Look North More Often

A poetry pack for teachers inspired by the gift of the Trafalgar Square Christmas tree

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Angel Dahouk, Judith Palmer & Michael Sims

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Imaginative leaps
How poetry inspires children across the curriculum

Children respond to poetry. You can use it as an imaginative tool for introducing new or challenging topics in the classroom. Poems can express and describe ideas and feelings using language in creative and exciting ways. Through sounds, rhyme, rhythm and metaphor, poetry transforms our everyday experience into something entirely fresh and new, that captures our individual experience of the world. Poetry is versatile; it can be generated around any subject and is easily adapted across the curriculum.

Engaging every sense
Poems send children’s imaginations leaping in unexpected directions, especially at primary level. And as a literary form poetry is easy to work with - every child at this age can complete a poem. It can be an excellent gateway for reluctant learners or children with learning difficulties because it engages so many of the senses. Poetry can support children whose first language is not English, by encouraging them to try heightened, condensed language, rhythm and repetition – sometimes incorporating words or forms from their own language traditions. Poetry can empower children with poor speaking and listening skills. It engages the natural performers in the classroom because it can be as much about performance as words on the page. Above all, it is fun! Through poetry, children are encouraged to play with sounds, even to create their own words. They are encouraged to embrace nonsense, to make their own sense of it.

The joy of language
Through poetry, children can create other worlds entirely. As poet Cheryl Moskowitz points out, “for a child, crying and laughing are the most immediate forms of emotional expression, but very often, a child will be shushed for doing either. Poetry can be a way of legitimising these feelings”. Children are able to channel intense feelings through poetry, and can also share these with others without feeling exposed or vulnerable.

Poetry can, of course, improve literacy skills right across the curriculum: by building up pupils’ confidence and sense of empowerment, by making classroom activities accessible to all, regardless of the child’s intellectual, physical or social situation. It inspires children with the joy of language and wordplay and is an outlet for emotional expression. “We used our imagination,” the children responded when poet Mandy Coe asked them what they enjoyed most about their day with her.

Don’t be afraid of poetry. It isn’t a code that needs cracking. Enter the surprising world of the poem: enjoy the layers and ambiguities and see where it leads. Poetry is an art form that can help teachers and facilitators set imaginations leaping.

Angel Dahouk is the former Deputy Education Manager of The Poetry Society
Look North More Often  A resource for teachers

The Poetry Society has collaborated with the Royal Norwegian Embassy, the Office of the Mayor of Oslo and Westminster City Council to organise an exciting and unique annual schools programme which makes cultural connections between Britain and Norway, and more specifically London and Oslo, using the Trafalgar Square Christmas tree as a focal point. The title of the project, Look North More Often, is inspired by the first line of Nord (North) by Rolf Jacobsen (1907–1994).

Since the project was founded in 2011, The Poetry Society has commissioned a new children’s poem inspired by the annual gift of the Christmas tree. We’ve featured poets such as Joseph Coelho, A.F. Harrold, Ian McMillan, Julia Copus, Jackie Kay and more. To read all the poems from across the history of the project, discover more teaching resources associated with the Christmas tree, and to find out more about the latest iteration of Look North More Often, visit poetrysociety.org.uk/projects/look-north-more-often-the-trafalgar-square-christmas-tree

The spirit of the project is one of celebration, custom and renewal. Seasonal themes that incorporate tradition and climate, such as gift-giving and ice-skating, are referenced as well as wider topics relating to peace and ecology.

This resource includes:

- Information and lesson plans to support teachers in delivering poetry workshops. These include practical ideas and approaches that can be adapted in order to inspire new writing from pupils.

- A selection of poems relating to each lesson plan, the majority of which are translated poems by Norwegian writers. The content of these poems will allow pupils to gain an overall impression of the culture and environment in Norway.

Poems may be photocopied and handed out to individual pupils and illustrations can be coloured in.

The resource pack contributes to both the reading and writing of pupils – a range of forms and styles of poetry are included and provide contextual understanding for the theme, as well as using metaphorical language to aid pupils in searching for meaning beyond the literal.

This project will enable pupils to extend their understanding and exploration of another culture, and to make links between the two countries through a range of contemporary British and Norwegian poetry. The lesson plans will also support their writing allowing them to try out new forms, to take their own experience as a starting point and to use language creatively.

For more information about Norway, visit www.norway.org.uk
Kevin Crossley-Holland

Queen of the Forest
The story behind a shared tradition

The soaring Norwegian spruce in Trafalgar Square – it must be the most famous Christmas tree in the world. And when The Poetry Society and the Royal Norwegian Embassy invited me to take part in their Christmas tree project, my heart leaped, because glittering Norwegian threads have woven in and out of my own life for as long as I can remember. My mother was engaged to a pilot who flew risky missions to Norway during the Second World War, and my wife is half Norwegian; I taught at the Norwegian St. Olaf College in Minnesota, and have retold the racy, ice-bright myths of the Vikings; my books are translated into Norwegian and I’m now working on a new novel about a Norwegian Viking girl...

