

AUTHOR AND POET

John Murray



The Poetry Pad Guidebook

Helping children to read, write and perform poetry

Key Stage 2

INTRODUCTION

“Poetry is language at its most distilled and most powerful”

Rita Dove

Poetry is a gateway to develop a love of language and literature.

Carefully chosen words placed precisely on the page have the capacity to captivate the mind and touch the heart. This allows us to engage with language in a way that is both playful and profound.

Poems are often less daunting for a child to read than a heavy book. Bite-sized, they provide children with meaningful chunks of language that are easier to chew over and digest.

This makes the language they encounter in poems sticky and when language sticks, we are more likely to use it in our own speech and writing and do so with a higher degree of success.

The musicality of poems makes things even stickier: the words and phrasing we encounter, the themes and ideas we consider, the images and sounds we create in our heads. It is why learning to recite poems by heart is such a powerful tool for learning.

Reading poetry fuels our imagination. It helps strengthen and embolden our vocabulary choices, builds reading fluency and deepens a wide range of comprehension skills.

Writing poetry gives children the opportunity to craft their own work, develop the art of expression and enables them to discover their own unique voice.

Performing poems and sharing them with others is not only satisfying but also builds confidence. It gives children a genuine reason to write. Nobody really writes for an audience of one, especially if that one is always their class teacher.

Poetry is a gateway to develop the **WHOLE** child.

In a world that is increasingly complex, children need opportunities to explore their feelings and understand the perspectives of others. Through poetry, children can experience and explore joy, sadness, wonder and humour, all within the safe confines of the written word.

Poetry has the power to build empathy and helps us to connect with each other through shared ideas and common experiences. Such connectivity is important, it helps us to find our own place in the world and understand the lives of others. It unites us.

Becoming a poet and falling in love with this beautiful language we call English is without doubt a journey worth taking. It is empowering. It can be life affirming and life changing.

I sincerely hope that your learners fall in love with the poems I have created and are inspired enough to put pen to paper and get creative themselves.

By sharing their work with others, not only will they become a more confident little human, they will also become someone who understands the power the spoken and written word holds and appreciate more fully the delight and the beauty that poetry can bring.

The Poetry Pad

There are two books in this series. Each book contains eight poems and each poem showcases a different poetic form for children to read, write and perform.

Each poem is supported by a video accessible on The Poetry Pad.

Here learners will be able to listen to and watch me talk about how I came to write each poem, the challenges I faced and how I overcame them to create something I am proud of and want to share.

Discussing the writing process is essential if children are to be enthused enough to embark on their own writing journey and continue on its path when the going gets tough.

Writing is not easy, it takes effort. A well-crafted poem does not appear on the page by itself. However, with a little patience, some determination and a lot of self-belief, any one of us can create a mini-masterpiece.

READING Each Poem



Each exemplar poem is accompanied by a set of questions designed to help encourage class discussion and elicit deeper thinking. Each set of questions are layered so that they gently immerse readers in the text and support them as they consider more intently the themes, ideas and language choices each poem has to offer.

The strands of comprehension covered when analysing each poem will enable children to:

- **Predict**
 - What might this poem be about? Where might it be set?
 - Might this suggest how the poem should be read? Why is this?
 - What prior knowledge leads me to think this?
- **Retrieve Specific Information**
 - What facts can I discover whilst reading the poem?
 - How will I locate this information?
 - Will this be during my reading of the poem or afterwards?
 - Will skimming and scanning the text and looking for key words help me? How so?
- **Summarise & Sequence**
 - Can I summarise the poem as a whole or create sub-headings for each stanza?
 - What choices have led me to do this within the text and beyond?
 - Am I able to visualise the poem and draw pictures that will help me sequence the events?
- **Consider Vocabulary Choices & Authorial Intent**
 - What does a particular word or phrase mean?
 - Do they have a literal or figurative meaning?
 - Why might the poet have chosen to use them? What effect do they have on the poem and the reader?
- **Infer & Deduce**
 - How can I think deeply about this poem?
 - What clues within the poem and prior knowledge outside of the poem help me to think this?
 - Might other readers think differently to me? Why might this be?
- **Evaluate**
 - How successful is this poem? How well does the poem do what it does? What is its value?

