Celebrations

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This lesson plan explores Lucy Thynne’s ‘the parents anniversary’, a winning poem from the Foyle Young Poets of the Year Award 2017.

The activities can be used in a single session, or over a series of sessions.

Memories collected over time build together the rich picture of our uniquely different lives. The activities stimulated by reading Lucy’s poem should inspire students to use their own experiences as a rich source for prompting poetry writing.

Class discussion
Discuss the regular celebrations that map out our lives: birthdays, Christmas, Eid, Diwali, Hanukkah, the end of term! These celebrations shape our lives but change over time. For example Christmas can be hard work as you get older and have less magic! Some people go back each year to the same place during the holidays and can see that place and themselves change. Ask the students to discuss which celebrations have repeated in their lives and what their feelings are about that event.

• Give each student a copy of Lucy’s poem.
• Read the poem aloud and discuss the following:
  ○ What words or phrases do you love or like? Put the words people choose on the board.
  ○ How many sections would you divide the poem into and why?
  ○ How is the last section different?
Worksheet One
- Ask the students to use the poem to sketch pictures created in the poem.
- The ideas are more important than the quality of the drawing and combining the pictures with words is always good.
- Discuss the pictures that people have created.
- What are the similarities and differences?

Worksheet Two
- Ask the students to choose a repeated event in their lives, e.g. Christmas traditions, birthdays, last day of term.
- Use the questions on Worksheet 2 to capture those events over the passage of time.
- Ask the students to collect their ideas into three separate verses to start their poem.
- Can they create three different pictures of that celebration over time?
- Ask the students to read and share their work at this point.

Worksheet Three
The discussion here helps the student to look more closely at the detail in the poem, in particular the ending, the use of metaphor and significant detail.

- Discuss how the ending of the poem is Lucy’s positive reflection on what her parents’ celebration of their anniversary has given her.

The poem plays a game with animal metaphor in its description of her parents as Lucy describes them as “she, a striped cat who purrs / he a tamed bear”.

- Ask the students to visualise the people in their lives, e.g. parents, friends, siblings as animals.

Lastly the detail given of the “eighties” is that it was “blurred with rain” and she remembers “home haircuts”.

- What specific details can the students remember that help to date their past e.g. specific food they ate, popular TV programmes of the time, type of weather they remember, toys they had etc.

And finally
- Ask the students to go back to their poem. They can add details gained from worksheet three at this point.
- In groups they should read Lucy’s poem again and share their work with each other.
- Lucy has introduced each section of her poem with the word “that”. They can discuss using ‘that’ or another word in the same way.
- Ask students to arrange their writing into lines.
- Ask students to take out any words they think are unnecessary.
- The finished poems can then be read aloud to the whole class and enjoyed!
For each section of Lucy’s poem ‘the parents anniversary’ sketch a picture that the poem has created for you! Add words from the poem to caption your pictures if you want to!
Worksheet 2
Exploring your event

Everyone has events or celebrations that are repeated throughout the years. Choose an event, e.g. Christmas, birthdays, holidays, anniversaries, going back to school etc.

The event I have chosen is ___________________________________________

In each box answer the following questions:
• What did you want to happen?
• What actually happened?
• How did you feel about it?
• What were you wearing or most likely to be wearing?
• What could you hear?
• What could you see? Think of specific objects, e.g. items of furniture, wall colour, and specific food.
• Was there any conversation? Can you remember what people there said?

1. When I was very young… (date ______)

2. When I was older… (date ______)

3. This year/now...
Worksheet 3
Consider the details

1. Look at the metaphor used by Lucy to describe her parents: “She a striped cat who purrs / he, a tamed bear.” Can you use animal metaphors in a similar way to describe people you know, e.g. friends, family?

2. How has the repeated pattern of this celebration or event influenced who you are today?

3. When Lucy reflects on the eighties she remembers it as “blurred with rain” and talks of “home haircuts”. Can you think what objects/weather/fashion were particularly important at the times you’ve chosen in your past?
Teacher notes

• Discuss how the ending of the poem is Lucy’s
• Do write your own poem with the students and share it!
• It would help if before the start of Worksheet 2 students are asked to find three photos of celebrations taken at different moments across time. This can help to make their work more specific, especially if it has been pointed out that Lucy’s poem seems to consist of a series of pictures. They might easily have the pictures already available on their phones.
• The whole exercise can be done with celebrities over time if you don’t want to use the students’ own life, e.g. the Royal Family, the Kardashian family, the Osbournes, the Beckhams – there are plenty of images for these families online.
• Students may find it interesting to detail their poem to research from the time period they refer to in their poem. For example:
  ○ What toys were the most popular at Christmas in 2007?
  ○ What sweets were people eating?
  ○ What furniture and wallpaper were common?
  ○ What music was common?

Google images can be particularly helpful here.

• It’s good to play with metaphor. This doesn’t have to be limited to people as animals. Try people as furniture, food, flowers etc.
• Looking at the detail of the weather can lead to a good discussion of pathetic fallacy.
• Depending on the age and or ability of the group, Lucy’s use of line breaks and her lack of punctuation can be used to start a discussion on these features and to influence the students’ use of them.

Enter the Foyle Young Poets of the Year Award

Lucy Thynne’s poem was a winner of the Foyle Young Poets of the Year Award 2017. 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 foyleyoungpoets.org
Lucy Thynne

the parents anniversary

that on the last day of july
my father would tell the story
of how they had met
so young in photos i once saw
of an eighties blurred with rain
and home haircuts
how easily she had made
her impression and left it there
that years later he would
follow her to pulsing cities
and countries now closed
to the rest of the world
that they would marry
dress each other in light
a day so hot that sand
could boil to glass
she, a striped cat who purrs
he, a tamed bear
that they could repeat these words
a little different year by year
but by the same stellate night
that he could sleep in
the fourth chamber of her heart
and stay there and stay there

‘the parents anniversary’ by Lucy Thynne was one of the top 15 winning poems in the Foyle Young Poets of the Year Award 2017. Illustration © Chris Riddell.