

A Caribbean Dozen: Poems from Caribbean Poets, edited by John Agard and Grace Nichols

This teaching sequence is scheduled for updating this academic year.

This unit will focus on:

- Listening to poetry read aloud;
- Responding to and understanding poetry, including through art;
- Performing, presenting, and writing poetry.

This unit focuses on *A Caribbean Dozen*, a book of poems edited by John Agard and Grace Nichols, poems that are inspired by the rhythms, flavours and textures of a Caribbean childhood.

The unit involves a class journal for recording whole-class discussions and responses, and initial ideas for writing poems, and individual poetry journals for children to record their own thoughts and to work on their own poems.

Alongside the unit, reading aloud and enjoying a broader range of poems from the anthology is recommended.

Unit Overview:

The suggested sequence of work focuses on a selection of poems that have been chosen for the opportunities they provide for exploration of nature in poetry, performance, discussion and children's own writing. The unit is planned over 10 sessions (approximately 2 weeks); although this should be flexible depending on children's needs and interests as the unit progresses.

Part 1 involves in-depth work around one poem, *For Forest* by Grace Nichols, which focuses on the sights, sounds and feelings of a tropical forest. The children are asked to respond to and discuss the poem, including through art, and then to write a group poem focused on the forest setting.

Part 2 involves reading, discussing and performing poems connected to the beauty of nature, with a range of potential extension activities such as recording children's performances and creating their own poems.

Part 3 involves a study of atmospheric poetry. Firstly, *The Sun is Laughing* by Grace Nichols and two poems linked to the wind, *Wind* and *Hurricane* by Dionne Brand; with children's responses supported through the use of images and video. The children are asked to write their own poems focusing on the power of nature and using effective vocabulary to represent the beauty and forces of nature.

Preparation and Planning:

Learning Aims:

- To experience poetry as pleasurable and meaningful
- To compare how a common theme is presented in poetry
- To explore the language and style of poetry through talk, performance, visual art, reading and writing
- To learn how to bring out the meaning of a poem through performance
- To learn more about writing poems (as a class, group and individually) based on observation and experience

Key Teaching approaches:

- Reading aloud
- Booktalk
- Visualising, illustrating
- Poetry performance
- Shared, paired and individual writing

Resources:

- A Copy of A Caribbean Dozen
- A class poetry journal
- Individual poetry journals for the class – either exercise books or booklets made from folded, stapled sheets
- Materials for art response, cartridge or sugar paper, pastels, watercolour paper and paints
- Materials for presenting individual poems or a class anthology

Possible audio-visual and web links:

- <http://soundbible.com/1818-Rainforest-Ambience.html>
- www.henrirousseau.org
- <http://www.kew.org/mng/gallery/caribbean.html>
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YJJoTpCokYE>
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lrHxR5CXeT4>
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=goHHcWTTFnk>

Also useful:

- Voice recorders / microphones
- Access to Moviemaker or other appropriate movie software

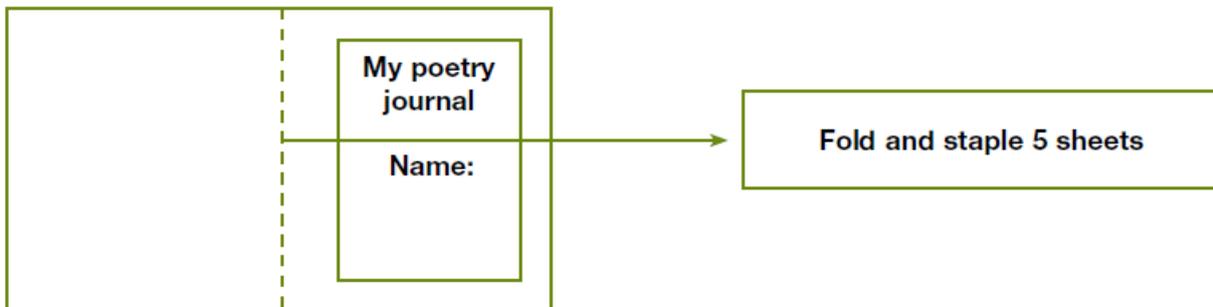
The Unit:

Part one: *For Forest*

Session 1:

Introducing the anthology:

Explain to the children that you will be sharing a range of poems from one collection over several days and that they will be listening to, reading, talking about, performing, writing and presenting poems and choosing their favourites. As part of their work, they will be asked to keep their own 'poetry journal'. This can take the form of a separate exercise book or stapled sheets (approximately 5 sheets of A4 paper stapled together produces a 20-page booklet, A5 size). The Children could decorate the cover of the journal, reflecting the poems read.



Reading aloud and discussion:

For Forest is the first poem introduced from the collection and explores the tropical forest using all of the senses.

Without disclosing the title or displaying the text, read the poem aloud, asking the children to close their eyes and visualise the poem as you read. You might suggest that they try to run what they hear into a film in their heads.

Listen to the performance of the poem by Grace Nichols, accompanied by John Agard in the video. Ask the children to work with a talk partner and discuss their initial responses to the poem, for example: a part that they particularly remember or liked about the poem, or the kinds of pictures they saw or sounds they heard in their heads.

Discussion and rereading:

Record the feedback from the discussion by making notes on a large sheet of paper or in a class poetry journal, made from several large sheets of paper and stapled or sewn together.

Starting with the words 'Tell me...', ask the children to describe any pictures that they saw in their heads. Ensure that your questions are asked in an open way – there is no 'right' answer. The children need to feel confident that their contributions are valued.

Then read the poem again, this time displaying the text, and ask the children to join in with you. Ask them to notice in detail as they read any words or phrases they think are particularly striking.

During the discussion, record two or three points in the class reading journal. Then give out copies of the poem and ask the children to work with a partner to text mark and note in their own poetry journals any words or phrases that they identify.

Record feedback by making notes in the class poetry journal or on a large sheet of paper.

The children may identify phrases such as: *darkness wrap her like a gown*, *forest is bad dream woman*, *forest dreaming of the caress of gold*, *forest rooting with mysterious eldorado*. Explore the use of simile and metaphor to create a powerful picture of the forest and look at what is being inferred as to the dual 'wealth' of the forest. Why is the forest rich for nature and for others? Why 'we must keep forest'? Why do you think 'forest don't broadcast her business' and forest keep her business down'?

Alternative titles:

The poem is called *For Forest*. Ask the children whether they can think of an alternative title. Ask the children to work in pairs, then in groups of four, to compare their titles. Share some of their titles at the end of the lesson.

You could also:

Read the supportive narratives *In the Forest* by Anouck Boisrobert and Louis Rigaud, *The Great Kapok Tree* by Lynne Cherry or *The Vanishing Rainforest* by Richard Platt and Rupert van Wyk to give the children extra experience of the destruction of forests and its implications.

Session 2:

Revisiting the poem:

Look back at the poem introduced in the previous session. Focus now on language that puts you 'inside the setting'. Explore the sensory experiences of the forest:



Role Play and Drama:

Use Soundbible download: Rainforest Ambience: <http://soundbible.com/1818-Rainforest-Ambience.html> alongside photographs of a tropical rainforest to give a sense of the sounds and sights of the Rainforest. Does it match what is seen in the poem? What sounds do you think we would hear in this forest? Look at the key words and phrases that directly relate to sounds: *watersound*, *birdsound*, *howl* (of the howler monkeys) and those that suggest sounds like *teeming*, *creeping of her forest-ground*. What other noises do you think you would hear? Wind? Trees rustling? Ask children to come up with others for a list.