Discussion around these layers of understanding will strengthen their appreciation of individual poems and poetry as a whole. It will also provide a firm foundation on which children can begin to construct their own poems and establish their unique writing identity.

Suggestions for comparative texts to consider alongside each poem are offered so that children are exposed to a variety of authors and a wider range of writing styles. This will enable them to make valuable links between the various poems they encounter. Not only does this broaden their literary knowledge but, more importantly, it enriches the reading experience. Great readers make great writers, not least because they are constantly being exposed to great text.



WRITING Their Poem

Magnificent Magpies



While exploring each poem, children should be encouraged to magpie any shiny ideas or language they may wish to adapt or include in their own work.

Anything that sparkles enough to make a child want to note it down for later use, can be placed in their personal Magpie Jotter. Never tell a child what to place in this jotter. If they place something in there themselves, they are much more likely to value it and want to use it in their own work later on.

Before learners embark on writing their own version of each poem, it is important that they view you as a positive writing role model. Seeing you write your own poem (with their help) is essential.

Not only will they see in real time how you organise and sequence your ideas, but they will also see the importance of drafting and editing your work when refining your final piece.

This shared experience allows them to appreciate and value the writing journey more fully, especially if they too have contributed to the writing process. Once completed, your class can then support each other using a pair then square model to create and critique each other's work.

As such, when it comes to writing their own independent poem, they will have experienced and have access to a range of models from which to gain confidence and inform their own work.

A scaffold for each poetic form is supplied to help structure and support this modelling process. However, it is important to note that when writing their own poems, this scaffold is optional. If their final poem is to be truly independent, children must be allowed to follow their own path if they wish to do so.

Teacher discretion will be needed for those who lack confidence in their own writing ability but, where possible, a free write ethos is to be embraced in order to ensure individual flare and creativity can take place.



PERFORMING Their Poem

When performing their poems, it is important for children to recognise that it is often better to anchor your poem with a brief introduction. This helps set the scene, settles your audience and calms the prospective speaker.

Consideration should therefore be given as to how this could look.

- How will I introduce my poem?
- How personal will my poem be? Will it be meaningful?
- How long will my introduction be? Why is it important to keep it brief?
- Will I ask my audience to listen out for anything specific? Why might I want to do this?

A top tip to remind learners of is to keep it short, keep it simple and keep it focused. Let your poem and your performance talk for itself. If your introduction is too long, your audience will tend to switch off before you have even begun.

Prior to reading their poems to an authentic audience, consideration should be given as to how they might do this effectively. The two main areas to focus on are:

- A) How will the performance of my poem sound?
- B) How will the performance of my poem look?

It is also important that sufficient time be given over to practicing their poem before they perform it. This will give them confidence and allow them to take ownership of the performance itself.

When practicing with their peers, conversations can be had as to how they might want to adapt or improve their performance and discussion take place as to why this may be the case.

Your Voice Choice



This is essential if you are to bring your poem to life and infuse it with both meaning and emotion. No one will remember a poem that is read in a monotone and no one will remember a poet who isn't passionate about reading their own work. Be proud of your poem and show it.

Various aspects of reading aloud have been separated into six key elements.

This list is by no means exhaustive and it must be remembered that rather than work in isolation, each aspect works in partnership with the others to produce a richer, more meaningful reading experience.



Pitch: The musicality of your reading voice, including tone and intonation.



Power: The strength given to your reading voice, including volume and stress.



Pace: The speed and rhythm at which we read.



Punctuation: The adherence to and understanding of the marks an author has placed upon the page.



Pause: The knowing of when not to read and for how long.



Passion: The emotion of reading and the development of a reader's love for the written word.

Facial Expressions & Body Language



It is noteworthy that performances do not have to be all singing and all dancing. Some of the greatest deliveries of their work are when poets are seated and keep movement to a minimum.