The soaring Norwegian spruce, some 70 feet (20–25 metres) tall, each November in Trafalgar Square began her life in a forest near Oslo between 50 and 100 years ago. Imagine! In the dark forest, children surround her, they sing carols, they honour her – just as Viking children once honoured the mighty ash tree, Yggdrasill, that spread out over the nine worlds of Norse mythology. The Norwegian forester calls this spruce destined for Trafalgar Square ‘the queen of the forest’. And once she has been cut down, she’s shipped across the North Sea as an annual gift from the city of Oslo to the city of Westminster.

Symbol of friendship

This tree now embodies the close friendship of the people of Norway and Britain. But she was first given in 1947 for a quite specific purpose, as a token of gratitude for British support during the Second World War. After Norway had been invaded by German forces in 1940, King Haakon VII escaped to Britain and a Norwegian government-in-exile was set up in London. The BBC relayed news about the war in Norwegian, as well as maintaining a message and information network which became vital to the resistance movement.

Days shorten; the year darkens. Then the scaffolding is erected in Trafalgar Square, the tree is winched up. The base of her trunk is pushed four feet into the soil beneath grey stone slabs, secured with a dozen wooden wedges. And then in the early evening of the first Thursday in December, the lights of the National Gallery are dimmed. The Lord Mayor of Westminster and the Mayor of Oslo arrive, a brass band plays, children sing, they read words in the tree’s honour. And, at the flick of a switch, the tree comes alive again: a mass of twinkling lights all of them white, in line with Norwegian tradition.

What is home?

Every evening from then until Christmas, carol singers surround the tree – and children and adults join in. And many of them then visit the beautiful St. Martin-in-the-Fields crib.

And in addition to Oslo’s gift to London, the city of Bergen gives a tree to Newcastle each year, while the city of Stavanger ships one to Sunderland. There are also Norwegian Christmas trees in Cardiff, Edinburgh and Kirkwall.

What is home? ‘Snow and spruce forest is home’, says the poet Tarjei Vesaas. ‘Snø og granskog er heimsleg’. But ‘the queen of the forest’ has made a long journey to her second home in Trafalgar Square; and, taking part in this Christmas tree project, children in schools all over Westminster are beginning their own journeys to welcome her.
Kevin Crossley-Holland

Odin’s Drink

How did poetry begin? Can we all be poets? And is there such a thing as inspiration?

The Vikings told an unforgettable myth to answer these difficult questions. They said-and-sang that the dwarfs killed a wise man called Kvasir and mixed his blood with honey and kept it in three huge pots – the mead of poetry. Whoever drank some of it became a poet. The giants stole this mead from the dwarfs and then Odin, greatest of the gods, stole it from the giants. He swallowed it all, turned himself into an eagle, and flew back with it to Asgard, kingdom of the gods. A terrifying bird-giant pursued Odin and he only just got back in time. He was in such a flap that he spilled some of the mead outside Asgard’s walls. And you and I, any of us, can sip one of the drops he spilt – they’re for rhymers, versifiers, poetasters. But Odin spat all the remainder of the mead into jars and crocks inside Asgard, and now and then he gives a mouthful – the gift of poetry – to a man or woman on Middle Earth. That’s why the Vikings called poetry ‘Odin’s drink’.

Odin also allowed his own son, Bragi, to drink his fill from one pot. So Bragi became the god of poetry, and eloquence, though actually that’s almost all we do know about him – except that he married Idun, the goddess who looked after the golden apples of eternal youth. Poetry and Youth, Youth and Poetry... Has there even been such a couple? Think about it!

You and I can read and write. But before literacy – what then? Before, people listened and they remembered. Poets and storytellers were the living memory of their tribe or society. They glorified God (or the gods); they celebrated great leaders, great events, great deeds; and they gave back to people the fabric of their own lives – birth, childhood, love, friendship, hope, despair, battle, a longing for peace...

The Vikings believed that all creation existed under the vast ash tree, Yggdrasill, and they believed this tree was a growing, nourishing, suffering being, crucial for each and every one of us. The three fates sat beneath it, shaping your life and my life. Pregnant women drank the dew from its leaves to ensure safe childbirth. Odin himself hung on it for nine long nights, his side (like Christ’s) gashed with a spear, in order to learn wisdom. A tree was at the heart of Viking society, and now it’s at the very heart of Anglo-Norwegian friendship, symbolised by the gift for the sixty-fourth consecutive year of a glorious spruce tree making its slow way across the North Sea to the docks at Immingham in Lincolnshire, and from there by lorry to Trafalgar Square.

When, in a forest outside Oslo, children joined hands around this tree before it was felled, and together sang, they were taking part in a ritual new for them and yet immensely old – worshipping the tree of suffering and renewal, the tree of life.

The Christmas tree in Trafalgar Square – in truth, is there anywhere better to gather, to bow our heads, to raise our eyes? Many carols sing of ‘peace on earth, and mercy mild’, but that is exactly what is so desperately missing from our poor planet. Compassion. Tolerance. Let them inspire us.

What was it Saint John the Divine said about the tree of life in his Revelation? ‘And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of nations.’
Lesson plan 1  Frances Presley and Hanne Bramness

Bladder Wrack

This lesson plan is designed to help children describe themselves or someone they imagine in a winter scene, using natural images and short verse lines. This short poem, Bladder Wrack, is similar to the Japanese verse form, haiku, although not as strict in terms of syllables per line. You should find examples of haiku to show the children. In the early 20th century the Imagist poets, who included Ezra Pound, Richard Aldington and HD (Hilda Doolittle), were very influenced by haiku. As a literary movement, Imagism was concerned with the use of free verse, concise forms and concrete images in reaction to Victorian Romanticism. Examples of the poetry can be found in Imagist anthologies; HD’s Sea Rose would be a good example here.