Spread the children out in the space you are working and allocate different sounds to groups / individuals. Start with the constant sounds; *water flowing*, *breeze blowing* and then layer in incidental sounds; *different birdcalls*, *howler monkeys*, *crickets chirping* from the list to build up a soundscape for the children to experience the setting. Ask the children to close their eyes whilst listening to the soundscape and picture the forest in their minds. Take a mind photo of the scene they can see and hold it in their head.

Response through art:

Using any preferred medium, or a mixed media as in the illustrations in the text (watercolour, pastels, collage) get the children to create their mind photo as a piece of art either during the session or in an additional art session working individually or in groups to create a larger painting or collage.

You could also:

Look at other Art for inspiration. Try art by Henri Rousseau (1844-1910) such as; Tiger in a Tropical Storm (Surprised!), Tropical Forest with Apes and Snake, Exotic Landscape, Apes in the Orange Grove (see www.henrirousseau.org). Surprised! can also be seen at the National Gallery, London.

There are also studies of Caribbean Art related to plant life at:

<http://www.kew.org/mng/gallery/caribbean.html>

Session 3:

Revisiting the poem:

Explain to the class at the beginning of the session that they are going to reread the poem, look at how the poet has created the poem, and then begin to work on their own poems. Put a copy of the poem on an interactive whiteboard (IWB) or flip chart and reread the poem with the class. Ask the children if they notice any patterns in the poem.

They may notice that:

- the first and last line of the poem is repeated, and the power of adding *And we must keep Forest*.
- the poet not only describes what can be seen and heard but also implies how she feels about the forest and how the forest is like a protective parent of the life that lies within it.

Highlight the first and last lines of each verse and explain to the class that they are going to write their own group poem based on the rainforest.

Group Composition:

Remembering the work they did in the soundscape, provide the children with strips of paper on which to write a line to describe the sensation of the forest, drawing on what they can hear, see, smell, things they could touch or how it felt to be there. In groups children can then arrange their individual lines into their own poem. The children can discuss which order the lines flow best in, how the lines will be arranged, whether they will repeat any of the lines for impact and whether any lines could be improved to fit the verse. Poems can then be written up and illustrated as presentation pieces for a class anthology or display.

Part 2: Imagery in Poems

Sessions 4 & 5:

Reading aloud and discussion:

Read 'Dancing Poinciana' by Telcine Turner and share responses. Which lines do the children like best and why? What kind of mood or atmosphere do they think this poem has? Is there anything they don't like or that puzzles them?

What do they think the Poinciana is? Share photographs of Poinciana; why do you think it is also known as the Flamboyant or Flame Tree?

Which lines do the children like best and why? What does the poem tell you about the plant? Which language helps to paint the picture in your head? Is there anything they don't like or that puzzles them?

Reading aloud and discussion:

Read 'I Am The One' by Opal Palmer Adisa and share responses. Which lines do the children like best and why? What kind of mood or atmosphere do they think this poem has? Is there anything they don't like or that puzzles them?

Compare and contrast with 'Dancing Poinciana' recording children's responses in the class journal.

What does the poem tell you about the plant? It would be good to provide children with a jasmine plant to look at, explore and smell the '*fragrant jasmine*'; collect examples of children's own descriptive language as they explore the plant.

As with the previous poem, ask children which lines they like best and why? Which language helps to paint the picture in your head? Is there anything they don't like or that puzzles them?

Response through art:

Using any preferred medium, or a mix of media as in the illustrations in the text (watercolour, pastels, collage) get the children to represent the Poinciana or the jasmine as a piece of art either during the session or in an additional art session working individually or in groups to create a larger painting or collage. Reflect on representing the language they have understood in the poem, reflecting back on the imagery of lines such as: *regal as a queen, fire in the treetops, on a sea of green, a ray on a cold bleak day, I dine with the moon and the stars.*

Session 6:

Performance Reading:

Prepare a group performance reading of one of the poems, discuss in groups which poem you will perform and how you will perform it to the class using different techniques, e.g. varying the number of people reading, changing, tempo, dynamics, using echo etc.

