

Talking Poetry



Age 7 – 11

Audio on demand:

These programmes are available as audio on demand from the School Radio website:

<https://www.bbc.com/teach/school-radio/english-ks2-talking-poetry/z77vmfr>

Credits:

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Introduction



Left to right: Michael Rosen, Grace Nichols, Roger McGough, Jackie Kay, John Agard, Mandy Coe.

There are eight programmes in the series. Each of the first 6 programmes profiles a different contemporary children's poet who introduces and then reads a selection of his or her work.

The final two programmes focus on classic poetry and include a selection of well-known poems often taught at Key Stage 2. The actors Maxine Peake and Julian Rhind-Tutt alternate in reading the poetry aloud without introduction.

Using the recordings

The programmes can be used in a variety of ways. You can listen to them in their entirety or listen to and focus on one poem at a time. Students can read the text of the poem before, during or after listening to the recording and there are suggestions in these notes for pre-, during-, and post- listening activities.

Using the pictures:

Each programme is accompanied by a composite picture inspired by the poems in that programme. These can be used:

- to stimulate pre-listening discussion about what the poems might be about;
- to explore themes in the poet's writing;
- to support reading of individual poems – the image can act as a visual reminder of topics, themes or narratives for students while they are completing work on poems;
- to stimulate creative writing: pupils could pick two or three elements of the picture and combine them to stimulate a story. This might work well with a 'consequences' story frame: a framework of actions already written where pupils add in nouns taken from the image to make a story.

Using these notes:

Each poem is accompanied by several different possible teaching ideas. Some of them are approaches to reading or understanding the poem, some of them are ways to explore further the techniques or themes of the poem, and some of them are ideas for follow up writing activities. All are designed to complement study of poetry at Key Stage 2.

Michael Rosen



'The space on the page'

- Pre-reading exercise: ask pupils to mind-map 'what is a friend?' Then see how many of these characteristics connect to what Rosen says makes space a friend.
- Rosen introduces this poem by linking it to why he writes. It might be worth discussing with some students how they feel about the blank page, particularly if they have negative attitudes to writing. Seeing a different point of view might be of use to help them change their attitudes (but might not). This topic would make a good follow up writing (or talking) activity.
- Ask students to pick out the image that makes them think the space on the page is most like a friend. What is it about that image that appeals to them? Is it true of the space?

'Words are ours'

- This might make a good pair with John Agard's 'Poetry jump-up', as both are celebrations of words.
- This is a list poem, citing lots of different types of words. It also has a strong rhythm and rhyme scheme. After listening to Rosen's reading, it would be useful to discuss how the rhythm and rhyme help to fulfil the intentions he mentions in his introduction to the poem.
- There are a lot of words in this poem which may be unfamiliar – pupils can use dictionaries to identify words they are unfamiliar with and claim them as their own, in the spirit of the poem. Which words do they like best and why?



‘Introduction song’

- This poem has a very strong rhythm, particularly in the way that Rosen reads it. Pupils can explore this by stepping on the spot in time with the beat. Why does it matter that this poem has this rhythm? What is the effect?
- Rosen introduces this as a ‘start of the day song’ – how would starting the day with this poem make you feel and why? Ask pupils to discuss in groups and then write down an answer, which they can then share with the whole class. Pupils could pick up on the rhythm, the mood, or the instructions to use everything they’ve got.
- The rhyme in this poem is particularly interesting because as well as the last word in every line being the same, there is an internal rhyme in each verse. Ask pupils to identify the rhyming words and discuss what effect this has.
- All of these link well to the fact that it’s called a ‘song’ – exploring the rhyme, rhythm and beat leads nicely into a discussion of what the difference is between a poem and a song.

‘Don’t’

- This poem divides into two halves: the realistic don’ts and the ‘one day they’ll say’ ridiculous ones. The two sets are presented using different poetic devices – in particular there is rhyme in the second set. Ask pupils to explore the different presentation – does it emphasise the ridiculous ones? Why?
- The mood of this poem could be one of several – is it angry? Is it silly? Is it joking or exasperated? It would be worth asking pupils what they think the mood/tone is and why before listening to Rosen read it. Does the way he reads it give any clues?
- Writing follow up: write as many ridiculous ‘don’ts’ as you can to create a list poem.

‘Do I know you?’

- Rosen calls this a nonsense poem and links it to ‘The Jabberwocky’. Listen to the introduction and the reading and discuss with pupils what the point of nonsense poems are. How do they make the reader feel?
- Print the two stanzas side by side to show how the structure of the poem works – each line links to its pair in the other stanza.
- Consider the metaphors in the poem. Why has Rosen chosen each of them, and how does each one show him as lost? Pupils might pick their favourite one and explain its effect on them. Some of these images might seem quite sad taken alone – but the poem as a whole is funny, which is something that might be worth exploring in class discussion.

‘Chocolate cake’

- This is an example of a narrative poem and is quite long. While pupils are listening ask them to note down what happens, to encourage active listening.
- When Rosen reads this he adds in a lot of sound effects – what do these add to the poem? Pupils could create stage directions for someone else reading the poem aloud. Some of the sounds are in the words of the poem, but not all: pupils can mark in the poem where extra sounds add to the drama of the poem. What effect do the sounds have in terms of adding dramatic tension to the story? This could be extended to a drama activity of freeze frames to show the different stages of the story.
- Writing follow up: imagine (or remember!) a time when you have got into trouble – tell the story of how you committed the ‘crime’ – but try to make it as funny as possible.

