

Poetryclass Fresh ideas for learning from The Poetry Society

Does this smell like a good poem?

By Joanne Bowles
Teacher Trailblazer
Tor Bridge High School

This lesson plan involves exploring some of the ideas in Cyrus Larcombe-Moore's poem 'my ghost' (see page 8 of this resource) which was one of the winning poems in the Foyle Young Poets of the Year Award 2016.

The activities in this plan could be used in one or two lessons or spread across a series of lessons/home learning to inspire poetry writing.

The activities use the sense of smell as a powerful stimulus.

Students will draft their own poem before reading Cyrus's poem. Their writing should inform their understanding of the winning poem and also allow them to reflect on how our senses, particularly smell invokes a strong human reaction.



KS3

Topics at a glance

- Imagery
- Metaphor
- Structure

KS4

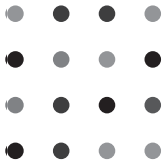
Getting started

Give students 5 minutes to complete the activity smelling pots (worksheet 1 – 'What's that smell?').

- Smell the pots around the classroom.
- Do not open them to look inside or the contents will fall out.
- What do they contain? Try to figure out what is in the pot.
- Complete worksheet 1.
- Smells could include fresh-cut grass, spices, sweets, herbs, onions, orange, and cheese.

Whole class discussion

- Run through the contents of the jars and ask students to share their answers, particularly what words they would use to describe the smell.
- Why is it that some of us like a smell and others dislike it?
- Why is it that the smells cause a different reaction to some people?



Smell is the only one of our senses directly hard wired to our brains. The sense of smell is by far the most powerful of all our senses but also one of our most underrated.

Our sense of smell is the direct extension of the brain. Its direct contact means we get a very quick, very intensive reaction to odours.

[See teacher notes for facts on smell, page 4.]

Solo activity

- Complete worksheet 2 – ‘This stinks!’
- Prompts:
 - *What are your best and worst smells?*
 - *What are your favourite smells?*

Perhaps it’s the smell of fresh bread or the scent of roses? And which smells are a positive turn-off? Maybe it’s the smell of raw meat, body odour or a particular food or environment?

- Use worksheet 3 – ‘Smell words’ if prompts are required.

Pair discussion

In pairs, share your list.

What do these smells make you think about?

Then choose either your favourite or worst smell and consider how this smell might relate to an experience?

Writing Exercise

Write about this smell as if it is something else – an experience, a person or a room.

For example; you hate the smell of sweaty feet... If this was a room it might be a teenage boy’s bedroom, it would be dusty and cluttered, there would be dirty plates under the bed and abandoned socks on the floor. Scruffy trainers would trip you up as you enter the room. The smell would be sharp and pungent, it would be eye-watering and stale.

Use the smell as a metaphor for a bad or good experience.

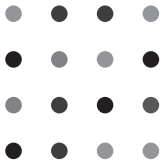
Create an atmosphere – you might want to take the class outside, particularly if the grass has been freshly cut or have the class take place in the dining hall just before lunch so the smells of the kitchen are strong around them.

Whole class discussion

Without telling people if it was your favourite or worst smell – read aloud your list.

See if the class can guess what the smell is and if the person likes or dislikes the smell.

Explain that we will use the lists later to write our own poem.



Reading the poem

The title of the poem we are going to be reading is 'my ghost' (on page 8). Ask the class to predict what is going to happen in the poem.

Read 'my ghost' aloud to the class.

Explain that titles give you an expectation but they can have multiple meanings/be ironic/be a metaphor.

Now give each student a copy of Cyrus' poem.

Ask them to highlight or underline all the parts of the poem which mention smell.

Are there other parts of the poem which invokes your sense of smell?

Get students to read through the poem again and in a different colour underline/highlight those parts of the poem which activates your sense of smell (can you smell the scrambled eggs and burnt toast as you read this part? Do the clothes in the cupboard smell?)

Our sense of smell is the most evocative sense but it is often overlooked because we rely so much on what we see and what we hear.

We very rarely think about what we smell. But actually when you smell something it brings back a memory more quickly than any of your other senses. It is immediate.

Ask students why they think Cyrus used the sense of smell in the poem. (Consider that you can close your eyes but it is much harder to block a smell out of your memory).

- How do the smells make the poet feel?
- Do you think this poem is a happy or sad poem – what supports your view? What words does the poet use to inform your decision?
- What words would the poet use if this poem was the opposite (sad to happy/frustrated to satisfied)?
- 'Banishing' could be changed to accept/welcome.

The poet uses 'my ghost' as a metaphor – like you did using smells to describe an experience you loved/hated.

Does the poet's use of smell within the poem help us to understand the poem's meaning and who 'my ghost' is?

