by my hands.

They may have been repelled to separate lands,
in separate hemispheres, may sleep with other lovers,
but in me they touch where fingers link to palms.

With nothing left of their togetherness but friends
who quarry for their image by a river,
at least I know their marriage by my hands.

I shape a chapel where a steeple stands.
And when I turn it over,
my father's by my fingers, my mother's by my palms

demure before a priest reciting psalms.
My body is their marriage register.
I re-enact their wedding with my hands.

So take me with you, take up the skin's demands
for mirroring in bodies of the future.
I'll bequeath my fingers, if you bequeath your palms.
We know our parents make us by our hands.

© Genetics from *The State of the Prisons* by Sinead Morrissey, edited by Michael Schmidt,
published by Carcanet Press Limited, 2005. ISBN 978-1857547757

Writing Poetry by Example

Suggested Learning and Teaching Activities

This is a good exercise to introduce the pupils to the various aspects of form without making it the entire focus. Use a poem which repeats its structure. Ask the pupils to write their own poem using the same title and matching the structure as much as possible, for example:

- form;
- line length;
- rhythm;
- placing of metaphor;
- punctuation;
- rhyme scheme; and
- length.

Many pupils like this very prescriptive structure for a variety of reasons. Pupils who might find the writing of poetry baffling have a structure to hang their own ideas on. They can find it liberating to be able to enjoy thinking of the content without having to think about structure. They are learning so much about how poems are shaped in the process. Any one of these poems works for this kind of creative work. Below are a few examples of how this might work.

Mimicking Poet's Use of Form

You can spend time on the poem as a whole group first, noting things like Plath's use of nine lines to represent the nine months of pregnancy or Morrissey's use of the villanelle. You do not have to ask pupils to follow the rules of the villanelle precisely, but pupils who might not normally enjoy poetry can become intrigued by all the rules attached to a form like this. You might use this poem more loosely as a stimulus piece for writing on the theme. If you do this, point the form out to them and perhaps suggest taking some things from it such as a repeated line. Ask pupils to think of things they have inherited from their parents or how they feel connected to stories of their parents' lives and use these as the inspiration for their poems.

You're by Sylvia Plath

In mimicking the Plath, ask the pupils to discuss who the 'You' is in the 'You're' of the title. They should then look at how the poem is essentially a simple list of metaphors for an unborn child. Ask the pupils to write their own poem describing someone using only such a list of metaphors. The more advanced pupil will be able to do this precisely and often very effectively while others may move into looser forms of description.

The Body I Once Lived in by Joyce Sutphen

Another poem for more advanced pupils could be Joyce Sutphen's 'The Body I Once Lived In.' This is a good poem to support pupils in writing a poetic autobiography piece using the repeated line and punctuation exactly as she does. The poem challenges the pupils to mimic the rhythm while reflecting on their own life and memories in their own poem. Ask the pupils to look at the number of lines per stanza where there are run-on lines, full stops, commas, dashes and so on, so that they can create a poem using the same structure. Hence they would use:

'The body....
It –
; it.....

That body....
and....
That one....

The body....
And....
Next day....

and the body...'

and so on.

Sutphen's childhood was spent in rural Minnesota on a dairy farm. Ask pupils to write poetry about the essential things about their lives and home places. In doing so they are learning a lot about form while having fun and creating their own piece of work. They can submit their poem for their 'good work' folder with a copy of the template poem and perhaps a paragraph introducing it. With pupils' permission you could use these for display purposes or pupils could volunteer to present a class poetry reading.

The Study of a Given Form

Suggested Learning and Teaching Activities

The Study of a Given Form

A good way to introduce pupils to poetry and form is to start with something light, which conforms to the more traditional concept of poetry. The ballad is a good starting point as you can begin with comic ones and move on to something more serious. This particular form also gives you the option to introduce pupils to musical versions so that pupils link poetry to song and think about rhythm and rhyme.

Examples of ballads which you could use are:

- 'Annachie Gordon' by Mary Black;
- 'The Ballad of William Bloat' by Raymond Calvert;
- 'Frankie and Johnnie' by Anonymous American;
- 'The Ghost of Tom Joad' by Bruce Springsteen (or the inspiration for this by Woody Guthrie, 'The Ballad of Tom Joad');
- 'The Highwayman' by Alfred Noyes;
- 'The Lady of Shalott' by Alfred, Lord Tennyson;
- 'Little Musgrave' by Christy Moore; or
- 'Pirate Jenny' by Nina Simone.

Try to give pupils as much and as wide a taste of the form, while giving special attention to one or two ballads. Try to show pupils the written lyrics of at least one of the musical ballads they hear. This will help them to make the connection between the form and the song. Pupils can then begin to work on their own written versions.