Maya Angelou's performance of her poem *Still I Rise* is a masterclass of how a well-considered voice with few (but meaningful) body movements and facial expressions provides a powerful arrow in your quiver when producing an impactful performance.

You can watch her demonstrate this here and other poets are readily available to watch online too. Choose wisely. Showing such models of excellence will influence your learners on many levels.



The Art of Reciting by Heart



Being shackled to a piece of paper when you read your poem dulls your performance and means that you are less free to express yourself and showcase your work.

Time, therefore, should be given over for learners to learn their poem by heart and practice reciting their poem paper free. Discussion and activities can be undertaken to help children achieve this and it is useful to share with learners how you try and remember the poems you have written or love to recite.

Here are some suggestions:

See it

Try writing out your poem by hand and illustrating it with patterns and pictures.

Try drawing the images key words and phrases create in your mind.

Try sketching a road map using different colours to illustrate your poem's journey.

Move it

Try walking in time to your poem as you speak it.

Try clapping, tapping or clicking to the beat of your poem.

Try making up gestures that match the words or ideas in your poem.

Hear it

Try being in a quiet place so you don't get disturbed or distracted.

Try adding music, percussion or sound effects to your poem.

Try recording yourself and listening back to your poem in snippets.

Say it

Try repeating your poem to yourself in the mirror.

Try using different voices before choosing the voice you like best.

Try speaking your poem to somebody else... your family, friends or family pet.

Above all, help your learners to value and enjoy the reading to write process. Encourage them to embrace the challenge of creating and performing their work to make it a more memorable and meaningful experience, one that they will treasure for many years to come.

Exemplar Videos



Each poem is supported with an exemplar performance. Simply click on each title to watch.

A Dead Man's Chest



The Soldier



Blossom



The Mountain



The Mirror



These Are the Hands



Collocation



A Poet's Pledge



Read, write & perform... poetry!



THE SOLDIER

An Anti-War Poem

An anti-war poem is one that rejects war. Such poems convey the emotional impact of war and the suffering it causes. They highlight the destructive nature of conflict and question why such battles are fought. They often consider themes such as faith and justice and ask how true lasting peace can be achieved in the future.

READING

Predict

Do you think this soldier will be male or female, young or old, alive or dead? Why do you think this?

Where and when do you think this poem will be set? Why might this be?

Do you think this soldier will be alone or with others? What might they be thinking?

How might they be feeling? Why might they be feeling this way?

Will we be told which battle this soldier has been fighting in? Why? Why not? Does it matter?

Fluency Practice

Watch and listen to the poem being read.
Practice reading the poem out loud to a Reading Buddy.

To watch my performance,
please scan the QR code.



Orientation Questions

Where is the soldier sat? Draw your answer.

Who is sat with him? Why is this?

What does the soldier hear? What does he wish for when he hears this?

Who does the soldier think about as he stares into the sky?

What does he want to ask them? Make a list with your teacher.

Evaluative Question

Why do you think this poem has been written?

Re-Orientation Task

To which line(s) would you place each of the following notes? Discuss why this might be.

Love lost

Be brave

A lie

Happier times

Deeper Thinking

Are we told in which war the soldier has been fighting? Might this have been deliberate?

This soldier could have been fighting anywhere, on any side and at any time. The horrors of war are universal and not bound by time or place. The fact we aren't told directly which war he has been fighting in is deliberate. However, line fourteen reminds us of World War One. The reality that wars continue to be fought to this day forces us to ask ourselves whether wars will ever truly cease.

Why do you think this poem begins with the soldier sitting in the *rubbed ruins of a once proud, noble church*?

Having the soldier sit in the ruins of a church is a powerful image and one that raises an important question around faith. Like the church itself, perhaps the soldier's belief in God is in ruins. How can there be a loving God when all around him is death and destruction? Interestingly, when the soldier hears music, it is an anti-war song he remembers and not a hymn.

Why is the soldier sitting here alone?