These poems often had a seasonal theme, as well as providing precise descriptions of nature. It is a verse form which is especially appropriate to the spareness of a winter landscape. Although the poem focuses on the natural image, the writer’s state of mind is often implicit.

In preparation for this poetry workshop, talk about different plants and animals in winter, both in Britain and Norway. You could talk about how they are changing due to our warmer climate.

Stage 1 Reading

Read Bladder Wrack (Pg. 7). Hanne Bramness (1959–) grew up in the capital city of Norway, Oslo, but has now moved to the rural west coast. This poem is taken from a series which is about all the plants that you find in winter in the north (Bladder Wrack is a seaweed that grows on the coastline of the North Sea, the western Baltic Sea and elsewhere). Seaweed is one of the few plants that would have survived through the coldest winters and we do not normally think of it as a flower. In spite of the long winters in Norway, there are more and more plants which do survive, since the climate, especially on the coast, is getting warmer.

This poem is not just about the ‘shape and colour’ of seaweed, but also the state of mind of the author. Her race toward the beach and the sea suggest a desire for escape into nature. Ask the children to notice how this is conveyed in the vowel sounds of the poem, the ‘ou’ in ‘out’ and other words.

The spray of the sea will wash away her ‘knotted thought’. What is she thinking and feeling? Perhaps the seaweed or algae is an image of her thoughts, which are now outside her and captured in the ice.

Stage 2 Writing Activity

Ask the children to write a short poem (no more than three verses) about what they can see in a winter landscape, either one they imagine or one that they know. They will need to focus on one or two images. Ask them to choose some natural images which may reflect how they think or feel.

You could do this exercise outside, in a park or garden, and combine it with nature study. In this case the children could make notes, and shape them into a poem afterwards.

Themes

Climate change • Plants and trees • Winter
Hanne Bramness

Bladder Wrack

out to the winter beach
feet bouncing on
the frozen path

reaching
the outer boulders
the spray will
wash away
knotted thought

the shape and colour
of this ice over
algae

*From Winter Flowers (2008)*
translated by Frances Presley.
Published by Longhouse
Publishers & Booksellers.
Lesson plan 2 Frances Presley and Hanne Bramness

The Snow Tasted

This lesson plan will help children to find unusual or imaginative ways of describing their sensations in winter time. It will also provide opportunities to explore the contrast between a wild winter landscape and the warm, safe space of home.

Poets like to come up with new and unusual ways of describing one thing as being like, or having the qualities of, another – a device which is called a simile or metaphor. Similes tend to make the comparison more explicit, and the metaphor more implicit. The example given here is closer to metaphor, as the poet is telling us that the snow tastes ‘of stars and moon’, rather than merely ‘like’ stars and moon, and so makes the impossible seem possible.

In preparation for this poetry workshop, it is important that the class has talked about and looked at images of winter landscapes both in Britain and Norway, whether in the country or the city.

Stage 1 Reading

Read the poem, ‘The Snow Tasted’ (Pg. 9). The poems of Gunvor Hofmo (1921–1995) are very much of this world, and she keeps her senses wide open, recording everything she smells and feels and hears; but she is also aware of another reality or presence in the landscape of Norway.

Although the first two verses of this poem are very tangible and physical, they are not entirely literal in their use of simile or metaphor. Throughout the poem the poet suggests something rather mysterious, with her depiction of boundless space and an endless journey. Ask the children to find which words create this effect.

In the final verse there is a contrast, perhaps a tension, between the snowy landscape and the mother standing at the window. We feel the contrast between the endless landscape and the warmth of home. Ask the children how this makes us feel.

Compare this poem with the famous poem by Robert Frost, ‘Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening’ (the children will need copies). Frost lived in North America where the winters, as in Norway, are severe but beautiful. This is another poem that appears to be about a very simple scene, but is also a way of talking about our journey through life.

Stage 2 Writing Activity

What does snow taste like? Ask the children to imagine themselves in a snowy winter landscape at night, and write about what the snow or ice smells or tastes or looks like. Try to find unusual ways of doing this, unexpected examples in the world around and above them, such as ‘the snow tasted of white vans’.

Ask the children to use images in the final verse of their poem to make a sharp contrast between an outer wintry landscape and the things that represent the warmth of home.

Themes

Journeys • Metaphor • The senses • Snow • Winter
Gunvor Hofmo

The Snow Tasted

The snow tasted of stars and the moon and of spruce, from the Nordmarka woods and of the Christmas tree.

The snow tasted of empty streets, of the Maridalen road with two mounted police riding their horses at dusk.

The sleigh whizzed through all evenings through the dusk of all roads And always there was a mother standing at a window calling...

From Stjernene og Barndommen (The Stars and Childhood, 1986) translated by Hanne Bramness and Frances Presley. Published by Gyldendal Norsk Forlag.
Lesson plan 3 Frances Presley and Hanne Bramness

Skating Competition

This lesson plan is designed to help children explore how a poem can build a sequence of events, while making use of the verse line. They can write poems which will describe an experience of a sporting event in winter, or simply a walk, whether as an individual or as part of a group or team. There is a strong narrative development in the poem Skating competition and poets often write narrative using verse lines with short sentences, or by breaking phrases, or clauses, within a sentence to create separate lines. This makes the individual stages of the experience or narrative stand out more on the page, and take on greater meaning.