There are various ways of working on a single form.

Dramatising Poetry

In small groups pupils could create a drama version of one of the humorous ballads like 'Frankie and Johnnie.' Some of the pupils could have named parts and the rest could form the chorus of narrators.

Storyboarding

You might invite pupils to choose one of the ballads and create a storyboard showing how the story progresses. They could do this either manually or digitally. This is a good way of showing them that the ballad is a narrative form within poetry. The pupils could use the various types of editing software available for this.

Ballad Sheets

When pupils have read and listened to a number of ballads ask them, in small groups, to write their own. Spend some time with them discussing it as a group before they begin. Ask them to list the characteristics of the ballads they've observed such as the common themes, and the regularity of form including:

- stanza length;
- repeated lines;
- use of quatrains or septets;
- the tone; and
- the strength of rhyme and the rhyme schemes.

Ask pupils to do some of their own research on the origins of the ballad. They should look at the idea of the 'ballad sheets' that were sold in earlier centuries. Once the group work of writing the ballad is complete, ask each pupil to create a 'ballad sheet' of their poem which they have suitably illustrated. They could submit this for their folder or wall display.

Each pupil's final assignment could be the group ballad which they should present individually, with a detailed introduction. In this introduction the pupils should:

- describe the examples of ballads they listened to/read together;
- explain what they learned about the form, giving examples;
- analyse what aspects of the ballad they have attempted to reproduce in their own ballad.

The group can perform the ballad they have created. You could assess them on Reading, and Talking and Listening in this work.

The Lady of Shalott by Alfred, Lord Tennyson

'The Lady of Shalott' is a complex poem which makes a good single study with more advanced or older pupils. It is suitable for an analytical essay as there is so much to discuss in its imagery and ideas. You can link it with *Anne of Green Gables* by LM Montgomery if pupils have read it earlier.

Exploring Imagery Using Visual Art

The Song of Wandering Aengus

WB Yeats

I went out to the hazel wood,
Because a fire was in my head,
And cut and peeled a hazel wand,
And hooked a berry to a thread;

And when white moths were on the wing,
And moth-like stars were flickering out,
I dropped the berry in a stream
And caught a little silver trout.

When I had laid it on the floor
I went to blow the fire a-flame,
But something rustled on the floor,
And some one called me by my name:

It had become a glimmering girl
With apple blossom in her hair
Who called me by my name and ran
And faded through the brightening air.

Though I am old with wandering
Through hollow lands and hilly lands,
I will find out where she has gone,
And kiss her lips and take her hands;

And walk among long dappled grass,
And pluck till time and times are done
The silver apples of the moon,
The golden apples of the sun.

Exploring Imagery Using Visual Art

The Evacuee

RS Thomas

She woke up under a loose quilt
Of leaf patterns, woven by light
At the small window, busy with the boughs
Of a young cherry; but wearily she lay,
Waiting for the siren, slow to trust
Nature's deceptive peace, and then afraid
Of the long silence, she would have crept
Uneasily from the bedroom with its frieze
Of fresh sunlight, had not a cock crowed,
Shattering the surface of that limpid pool
Of stillness, and before the ripples died
One by one in the field's shallows,
The farm woke with uninhibited din.

And now the noise and not the silence drew her
Down the bare stairs at great speed.
The sounds and voices were a rough sheet
Waiting to catch her, as though she leaped
From a scorched storey of the charred past.
And there the table and the gallery
Of farm faces trying to be kind
Beckoned her nearer, and she sat down
Under an awning of salt hams.

And so she grew, a small bird in the nest
Of welcome that was built about her,
Home now after so long away
In the flowerless streets of the drab town.
The men watched her busy with the hens,
The soft flesh ripening warm as corn
On the sticks of limbs, the grey eyes clear,
Rinsed with dew of their long dread.
The men watched her, and, nodding, smiled
With earth's charity, patient and strong.

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Exploring Imagery Using Visual Art

Frying Tonight

Vernon Scannell

Outside, the dark breathes vinegar and salt;
The lemon window seems to salivate.
Draws puckish kids, black moths to candlelight.

Inside you may sit down to eat, or take
Your parceled supper out into the night.
On each white halo of a china plate

Dismembered golden dactyls form a nest
About the scab of butter which, when split,
Confesses flesh as white as coconut.

Beneath investigation of bright fork
The naked body breaks and separates,
Unfolds its steaming leaves in smooth soft flakes.

Sleep, plump bottles, bodies almost black.
Hold vinegar on all the table tops
Like little holy sisters in white caps.

And on the counter in a gallon can.
Floating blindly in translucent brine,
Small green dirigibles loll still, becalmed.