Grace Nichols



'Sun is laughing'

- Before listening to Nichols's introduction and reading, ask pupils to decide what kind of person the sun is in this poem and why. Then listen and discuss the differences between what they thought and Nichols's view of the sun as a moody teenage girl.
- Explore the colour and light imagery in this poem – but think about these broadly to include 'bright' and 'butter'. Can you see the trajectory of the poem through just these words?
- Writing follow up: personify another type of weather event. Pick a weather type and an appropriate type of person. Then make a list of all the things you could expect that weather type to do and another of all the typical actions of the type of person. Then make connections between the two lists to make the poem. This is a good collaborative activity.

'For forest'

- This is another good poem to explore personification. In this case because visiting the forest was such a powerful experience, the character becomes almost mythological. How does Nichols create this effect? Pupils need to closely examine the imagery and think about the connotations of individual words to understand this.
- Drama activity: this poem lends itself to an empathy-based acting activity. Depending on your class's level of comfort with drama, you could use a sculpting approach, where the class tells you how to stand to become 'Forest'. For a more confident class, ask them to stand eyes closed and imagine themselves into the character of Forest while Nichol reads. They can move with the words to show what Forest is doing, but they must stay standing in the same spot. Then discuss how they felt, how they think Forest feels, and if they have any more insight into her mysterious character.



- Writing follow up: in her introduction Nichols mentions that this poem is based on a powerful experience from her childhood. Elicit places which pupils have been to that made a big impression on them (you could use a guided memory stimulus exercise to help them remember). Then they can write about that place and describe what it was that made an impression on them.

‘Cosmic disco’

- This poem offers a number of cross-curricular teaching elements, in particular the scientific concepts of orbit and gravity.
- Exploring the imagery: identify the different elements which make up the cosmos in Nichols’s view. What does the inclusion of the trees and the lark as well as Saturn and the stars say about what the universe is? How does this affect the reader? There is a strong sense of movement in the poem, which makes the disco metaphor appropriate.

‘Alligator’

- Drama activity: a nice way of introducing this poem, particularly with younger Key Stage 2 pupils, would be to use it to reinvent ‘what’s the time Mr Wolf?’ Use the first two verses to introduce the game. Then the children creep closer to ‘Alligator Mama’, facing away from them as if playing Mr Wolf. As they creep they must call ‘Alligator Mama’. The challenge is to get as close as possible without being caught. Alligator Mama can turn round at any time and shout ‘Run for your life’, at which point the children must run away without being caught. Use this activity to introduce a discussion about the format of the poem, and link to Nichols’s introduction to it with the story from her childhood. We like to play games with some danger in them, because it is exciting, but we don’t want to get too close.

- As a follow up to this activity, discuss the format of the poem, which is very much like a childhood game, with repetition and getting closer and closer to the danger, with a jump at the end. Why is this an appropriate format for Nichols to use to tell this story?

‘I am the rain’

- This makes a good pair with ‘Sun is laughing’ and some of the teaching ideas from that poem also apply here.
- Ask students to discuss in groups what kind of personality the rain has in this poem and why they think this. They could also discuss whether they think this is appropriate for the rain. As a group they could collaborate on a drawing of the rain as a person, with labels to link to bits of the poem to explain why they envision him/her like that.
- Explore the layout/form of the poem and how it matches the poem’s imagery. Look in particular at where lines start. As a class or individuals, pupils could experiment with changing the layout on a computer and considering why Nichols chose that particular layout.

‘My gran visits England’

- Nichols links this to John Keats’s ‘There was a naughty boy’ which is widely available online. The verse she quotes is the last stanza of the poem. Older pupils might like to work with a copy of this stanza and a copy of Nichols’s poem, to spot links between the two.
- Explore the similes in this poem: some of them do not appear to be very imaginative (‘the seeds were as seedy’) – explore whether these images are poor images, or if they are a very deliberate choice by Nichols to convey a specific message.
- This is a good poem for exploring themes of belonging and humanity. Perhaps supply photos of different places/people in the world and make a list of everything they have in common.



'Wha me mudder do'

- Dialect investigation: Nichols links the creole dialect she uses in this poem to Northern dialect words like 'nowt'. Pupils can investigate their own language at home and work out what words they use which are not Standard English.
- Translation exercise: pupils could rewrite this into Standard English (not only changing the words, but also the syntax). What difference does it make to the poem? Why would Nichols want to write poems in her native dialect?
- The mother in the poem is a bit of a hero – she can do everything! Pupils can explore the imagery to consider what the narrator thinks of her mother. Rather than explicitly describing her mother, the narrator lists what her mother does – actions speaking louder than words in this description.
- Writing follow up: convey an impression of a person by describing what they do, rather than what they are like. Exchange poems to see if the impression comes across to the reader.

'Give yourself a hug'

- Ask pupils to act out the poem and give themselves a hug (they should be able to do this in their seats). Discuss how it feels – does it make them feel happier? Consider Nichols's introduction to the poem and discuss why giving yourself a hug might be a good thing.
- What does the ending of the poem mean? Does it mean that no-one is special, or is it intended to be a comfort? It might help students to conceptualise the number by showing a million printed out with all the noughts and a billion printed out with all the noughts. What would a trillion be? Or a zillion?