In preparation for this poetry workshop, talk about different kinds of sporting or recreational activities in winter, and the children’s experiences of them. Use examples both in Norway and Britain.

Stage 1 Reading

Read the poem Skating Competition (Pg. 11). Olav H. Hauge (1908-1994) was keenly aware of and interested in nature. He grew up on a small farm on the coast in western Norway, in Hardanger south of Bergen, a region with a strong cultural tradition. The winters were colder than they are now, and the children spent much of their time on skis and skates. They did not have a lot of money, so their equipment was very simple.

This is a poem about a competition, in which it seems there can only be one winner. It is also about the role of the individual. It is written in the voice of someone who is competing, but it is also written in the second person, which makes it a more universal experience. Ask the children how the person in the poem (the narrator or protagonist) feels at first. What does he try to do? How do they think he feels in the second verse? How does the poem convey that feeling, with its repetition of the word ‘glide’?

Ask them about the final message of the poem, and the importance of ‘winning’. Is it one of resignation or of something much more positive for everyone in the race?

Stage 2 Writing Activity

Ask the children to write a poem about someone in a winter sporting event or perhaps just someone going for a walk in a winter landscape. It could be themselves or someone else. They can either write it in the first person, or by using the more inclusive second person pronoun.

Make each verse describe a different stage in the competition or journey, and describe how the person’s experience of the event changes as it progresses, and what they learn from it. They could write about the experience of competing with others, or of playing in a team against another team. It could even be about surviving hostile weather, or rugged terrain, on their own.

Themes

Competition • Ice skating • Journeys • Perseverance
Olav H. Hauge

Skating Competition

You start with the champion.
You know you cannot keep up with him,
but you get into your stride
and use all your strength
to accompany him for a while.

But he glides away from you
glides from you, glides from you –
Soon he is a whole lap in front.

It feels a bit shameful at first.
Until a strange calm comes over you,
just let the champion run!

And you fall into your own rhythm
and compete with yourself.
No one can do more.

From Dropar i austavind (Drops in the East Wind, 1966)
translated by Hanne Bramness and Frances Presley.
Published by Det Norske Samlaget
Lesson plan 4 James Carter

Write Your Own Viking Poem!

Alongside raps, kennings are arguably the most fun and exciting of all poems for Key Stage 2 and 3 children to write and perform. Kennings seem to inspire and switch on even the most reluctant writers. One seemingly demotivated post-SATS Year 6 class I visited a while ago refused to go out to break because they wanted to finish off the kennings they were writing.

Kennings are an ancient form that originated in Scandinavia. The word kenning comes from the Old Norse word ‘kenna’, which means to know or recognise. The Icelandic peoples and also the Celts adopted kennings into their poetry, storytelling and literature to make their descriptions more colourful and expressive. Classes love being told that the Vikings called their swords ‘skull-splitters’!

Each two-word line of a kenning brings together two different elements (as in ‘world wider’ and ‘April shower’ below) – and, more often than not, a noun-noun, a noun-verb or an adjective-verb. Together, the two words create a metaphor, and ultimately throughout a kenning poem, a full image of its subject, often an animal. Having two words in each line sets up a regular, rolling rhythm.

Most commonly, a kenning poem will have up to twelve or so lines, and they do not have to rhyme. And although the second word has an ‘er’ sound it can be spelt with an ‘or’ / ‘a’ / or ‘ure’ – as in the words – ‘terminator’ ‘fella’ and ‘creature’ respectively. Occasionally, you can even break the two word rule with a single word (as in ‘shapeshifter’ below) and even three words (‘make-a-cuppa’ below). One strict rule is that kennings cannot include the name of the subject that is being addressed; so, in a dog kenning for instance, you could not even include the lines ‘puppy-producer’ or ‘dog food eater’.

To reinforce the basic rules in a kenning workshop, it is good every now and then to ask the class – ‘What are these poems called?’ Kennings! How many words per line? Two! The second word ends in what sound? -er!

Warm-up

As a fun warm-up, ask the class in pairs to devise their own one-line animal kennings. First, put these on the board as examples – ‘bone burier’ (dog), ‘sofa scratcher’ (cat), ‘wave maker’ (whale) and ‘back scratcher’ (hedgehog).

Topic discussion

The topic for this kenning workshop will be gifts. Before getting immersed in the writing stage, ask the class these questions to help them to start considering the whole issue of gift-giving:

- What is a gift?
- When do people give gifts? On what occasions?
- Why? For what purpose? What does the gift say about the giver/receiver?
- List a few different (and even unusual!) gifts that people give and receive.
- Think of a special gift you would like to give to someone you know.
- What is your favourite gift you have ever given?
Workshop

Each child will have to decide first of all which gift they wish to focus upon. Now write this template structure on the board:

What Is It?

............. – giver
............. – taker
............. – lover
............. – hater
............. – eater
............. – maker
............. – creature
............. – dweller
............. – fella

Now choose a gift to brainstorm ideas around – say a book.