Those silver vats behind, they all contain
Hot lakes of oil: when fresh peeled chips are drowned
They spit and sizzle like a thousand cats.

In front a patient congregation stands;
These serious communicants who long
To feel warm parcels solid in their hands.

Later, at home, replete, they may spread out
Stained paper cerements, read about old scores
Dead scandals, weddings, unimportant wars.

Exploring Imagery Using Visual Art

Suggested Learning and Teaching Activities

These are obviously just examples of poems that could be used in this way. You can use any poem rich in imagery for an exercise like this.

Ways into the Poems

Yeats' 'The Song of Wandering Aengus' is magical and repetitive. The almost nursery-rhyme rhythm makes it a good poem for younger pupils to study. 'The Evacuee' is a poem you might use when pupils are studying a novel such as *Goodnight Mr Tom* by Michelle Magorian or *Faraway Home* by Marilyn Taylor. Both novels depict the experience of an evacuated or transported child. Finding a poem or poems that relate to a novel's themes is a good way to introduce poetry. Novels often use a part of a poem which you can then follow up and look at why the novelist might have referenced it. Examples include Heaney's bog poems in Siobhan Dowd's *Bog Child* or Yeats' 'A Stolen Child' in *Faraway Home*. A good essay question for younger pupils is to ask them to explore the novelist's use of the poem by connecting its meaning to their understanding of the novel's themes.

Frying Tonight by Vernon Scannell

The Vernon Scannell poem works well because the object of description (a chipper on a cold dark night) is one many teenagers can relate to. The poem then explores aspects of that familiar, everyday scene using the most extraordinary and surprising imagery which pupils can have great fun unpicking. This poem provides enough good material for a stand-alone analysis for more advanced or older pupils. Scannell's biography is worth bringing into the discussion because it accounts for aspects of its imagery.

Illustrating Imagery

There are different ways of working visually. Here is one particularly effective method:

- Photocopy the poem onto an A3 sheet with the poem in the middle of the page in Times New Roman 12 font, leaving a much larger than usual amount of white space around it. Do not enlarge the poem's font to fit the bigger page.
- Instead of asking pupils to annotate in words around the poem for meaning, ask them to fill the space around the poem with drawings, symbols or cut-out pictures which represent the poem's imagery.
- Depending on what level the pupils are at, and what you want from the work, you might first explore the poem as a class and then ask them to create images around it. You are asking the pupils to effectively create a collage of imagery that surrounds the text of the poem. They can do this in pairs or individually.
- You could adapt this as an ICT activity. Pupils could create digital imagery around the text of the poem.
- You could also ask them to use software packages like Moviemaker or ComicLife to represent the poem visually using the most vivid metaphors or images. This allows them to illustrate the imaginative transformations in the poem's language.
- You can decide what the outcome of this work will be depending on the pupils. They might give an oral presentation and explain their choices of illustration to the class. This is really a way of introducing pupils to a close reading of metaphor. Working with visual images gives pupils the confidence to explore concepts of metaphor which they do not yet have the language to describe. The differentiation will be in outcome: the more advanced pupils will often produce very thoughtful visual interpretations of metaphor, while for others the process of transforming words into images helps them towards thinking about metaphor even if they do not fully understand the concept. In all cases, by discussing these transformations they are actively engaging with and interpreting the meaning of the poem in a way that takes it away from that simplistic line-by-line 'translation' and involves them in something closer to the work of the poets themselves.
- Pupils could then write an accompanying essay describing and explaining the metaphors they have illustrated and how the poet has used them effectively. Each pupil could have a final copy of the artwork in their folder along with the essay. If the pupils have shared their work they can photocopy the collage.

The Sound of Sense – from Poem to Performance

The Snow Party

Derek Mahon

for Louis Asekoff

Basho, coming
To the city of Nagoya,
Is asked to a snow party.

There is a tinkling of china
And tea into china,
There are introductions.

Then everyone
Crowds to the window
To watch the falling snow.

Snow is falling on Nagoya
And farther south
On the tiles of Kyoto.

Eastward, beyond Irago,
It is falling
Like leaves on the cold sea.

Elsewhere they are burning
Witches and heretics
In the boiling squares,

Thousands have died since dawn
In the service
Of barbarous kings –

But there is silence
In the houses of Nagoya
And the hills of Ise.

The Sound of Sense – from Poem to Performance

Suggested Learning and Teaching Activities

The following activity can be carried out by pupils of any age group and any difficulty level. The suggested poem, Derek Mahon's 'The Snow Party' is best to use with older or more advanced pupils but you could use the exercise with almost any piece of poetry. You can use it with a one-off poem as an exercise in itself or as an introduction to something on which you intend to do much more detailed work. You could also develop it into a whole class reading for performance.