Roger McGough



'The writer of this poem' and 'The hearer of this poem'

- Ask students to pick their favourite simile ('as... as a...') and explore its effects. Why is it a good insult/compliment? Exaggeration will be a useful concept for this.
- Use 'The hearer of this poem' to explore insults. Why is this poem funny, when insults can hurt us? Is it because of the different context (poems are not usually full of insults)? Or is it because of the change of level – over the top and exaggerated make it a joke rather than hurtful?
- 'The writer of this poem' ends with 'or so the poet says', and 'The hearer of this poem' ends with the poet hoping the hearer can take a joke. Explore how these phrases undercut and reverse what's gone before – why did McGough choose to end this way?

- Writing follow up: use these poems as models, but do the opposite – create similes to explain why the hearer of this poem is brilliant, or why the writer of this poem is awful! This would work well as a class composite poem so each pupil/small group only has to come up with one or two similes.

'Give and take'

- Pre-reading: cut up the poem into 'I give' and 'you take' slips. Ask pupils to pair these together. Discuss why they've linked different lines. Pairs are often opposites in a way. It can help to link this to the use of pronouns in the poem.
- Discussion: ask pupils to identify who they think 'I' and 'you' are in the poem. What is the effect of these alternating pronouns?



- Re-writing: why is the poem called 'give and take' when the verb in the poem is always 'give'? Ask students to change the 'you' verb to 'take'. What's the effect? This is a good poem to focus on the theme - ie environment and environmental destruction. There is a clear message – ask pupils to identify it and decide if they think this is an effective way to convey it.

'First day at school'

- Memory stimulus exercise (closed eyes, heads on desk, guided remembering as the teacher suggests different aspects of the school experience). Make a collection of what pupils remember from their first days of school. This can be used as a pre-reading activity or as a stimulus for follow-up creative writing.
- Word investigation - what are the 'not words' in the poem? (Depending on the class, they may need access to dictionaries for this.) What are their origins? Why are they there? It would be useful to do this before listening to McGough talking about the poem and then compare to what he says. Why does the poet choose to use these?
- Extension for older or gifted and talented pupils: to look at 'eggcorns' - false etymologies. 'Eggcorn' is a made up origin for 'acorn', because it's egg-shaped and it's a seed (corn) so it's plausible. Give list of common words associated with school (or other topic) and ask pupils to come up with alternative origins and therefore meanings for the word. Teacher is a good one because it works by splitting the word in the wrong place – which is a useful clue to how students can do this. Link to 'root words' for curriculum content.
- This is a poem written in the first voice which helps to create empathy with the character. Use the reading of the poem to work out what kind of character the speaker is. Then give groups of pupils large copies of the poem to annotate for the ways in which the poet creates a specific voice of a character (vocabulary, reading voice, imagery (monsters)).

'The sound collector' and 'The colour collector'

- These are both examples of list poems. Useful discussion question before or after reading the poem: what is the power of a list poem? Why does it work in this format?
- Both these poems have strong rhyme schemes (ABCB). 'Walking the poem' might be useful to feel the rhythm – pupils walk the room as the poem is read aloud, changing direction at the end of lines, keeping step with the beat. This rhyme scheme also contributes to making the list poem form work – how?
- These poems offer a useful way to explore how mood is created by colour and sound. In both poems there's a change at the end (particularly 'The colour collector'). Students could explore the effect of certain colours and sounds (each a different one, or groups doing the same one) – by mind-mapping the emotions, events, objects etc they associate with it.
- 'The colour collector' only – there is a visual aspect to this poem - it's often printed with the colours in the appropriate colours. Compare two versions - a black and white and a coloured one. What effect does this have on the reader?
- Writing: use these as a model for pupils to write their own poems. How about 'The scent collector'? 'The shadow collector'? 'The shape collector'? The list poem is also a useful format for other poem writing – particularly for season poems or place poems. Both these exercises have the potential for collaborative poem-building as a class.
- Another creative writing opportunity – where do these two characters come from? A description of that place, or a story about how they came to be sound and colour collectors both have good potential.

'Didgeridoo'

- This poem falls into the nonsense poem tradition - something which almost makes sense but doesn't really.



- This is a good poem for a word investigation. Ask students to identify words inside other words and to map the connotations of the inner word. This could be a useful pre-reading exercise or could be a good way to create images to use to write their own poems.

‘The fight of the year’

- Introduce the idea of an extended metaphor - an image that links through the whole poem. You could identify bits of the poem that link to the boxing match and highlight those. Why did the poet choose that metaphor? Discuss this before listening to McGough talking and then compare the different ideas.
- Listening to the poem read by McGough - discuss how the reading affects your understanding of the poem. Does it make it clearer? How and why?
- Layout: discuss why the poet has chosen to lay it out in that way. Change the layout (probably most easily done on a computer). What is the effect of doing so? It is also worth using this to look at punctuation – because there is none, what are the line breaks having to do?