Ask the class to suggest words to place into the left-hand side, such as:

pleasure – giver
time – taker
ink – lover
shredder – hater
word – eater

...and so on. Now the class will begin to write their own kennings, copying down the whole template structure. With older and more able groups, encourage children to use alliterative kennings where possible (‘bone burier’ ‘fierce fella’), as this adds extra texture to the poem – however, this could also be a drafting device: going back to the kenning in a second or third session, putting alliteration into lines, for example, turning ‘furniture wrecker’ into ‘sofa scratcher’. And also, internal rhymes – so ‘shredder hater’ could become ‘shredder dreader’.

Children do not have to stick to all of the cue words: ‘giver’ / ‘taker’ etc. Some of these may well not work for their gift topic, and children may well want to put in extra words of their own, so, for example, a book could also be a ‘shelf filler’ and a ‘storyteller’.
Even if they write more than 12 lines, ask them to edit it down to 12 or so. (This work is ideally done in a second sitting). They might even wish to change the order of the lines to get a better flow. When the 12 lines are completed, they can add this coda verse or even think of their own version:

I hope you think
this gift’s the best!
It’s a ...
Had you guessed?

Performance
Kennings are perfect for poetry performances and assemblies. Perhaps encourage 6 or so members of your class to read them out in the next assembly. It often works well if pairs read together, swapping lines and even adding actions, which really brings the kenning to life. Ask them to read up to half-way through the penultimate line of the final rhyming stanza, so ‘I hope you think/my gift’s the best!/It’s a ............ and from there they can ask members of the audience to guess what their gift is!

Moving on
Kennings are also ideal for class topics such as the Vikings, the Ancient Egyptians, the Romans, the Tudors or the Aztecs. Kennings act as list poems or summaries of facts and knowledge covered during a topic. For instance, the Ancient Egyptians become ‘desert dwellers’, ‘pyramid producers’, ‘mummy makers’ ‘hieroglyphic scribes’, ‘cat lovers’, ‘Nile navigators’ and so on. Possibly unlike any other form of poetry, kennings allow you to view your chosen topic from many different and disparate angles in so few words. Though only recommended in the Primary Strategy as an optional form, kennings can be and regularly are produced in Primary schools from Year 3 across to Year 6, and into Secondary in Years 7 and 8.

Themes
Gifts ♦ Kennings ♦ Metaphor ♦ The Vikings
James Carter

**WHAT on EARTH...?**

shapeshifter
ship lifter
beach crasher
cliff basher
sin washer
loo flusher
worldwider
firefighter
life taker
life saver
make-a-cuppa
washer-upper
store-in-tower
hydro-power
April shower
feed-a-flower
I can be ice
or steam or snow
but just for now
I’m... H2O!

*Published by Macmillan*
Lesson plan 5 Coral Rumble
Snowdrift

This lesson plan is designed to help children explore how poems are ‘built’. Children love building things, from Lego models to snowmen, and I have often found it helpful to describe poem writing as ‘building with words’. A poet is intimately involved with the process of construction, when they arrange words on a page, and children will be fascinated by this process. Before this lesson it is important that the class teacher has researched some British and Norwegian Christmas traditions with the children.

Stage 1 Building
Ask the children about the things they’ve built over the years, discussing the fun of the process. Lead the discussion towards the building of tree houses and dens. Then read Olav H. Hauge’s poem, *Leaf-Huts And Snow-Houses* (Pg. 17). Ask the children why they think he likens writing poems to building a snow-house. Read the visual poem, *Raft Building* (Pg. 18) (children should have a copy in front of them). Discuss why I have likened writing to raft building. Consider how one word leads to another, when we write poems and stories.

Stage 2 Line layers
Explain to the children how poets like to work in line units, and how that’s the most obvious way you can identify a poem on the page. Poems are built in layers of lines, just like layers of snow. Read the visual poem, *Dazzle* (Pg. 18), and ask the children how the lines are building, and why they think I liked the idea.

Stage 3 Getting a bit random
In Hauge’s poem, he refers to his words as “piled up / at random”. Now it is time for you to encourage the children to be random as they write! We often think of snow at Christmas, and hopefully your pupils will have had experience of snowfalls. Talk about their experiences, then ask them to take the following steps:

a. You are going to write a poem about snow at Christmas. Decide if it is set in Britain or Norway.
b. Write words, at random, that come into your head when you think of snow. Eg. deep, icy, sparkle, fresh.
c. Write random lines that come into your head, like, “bushes iced like Christmas cakes”.
d. Allow words and lines to settle on the paper, like snowflakes, and whisper a clue that would suggest the country you’ve chosen as the setting. For example, if you mention church bells chiming on Christmas Eve afternoon, the setting could be Norway, as that happens for several minutes each Christmas time. If you are setting your poem in Britain, you could mention mince pies or the smell of turkey cooking (they cook pork in Norway). There are lots of traditions you could refer to from your research, but one would be enough.

Stage 1 Building work
Ask the children to take their words and lines and set about building – as if making a raft or a snow-house. They can adjust, expand or cut words as they go. They will be able to see their snow poems grow, line by line.

Stage 5 A guessing game
Direct the pupils to exchange their poems, and guess the country setting of each one. Have fun!

