



## **National Poetry Day 2008 Lesson Plans**

National Poetry Day has been bringing poetry to children and adults since 1994. In that time, our educational materials have changed a good deal, and this year they are entirely online.

Poetry is one of the most powerful ways to use language. Enjoying it is the first step in harnessing that power, and we know from your feedback that teachers sometimes want extra support in teaching poetry. We asked expert educationalist and poets, Andrew Fusek Peters and Polly Peters, to write enjoyable lesson plans. Each one includes a piece of poetry, followed by background information and suggestions for classroom activities and exercises. These will help children to hone their literacy and linguistic skills, but also to have *fun* with poetry.

We have made them as broad as possible but if you want further support or resources, do go back to our website for links and information. Our partners in the Poetry Society, the Poetry Archive, the Scottish Poetry Library, Academi in Wales and other organisations give access to a wide range of resources, tips and poems. Do explore these fully, to make the most of all the free resources available to you on National Poetry Day and all year round.

Please feel free to print and circulate these notes: we want them to be as widely used as possible.

Jo Bell  
**Co-ordinator, National Poetry Day**



## Lesson plan 3 – Level 2 (age 8-11)

### For My Poems

Marina Tsvetayeva, translated by David McDuff

For my poems, written down so soon in life, so early,  
I did not know I was a poet yet,  
Forced loose from me like droplets from a fountain,  
A rocket's sparkling jet,

Poems storming from me, invading, like some tiny demons,  
The sanctuary where sleep and incense twine,  
Their themes made up of youth and death, my poems,  
My always unread lines!

Thrown here and there, amid the dust of various bookshops,  
Untouched then, now, by any reader's thumb,  
For my poems, stored deep like wines of precious vintage,  
I know a time will come.

### First Things First:

Read the poem aloud. In each of the three verses, there are two words that are repeated. What are they and why do you think they are repeated? Why do you think it is so important that they are 'my' poems, not just 'poems'? (The repetition of 'my poems' reinforces the central importance of her poems in the life of Marina Tsvetayeva. The ownership of 'my' poems makes them inseparable from her. The word 'poems' pulses through each verse in the same way that poetry is seen to 'invade' all aspects of her life).

Look at the title of the poem. Usually, if we see a title which begins as a dedication, 'For my...' who, or what might we expect the poem to be dedicated to? If you just saw those first two words, give some ideas as to what you might expect the next word or phrase to be. ('For my...mother/brother/best friend/cat...?') There is an expectation that a dedication is likely to be to someone or something that is or was animate (alive). So, what does this suggest about how Marina Tsvetayeva feels about her poems?

In groups, take lines 4,5, 6 & 7 of the poem. How do you think these lines should be spoken aloud? Experiment with different ways of speaking/performing them to find what you think is the best way. Do the words almost force you to read them out in a certain way? Which words in particular do this? Do you find that you need to change the pace between lines 6 and 7? Why do you think this is?

The best poems almost sound like music when read aloud. This poet is utterly passionate about her work – being a poet. Re-read the first verse. Did she always want to be a poet? Did she have any choice in the matter? How do we know? In your opinion, which is the most important word in the first verse, the one that carries the most weight? Say why.

In the last verse, what does she hope for (perhaps not for a very long time)? Has her dream come true do you think? Does the fact that we are reading this poem in 2008 give a new and added meaning to the last line?

### Poetic Response

The poet describes her poems being

*Forced loose from me like droplets from a fountain,  
A rocket's sparkling jet*

These are wonderful similes. The verb 'forced' is so powerful that any simile that follows on has to be equally vivid, giving a strong, energetic picture.

Look at the first line of the second verse. What are the two verbs used to describe the movement of the poems? What is the effect of these two words?

Can you name the poetic device/tool being used here? (Personification. The poems have been personified by being described as though they are living things).

How else could a poem or an idea be 'forced loose' or 'forced out' of you? It almost sounds like a poetic alien takeover! *'It wasn't my idea! It just forced its way out through my thoughts!'*

### Collect ideas together into a group poem

For example – My ideas, squeezed out like..... juice from a lemon,  
My poems, pulled out like...teeth, in the dentist's chair.  
Forced loose like...  
Driven like...  
Propelled like....  
Burst out like...  
Pushed through...  
Poems storming from me like...

Help! These ideas! They're unstoppable! Catching the ideas and pinning them down to the page is what will form your poem.

In verse two, Tsvetayeva describes poems 'invading' her sleep 'like tiny demons'. Why do you think that the word 'demons' is an effective word to use here? What sort of picture does it conjure in your imagination?

How else could a poem creep up on you? Attract your attention? Add these ideas into your group poem.

### The poems are invading! Watch out. It's a poetry ambush!

Poems invading like...  
Sneaking up like...  
Similes surprising you like...  
Personification, a creeping...(what? Some sort of animal?)