‘Why trees have got it all wrong’

- This is a useful poem to link to John Agard’s ‘A date with spring’. Both explore the idea of trees being ‘dressed’ in their leaves.
- Discussion: this poem is based on the idea of trees having control over their own actions. Does this make it a sad or a funny poem?
- Writing activity: use pictures of trees of different sorts and at different stages (in blossom, in fruit, bare, in full leaf) and describe those trees in terms of their outfits – for example, are their flowers buttons? Jewels? Decorations?

Jackie Kay



'Brendon Gallacher'

- Jackie Kay's introduction makes it clear that this poem is based on a real incident from her childhood. How does she feel about Brendon Gallacher? Use the reading of the poem to investigate the emotion in this poem.
- Give pupils a printed copy of the poem to identify all the details about Brendon Gallacher. What kind of character is he? Why would a young Jackie Kay find him to be an irresistible imaginary friend? This could also link to the next activity.
- Writing follow up: discuss imaginary friends – who had one, what were they like, why do we have imaginary friends? Pupils can use this discussion to write either poems or prose descriptions of their imaginary friends (which may be made up rather than real memories).

'Red running shoes'

- Exploring imagery: ask pupils to pick their favourite image of the poem and explore its effect. Why do they like it? For younger pupils it may help to isolate some specific images on cards, so that they have a limited choice or appropriate length extracts. Annotating/mind-mapping the image with all the associations can build the analysis.
- Exploring themes: this poem is not only about running, it's also about time. Ask pupils to pick out all the references to time in the poem and to discuss what the message is and how well it links to running.
- Writing follow up: this is a memory poem, thinking back as an adult. What do students think they will miss when they're older? It's quite useful to refer back to Jackie Kay's introduction here – she points out that the accident that stopped her running also allowed her to become a poet.



‘My face is a map’

- Discussion: does what we look like or what we can’t do become part of our identity? What makes you know you’re you? Should the girl get the map removed? What are the arguments on either side?
- This is a good poem to use to explore empathy and other citizenship/PSHE issues. Listen to Kay’s introduction and this poem and then ask pupils to think about how they feel about this girl. Poetry is a good tool for getting us into other people’s shoes. Pupils could consider whether thinking about what other people feel would change their own reactions (link to the line ‘people gaped and gawped and gawked’) in future.
- Explore the image of the map: how does Kay extend the image and link it to specific problems the girl has (like being unable to speak quickly, or not being able to move her face).

‘Stick insect’

- Similes – explore the description of the stick insect in the second verse, which pupils should be able to explore quite precisely. But the images also connect it to other members of the family, so give an emotional tone as well as a physical description.
- Writing follow up: describe a favourite pet/animal/object (if no pets) using three similes which link physical description to the emotion of love.

‘The moon at Knowle Hill’

- Kay’s introduction shows the story behind this poem. Discuss with pupils whether this story changes how they feel about the poem. First read the poem and record reactions to it, then listen to the introduction and reading by Kay and discuss if/how their reactions have changed.
- Kay talks about this poem being a ‘secret message’ of a kind. A follow up might be to discuss where pupils would leave a secret message that might or might not be found. What would they write in such a message? (You may or may not want to complete this activity by writing the secret message poems and hiding them appropriately).

- Personification: explore what the moon and stars do which is human. Identify the specific images. What is the effect of this? Some of the images are more human than others. Would we sometimes talk of things ‘dancing’ when they are not human?

‘Bush fire’

- It may be helpful for pupils to see some of the news coverage of a bush fire from Australia to see how devastating it is and understand this poem.
- Repetition is used a great deal in this poem. Give students a copy and ask them to identify repeated words. What impression of the fire do these repeated words give?
- Similes – identify the similes in the poem and consider their effect. Are there any unusual ones which are not what we might expect? There are also two metaphors (‘had a big bad mouth’ and ‘wolfed down the lot’). It would be worth exploring the difference between the effect of the similes and the metaphors – if there is any – and why Kay chose each technique in each place.
- Writing follow up: this poem is about a bush fire but are other fires different? Pupils might write about: a bonfire, a campfire, a sitting room fire, a gasfire, the fire of a gas cooker, the fire of a candle, etc.

John Agard



'A date with the spring'

- This would link well with Roger McGough's 'Trees have got it all wrong'. Both show leaves of trees as 'outfits' which trees can independently control.
- Use the poem to introduce the idea of an extended metaphor. The tree is being compared to a woman getting ready to go on a date. Give pupils a copy of the poem and ask them to highlight in one colour (green?) the nature half of the image and in another colour the date half.
- Personification: explore what kind of a person the tree is. Pupils could draw pictures of the tree woman dressed up for her date with the spring. Explore why the poet uses this technique and what effect it has.

'Message from your mobile'

- Before listening to the recording use the verses of this poem as a riddle. Supply one verse (or pair of lines) at a time (no title). Students write down what they think 'I' might be and why. When the answer is revealed at the end, explore why they didn't see that earlier, or indeed if anyone did guess that early on, why they did. A mobile is such an everyday item and the imagery is quite elevated – does the mismatch make us look at everyday items differently? After this, use Agard's introduction to the poem to consider whether this is what he intended to do.
- Writing follow up: pick another everyday object and find a way to describe it mysteriously but truthfully. Have other students guess what the object is. This might work well in groups: each group writes a riddle poem and the other groups have to guess.