His friends lie scattered in *eternal sleep*. Only he has survived the battle. Perhaps this is why he is *soaked in sorrow*. Having the soldier have no one to turn to for comfort or support forces us to empathise with him and helps us to understand why he is feeling the way that he does. With no friends around him to talk to, is it any wonder that he starts to think of those he has left behind back home: the girl he loves and his parents?

When is this poem set? Why might this be?

It is Christmas time, a time associated with family and festive cheer, as well as the birth of Jesus, the Saviour of mankind. The music the soldier hears is a song we traditionally listen to at this time of year and it is no coincidence that this poem ends with *Christmas*. Indeed, it is the second time that it is uttered, helping it to resonate and root itself more firmly in the poem and our mind. All this contrasts sharply with the situation the soldier finds himself in. Such a contrast shocks the reader and makes the poem and its message more memorable.

Authorial Intent

Find and copy a word the writer of this poem has made up in line one. What do you think it means?

Why do you think the poet has created this word?

Why do you think he uses it at both the start and end of this poem?

Which question stem ends line ten and begins lines eleven and twelve?

Why do you think the poet uses this question so many times so close together?

The word *arms* is used twice in this poem. How so?

How do their differing meanings contrast with each other? Discuss.

Highlight the word *hellish*. Underline the root of this word. What do you think this word means?

Was the poet right to use it? Discuss.

How does the poet use alliteration to promote this idea?

Highlight the phrase *The Promised Land of Liberty* in the next line. What do you think this phrase means?

How does this contrast with the previous line?

Which lines do not rhyme? Why do you think the poet chose to do this?

Was this a good choice? Why? Why not?

Read lines fifteen and sixteen.

Why do you think the soldier begins each of these lines with *if*? Discuss.

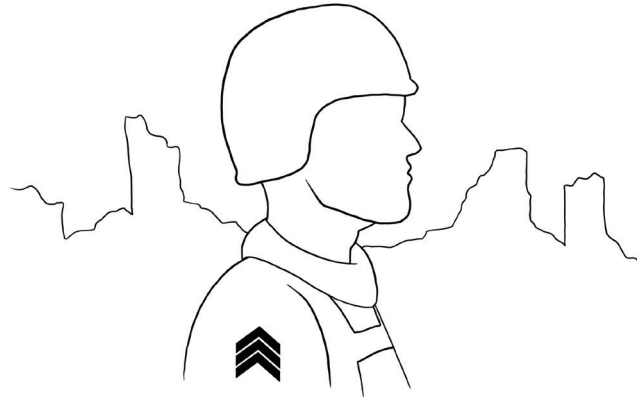
He ends this couplet with the word *fool*. How strong is the use of this word?

Why do you think he ends this couplet with such a derogatory term?

Key Words

arms	eternal	hellish	liberty
melody	ruins	solitude	steadfast

The Soldier



He sits in rubble ruins of a once proud, noble church.

He sits in silent solitude; his soul begins to search.

Alone and soaked in sorrow, his friends eternal sleep.

Alone in foreign lands they fell, their knowing mothers weep.

The soldier hears the whisper of a song from yesteryear.

The soldier feels the words, the melody, the festive cheer.

Wish I could be dancing now, in the arms of the girl I love.

Wish I was at home for Christmas.

He pictures childhood memories as he stares into the sky.

He thinks about his parents; he wants to ask them why.

Why fight for flags, for uniforms, for presidents, for kings?

Why fight for land, for property, why fight for other things?

We're told we fight for freedom, a just and worthy cause.

We're told the war we're fighting is the war to end all wars.

If all men dared lay down their arms, say no to those who rule.

If all men dared to stand steadfast and not be played a fool.

The hellish heat of hatred, would immediately cease.

The Promised Land of Liberty, we'd build true lasting peace.

He sits in rubble ruins of a once proud, noble church.