What smells does he associate with his ghost?

Do you think the poet loves or hates his ghost? – What parts of the poem help you to determine this?

What other emotions do you understand from the poem?

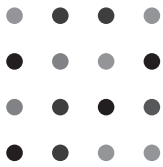
If the poet did not include the last stanza (where smell is mentioned) would you have a different opinion about how the poet feels about their ghost?

E.g. The smells that he/she associates with his ghost are pleasant smells yet 'I spent years banishing....' and 'I just wish I could eat alone sometimes' suggests he/she would prefer the ghost to leave him/her alone.

Who do you think his/her ghost is?

Prompts:

- Is the ghost a family member who has left/died?
 - *Do you perceive that the author misses his/her ghost?*
- Is this a break-up of a relationship, his/her ghost is a lost love?
- Why does the ghost stand at the end of his/her bed 'whenever I'm not alone'?



Extension

- Write your own poem about your 'ghost'.
- Use your list of words from the 'This Stinks!' exercise within your poem
- Could you include any other senses in your poem?

Teacher notes

Facts about our sense of smell

- Olfaction is the sense of smell.
- People can detect at least one trillion distinct scents.
- Scent cells are renewed every 30 to 60 days so every couple of months you get a new 'nose'
- You can smell fear and disgust. You can smell feelings of fear and disgust through sweat.
- Women have a better sense of smell than men
- Like fingerprints, every person has their own distinct odour.
- Dogs have nearly 44 times more scent cells than humans. "Humans have five to six million odour-detecting cells as compared to dogs that have 220 million cells
- People who cannot smell have a condition called anosmia.
- Your sense of smell accounts for 75-95% of the impact a flavour has.
- When you are asleep your sense of smell shuts down.
- The way we smell plays a large part in who we are attracted to.
- People who suffer from cacosmia find all smells revolting.

Source: <http://www.everydayhealth.com/news/incredible-facts-about-your-sense-smell/>



Enter the Foyle Young Poets of the Year Award

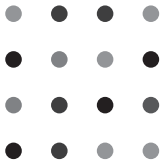
Cyrus's poem was a winner of the Foyle Young Poets of the Year Award 2016. Now your students are writing their own poetry they can enter the competition themselves.

The Foyle Young Poets of the Year Award is the most prestigious award for writers aged 11-17. It is an annual competition that welcomes poems on any theme and entry is completely free.

Since it began in 1998, the Award has kick-started the career of some of today's most exciting new voices. Past winners include Sarah Howe, Helen Mort, Jay Bernard and Caroline Bird.

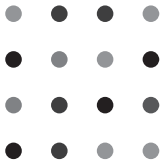
Winners receive a fantastic range of prizes, including mentoring, a residential Arvon writing course, Poetry Society membership and books. The Poetry Society also continues to support winners' development with performance, publication and internship opportunities.

Find out more and enter your students' work at foleyoungpoets.org



Worksheet 1 What's that smell?

Guess what is inside the jar	Do you like the smell?	What words would you use to describe the smell?	What does the smell remind you of?	How does the smell make you feel? (Happy, sad, annoyed etc)

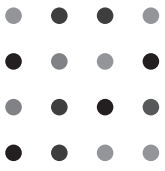


Worksheet 1 This stinks!

Complete the boxes. Use the prompt sheet (Worksheet 3) if necessary

**My
favourite
smell**

**The
smell
I hate**



Worksheet 3 Smell words

Acidy

Aromatic

Balmy

Briny

Burnt

Cheesy

Clean

Damp

Dank

Decayed

Earthy

Eye-watering

Fishy

Flowery

Fragrant

Fresh

Fruity

Gamey

Gaseous

Grassy

Mildewed

Minty

Mouldy

Musty

New

Old

Perfumed

Piney

Pungent

Putrid

Rancid

Reek

Rotten

Salty

Savoury

Scented

Sharp

Sickly

Smokey

Sour

Spicy

Spoiled

Stagnant

Stale

Stench

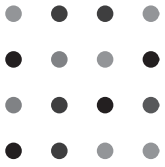
Strong

Sweet

Tempting

Wet

Woody



my ghost

By Cyrus Larcombe-Moore

A winner of the Foyle Young Poets of the Year Award 2016

I spent two years banishing a ghost from my head.
So now it sits in my back garden.
And sometimes it stands by the kitchen window,
watching us scramble breakfast eggs
and burn toast.

And every now and then,
whenever I'm not alone,
it stands at the end of my bed.
And it will sleep in my cupboards
among the baggy t-shirts and jumpers.

And where ever it goes I smell chesnuts,
honey, cinnamon, raisins.
It still gives me butterflies,
and the smell clings to everything.
I just wish I could eat alone sometimes.