- Use of abbreviations: Agard uses one abbreviation in this poem – ‘yr’. Explore why he does it at all and what the effect is. Ask students to write a brief message in abbreviations as a follow up.
- Personification: this is another poem where it is easy to explore personification. In this case, it might be interesting to explore the effect – is it slightly creepy? It might also be worth linking this to the tone in which Agard reads this.

‘Punctuating the silence’

- Give students a copy of the poem and ask them to punctuate it appropriately. How does this compare to the original? Why did the author choose not to put punctuation in it? The reading is useful to show the effect of the different punctuation marks.
- Kung Fu Punctuation would be a good starter for a lesson on this poem. Instructions can be found in several places on the internet (eg www.telegraph.co.uk/news/features/3633548/Punching-home-the-art-of-punctuation.html). Once they’ve grasped the basics, it would be interesting to use the poem to reinforce the activity above.
- Look at the pronouns. Who is the ‘I’ and who is the ‘you’? (There are several potential answers to this one so encourage pupils to give a reason for why they think they know.)
- You could use this to link to some investigation on Emily Dickinson, whom Agard also mentions in his introduction.

‘Hopaloo kangaroo’

- Choral reading: the nonsense words make for a good practise at choral reading. Alternatively try call and response, where the class call out the ‘loo’ words. Younger pupils might enjoy creating dance moves to go with this activity.
- With older classes you might introduce the idea of superlative adjectives. The ones in this poem are all made up, but pupils will easily be able to understand what they are meant to convey. Use them to create the base and comparative forms, or create new superlatives of the class’s own.

‘The hurt boy and the birds’

- Useful to explore themes of hurt and how we deal with it. Agard’s introduction talks about why he wrote it and the idea that boys shouldn’t cry. The poem itself can be used to explore empathy: can we understand how the boy is feeling?
- Writing follow up: when he is upset the boy in this poem feeds the birds and tells them his inner hurts. Pupils can write about what they do when they are upset to make themselves feel better. This might be quite private, so perhaps start with a class brainstorm of all the things you might do to make yourself feel better, so they can choose to write about a generic activity. This could be a poem or a story writing activity.

‘Poetry jump-up’

- Phonetic spelling: Agard reflects his accent in the spelling he uses in this poem. Use the recording to match this and to hear the musicality. Pupils could write a corrected version in Standard English and consider how this changes the effect on the reader.
- Writing follow up: words are the focus in this poem – ‘words like fishes’. Write an extension to the poem celebrating words, using students’ own images.
- You might want to explore some of the vocabulary in this poem, particularly the word ‘bacchanal’, which could be used to introduce some Greek mythology. Alternatively you can just explain it as a very wild party!

Mandy Coe



'If you could see laughter'

- Coe introduces this poem by saying she thinks a lot about 'what ifs'. Pupils could create a collage of their own 'what if' ideas.
- Explore the imagery in this poem – in particular the colours and the physical form laughter takes – it's always in a breath, or air form, rising up. Pupils could work in groups on individual images working out what the effect is – how does it make them feel?
- The final image is the message of the poem – what is it trying to tell the reader? This is the theme of the poem – that laughter is very powerful, even if it comes in different forms and we can't actually see it.

- Writing follow up: Coe herself points out that there are lots of different what-ifs that could be explored coming out of this poem. Ask pupils to describe what something you cannot normally see looks like: happiness, sadness, loneliness, love, hunger, etc. Alternatively, use other senses for things you can usually see. What does a smile sound like, for example.

'Buttercup'

- Coe says the rhythm of this poem is particularly important. Practice clapping along to the poem (with either the teacher reading aloud rhythmically or the class chanting along). What effect does the strong rhythm have? How does the repeated '-cup' at the end of each second line help with this?
- This poem lends itself to story boarding – each verse has a different image. Create individual or group storyboards, with one picture per image.



‘Sensing mother’

- This poem is good for exploring empathy. How can we tell that the dress is important to the narrator? There are several different clues. Students might also discuss how the narrator’s father would feel about it – there are different possible readings of this also. The themes of sadness and comfort are both strong in the poem.
- Imagery: identify the different senses which the poem draws on to create images. Do pupils have a favourite one? How does the use of the senses affect the reader?
- Writing follow up: this poem shows how important the senses are for evoking memories. Ask pupils to think of an object which is important to them. It might be something they own, or it might be something at school. Ask them to list descriptions of it against all five senses. This could form the basis of writing riddle poems, or another piece of creative writing.

‘Busy feet’

- There is a strong sense of rhythm in this poem, aided by the repetition that Coe notes in her intro. It also has a strong repeated rhyme – ask pupils to identify the sound that is often repeated at the end of the line. What effect does this have? (Linking it to footsteps would be ideal.)
- The image of feet in this poem is a particular type of metaphor, where one part of something represents the whole of it. (It’s an example of *synecdoche*, which is a term students will be expected to know later - in Key Stage 4 - but may or may not be appropriate to introduce now.) Ask pupils how the feet show the whole person and what we can tell about the people from what Coe says about the feet.
- Writing follow up: feet guide the imagery in this poem, even though it’s really about people. Use a description of feet in another situation to show what that situation is like. For example, playing a sport, doing the housework, sitting in a classroom.