Groups prepare and rehearse their performance before performing to the class. Discuss different techniques used and the ambience they create; which effects were the most striking and why?

You could also:

Record children's performances and use MovieMaker to set these to their artwork and accompanying music.

Bring in a variety of plants and flowers to stimulate children's own poetry writing.

Part three: *Atmospheric poetry*

Session 7:

Reading aloud and discussion:

Read 'Sun is Laughing' by Grace Nichols, share children's initial responses, connections and any puzzles or questions the children have.

In groups discuss responses to the poem, for example: memorable words and phrases, a part that they particularly remember or liked about the poem, or the kinds of pictures they saw or sounds they heard in their heads.

Performance reading:

Focus on the vocabulary that evokes mood and how the mood changes as the sun moves away. Split the class into groups to perform the two parts of the poem. Think about how to relay mood through voice, actions and facial expression as you perform.

It would be good to have equipment to video the performances, such as a Flip camera, so that children can watch the performance back and evaluate its effectiveness as part of a group discussion. They can then have the chance to 'edit' and re-perform if they would like.

Watch the video of Grace Nichols performing the poem and share responses to the performance.

Session 8:

Reading aloud and discussion:

Without disclosing the title or displaying the text, read the poem 'Hurricane' by Dionne Brand aloud, asking the children to close their eyes and visualise the poem as you read. You might suggest that they try to run what they hear into a film in their heads. What do they think the title is? Why?

Re-read, then discuss responses to the poem; memorable words and phrases, a part that they particularly remember or liked about the poem, or the kinds of pictures they saw or sounds they heard in their heads. Discuss how the tension is built in the poem through the short, immediate responses to portray the urgency and how repetition in the phrases: *Big rain coming*, *Big wind rising* and *Big wind blowing* are a reminder of the danger.

Towards own composition:

Watch a video of a hurricane striking the Caribbean, this one shows Hurricane Tomas in Barbados:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YJJoTpCokYE>

Collect banks of words and phrases to describe actions and feelings and look at how to run these into short, immediate sentences like they saw in the poem. Let children have a go, either in groups, pairs or individually, at composing their own poems using noun and verb phrases to portray immediacy and urgency and repetition of key phrases as a reminder. They can then, read, edit and present their work for the class anthology.

You could also:

Watch a video of a news segment on the effects of a hurricane and have children script and perform their own reports, including interviews with residents who faced the storm, describing what had happened:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lrHxR5CXeT4>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=goHHcWTTFnk>

Sessions 9 & 10:

Reading aloud and discussion:

Read the poem 'Wind', also by Dionne Brand, aloud. Compare and contrast with 'Hurricane' recording children's responses in the class journal.

Re-read, then discuss responses to the poem; memorable words and phrases, a part that they particularly remember or liked about the poem, or the kinds of pictures they saw or sounds they heard in their heads. Discuss how the wind is represented as a person in the poem, showing his power and the effect he can have on people and places. What do we think of him as a character? What words and phrases tell us this?

Composing a poem:

Collect banks of words and phrases to describe actions and feelings to describe the wind. Look at how to use these to create own poems. What mood will your wind be in? What atmosphere do you want to create in your poem? What words, phrases and actions will best convey this? Will your poem be dark and tense or light and happy? What techniques that they have seen throughout the poems studied that they would like to use? Mood change as in 'The Sun is Laughing'? Vivid description and imagery from 'Dancing Poinciana' and 'I Am The One'? Personification as in 'Wind' and 'I Am The One'? The short phrase urgency of 'Hurricane'?

Support composition by modeling writing of own poem then give children time to draft, edit, present and illustrate their own poems for the class anthology.

Allow time at the end of the sequence for children to read and discuss children's own poems and allow children to perform their own poems. These could be videoed and shown alongside the videos from the poets studied.