From Poem...

Read the poem to the class. Do not at this stage let them see a copy of the poem or write anything down. They are simply listening. Do not ask them to do anything beyond that.

On the second reading, invite the class to make notes on what they are hearing. These can be in different categories:

- words or phrases they like;
- words or phrases that seem odd and are interesting;
- memories or associations that the poem suggests to them;
- triggers from the poem into their own lives; or
- pictures the poem suggests to them.

Read the poem a third time.

Read the poem one more time. Ask the class to make notes on the different categories again.

Ask the pupils to write their own poem based on what they have heard in the original. They must do this without having had any access to the poem itself apart from hearing you read it. You may give some time in class to begin this work – follow on from the listening exercise and then ask them to finish the writing at home.

In the next class, invite the pupils to share what they have written. What is really fascinating at this stage is to find just how much implicit understanding they will have of the original poem through their responses. Make much of the fact that their poems are in effect readings of the original – readings that rely on sense and sound more than on intellect. The lesson here is that when they come to study a poem, that first personal response, which is about how the poem sounds and their own associations with its language, is a key part of the more analytical work they will do and they should try not to lose that

personal engagement in their response. Encourage pupils to always include such personal associations in their initial annotations and in their oral discussions of the poem. They should not become part of a formal academic essay but will nevertheless enrich their reading of the poem and help with their understanding.

It is only at this point, when the pupils have heard their own versions, that you should give them the original poem to read. Ask them to highlight all aspects of the original that made it into their poems such as individual words and phrases, ideas, or tone. You can begin tentatively exploring the meaning of the original poem. They might want to find out who Basho is and to connect the imagery and form of Mahon's poem to that of the haiku. Alternatively, this exercise could form an interesting conclusion to a different kind of unit of work where the pupils study the haiku and write their own. They would then bring an understanding of the form Mahon is using to their study of this poem, which in turn would help in thinking about what he is trying to say and the fact that the poem is not simply decorative, but has many layers of meaning.

To Performance...

You could also create a performance out of this exercise:

- Appoint one person to be the reader of the Mahon poem. Since they are going to have to reread the original poem many times, you might like to take this role yourself or even record a reading of it to play.
- The person who reads the Mahon poem stands amidst the rest of the class with everyone standing and looking ahead.
- The narrator begins. By the second or third line, their voice drops down and fades, and they continue to read very quietly in the background. Meanwhile, the first pupil reads the poem they have written in response. As they finish their poem, the narrator begins the Mahon poem again until another pupil begins to read their version and the whole action is repeated. The narrator drops their voice and then raises it when the pupil's poem is finished. This continues on until all the pupils have finished reading. This can be a classroom exercise or even polished into a public performance.

This exercise can be an effective lead-in for pupils to discuss the way they have transferred key images, sounds and meaning from the original into their own work via their individual voices and experiences. The performed reading with the original poem 'underneath' illustrates this, with echoes working between the poems for the pupils and/or audience. The group reading becomes a meta-poem itself and illustrates musicality and the importance of the sound in poetry.

The idea here is to illustrate for the pupils Frost's ideas of all poems being related to all other poems ever written, and that no poem exists in isolation. You can also suggest to them that this is what will happen with their own understanding of poetry – that the more poetry they read, the more they will come to understand what they have read.

You can use this exercise as an introduction to a poem on which you intend to do a piece of more traditional analysis. The creative introductory work will increase the ease the pupils feel with the poem as they realise that they've understood a lot of it inadvertently, possibly unwittingly reflecting its ideas, themes, contrasts and tones.

You could also ask them to do individual readings in which they make connections from the original to their own work. You might ask them to do this as a written piece or the performance itself might be the end product.

The Class Anthology

By My Skin

Leontia Flynn

for Terry McCaughey

Mr Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice – The Musical!*,
my father communicates with his family almost entirely through song.
From the orange linoleum and trumpet-sized wallpaper flowers
of the late 1970s, he steps with a roll of cotton,
a soft-shoe routine, and a pound of soft white paraffin.

He sings 'Oft in the Stilly Night' and 'Believe Me, If All
Those Enduring Young Charms'.
He sings 'Edelweiss' and 'Cheek to Cheek' from *Top Hat*.
Disney-animals are swaying along the formica sink-top
where he gets me into a lather. He greases behind my knees
and the folds of my elbows; he wraps me in swaddling clothes.

Then he lifts me up with his famous high-shouldered shuffle
-'Yes Sir, That's My Baby!' – to the candlewick bunk.
The air is bright with a billion exfoliate flitters
as he changes track – one for his changeling child:
Hauld Up Your head My Bonnie Wee Lass and Dinnae Look So Shy.