‘Fizz’

- In her introduction Coe says that people often ask her to read this poem at celebrations. What is it about this poem that is celebratory? The term exaggeration might be a helpful one to introduce pupils to. What mood does the poem evoke?
- Look at the metaphors in the poem: ‘if you were... you would be...’ These are useful models for pupils to create images of their own. In particular ‘If I was a *food*, I would be...’ is a good start. Ask students to explain why they completed the image they way they did.

‘Sisters’

- Explore the structure of the poem by highlighting the lines which apply to each ‘sister’ – it might be a good idea to use a third colour for the lines which are them both. What shape does this suggest the poem follows? How does this match the topic of the poem?
- Personification: draw the two sisters, based on information from the poem (this might work well in pairs, with one person doing night, the other doing day). What effect does representing these two things as people have on the reader? Are the characteristics of each one appropriate? Why?
- Writing follow up: identify some other pairs and turn them into people – what would they be like? This could be a poem, a description or a drawing/listing exercise. Pairs could include: sun and moon; cat and dog; right and wrong etc.

‘Soft as the blanket’

- Pre-reading exercise: give pupils one or two of the first halves of pairs of lines (eg ‘I can taste in a grain of salt’) and ask them to write second halves of their own. After listening to the introduction and the poem consider the difference between what they have written and what Coe wrote – which do they prefer and why?



- This poem has a fairy tale quality to it, so works well with 'Upon once' as a pair. This is also reflected in the form that it takes, with the repeated refrain. Ask pupils to consider what the effect of the refrain is – what does it remind them of? What do the words of the refrain do for the rest of the poem? Should we think that these are 'daft' things?
- Writing follow up: if the baker wore blue shoes, what would the bread taste like? What if he wore red shoes? Yellow? Green? There are various different possibilities like this drawing on the poem – you might allow pupils to choose their own personal favourite and expand it into an entire poem.

'Being the baddie'

- Coe asks the listener in her introduction to work out who each of the four first person baddies are. Pupils might need some clues/ access to the internet to work this out.
- The poem then offers you the option to connect this to study of other topics: the stories of Medusa and Dracula and the characters of the Ugly Sisters and Big Bad Wolf in fairy stories. If you prefer you might prepare students with the story of Medusa beforehand and just use a generic vampire for the second verse. This would open up the discussion of empathy more immediately upon encountering the poem.
- Each individual narrator has a list of reasons why we should sympathise with them. This might be a useful poem to link to discussion of the concept of the 'baddie' more generally and potentially to link to discussion of people you don't like in school and how they may have other factors under the surface.
- Writing follow up: pupils can pick a baddie and write a letter from them explaining why they are not such a bad guy after all. This would pick up on both the first person and the empathy from the poem. Pupils might pick their own, or you could use the 'baddie' from a book they have previously studied, or from other fairy tales.

'Upon once'

- Pre-reading: this poem is based on one of the most famous phrases in the English language. Ask pupils to come up with everything they would expect from a poem based on 'Once upon a time'. After listening to the poem, revisit their expectations and see what has been met and what has been subverted.
- The images in the poem are all of impossible, magical things, as befits a world turned upside down by muddling 'Once upon a time'. What is the effect of these images? You can ask pupils to pick their favourite one to explore, or divide verses among groups.
- Writing follow up: pick one image and mind-map all the possibilities of that image. For example – postcards people have to be asleep to receive – who is the postman? What do the postcards look like? If you are dreaming, do they read themselves aloud? Complete this exercise with the whole class and use the mind-map to inspire further story writing.

Classic Poetry I



Read by Maxine Peake and Julian Rhind-Tutt



'The naming of cats' – T.S. Eliot

T.S. Eliot was born in 1888 and died in 1965. He was a pioneer of the forms and language of poetry and was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1948. *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* is one of his best known collections, which became the basis for the long-running musical *Cats!* He was born and grew up in the USA but as an adult lived in England.

- Dictionary challenge: there are a number of potentially unfamiliar vocabulary items in this poem. Make a list for pupils to find out the meanings and then write sentences of their own containing the words (perhaps in pairs).
- In particular the word 'ineffable' needs to be highlighted, and the fact that 'effable' and 'effanineffable' do not actually exist. Why/how has Eliot created these words? (Listening to the recording of the poem should help to answer this.)
- Create cat characters for each of the names mentioned in the poem – pupils might choose their favourite or be allotted one at random. A cat character sheet should include its appearance (colour, markings, shape and size) and its personality (what does it like doing, how does it behave, how does it interact with humans?).
- Discuss how names affect our impressions of people and characters.



'The highwayman' by Alfred Noyes

Alfred Noyes was born in 1880 and died in 1958. Although he wrote a great deal of poetry, 'The Highwayman' is his best-known work. He failed his degree at Oxford because he missed his final exam to meet with a publisher about his first book of poems.

- 'The Highwayman' is a ballad in form. Get students to identify the rhyme scheme, the bouncy rhythm and the repetition. Different students could look at different verses and cross-reference similarities. It also tells a (tragic) story – another feature of the ballad.
- Assign students (or groups of students) to create pictures to illustrate each verse (be careful in assigning the verse with Bess's death). Use these to create a slide show, projected while playing the recorded poem. This could lead to a discussion on whether it's easier or harder to understand the poem by hearing alone, or with illustrations. As part of this activity, students could identify the similes in the poem, some of which are very visual.
- Writing follow up: write the newspaper report of the story told in the poem.

