Tell and see

A surreal guessing-game
to tease you into poetry.

Key stage 3/4

Diamonds

The fish ate the diamond, 
ate the pearl,  
and the pearl became its eye,  
which gleamed in the sunlight  
as its rays rippled through the sea.  
But then the fish became woman  
and she crawled her way to shore  
where she was told you can eat fish eyes.  
So fish-woman cut out her own eye  
and ate it, and she couldn’t see or  
breathe anymore but instead she saw  
the future where her eye became pearl,  
became diamond again.  
And her eye diamond sliced her stomach  
open and fish-woman began to bleed.  
She bled until she wasn’t woman anymore,  
just fish, and fish was caught.  
Gutted by monger who found that  
her stomach held another fish, with  
milky white eyes and pearly tears,  
which fish woman had once swallowed down.  
They tossed her body back into the sea.
How we look at the world can inform our creativity, especially where poetry is concerned. Diamonds by Evelyn Byrne demonstrates this perfectly. Her vision of a fish-woman who eats diamonds and pearls offers us a slightly surreal invitation to be playful with stories created from everyday things.

BEFORE THE LESSON

VISUALS:

Find some pictures of exotic fish and print them in colour – if they can be glittery/iridescent/sparkly so much the better. Scatter them randomly on the desks. This poem is all about seeing and looking.

DURING THE LESSON

WARM UP:

• Before you share the poem, allow a few minutes for the students to handle the fish and enjoy them.

• Display the verbs used in the poem (gleamed/rippled/crawled/sliced/ bled/swallowed/tossed) and ask students to predict what they think the poem is about, and jot them down.

• Give them the title - does this change their thoughts?

• Tell them the poem uses the word ‘eye/s’ 6 times – why do they think this might be?

• Tell them the poem tells a short story about a fish/woman and involves a diamond and a pearl.

• Ask them to refine their predictions to include these details.

WRITE A NARRATIVE POEM:

Tell them their poem can take whatever form they like but must tell a story. Tell them they must follow the idea that they had originally (before they knew the title) and write their poem using the verbs on the board, plus the words ‘eye, fish, woman, pearl, diamond’ and any other words they want to add.

READ THE POEM:

Show students Evelyn Bryne’s poem and read it aloud. Create a story board in six pictures to show the narrative arc of the poem. How do their poems compare with the original? Allow them to share their first drafts with each other. Invite their comments on Diamonds and on each other’s poems. How different/similar is each individual vision of the story?

AFTER THE LESSON

Display the fish, the original poem and the students’ work for all to enjoy.

Diamonds by Evelyn Byrne was a commended poem in the Foyle Young Poets of the Year Award 2019. The competition is run by The Poetry Society and is open for entries from young writers aged 11-17, from early March - 31 July each year: www.foleyoungpoets.org

Share a poem by tagging it #MyNPDPoem
www.nationalpoetryday.co.uk