He sings 'Put Your Shoes On, Lucy (Don't You Know You're In The City)'.
He sings 'Boo-lavogue' and 'Can't Help Loving that Man of Mine'
and 'Lily the Pink' and 'The Woods of Gortnamona'.
He sings – the lights are fading – Slievenamon
and about the 'Boy Blue' (who awakens 'to angel song')

My father is Captain Von Trapp, Jean Valjean, Professor Henry Higgins –
gathering his repertoire, with the wheatgerm and cortisone.
like he's gathering up a dozen tribute roses.
Then, taking a bow, he lays these – just so – by my skin
which gets better and worse, and worse and better again.

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The Class Anthology

My Father Perceived as a Vision of St Francis

Paula Meehan

For Brendan Kennelly

It was the piebald horse in next door's garden
frightened me out of a dream
with her dawn whinny. I was back
in the boxroom of the house,
my brother's room now.
Full of ties and sweaters and secrets.
Bottles chinked on the doorstep,
the first bus pulled up to a stop.
The rest of the house slept

except for my father. I heard
him rake the ash from the grate,
plug in the kettle, hum a snatch of a tune.
Then he unlocked the back door
and stepped out into the garden.

Autumn was nearly done, the first frost
whitened the slates of the estate.
He was older than I had reckoned.
his hair completely silver,
and for the first time I saw the stoop
of his shoulder, saw that
His leg was stiff. What's he at?
So early and still stars in the west?

They came then: birds
of every size, shape, colour; they came
from the hedges and shrubs,
from eaves and garden sheds,
from the industrial estate, outlying fields,
from Dubber Cross they came
and the ditches of the North Road.

The garden was a pandemonium
when my father threw up his hands
and tossed the crumbs to the air. The sun

cleared O'Reilly's chimney
and he was suddenly radiant,
a perfect vision of St Francis,
made whole, made young again,
in a Finglas garden.

The Class Anthology

Cuttings by Nick Laird

This poem is available to view in
the printed version of this book.

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Fire Starter

Tess Gallagher

The seen caresses the unseen.
Two eagles, like twin palms in shadow-play
flex an opening in the sky, heavily gain
the pitch of my roof.

It's WWII. My father
is a pipe-fitter in the Bremerton shipyards.
For a year I am an only child running
into the winter glare. But before my father goes
to the shipyard, my mother
lets me see him, in recollection, leave the bed in darkness
to work another job.

He slips from warmth not to wake us.
Soon, like a thief who belongs, he enters,
one after the other, the neighbourhood houses, before
the families are up. He gathers
what he needs to lay the fire
in each stove, then strikes a match
to set it going, so when they rise
from sleep, the house will have the chill off
and a fire crackling. Such work is his
because these southern transplants
don't yet know what will catch fire
in the damp of hemlock, fir and alder.

My young father, newly arrived himself
from coal mines and cotton fields
to the Northwest, carrying fire, hearth to hearth,
in a time when no one locks their doors.

The Class Anthology

House to house he clears ashes, crumpling
news of war: June 6, 1944.

ALLIES INVADE EUROPE.

In a calculated toss, he
adds kindling split the night before, builds
the loose crisscross cedar scaffolding
for fire to climb, mindful that even flames
must breathe – leaving space for breaths,
in his absence, to be drawn.

He does this before I know what fire is, how it
arcs back to caves and clearings,
our ancestral huddlings.

I am nearly a year old.

The first nuclear bomb is being readied to drop
on Hiroshima and, *for good measure*, Nagasaki.

It is something of which my father
will never speak – so far beyond his ken,
the use of people, their homes, as incidental
combustibles. What news of Nazi ovens
he had, or what he thought, I do not
know. Only that Europe
was always over there,
and he didn't need to see it, asking me later
Are you sure you have to go over there?

My father on his knees
in the sleeping house, trying not
to wake the babies, and beneath
the dull clang of wood against metal
the muffled sounds of lovemaking, or
the low murmur of night's dream-cargo
exchanged between husband and wife, or
the husband gone to work, the mother
a room away, child at her breast, swaddled
in the after-warmth of their night's accumulated
heat. Trust then, sure as the flare
of the wooden match.

The Class Anthology

In the open malevolence of this young millennium, we are like lilies struck by snow: asking why democracy works so well when nothing's going wrong. Why some lethal agreeableness chloroforms the general will to dissent.

So much of reasoning subtracts us from ourselves: *so far it is not us, not anyone we know whose liberty is traded out for the general safety – illusionary oasis, safety.*

My young fire-starter father has done his work. The street he leaves uncoils white plumes scribbling the damp air, signs of life rising from the chimneys of the wood-framed houses, as if each had a comic-book voice for a comic-book time in which war was going to succeed, after which an eagle would sift down into the hemlock, the men would come home under confetti, and women, laying aside their welding tools, would again disguise themselves with aprons. A time in which horrors might be stopped by the quick fix of war.