'Colour' by Christina Rossetti

Christina Rossetti was born in 1830 and died in 1894. She was part of a family of writers and painters – including her brother, the Pre-Raphaelite painter, Dante Gabriel Rossetti. She also wrote the long poem 'Goblin Market' and the words for the carol 'In the bleak midwinter'. She is considered to be a Romantic poet.

- This seems at first to be a simple list poem, with not a lot of content. But from what topic area are the images all drawn? What is the effect of this on the reader? Why would Rossetti choose to use this kind of theme-based approach?

- Writing follow up: use this poem as a model, leaving the questions and the colours in place, but changing the answers to the questions. The rhyme scheme should remain the same – but try to change the words which rhyme with the colours. Orange might be a particular challenge! You might choose to set specific topics – the original draws from nature, but you might ask pupils to identify objects from school, or sport, or cities, which are these colours.

'If' by Rudyard Kipling

Rudyard Kipling was born in 1865 and died in 1936. He was born in Mumbai (Bombay), in India, but his family returned to England when he was 5. When he finished school he returned to India to work as a journalist. He wrote many famous poems and books, but perhaps the most famous is *The Jungle Book*.

- This is an advice poem, written by Kipling for his son. Chop the poem up into pairs of lines and get students to identify the characteristics (the virtues?) which are shown by the images in each pair of lines. Which is more effective? Commanding someone to be each of these (eg strong, patient, resilient) or this way of presenting it?
- The whole poem is a series of conditional statements ('if...') and then a final result ('you'll be a Man, my son!') This final result is a bit like a punch-line, coming at the end of a very long joke. You might want to discuss the idea of 'being a Man' – does it exclude girls, for example, or is it supposed to stand for all grown-ups?
- Writing follow up: create an ending such as 'You'll be a Year 6, my child' (or referencing the school name, or the area where they live), and get students to create 'if...' statements to go with it, to create a collaborative poem.



'Daffodils' by William Wordsworth

William Wordsworth was born in 1770 and died in 1850. He was one of the major poets of the Romantic movement and was appointed Poet Laureate in 1843. He is strongly connected with the Lake District. 'Daffodils' is probably his most popular work today, but he published extensively.

- This poem has some quite complex imagery and syntax in it. After listening to a recording, discuss the poem to work out the main points of each verse. Connect some of the main images to their meaning – the number of daffodils, the way they didn't seem to end and their 'glee' being the main points to bring out from this.
- Word investigation: the use of the word 'gay' in the third verse provides the opportunity to discuss the use of this word – which is used in its original sense of 'happy' here. Use context of the word to consider its meaning (you might need to supply the meaning of 'jocund' in addition).
- Writing follow up: the final stanza shows the idea that we can look back on amazing things we've seen and by remembering get pleasure. The metaphor of his heart dancing with the daffodils brings this out. Ask students to write about a memory which makes them happy – try to get them to limit it to a specific picture in their minds, rather than an event, which will enable better description and imagery, rather than narration.

'From a railway carriage' by Robert Louis Stevenson

Robert Louis Stevenson was a Scottish novelist and poet, born in 1850 and died in 1894. He wrote *Treasure Island* and *The Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. He travelled extensively and lived all over Europe and the USA.

- This is a very aural poem – after listening to the recording, try different ways of performing the poem as a class, such as choral reading. The rhythm, metre and rhyme scheme of the poem are connected to its subject matter. Although modern trains don't necessarily sound like that, if you ask pupils to 'do a train noise' they will probably imitate a steam train. A video of a steam train may also help.

- The poem describes in flashes the images that can be seen from a train window. Create a list of what is seen and talk about which of those we would still see today. Then identify the imagery which shows the speed at which each thing passes and discuss how it emphasises that speed for the reader. Lead the discussion to show how the poem effectively evokes the experience of being on a train – the glimpses of things which rush past.

Classic Poetry II



'Jabberwocky' by Lewis Carroll

Lewis Carroll was born in 1832 and died in 1898. Lewis Carroll was a pen name – under his real name of Charles Dodgson he was a lecturer in Maths at Oxford. He wrote the books *Alice in Wonderland* and its sequel *Through the Looking Glass* – the book in which the poem 'Jabberwocky' appeared.

- Get students to identify all the made up words in the poem. By listening to the recording, using the context, and their instincts, get pupils to make up definitions for these words. This might work well with each verse being handled by a different group, or words being allocated at random to at least three pupils or pairs of pupils, so that there are some alternative definitions for each word, to discuss similarities, or the class's preferred definition for each one. You could also use this to stimulate some grammar teaching – many of the made up words rely on familiar morphemes to be comprehensible.
- Although a nonsense poem, 'Jabberwocky' is also apparently an epic poem telling the story of the slaying of a monster. Get students to draw up two lists of the poem's features – those which are on the side of it being a funny nonsense poem and those which are on the side of it being an epic adventure poem. Which is it most? Can it be both? This would make a good debate activity.
- Creative follow up: Students can draw the Jabberwocky (and label with extracts from the poem if required).
- This poem is reminiscent of, if not based on, the story of Beowulf and Grendel, which would make a good companion story to teach it with.