Themes
Building with words • Christmas • Snow • Tradition
Olav H. Hauge

Leaf-Huts And Snow-Houses

There’s not much to these verses, only a few words piled up at random. I think nonetheless it’s fine to make them, then for a little while I have something like a house. I remember leaf-huts we built when we were small: to creep in and sit listening to the rain, feel alone in the wilderness, drops on your nose and your hair – Or snow-houses at Christmas, to creep in and close the hole with a sack, light a candle and stay there on cold evenings.

Coral Rumble

**Raft Building**

Words are like a raft you build,

once they’re linked and holes are filled,

they float you to a distant place

where stories grow and poems pace;

where verbs can leap and nouns can vault,

where syllables can somersault;

where letters can run wild and free,

then regroup for a spelling bee.

so grab some words and rope them on,

there are pages and pages to sail upon

Coral Rumble

**Dazzle**

layer upon layer, snow covers the hillside with the dazzle of purity
layer upon layer, snow covers the hillside with the dazzle

layer upon layer, snow covers the hillside with the dazzle
layer upon layer, snow covers the hillside with the dazzle

layer upon layer, snow covers the hillside with the dazzle
layer upon layer, snow covers the hillside

layer upon layer, snow covers the hillside

layer upon layer, snow covers

layer upon layer, snow

layer upon layer

layer upon

layer


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educationadmin@poetrysociety.org.uk poetrysociety.org.uk
Lesson plan 6 Kit Wright

A Tree From The Wood

Stage 1 Introduction: the making of ‘Tree Poem’

Is there something just a little strange about the poem, ‘Tree Song’ (on Pg. 21)? Do one or two of the images give the impression of meeting here rather suddenly, and to mutual surprise?

It wouldn’t be odd if this were the case. I wrote it, and I think it’s probably quite characteristic of one particular style I’ve liked to write in sometimes: a ballad-like, song-like, incantatory mode, in fact as much like a song as I can make it without it actually being one. But I wasn’t a lone voice!

It happened like this. The Poetry Society, the Norwegian Embassy and the London Borough of Westminster decided to shape a poetry project in the winter of 2009 to coincide with the annual gift, by the people of Oslo to the people of London, of a Christmas tree—a huge one shipped from Norway to stand in the middle of Trafalgar Square at Christmas time. So two poets (Kevin Crossley-Holland and Coral Rumble) went to a number of primary schools in the borough and worked with the children to inspire poetry writing around the theme of trees and gifts. All the poems produced (four hundred and fifty of them) were sent to me and it was my task to make a kind of composite poem, using as many lines, phrases, images and ideas from these as I could. Not all that easy, but I very much enjoyed giving it a go. Of course, I could only use a tiny proportion of that amount of work. On the other hand, there were several bits I shamelessly swiped, including the Tree of X, Tree of Y, idea which I formalised into a chorus. Since the poem was to be declaimed by three children at a big party in the crypt of St Martin-in-the-Fields before the lighting-up of the tree, I went for something I hoped would be dramatically effective; thus strongly rhythmical, firmly rhymed, primary coloured. The children did it beautifully.

“I threw rocks at the apple tree” etc., I’d never have thought of myself but found irresistible. Likewise “motionless mime”, the “Tree of Luck”, the “wounded men” sheltering, the “spine of life” and “cradle”. And much else. On the other hand, the rather cheesy verse about the spruce making our spirits glow was all my own work! (I wanted to try and spell out the raison d’etre of the whole project). Finally, among the poems sent to me was an extraordinarily good one by Zachary of St Mary Magdalene’s School, aged 11. Vivid, precise and very moving, it was an inspiration to me.

Stage 2 Performance

So: what can we do in the classroom with ‘Tree Song’?

To start with, since the poem was designed to be spoken aloud, why not have a go at that? It works very well with three voices, but you could easily have three teams instead. Split the poem up into lines and combinations of lines to be spoken by A, B and C individually, by any two, and by all three together. (You don’t have to use all the options). If humanly possible, over a period of time get the children to learn it by heart. It sounds better and they enjoy it more. This sort of thing used to be called choral speaking; I call it voicedance.
Choose another abstract noun for the tree to represent – Hope, Joy, Loneliness, Fear, Beauty, for instance – and write a poem based on it. You could adopt one, or a number of different strategies. You could address it, pray to it, mourn for it, sing to it, tell its life story, make a promise to it, celebrate it, use it in a magic charm. You could do all these things in a single poem.

Tell us: who is living inside the tree/in a treehouse held by it? Who is sitting on one of its branches? What are they singing? Who stands in a circle around its trunk? Can the tree walk and where will it go? Whose names are carved in the bark, whose voices speak when the wind sighs in the leaves?

Make a variation on the idea of the tree. It could be a Ship, a House, a Sea. Or a Star.

It could be a quiet kind of poem, but I rather like the idea of something rhetorical and resonant. In any case, your three-part oral delivery gives you the opportunity to use several different tones of voice. Whatever you decide on, and however it turns out, I wish you good luck!
Kit Wright

Tree Song

Mother Tree, Memory Tree,
Tree of Time and Tree of Music,
Tree of Love and Tree of Sorrow,
Tale that’s told
In motionless mime.

I threw rocks at the apple tree
And the apple tree
Threw apples at me:
The Tree of Luck is the best tree ever:
God take care
Of the caring tree.

People rested in its keeping,
Wounded men died in its shade,
Ever-growing, ever-grieving,
Ever-greening palisade.

