

A Kid in My Class

by Rachel Rooney, illustrated by Chris Riddell
(Otter-Barry Books)

Open this book and meet your new class in this collaboration where words and pictures work beautifully together. Maybe you'll find a child you already know or someone who reflects the child in yourself. A variety of poetic forms abound. There are list poems that rhythmically describe a 'Fidget' or enumerate the qualities that guarantee eligibility for a 'Drama Queen Award'. There are conversation poems such as 'Copycat' in which that annoying kid repeats everything you say in exactly the same tone, and the seemingly one sided conversation from the respondent in 'The Questioner'. We can share the 'Friendship Bench' haunted by a shadowy figure and enjoy the bouncy beat pounded out by 'The Keepy-Uppy Kid'.

This collection was shortlisted for the CLPE Poetry award in 2019.

Overall aims of this teaching sequence.

- To explore and understand the importance of poetry as a genre
- To know how to listen and respond to a wide range of poems from a single poet collection
- To understand that poems are written for different reasons
- To interpret poems for performance
- To gain and maintain the interest of the listener through effective performance of poems
- To recognise how a poet uses poetry as a voice to express their own feelings and views
- To explore how poetry is presented on the page to enhance our understanding
- To draft, compose and write poems based on personal interests, experiences and emotions or fantasy poems using language and form with intent for effect on the reader

This teaching sequence is designed for a Year 3, 4 or 5 class.

Overview of this teaching sequence.

This teaching sequence is designed to be delivered over 15 sessions but teachers will want to use their own judgement about the length of time their class will need to spend on each of the sessions, particularly in relation to the time taken to develop, write, refine and publish children's poetry. Sessions are designed to explore personal response and expression and to help children understand the different ways in which they can respond to poetry. The sequence is designed so that the children's experience of this collection, and their understanding of a poet's voice and use of language, will support them to use similar techniques, poetic devices and wordplay in their own writing.

Teaching Approaches

- Reading Aloud
- Responding to Illustration
- Listening to the poet and responding
- Visualising and drawing
- Shared writing
- Response and Editing
- Publishing

Outcomes

- Art and illustration related to poems studied
- Text marking
- Poetry performance
- Drafting, redrafting and writing poetry
- Published poems

Cross Curricular Links:

Art and Design:

- Throughout the sequence, children will be encouraged to respond through art and producing “creative work, exploring their ideas and recording their experiences” as stipulated by the aims of the National Curriculum.
- Children might explore in greater depth the accompanying illustrations in the collection which were created by Chris Riddell. What do his illustrations add to our reading of the poem? What in the poem might he be responding to, and how does he communicate that response? Which art materials does he use and why might they have been chosen?

Links to other texts and resources

This is Rachel Rooney’s third collection of children’s poetry. Her first published collection of poetry, *The Language of Cat* (Lincoln Children’s Books, 2011), won the CLIPPA (Centre for Literacy in Primary Poetry Award) and was long listed for the Carnegie medal. Since then her second collection, *My Life As A Goldfish and Other Poems*, was also shortlisted for the CLIPPA in 2015. Teaching materials for both of these titles are available on the CLPE Poetryline website.

Other books by Rachel Rooney:

- *The Language of Cat* by Rachel Rooney, illustrated by Ellie Jenkins (Frances Lincoln Children’s Books)
- *My Life As A Goldfish* by Rachel Rooney, illustrated by Ellie Jenkins (Lincoln Children’s Books)

Further collections of poetry that you may wish to make available for children to read and discuss include:

- *Moon Juice* by Kate Wakeling, illustrated by Elīna Brasliņa (The Emma Press)
- *Dancing in the Rain* by John Lyons (Peepal Tree Press)
- *The Rainmaker Danced* by John Agard, illustrated by Satoshi Kitamura (Hodder)
- *The Dragon with a Big Nose* by Kathy Henderson (Frances Lincoln)
- *Michael Rosen’s Big Book of Bad Things* by Michael Rosen, illustrated by Joe Berger (Puffin)
- *Poetry Pie* by Roger McGough (Puffin)

- *Werewolf Club Rules* by Joseph Coelho, illustrated by John O’Leary (Frances Lincoln)
- *Everybody Got a Gift* by Grace Nichols (A & C Black)

CLPE’s Poetryline website contains a wealth of resources including videos of Rachel Rooney and other poets performing their poems and talking about their writing process, which will inspire children in their own performances and writing. These can be found at:

<https://www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poets>

and

<https://www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poet-interviews>