'The listeners' by Walter de la Mare

Walter de la Mare was born in 1873 and died in 1956. He wrote poems, stories and novels, but was particularly celebrated for his poetry for children. He also wrote some ghost stories – which are echoed in *The Listeners*.

- Who are 'The listeners'? Are they ghosts, or do they not exist at all, or are they people who are just not speaking? Students should try to find evidence in the poem to decide who they think 'The listeners' are. 'The traveller' is also only known by a title – what can we find out about him from the poem?
- This is quite a creepy poem – much of the imagery is designed to ensure that! Ask students to highlight specific items of vocabulary which create this sensation – most of them are adjectives, but there are also small images which are effective, so you could adjust the focus appropriately.
- Writing follow up: there's a mystery happening here. Students could imagine the prequel (who is 'The traveller' keeping his word to?), or what happens next to either 'The listeners' or 'The traveller', or what would have happened if he hadn't gone away, but had opened the door instead?

'The Tyger' by William Blake

William Blake was born in 1757 and died in 1827. He was an artist as well as a poet and is now considered to be one of the major Romantic poets. His *Songs of Innocence and Experience* is among his most famous works. He also wrote the poem which became the hymn 'Jerusalem'.

- This poem is full of religious imagery – it asks many questions about the creation of the tiger by a mysterious 'immortal hand'. It also elevates the tiger into terrifying status. Ask students to identify the images of creation – such as the 'anvil' – but also the images describing the tiger and their effect. This links to the theme of the poem – which is not just about a tiger!
- An alternative focus on imagery is to pick out all the references to heat and fire and to look at their effect.

- Language investigation: for older pupils in particular, it is worth investigating the language of the first verse. Blake deliberately uses an archaic spelling of the word 'tiger' – and the pronunciation of the word 'symmetry' is heavily debated in this poem. David Crystal has written a very good blogpost on the topic here: <http://david-crystal.blogspot.co.uk/2013/09/on-burning-poetic-question.html> The main arguments are whether it's an 'eye-rhyme' (something which looks like a rhyme but isn't) or a deliberately archaic pronunciation of the word. Discussion could focus on the effect of using these old forms – what do students think Blake was trying to achieve? (This might link to the religious imagery in the poem.)

'How do I love thee?' by Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Elizabeth Barrett Browning was born in 1806 and died in 1861. She was one of England's most prominent poets of the Victorian era. She was married to fellow poet Robert Browning and they lived in Italy for many years. As well as writing many volumes of poetry, she is also known for her letters to various people, which have been collected and published since her death.

- This is a sonnet form. Ask students to identify the features of the poem such as the number of lines and the rhyme scheme in order to link the features to the form. They may need some assistance in working out which words are supposed to rhyme, since they do not always match perfectly. (It is a Petrarchan sonnet, not a Shakespearean one, as can be seen from the rhyme scheme, but this is rather advanced knowledge!)
- Each of the 'I love thees' is qualified with a different image. Distribute the images to groups and ask them to explore the connotations of the words used in each one. Dictionaries may be helpful for this as some words have religious meanings which pupils may not be aware of. Some of the images are also quite difficult, so it may be worth modelling first, or differentiating images to groups. When the connotations have been explored, students should be able to see some overlap between the images, and consider the effect of this on the reader.



- Writing follow up: use the first line of this poem as a stimulus. You could either copy it as it stands, and ask pupils to come up with answers, or change the 'thee' to something else – ice-cream? Games? The park? Football?

'Night mail' by WH Auden

WH Auden was born in 1907 and died in 1973. One of his most well-known poems 'Funeral blues', often known by its first line 'Stop all the clocks', was featured in the film 'Four weddings and a funeral'.

- This is a poem which again lends itself to choral reading. It makes a good pair with Robert Louis Stevenson's 'From a railway carriage'. After listening to the recording, ask students to investigate the rhythm of the poem, which is partly created by rhyme and partly by metre. They should work out that different sections work differently. Why do they change? How does it link to the content in the section? It is probably a good idea to clarify that the 'Night mail' was a train carrying post overnight from London to Scotland.
- This might seem quite an archaic poem for young students – the emphasis on letters has changed rather a lot. Discuss whether they empathise with the final three lines – are they always excited to hear the postman's knock? What have we replaced post with nowadays? And is there still something special about receiving a letter? You could also link this to the imagery in Section IV, which describes people sleeping through the night while their post travels to them.
- Section III lists all the types of letters the train is carrying. Students might like to see if they can come up with any other sorts of letters, or to explore what the contrasts are between types of letters put together. How does the listing assist the rhythm?
- Writing follow up: use the listing approach of Section III to create another poem. All the types of phone calls in the wires? All the types of book in a library? All the types of food being delivered to a supermarket?

'The Jumblies' by Edward Lear

Edward Lear was born in 1812 and died in 1888. He was one of 21 brothers and sisters! He is now best-known for his nonsense poems, particularly his limericks. He also wrote 'The Owl and the Pussycat'.

- This is a very visual nonsense poem. Divide the poem into sections and give each section to a group to illustrate. Then use the illustrations to create a slide show to show while playing the recording.
- What kind of people are the Jumblies? They are fairly clearly described in terms of appearance, but pupils should be able to deduce the characteristics of their personalities as well. Depending on the age/ability of your class, you can either provide them with some short extracts to work from, or ask them to identify their own quotations to support their deductions.