My flesh-and-blood father glances back at the peace of his neighbourhood to which he has added one small, necessary magic: fire. The lights are going on. Households are stirring. The sweet wood-smoke nostalgia of democracy hangs over the town.

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The Class Anthology

The Pattern

Paula Meehan

Little has come down to me of hers,
a sewing machine, a wedding band,
a clutch of photos, the sting of her hand
across my face in one of our wars

when we had grown bitter and apart.
Some days that's the fate of the eldest daughter.
I wish now she'd lasted till after
I'd grown up. We might have made a new start

as women without tags like *mother, wife,*
sister, daughter, taken our chances from there.
At forty-two she headed for god knows where.
I've never gone back to visit her grave.

~

First she'd scrub the floor with Sunlight soap,
an armreach at a time. When her knees grew sore
she'd break for a cup of tea, then start again
at the door with lavender polish. The smell
would percolate back through the flat to us,
her brood banished to the bedroom.

And as she buffed the wax to a high shine
did she catch her own face coming clear?
Did she net a glimmer of her true self?
Did her mirror tell what mine tells me?
I have her shrug and go on
knowing history has brought her to her knees.

She'd call us in and let us skate around
in our socks. We'd grow solemn as planets
in an intricate orbit about her.

~

The Class Anthology

She's bending over crimson cloth,
the younger kids are long in bed.
Late summer, cold enough for a fire,
she works by fading light
to remake an old dress for me.
It's first day back at school tomorrow.

~

'Pure lambswool. Plenty of wear in it yet.
You know I wore this when I went out with your Da.
I was supposed to be down in a friend's house,
your Granda caught us at the corner.
He dragged me in by the hair – it was long as yours then –
in front of the whole street.
He called your Da every name under the sun,
cornerboy, lout; I needn't tell you
what he called me. He shoved my whole head
under the kitchen tap, took a scrubbing brush
and carbolic soap and in ice-cold water he scrubbed
every spick of lipstick and mascara off my face.
Christ but he was a right tyrant, your Granda.
It'll be over my dead body anyone harms a hair of your head.'

~

She must have stayed up half the night
to finish the dress. I found it airing at the fire,
three new copybooks on the table and a bright
bronze nib, St Christopher strung on a silver wire,

as if I were embarking on a perilous journey
to uncharted realms. I wore that dress
with little grace. To me it spelt poverty,
the stigma of the second hand. I grew enough to pass

it on by Christmas to the next in line. I was sizing
up the world beyond our flat patch by patch
daily after school, and fitting each surprising
city street to city square to diamond. I'd watch

The Class Anthology

the Liffey for hours pulsing to the sea
and the coming and going of ships,
certain that one day it would carry me
to Zanzibar, Bombay, the Land of the Ethiops.

~

There's a photo of her taken in the Phoenix Park
alone on a bench surrounded by roses
as if she had been born to formal gardens.
She stares out as if unaware
that any human hand held the camera, wrapped
entirely in her own shadow, the world beyond her
already a dream, already lost. She's
eight months pregnant. Her last child.

~

Her steel needles sparked and clacked,
the only other sound a settling coal
or her sporadic mutter
at a hard part in the pattern.
She favoured sensible shades:
Moss Green, Mustard, Beige.

I dreamt a robe of a colour
so pure it became a word.

Sometimes I'd have to kneel
an hour before the fire,
a skein around my outstretched hands,
while she rolled wool into balls.
If I swam like a kite too high
amongst the shadows on the ceiling
or flew like a fish in the pools
of pulsing light, she'd reel me firmly
home, she'd land me at her knees.

Tongues of flame in her dark eyes,
she'd say, 'One of these days I must
teach you to follow a pattern.'

The Class Anthology

I See You Dancing, Father

Brendan Kennelly

No sooner downstairs after the night's rest
And in the door
Than you started to dance a step
In the middle of the kitchen floor.

And as you danced
You whistled.
You made your own music
Always in tune with yourself.

Well, nearly always, anyway.
You're buried now
In Lislaughtin Abbey
And whenever I think of you

I go back beyond the old man
Mind and body broken
To find the unbroken man.
It is the moment before the dance begins,

Your lips are enjoying themselves
Whistling an air.
Whatever happens or cannot happen
In the time I have to spare
I see you dancing, father.