Mother Tree, Memory Tree,
Tree of Time and Tree of Music,
Tree of Love and Tree of Sorrow,
Tale that’s told
In tune and rhyme.

Tree with a tree-house on its back,
Girl on a swing held under its arm,
Spine of life and living cradle,
Keep the caring
Tree from harm.

Bluey-green, the spruce of Norway
Lit to make our spirits glow,
Come to London Town this winter
From the forest deep in snow.

Mother Tree, Memory Tree,
Tree of Time and Tree of Music,
Tree of Love and Tree of Sorrow,
Tale that’s told
Till the end of Time.

A poem composed from lines written by children from Westminster primary schools with poets Kevin Crossley-Holland & Coral Rumble
Lesson plan 7 Philip Gross

Peace-making, Poem-making

Outcomes

• **For poetry**: moving from an abstract noun to an active, personally involving verb; experiment with ordering words within lines and rhythmic units.

• **For peace study**: moving from a general declaration of intent to an awareness of what peace-making means in practice, and in people’s real lives. This could lead on, as age-appropriate, to factual material about peace-making and rebuilding projects in war zones, with material from charities, etc.

• **For language and thinking skills**: opens up discussion of the difference between things you can have, like presents, and things you can name, like peace, but you can only see in the process of doing.

Stage 1 Constructing a peace tree

With parallel branches coming off an upright trunk – classic Christmas-tree shape, wide at the bottom, narrowing towards the top.

EITHER this can be drawn on a large sheet of paper, or a whiteboard and the ‘birds’ attached with blu-tack,

OR made with parallel strings pinned on a background so the birds hang off the strings,

OR made in three dimensions from stiff cardboard (two planes slotted into each other at right angles, so it free-stands), with stiff branches on which to hang the birds.

Preparing the birds

From squares of paper, folded diagonally, of a size that two or three can hang from each branch (fewer on each branch towards the top).

EITHER cut out a very simple flying-bird shape in advance,

OR make the shaping of the birds a craft activity with the children. (The extreme version would be origami paper cranes – needs expertise!)

Other materials

Pencils, pens for children’s writing; felt pen / board-writer for the adult leader.
Stage 2 Discussion

The Christmas tree, especially the Norwegian tree in London, is a tree for peace.

What is peace? Everybody says they want it, but...it’s easier to say what it is NOT than what it is.

Talking together (whole group)

Gather words from round the group for the many opposites of peace, e.g.

war... fighting... arguing... being unkind... hating... ganging up... falling out... sulking...

(Encourage the ideas to branch out into different levels: friends, school, family, street... and nature: its own conflicts, like hurricanes and earthquakes, and what humans do to it... and also our own feelings: being worried, being scared...)

Stick these antagonist words up round the edges of the board or sheet or on the wall.

Stage 3 Reading

Poem

“Now, some advice from a little bird...” – remind children of the old expression “A little bird told me...”

Read the poem ‘Little Bird’ (on pg. 25). Children can help with the bird calls in the poem, by whistling or similar sounds.

Be prepared to talk about the poem, and read more than once, stressing the idea in the (deliberately) challenging line “There’s no such thing as...” – peace or a song, are not things you can handle, have and hold, like presents. They are things people do. The following questions help explore this.

Stage 4 Writing and sharing ideas (pair work or alone)

The question: What we DO when we make peace / are peaceful / live in peace. Use the anti-words as stimulus: When the arguing stops, what do we do then?

The doing words can include the ways that people show what they are feeling inside, e.g. smiling, sighing, stretching, waving, shaking hands or hugging. Encourage remembering a time from each person’s own life, with family or friends ... or imagining a situation you’ve heard of, as if you were there.

Now, as appropriate to skills and age:

EITHER write two or three lines (prose notes) about that moment, on the inside of a paper bird

OR in pairs, discuss a thought to share with the class together, before writing the words.
Sharing notes (whole group)
Read peace ideas out loud.
Question, for each: What’s the doing word here?
Together, and with an adult’s help, find one key verb to get the essence of each.
Write this word, in –ing form, clearly on the outside of the bird.

**Stage 5  Presentation**

**Arranging birds on the tree**
Collaborate in whole class or in small groups to arrange the words, several to a ‘branch’, in different orders, so they group in interesting ways

(a) sometimes by meaning
(b) sometimes by their sounds

Discuss why we feel that some words ‘go together’, with the adult being alert to point out the connections children are making with their eyes or minds or ears.

**Reading the tree**
An adult or a confident reader-aloud reads the last verse of Little Bird with the lines from the tree inserted (e.g. after ‘growing’)...