The Poetryline website also contains resources to support subject knowledge around poetic forms and devices: <https://www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poetic-forms-and-devices>

Further information about Rachel Rooney, including details about her school workshops and other writing, can be found on her website: <https://www.rachelrooneypoet.com/>

Before the Sequence:

- Before teaching from this poetry sequence and prior to reading *A Kid in My Class*, it would be useful to spend time exploring poetry more generally with the children in your class. If this is not part of the whole school ethos, consider immersing the school, and certainly your year group, in a wide range of poetry. Become familiar with CLPE’s Poetryline website www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline and other sites that enable the children to watch poets reading their own poems. It is important for the children to see a poet perform a poem as it was intended to be read. Make available collections of poetry books; collections by the same author and anthologies, planning in regular browsing and independent reading time when the children can access the books.
- Ask children to share their favourite poems with each other, encourage them to bring poems into class and provide a setting in which they can explore their recommendations, such as in a poetry corner. From this starting point you can then begin to explore the poems that the children are drawn to and respond to in the collection *A Kid in My Class*.
- This will also be a useful opportunity to discover what the children like and dislike about poetry, which poems are their favourites, if they have a favourite poet that they turn to when reading poetry and if they read poems outside of the school setting.
- Explore what the children already know about poetry. Engage in and discuss children’s preconceptions and earlier experiences, both positive and negative. *What do we like about poetry? What don’t we like about it? What do we expect from it? Does anyone have any favourite poets or poems? Has anybody read any poetry collections recently? When do they expect to hear or read poetry?* Ensure that children’s attentions are drawn to any poetry collections, anthologies or books by individual poets and that children have time to explore these independently.

- Add children's initial thoughts and impressions to the Working Wall, either scribing their ideas on sentence strips or giving out paper strips or post-it notes for children on which to write their own ideas.
- It is useful at the start of a poetry sequence to debunk the myth that exploring poetry means only deconstructing the use of language in the poem or only examining the poetic form and devices, it is primarily and initially about responding emotionally and personally to a poem and considering what it means or says to you individually.

Teaching Sessions:

Part 1: Initial Response and Performance

Session 1: Introducing the poet and the collection

The experience of being read to is likely to be the real foundation of children's knowledge of poetry, and is also going to be a major influence on how they write themselves. So it is important that it should be as rich, interesting and 'ear-catching' as it can be. It is important that voices other than the teacher's should be heard interpreting a poem. In this way, a range of accents, dialects and voices can be introduced into the reading. It can be particularly valuable for children to hear the poets themselves reading their own poems. This allows authentic voices to be heard.

- Read aloud the poem *The Poet* (p.16-17). Allow time for the children to talk about their initial responses. What were they thinking of as the poem was read? How did it make them feel?
- Re-read the poem and allow time for the children to discuss the poem more deeply, talking about what they like, any questions they have, words and phrases that they like or that are interesting to them. *What do you find out about the poet from reading this poem? How does she view writing? What does she like about it? How do you think it makes her feel?*
- Watch the video on Poetryline of Rachel Rooney talking about her writing: <https://clpe.org.uk/poetryline/interviews/rooney-rachel> (How I Write My Poems). *What else does this tell us about her?*
- Now look at the poem on the page. Divide the children into groups and give each group an enlarged copy of this poem. Have the children read it through, talk about the words and phrases that they find interesting.
- Discuss the illustration which accompanies the poem. *Does this affect your response? Does the illustration make you feel the same way as hearing the poem read aloud, or is it different? What do you think the illustrator might have been responding to in the verse?*
- Watch the video on Poetryline of Rachel Rooney reading aloud *The Poet*. <https://clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poets/rooney-rachel> *Does this add to your feelings and ideas about the poem or alter or add to our response?*
- Allow time for the children to think about and discuss what poetry is for and why we might write it. Note responses down on post-it notes to add to a working display. Discuss ideas and responses. Allow time to compare these with some of the reflections some other poets make on writing poetry on the Poetryline website (see: <https://clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poets-videos/poet-interviews>).
- At the end of the session share the cover and the title of the collection. *Based on the first poem shared and the book cover, what are their expectations of the collection? What might the collection be about? What themes might it encapsulate?*
- Share Chris Riddell's endpaper illustrations which portray 25 members of the class. *What do they remind you of? What do you notice? What might they tell you about the poems contained within this collection? How are these similar to or different from the cover illustration and/or the*

illustration which accompanied *The Poet*? (the other portraits that complete the class are included on the title page (p.5) and the page opposite Rachel Rooney's letter to the reader (p.8))

- End the session by reading aloud Rachel Rooney's *Dear Reader* (p.9). Consider this in relation to *The Poet* and to their thoughts about the collection overall. *Do they think that their whole persona could be encapsulated in one poem?* Before you share more from the book, they might reflect on what different aspects of their personality they think they might find across the wide variety of poems in this collection.