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Selected Poems with Live CD (Bloodaxe Books, 2011)

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Limbo by Seamus Heaney

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The Class Anthology

Bye-Child by Seamus Heaney

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Night Feed

Eavan Boland

This is dawn.
Believe me
This is your season, little daughter.
The moment daisies open,
The hour mercurial rainwater
Makes a mirror for sparrows.
It's time we drowned our sorrows.

I tiptoe in.
I lift you up
Wriggling
In your rosy, zipped sleeper.
Yes, this is the hour
For the early bird and me
When finder is keeper.

I crook the bottle.
How you suckle!
This is the best I can be,
Housewife
To this nursery
Where you hold on,
Dear life.

A silt of milk
The last suck.
And now your eyes are open.
Birth-coloured and offended.

Earth wakes.
You go back to sleep.
The feed is ended.

Worms turn.
Stars go in.
Even the moon is losing face.
Poplars stilt for dawn
And we begin
The long fall from grace.
I tuck you in.

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Morning Song by Sylvia Plath

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Clearances III and Clearances V
by Seamus Heaney

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A Kite for Michael and Christopher

by Seamus Heaney

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Suggested Learning and Teaching Activities

While the poems suggested in this final activity are particularly suitable for older and more advanced pupils, you could do a less ambitious version of it with simpler poems for younger or less advanced pupils. The poems supplied here are only suggestions taken from successful work with higher level Year 10 pupils. These poems focus on relationships between mothers and daughters and fathers and sons. You could create a selection of poems on an entirely different theme that you feel would suit your class.

Read a selection of poems on a similar or related theme. Some of these poems can be read just for enjoyment, some might be performed in small groups and then others you may look at together and make notes on. This work can either be done over a designated period of weeks or poems on the theme can run throughout a whole term, interspersed with other work.

Exploration and Comparison

Out of this particular selection you will see how it is possible to create subgroups of more specific subjects such as:

- new mothers;
- lost fathers;
- a mother's love for her child;
- a mother's and father's care;
- children's memories of parents; (another good poem, if studying this theme could be 'Kidspoem/ Bairnsang' by Liz Lochhead); and
- parents' thoughts on their child/ren.

You may wish to select two poems to use as the basis for a reading task. Examples from this unit could include:

- a comparison of Plath's and Boland's depiction of the mother feeding her newborn child in the night;
- an exploration of two of Heaney's sonnets in memory of his mother;
- a comparison of Leontia Flynn and Nick Laird's memory of their fathers; or
- an exploration and analysis of Heaney's darker poems 'Limbo' and 'Bye-Child' which look at attitudes to illegitimacy in an earlier Ireland and the abuses they could lead to.

Pupils are always fascinated by the fact that 'Bye-Child' is based on a real case. Both the Gallagher poem 'Fire Starter' and the Meehan poem 'The Pattern' would justify single essay exploration since there is so much in each poem.

Creating an Anthology

Alternatively you could wait until the pupils have read and studied a variety of 8–10 poems in class. Ask each pupil to create their own individual anthology and give it a title. For this you might want to let them have a look at some themed poetry anthologies to see what the logic and purpose of such a thing is. The pupil's task then is to create an anthology specifically for his/her own age group. The pupil must choose poems, including a few poems not covered in class, to include in their anthology. They should then design a cover for it and write a short introduction explaining the choice of poems, any links between them and say something about each of them. The assignment piece comprises the full anthology, with the cover, the chosen poems and a detailed introduction or forward.

- Another suggestion is to ask the pupils in groups to produce a 'Poetry Show' using presentation software in which they record an introduction and then readings of each poem they choose followed by a short commentary. Allow them to listen to something like 'Poetry Please' on Radio 4 for an example of how such a thing would sound. They could produce a sound version which is only for radio, and record it, or simply perform it for the class.

These are useful ways of introducing pupils to a wider range of poetry and suggesting to them the scale of the poetry world. It encourages them to make connections between poems and between subjects.

Bibliography (Suggested Reading)

An Introduction to English Poetry, by James Fenton

Staying Alive: Real Poems for Unreal Times

Being Alive: the Sequel to 'Staying Alive'

Being Human: the Companion Anthology to 'Staying Alive' and 'Being Alive'

all edited by Neil Astley (useful for total immersion in contemporary poetry)

52 Ways of Looking at a Poem: A Poem for Every Week of the Year,

by Ruth Padel (a good way for teachers to read a wide range of poems and to gain some confidence in reading them)

The Making of a Poem: a Norton Anthology of Poetic Forms, edited by Mark Strand and Eavan Boland

The Ode Less Travelled: Unlocking the Poet Within, by Stephen Fry

Why Poetry Matters, by Jay Parini

Resources

Empathising through Poetry

Resource 1

Walking debate statements

- Friendship is important.
- It is wrong to hurt people.
- Gossip is always harmless.
- Gossip is not always harmless.
- I am a good friend to have.
- I would stand up for someone who is being picked on.
- I would be kind to someone who seems lonely.
- My friends trust me.
- My friends are right to trust me.
- I have at least one friend who I really trust.
- It is wrong to spread rumours.
- I would never spread gossip.
- I would never maliciously spread gossip.
- People put others down to make themselves look big.
- I would be hurt if my friends believed lies about me.
- I would be hurt if my friends deserted me.