...then prepare a performance with different voices reading different lines, and maybe choral or dramatised speaking of the linking lines.
Philip Gross

Little Bird

The wood was dark,  
the silence deep,  
when suddenly:  
\[ \text{Whhhht!} \]
I said: *Bird, bird,  
give me your song  
to take away and keep.*  
And it said:  
\[ \text{Whhhht!} \]  
\[ \text{Hear, near,} \]  
\[ \text{a word in your ear.} \]  
\[ \text{Hush.} \]  
\[ \text{Are you listening?} \]

And the little bird sang  
\[ \text{There's no such thing as a song.} \]  
\[ \text{Song?} \]  
\[ \text{It's there for as long as you sing.} \]  
\[ \text{There's just the singing.} \]

All the faces were grave,  
the news was bad,  
when suddenly:  
\[ \text{Whhhht!} \]
I said: *Bird, bird,  
give us some peace  
to make the world less sad.*  
And it said:  
\[ \text{Whhhht!} \]  
\[ \text{Hear, near,} \]  
\[ \text{a word in your ear.} \]  
\[ \text{Hush.} \]  
\[ \text{Are you listening?} \]

And the little bird sang  
\[ \text{There's no such thing as peace.} \]  
\[ \text{Is peace just when wars cease?} \]  
\[ \text{Or what comes then:} \]  
\[ \text{peace-making, mending, living,} \]  
\[ \text{laughing, planting, sowing,} \]  
\[ \text{loving, building and forgiving,} \]  
\[ \text{watering and growing,} \]  
\[ \text{listening, agreeing, simply being...?} \]  
\[ \text{It's there for as long as you do these things.} \]  
\[ \text{Peace is just beginning} \]  
\[ \text{(and a little bird, still singing).} \]

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Contributors


James Carter is a prize-winning poet and guitarist. He travels all over the UK and abroad to give lively poetry performances as well as workshops and creative writing INSET sessions – and more than anything else he wishes to pass on confidence to young writers. A former lecturer in the School of Education at the University of Reading, he has written four creative writing books for teachers (all Routledge), and a number of poetry books, including Cars Stars Electric Guitars and Orange Silver Sausage (both Walker Books) and Time-Travelling Underpants and Greetings, Earthlings! (both Macmillan). Find him / see him / hear him at www.jamescarterpoet.co.uk

Gemma Correll is a freelance illustrator, crafts person and animal lover. She has exhibited around the world in countries including Belgium and China and has produced illustrations for clients such as Virgin Holidays and the Guardian. She is currently based in the self-proclaimed “Fine city” of Norwich. See www.gemmacorrell.com for more of Gemma’s work.

Kevin Crossley-Holland is a well-known poet and translator, a librettist, and a reteller of myth, legend and folktale. He won the Carnegie Medal for Storm while his Beowulf with Charles Keeping is a contemporary classic. He is the author of The Penguin Book of Norse Myths. He is also the author of the award-winning Arthur trilogy, and of its successor, Gatty’s Tale (shortlisted for the Carnegie Medal), now translated into 24 languages. His most recent book for children is Waterslain Angels, a fast-paced detective story set in the 1950s in Norfolk. Kevin makes many primary and secondary school visits each year to conduct poetry and writing workshops. His own Selected Poems were published in 2001. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and patron of Publishing House Me and the Society for Storytelling. His website is www.kevincrossley-holland.com

Philip Gross has written poetry for adults and children, opera libretti, stage and radio plays, and teenage novels of high suspense and unsettling depths, most recently The Storm Garden. He has visited schools, leading writing workshops, for twenty years and is Professor of Creative Writing at Glamorgan University. This year he published three award-winning poetry collections, winning the T. S. Eliot Prize for The Water Table, Wales Book of the Year for I Spy Pinhole Eye and Children’s Poetry Bookshelf Choice for Off Road To Everywhere. He is the son of a wartime refugee from Estonia. More details at www.philipgross.co.uk

Frances Presley is a poet and freelance writer, who lives and works in London. She has worked at the national Poetry Library, where she also helped with educational projects. Publications of poems and prose include Paravane: new and selected poems 1996–2003 (Salt, 2004); and Myne: new and selected poems and prose 1976–2005 (Shearsman Books, 2006). She has written various essays and reviews, and given talks,
especially on innovative British women poets. She has co-translated the work of the Norwegian poet Hanne Bramness in Salt on the eye: selected poems (Shearsman, 2007). Her new book, Lines of Sight, will be published by Shearsman in Autumn 2009. More details can be found at www.soton.ac.uk/~bepc/poets/Presley.htm

Coral Rumble has worked as a poet for many years, and is featured in Favourite Poets (Hodder). Michael Rosen has commented, “Rumble has a dash and delight about her work”. Coral has worked in numerous schools, with all age groups. Three collections published – Creatures, Teachers and Family Features, Breaking the Rules, and My Teacher’s as Wild as a Bison, plus contributions to 100+ anthologies. Both of her later collections have been featured in the ‘Best Books’ supplement of Junior Education magazines, and have been selected as choices by the Children’s Poetry Bookshelf. Coral is one of the writers of the popular Cbeebies series, Poetry Pie, and is the author of the Pinkasaurus stories on Cbeebies Radio. Coral can be contacted at rumblerhythm@hotmail.com

Kit Wright is a poet and children’s author. Born in 1944 and educated at Oxford University, he lectured in Canada before working as Education Officer at The Poetry Society (1970–75) and was Fellow Commoner in Creative Art at Cambridge University (1977–9). He was awarded an Arts Council Writers’ Award in 1985. His books of poetry include The Bear Looked Over the Mountain (1977), which won the Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize and the Alice Hunt Bartlett Award, and Short Afternoons (1989), which won the Hawthornden Prize and was joint winner of the Heinemann Award. His poetry is collected in Hoping It Might Be So: Poems 1974–2000 (2000). His latest book of poetry is The Magic Box: Poems for Children (2009).

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Contact

Education Team
The Poetry Society
Tel 020 7420 9880
Email education@poetrysociety.org.uk