Session 2: Initial Response and Performance

Discussion forms the foundations for working with books. The same is true of working with poems. Children need frequent, regular and sustained opportunities to talk together about the books and poems that they are reading as a whole class. The more experience they have of talking together like this the better they get at making explicit the meaning that a text holds for them.

- Introduce the title of the next poem that we are going to read from the collection: *Daydreamer* (p.12-13).
- Create a class mind map or spider diagram around the label of the 'daydreamer'. What do they associate with the word? What does it remind them of? Is there anyone they know or are there characters in books or films who they would describe as daydreamers? What other words or phrases does it make them think of? How do you perceive daydreaming? What are the benefits of having time to daydream? You may want to share with the children Children's Laureate Lauren Child's views on the importance of children having time to daydream as explored in this interview with *The Guardian* to provoke discussions:
<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/sep/09/lauren-child-let-children-dawdle-and-dream>
 How or why might others perceive daydreaming as a negative thing? Based on the first session, what might they expect the poet to highlight or to focus on in this poem?
- Watch the video of Rachel Rooney reading *Daydreamer*.
<https://clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poets/rooney-rachel>
- Allow the children to discuss their responses to the poem in small groups and then as a whole class. *Did it reflect their expectations? Why/why not? What did it make them think? How did it make them feel? Why? What did you picture in your mind as you were listening – was it the daydreamer or one of their daydreams? Were there any phrases that stood out and helped you to create the picture in your mind?*
- Give out copies of the illustrated poem for them to read in more detail and annotate. As in the previous session allow time for them to respond to the language and the layout of the poem as well as Chris Riddell's illustrated response. *What do they notice? What words or phrases interest them the most? Are there any words or phrases that you are unsure about? How could you find out what they mean? What has the illustrator seen in the piece? What do you think he is responding to?*

- Still working in their groups, ask the children to think about how they could perform this poem for others to listen to. Will they split the poem into parts? Will there be parts that they will perform together? How will they use timbre, tempo and dynamics to create effects? Are there words and phrases that might be whispered or echoed or shouted or sung? Are there places where they might slow the reading down and others where it could be sped up?
- Give them time to annotate their copies of the poem ready to perform and then to rehearse. After sufficient rehearsal time, invite groups to share their performances. Consider any aspects of the poem that came through strongly in the different performances. *Were there some groups which particularly emphasised the rhythm of the poem, or the rhyme? Were their groups which captured a particular image or daydream from the poem? What impact did this have on you as a listener?*
- *What do you think the poem tells us about the child, the daydreamer? Did that view of the character come through in the performances?*
- *Having spent time reading and re-reading the poem aloud, is there anything else that they notice about the language, the form or the structure?* Children might talk about the rhythm, the rhyme, the assonance, or any recurring patterns that they have spotted. *How would they compare it to the first poem that was shared from the collection?*

Session 3: Performance and Movement

If poetry is not given a voice, if it just stays on the page as a printed object, then it is not going to come alive for most children. Giving voice and sound to poetry is an important key to unlocking the meanings and music contained in each poem. It is through performing poetry that the quality of rhyme and verse form, and the power of language can be explored and realised. Presenting poetry to an audience in this way might also lead children to recognise more clearly the humour in a poem or reflect more thoughtfully on its meaning.

- Share three further poems from the collection with the class: *Accident Prone* (p18), *Fidget* (p26) and *Talking Hands* (p62).
- In groups or as a whole class, allow children to start by responding to them as they have the previous two poems from the collection. *What did the poems make them think about? How did they make them feel? What words or phrases particularly interested them? Did they notice anything else on a first listen? Is there a poem that they prefer? Why?*
- Now guide the children's thinking toward poetry performance; *If they were going to choose one of these poems to perform which would they choose and why? How do they think it would be best performed; individually, in pairs or in a small or larger group? What might they do to help lift the poem from the page? What would bring a performance of the poem to life?* Recap some of the performance choices that were during the previous session – tone of voice, timbre, dynamics, tempo. *Are there any of these poems – or the others we have read so far – where the performance would be enhanced by movement from the performers?*
- Discuss as a class some of the benefits and drawbacks of incorporating movement into a performance. Too much movement or ill-considered actions can be distracting and detract from

the meaning of the poem; while carefully considered, well-chosen movement decisions can emphasise the meaning and support the audience in appreciating some of the nuances of language, imagery, theme and sense.