### Comic Strip

What would an invading poem look like? Draw a comic strip sequence of three or four pictures showing a 'poem' as a cartoon-like character getting ready to ambush someone's thoughts or dreams.

## Developing Ideas

Marina Tsvetayeva is celebrating the job of being a poet and of being compelled to write. In her case, she suggests that she had no option, no choice in the matter. The work of writing poems and being a poet chose her. Try these activities:

- 1 Make a thought-shower of all the different parts or elements of a poem you can think of (such as similes, metaphors, verses, images, lines, rhymes...). Imagine that all these words are like a whole range of ingredients and equipment spread out across a table - ready for you to pick and choose and mix and bake into a poem. Just sprinkle in plenty of wild imagination.
- 2 Maybe you are a hunter, out to stalk *ideas* and bring them back to your brain, or perhaps you have to go to the local shop for a kilo of *metaphors*. You could be a thief plotting to pinch *similes* from a word bank. Use these ideas to write a short poem about ingenious and imaginative ways of getting hold of all the different bits of a poem. You have to think of each aspect of the poem as though it has turned into a real object or creature.
- 3 Writing poetry is a job. Imagine that all the words and parts of a poem are incredibly heavy. The process of writing a poem would become back-breaking, physical work. Think of verbs (action words) linked to hard work. For example, 'I *haul* heavy words out of my thoughts and *push* them through my pen. I *heave* a sledgehammer on similes, *sweat out* sentences.' Notice how the use of alliteration, where words begin with the same letter, can add to the musical effect of your poem.
- 4 What do you think that a poet's CV would look like, or a job application? Who is a poet's boss? Do poets have a boss? Who might fire a poet? How could you advertise yourself to your new employer? Try writing an application for the job of poet as a list poem, using some of the poem 'ingredients' you collected earlier. For example,

My *rhymes* are riveting,  
My *similes* astonishing  
My metaphors will...'

- 5 What if your poem was a new baby?

### A Poem in its Pram

'Ooh, coochoo! Hasn't she got a lovely, dimpled *simile*  
And look at those cheeky little *puns*!  
Such cute *rhythms*.

Write your own 'Poem in a Pram' poem to personify a poem as though it is a cute, newborn baby.

## Poet Background

Marina Tsvetayeva had a difficult life. She was born in Moscow, Russia. Her father was a professor of art history and her mother a pianist who never fulfilled her ambition of playing at concert level. By her own account, Tsvetayeva had a 'bittersweet' childhood. Her mother had wanted a musical son. Instead, she got a poetic daughter! Apparently, her mother sometimes destroyed her daughter's early poems.

After her mother's death in 1906, Tsvetayeva could finally give up her music lessons and concentrate on her writing. She married in 1912 and had two daughters. When her husband

joined the Tsar's White Army, they were separated by events for five years. During this time, she suffered badly in the Moscow famine. She had no money to look after herself and her children. Therefore, she took the drastic step of putting one of her daughters in a state orphanage, hoping she would be better fed. However, tragically, her daughter died of starvation in 1920.

It is important to remember that Marina Tsvetayeva's poem has been translated from Russian into English.

David Mc Duff (born 1945 in Cheshire) is a literary translator and editor. In his notes on translating the work of Tsvetayeva (*Selected Poems*, Bloodaxe 1991), McDuff refers to 'the Russianness of her poetic style' and says that she 'is not an easy poet to translate into any language.' He also describes her as striving 'constantly beyond the limits of the 'real' world.'

The work of translating poetry is probably the hardest sort of translation that there is. It's not just a matter of giving a direct and literal translation but also of communicating something of the rhythm, (and in Tsvetayeva's case, the rhyme) as well as aspects such as mood, atmosphere and the 'feeling' communicated by the poem. Hard work indeed - like keeping lots of juggling balls in the air all at the same time! David McDuff has performed a highly skilful job with this beautiful translation.



## Acknowledgments

### About the authors of these notes

Andrew Fusek Peters and Polly Peters wrote these lesson plans and notes for National Poetry Day. Andrew and Polly are poets, editors and novelists who have written over sixty five titles between them, including the best-selling *Poems With Attitude* (Wayland). 'It is rare and welcome to find a collection that speaks so directly to teenagers' - *The Guardian*.

Andrew also has a 'best of' for younger readers, *Mad, Bad & Dangerously Haddock* (Lion) and two collections for Oxford University Press – *Spies Unlimited* and *Ghosts Unlimited*. Their poems for both younger listeners and teenagers have been recorded for the Poetry Archive. Andrew has worked tirelessly over the last twenty years as a visiting poet in schools, performing his material and trying to show that poetry can be both entertaining and thought-provoking. He also juggles, plays didgeridoo and jaw-harp and has got back into skateboarding in his forties!

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