



## **General Tips for Schools: Bringing Poetry Alive**

### **I: Children aged 5-11**

Look also at our tips for children aged 11-16, as you may find activities there which would suit your class too. There are many resources and lesson plans available from other providers such as the Children's Poetry Bookshelf ([www.childrenspoetrybookshelf.co.uk](http://www.childrenspoetrybookshelf.co.uk)) or Scottish Poetry Library ([www.spl.org.uk](http://www.spl.org.uk)) – have a look at our Education pages for links to these.

#### **Poems in Strange Places**

'We're Going On A Poem Hunt! We're Going to Catch a Big One! We're Not Scared...'  
The *job* for the pupils on National Poetry Day will be to role-play at being super-sleuths, hunting out poems. Staff will need to create a poetry treasure hunt throughout the school or class. Hide poetic clues in unusual places – hanging from coat pegs, underneath desks, on ceilings, behind (or within) pictures, hidden in trees, inside shoes or PE bags. The final treasure/prize could be a poetry collection/book.

Alternatively, instead of devising a hunt with clues leading to a final treasure, make the finding of as many poems as possible (in odd or unexpected places) the object of the hunt. The idea almost becomes like a site-specific poetry installation, with poems finding new spaces to occupy: inside cupboards, laminated in the fish tank, inside or underneath items in the home corner, laminated under the sand in the sandpit, pinned to playground fences, printed on fabric (like prayer flags) and fluttering outside, taped to the outside of windows...

#### **The Longest Poem in the World**

Use an industrial roll of paper or wallpaper and place it in the library/foyer/hall. Designated pupil groups visit the library/foyer in turn throughout the day. The idea is to gradually develop a story-poem in rhyming couplets whereby each group adds a couplet to further the plot, characters, situation and action. This is one possible opening for beginning a thriller story poem in verse:

'She stood on the cliff, catching her breath:  
Would she escape, or fall to her death?'

Alternatively, using this year's theme of 'work', it could begin:

*All in a day's Work*

This was his job. It had to be done!  
Would it be work, or would it be fun?

Danger? Plenty! Scary too.  
What in the world would he have to do?

Or use one of the follow up suggestions for a group poem in the teaching pack. Set the same task for several classes. Add ALL the responses together to make a v-e-r-y long poem. When complete, display the longest poem somewhere that it can wrap around a corner or disappear through a doorway.

### **Poetry Bunting**

The pupils are given the responsibility of being window dressers for the day, except that in this case, they are 'dressing' the school or classroom. Using string and triangles of brightly coloured paper with poems inscribed or stuck down, staple the triangles onto the lengths of string to create poem-bunting. Also, fill the school or classroom with poems as if they were confetti, streamers or Christmas decorations.

Hang, suspend, drape and festoon the walls, ceilings, (toilets, canteen, foyer and playground if possible) with poems, couplets, haikus, sonnets and verse. Everywhere you look, you should be able to find a poem. Work out original ways to inscribe words – in mud on the playing field, making letters out of leaves, using chalk on tarmac, using projectors on the ceilings, window blinds etc. Create letters (and words) by asking pupils to shape themselves into individual letter shapes - take photos. Assign work-related roles to pupils, groups or whole classes for the day such as photographers, production line for the bunting, designers, artists, publicity team.

### **Book a Live Poet**

Book a working poet who performs and runs workshops in schools. Kick-start National Poetry Day with a real live specimen of a poet on the job and inspire everyone into producing poems for a school-based poetry competition on this year's theme of work. Make sure you book someone who is experienced at performing their work and making poetry lively, fun and accessible – use websites like [www.poetrysociety.org.uk](http://www.poetrysociety.org.uk), [www.applesandsnakes.org.uk](http://www.applesandsnakes.org.uk) or [www.classactagency.co.uk](http://www.classactagency.co.uk) to find recommended poets, or contact the Literature Development Officer at your local council.

### **Poetry Café or Poetry Cabaret**

Have each class or group choose a poem they like. Use different ways to present the poem to an invited afternoon audience (pupils can also design invitations). This could be: setting the poem to music or percussion, dramatizing it, animating or illustrating it, setting it to dance or movement, using different voices/sound effects to create a poetry choir, filming scenes from the poem, using recording techniques and computers to create a screened presentation.

As the layout of classrooms lend themselves to café style seating, make illustrated poem place mats (laminated) or poem tablecloths (using rolls of lining wallpaper or other large sheets, with different poems inscribed on each). Serve tea or juice to your invited audience before or after the entertainment.