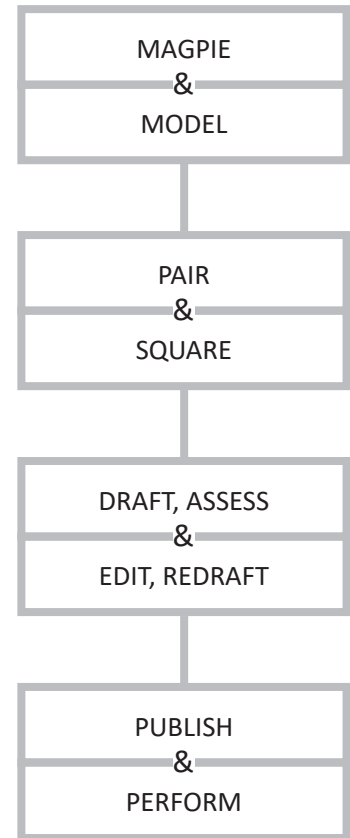
He sits in silent solitude, wishing he was home for Christmas.

Supported

- Step 1: Read other anti-war poems. Magpie your favourite parts.
- Step 2: Help your teacher write their anti-war poem. Watch how they do it.
- Step 3: In pairs, try creating an anti-war poem based on the ideas you have encountered.
- Step 4: Join another pair. Compare your poem with theirs. Help each other to improve your poems or join forces and create a better version as a group.

Independent

- Step 1: Begin to write your own anti-war poem. Use the examples you have looked at and created, as well as any ideas you have put in your Magpie Jotter to help you.
- Step 2: Once finished, let your teacher or AI assess your poem. Allow them to give you some pointers as to how it might be improved. Share your poem with a Writing Buddy and see what ideas they come up with too.
- Step 3: Read the suggestions for improvement you have been given. Choose which ones you want to make. Edit and redraft your poem until you are happy with your final effort.
- Step 4: Copy your final version out and decorate it. Think about how you would like to share your poem with others and practice performing it.



Creativity & Flare

Never think that war, no matter how necessary,
nor how justified, is not a crime.

Ernest Hemingway, 1946

One day President Roosevelt told me that he was
asking publicly for suggestions about what the war
should be called. I said at once 'The Unnecessary War'.

Winston Churchill, 1946

I know not with what weapons World War III will be fought,
but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones.

Albert Einstein, 1947

If we are to reach real peace in this world, and if we are to
carry on a real war against war, we shall have to begin with
the children.

