

Workshop 5 Resource Sheet on Activities to support reading and responding to poetry

Instead of hitting a poem cold, it can help to provide some context first.

Setting the scene

- Predicting from the title and/or one or two lines from the poem (What is the poem about? Is it happy/sad?)
- Talking about a related image / artwork / piece of music / video (What do you see, hear, feel? What does it make you think of?)
- Connecting to personal experience (Do you like ...? Do you agree with ...? Do you remember ...?)

Having introduced the poem there are a number of activities which can be used to explore the language and ideas contained within it:

Exploring the poem

- Missing words

Text of poem is provided with a number of words missing. Students work in pairs to fill in the blanks, then version is compared with those of classmates and with the original. Could also be done as a listening activity where students fill in missing words as they hear the poem read aloud. This can heighten awareness of sounds, colours and cadences.

- Missing lines

Text of poem is provided with some lines missing. It is for students to come up with possible versions of the missing lines and then to share ideas and compare with original.

- Jumbled words

Take a short poem (around 20 words or less) and note all the words it contains in random order. Ask students, working in pairs, to combine the words in straightforward but also playful ways to make as many meaningful sentences as they can. Ideas are then compared before showing and discussing original. This activity could also be used as starting point for students to write their own poem.

- Jumbled lines

Provide text of poem in which lines are given in jumbled order. Students work in pairs to put lines back in original order. This could be after hearing the poem read aloud.

- Illustration

Students work in pairs to match a poem with one of a set of images. This could lead on to writing poetry based on an art work

- Contrasts

Compare two poems on the same or a similar theme. (The poems could be in different languages). Discuss the differences in mood, message and language and which one you prefer and why.

- Review / Blog

Students are asked to choose a poem and write a review/blog explaining the qualities that made it stand out.

- Translation

Within the pedagogical approach adopted in the Critical Connections Multilingual Digital Storytelling Project translation represents an important element. Students are asked to create their films bilingually by providing a voiceover in the 'target language' and subtitles in their second language, usually English. Findings from research into the project have shown that:

1. Presenting films bilingually allows them to be understood by students and teachers across the globe and this means that there is a genuine communicative purpose behind translation which students respond to.
2. The process of translation supports vocabulary development and appreciation of finer nuances in meaning, fosters metalinguistic understanding including similarities and differences in ways that meaning is constructed across languages, and stimulates transcultural insights.
3. Working and presenting in two languages brings positive affirmation of bilingual/multilingual identities.

Work on ideas and language in the poem can act as springboard for students' own creativity.

Creating around the poem

A poem can provide a stimulus for students to engage in various kinds of creative work such as:

- Poetry writing
- Poetry Slam where students 'perform' their poems in front of an audience
- (Bilingual) Poetry anthology. Could be printed or posted online
- Poetry quilt – Colourful paper quilt for wall display of pupils' poems and art work
- Poet-tree. Hang students' work off the branches of a tree.
- Podcast Poetry
- Art poster / Collage
- Digital story

Poems inspired by art works (Ekphrastic poetry)

- Writing a poem about an art work can be approached in different ways:
- Stepping into the art work and looking around. Note impressions, feelings, associations, memories that spring to mind
- Writing in the voice of a person, animal or object within the art work
- Writing a dialogue among characters or other elements in the art work
- Imagining a story behind the art work
- Relating the art work to something it reminds you of
- Speaking directly to the artist or title of the work
- Comparing with another art work

Useful resources

The Stephen Spender Trust

'Creative Translation in the Classroom'

<https://www.stephen-spender.org/creative-translation-in-the-classroom/>

Creative Multilingualism (University of Oxford)

<https://www.creativeml.ox.ac.uk/index.html>

Creating New Meanings: Prismatic translation

<https://www.creativeml.ox.ac.uk/research/prismatic-translation>

Multilingual Poetry in Schools

<https://www.creativeml.ox.ac.uk/projects/multilingual-poetry-schools>

Multilingual Poetry Teaching Guides

<https://www.creativeml.ox.ac.uk/multilingual-poetry-teaching-guides>

Linked to the project is the Poetry Hub at Oxford Spires Academy led by Writer in Residence, Kate Clanchy. She has created activities which aim students to write their own poetry

<https://www.creativeml.ox.ac.uk/creative-poetry-activities-schools>

Short talk and poetry performance by Michael Rosen at the 2021 Our Planet Festival

<https://goldsmithsmdst.com/multilingual-poetry-and-artwork/>

Rosen, M. (2016) *What is Poetry? The essential guide to reading and writing poems*. Walker Books.

See also:

<https://www.michaelrosen.co.uk/>

<https://www.michaelrosen.co.uk/videos/>