Resources

Empathising through Poetry

Resource 2

List of Adjectives/Nouns

COLD FRIENDS

Icy stares

Golden gossip

Hurtful lies

Fragile memories

Sold secrets

Raw heart

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

DARK WORLD

Resources

Empathising through Poetry

Resource 3

Role cards for Conscience alley

Speaker

Somebody started rumours about me. I can't understand why. It was posted online. Now the lies are out of control and there's nothing I can do about it. People who I thought were my friends have joined in, even Ben. I feel like I'm frozen inside.

Speaker's Mum

I am worried sick about him. He says he's ok but his friends have stopped calling and I've heard him crying.

Michael

I started a rumour in school. So what? He needs to lighten up and get over it. It was only a bit of fun.

Ben

I've been his best friend since we were five, but all these rumours... I should probably stick up for him, but then people might start hassling me.

Emma

I told everybody at the club what I'd heard at school. I did tell them that I didn't know if it was true.

Gina

I am 13 years old. I have known my two best friends since we were all four years old. I would never talk about them behind their backs. If I did, I wouldn't be a real friend.

Resources

Empathising through Poetry

Resource 4

Cut up the 20 boxes and diamond rank the 'Whatifs.'

...I'm dumb in school?	...they've closed the swimming pool?	...I get beat up?	...there's poison in my cup?
...I start to cry?	...I get sick and die?	...I flunk that test?	...green hair grows on my chest?
...nobody likes me?	...a bolt of lightning strikes me?	...I don't grow taller?	...my head starts getting smaller?
...the fish won't bite?	...the wind tears up my kite?	...they start a war?	...my parents get divorced?
...the bus is late?	...my teeth don't grow straight?	...I tear my pants?	...I never learn to dance?

Resources

Poetry for Inspiration and Comfort

Resource 5

Characters

Elderly person

This person is eighty-three years old. He/she has been a widower/widow for eleven years. He/she lives alone in a city centre fold. He/she lives on the state pension and sees his/her son and grandchildren only very rarely.

Starving child

This child is only seven weeks old. His/her mother carried him/her from their village which was destroyed in civil war to the nearest refugee camp. The camp has run out of food and the baby's mother cannot feed him/her. Without food, the child will probably die within the next week.

Celebrity

This woman is nineteen years old. She has rocketed to stardom with three hit songs in the last year and is about to start her second sellout tour. She has made £8 million pounds so far and is mobbed by adoring fans everywhere she goes. She lives alone in a luxury penthouse apartment overlooking the Thames in London.

American president

President Obama is one of the most powerful men in the world. He is leader of the world's richest country, in charge of the world's biggest and most expensive armed force and has his finger on the nuclear button. He lives in the White House in Washington DC, USA with his wife and two daughters.

Adventurer

This man leads a team who are climbing Mount Everest. He is responsible for the progress, safety and wellbeing of the team of eleven people. He is an experienced mountaineer but has not climbed Everest before.

Carer

This man/woman looks after his/her disabled child full time. He/she is responsible for the child's wellbeing 23 hours a day – for one hour every day, someone comes to give him/her a break.

Resources

Poetry for Inspiration and Comfort

Resource 6

Whatifs for characters

- I can't cope with feeling lonely anymore
- I run out of money
- Someone I love dies today
- I make the wrong decision
- I run out of food
- People think I don't look good
- I fall in the street
- I don't have anyone to speak to today
- I run out of water
- I feel I can't go on
- I am about to starve to death
- I lose my home
- People get bored with me
- My internet stops working
- The pressure gets too much

Resources

Using Language for Effect

Resource 7

Word Association for school

bored	bell	test	football	Nonsense words
die	ears	fail	score	popclink
sleep	hurt	stupid	win	fuzzlewhaf
dream	bandage	anger	adrenalin	bazinsk
escape		red	rush	
prison		fire		

friends	fight			
smile	trouble			
teeth	bruise			
sparkle	purple			
glitter				

Glittering stupidity wins prizes of escape

Angry dreaming teeth are bandaged as they sleep

Fuzzlewhafs fight win or die

Hurting bazinsk tests smiles to fire

Troubled adrenalin sparkles the score

The trouble of red boredom bruises to winning purple

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