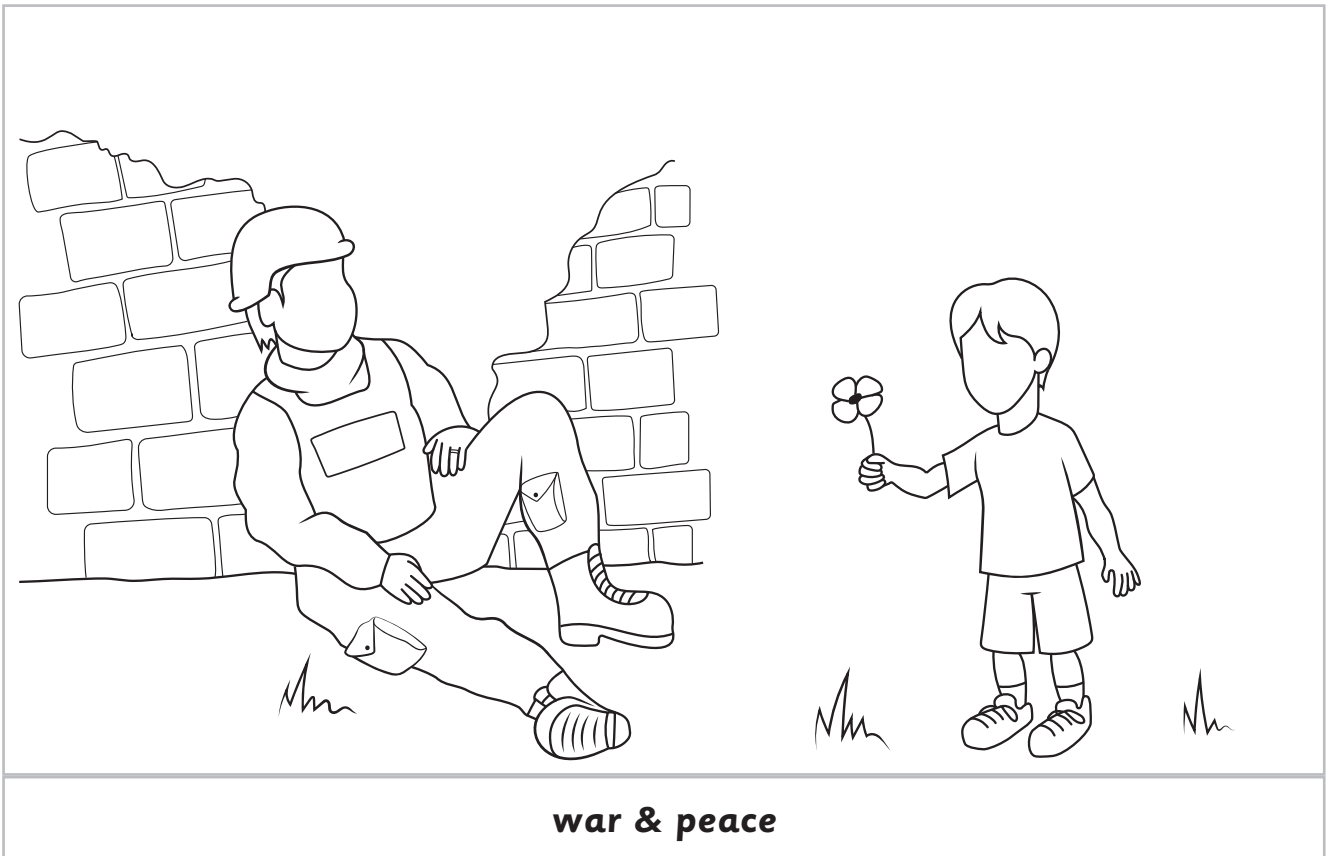
Mahatma Gandhi, 1921

The most valuable possession you can own is an open heart.
The most powerful weapon you can be is an instrument of peace.

Carlos Santana, 2015

Comparative Texts

- ★ After Blenheim
Robert Southey
- ★ Stop the Cavalry
Jona Lewi
- ★ Army Dreamers
Kate Bush
- ★ Everybody's Gone to War
Nerina Pallot
- ★ Last Night I Had the
Strangest Dream
Ed McCurdy
- ★ Sainsbury's Christmas Ad
(2014)
- ★ Website:
unicef.org/children-under-attack/poems-for-peace



SCAFFOLD

Read each line. Count how many syllables each one has.

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
 Alone and soaked in sorrow, his friends eternal sleep.

Alone _____ .

Alone _____ .

Why _____ ?

Why _____ ?

♪ _____ .

♪ _____ .

If _____ .

If _____ .

The Poetry Pad CPD



A venue of your choice.



All staff are welcome.



A time and date that suits you.



Visit my website to book.



John is an independent Literacy consultant and recognised specialist in developing children's reading and writing.

He works with schools throughout the UK to improve standards, secure best practice and achieve outstanding results.

THE POETRY PAD



This course can be facilitated as a half or full-day's training.

It considers when and how we can encourage children to read, write and perform a wide-range of poetry and explores the benefits this has for the developing learner.

Prices available
upon request

COURSE OUTLINE

Part I:

The session will begin by considering the important role poetry has to play when learning to master the English language.

We will explore how to embed poetry within Literacy to ensure you create a curriculum that is meaningful, engaging and accessible to all.

Using a Read, Write and Perform approach that includes a wide range of high-quality texts, we will also consider the importance of writing for purpose and with an authentic audience in mind.

Brew & Biscuit Break

Part II:

We will discuss how to structure and implement a poetry-based project that develops communication skills and provides opportunities for learners to create, collaborate and showcase their work.

I will demonstrate this using poetic forms that can be used across both Key Stages. This will highlight the importance of teachers becoming a strong role model and the need to provide learners with genuine opportunities for wider reading.