- Watch and then respond to the video of Rachel Rooney performing *Talking Hands* (<https://clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poets/rooney-rachel>)
- Ask children to decide which poem they would like to prepare a performance of. It might be one of the 3 poems introduced in this session or one of the poems from a previous session that they would like to return to and refine the performances already begun. Organise children into groups according to their preference. In addition to the aspects of performance that they were considering in the previous session, ask them to consider how well-chosen movements (including how the people in the group are positioned in the space) might enhance the meaning and emotional response that they are trying to communicate.
- Give time for the pupils to build up their poems, text marking with performance notes and ideas, practising, editing and polishing to a finished performance. Before the 13th June 2019, this could be filmed and submitted for the CLIPPA shadowing scheme competition to win the opportunity to perform this poem on stage as part of the award ceremony at the National Theatre, see: <https://clpe.org.uk/poetryline/clippa> There are also documents on this page with more detailed advice for a successful performance.
- Give time for the pupils to watch, reflect on and evaluate each other's performances. You might also share videos of other school groups who have submitted videos for the CLIPPA shadowing scheme in the past (see: <https://clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poet-videos/children-performing-poetry>). *How have they used movement and voice effectively to communicate to the audience?* Shadowing Scheme videos can be found here: <https://clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poet-videos/children-performing-poetry>

Session 4: Exploring Rhythm

Rhyme is the first poetic device that we become familiar with but it can be a tricky one to work with. Matching content to a rhyming pattern takes a lot of skill. A couplet is a pair of lines in a poem which have both the same rhythm (metre) and that rhyme. The lines can be independent sentences (closed form) or can run on from each other (open form).

- Introduce another poem from the collection: *Keepy-Uppy Kid* (p36-37). Hand out copies for children to read and discuss in pairs.
- *What do they notice? What do they like or dislike about the poem? What patterns do they notice?*
- *How does the way it is arranged on the page add meaning to the words?* Investigate the succinct use of words, the line breaks, the spacing between stanzas and within lines. *How do these elements feed your ideas about the poem?*
- *How does the arrangement of words, and the use of the bold typeface reflect the rhythmic bouncing of the ball? Does it give you any ideas about how you might perform it?*
- Give the children time in pairs or small groups to practise reading it aloud in different ways. You might take the children into the hall or an outdoor space so that they can incorporate throwing or

bouncing a ball in time to the rhythm of the poem (if you have a keepy-uppy kid in the class, they might try and get through the whole poem!). *How does the addition of the ball affect the tempo and rhythm of the overall performance?* Give time for the children to rehearse and perform their final interpretation of the poem to the class and reflect on the effectiveness of each performance on the audience watching.

- Give each group a selection of other poems that have a strong pulse or rhythm to explore. For each poem suggest that they read it aloud either individually or as a group. *Can they find the pulse or the beat of the poem? Does the pulse stay constant throughout the poem or are there places where the poet has made the decision to elongate or cut short a phrase? How do they respond to that?* They might find it useful to walk around as they read, allowing their feet to find the natural rhythm of the poem. Others may prefer to tap their fingers or feet to maintain the pulse.
- For this activity, you might use further poems from this collection such as *Drama Queen Award* (p.60) or *First* (p.10). Alternatively, use poems by a variety of poets from the Poetryline website, e.g.:
 - *The Lost Lost-Property Office* by Roger McGough <https://tinyurl.com/y4x9qwtD>
 - *Carnival Dance Lesson* by John Lyons <https://tinyurl.com/y4gbwvkv>
 - *The Rhythm of Life* by Michael Rosen <https://tinyurl.com/y4ynq2st>
 - *Cat Rap* by Grace Nichols <https://tinyurl.com/y62cqs43>
 - *What Turkey Doing?* by John Agard <https://tinyurl.com/y5t8wure>
 - *Look at the Train* by Kathy Henderson <https://tinyurl.com/y3ghn7fx>
- All of the links listed above also include videos of the poets performing their work which may be of interest to the children.

Part 2 – Deeper Response

Session 5: Poetry Papering and Performance

As poetry has developed it has become more page oriented. It is vital that children are given the opportunity to hear how poetry sounds different from narrative through regular exposure and to begin to make connections between the forms and devices that poets use and their impact on meaning.

- Explain that today they are going to explore some of the other poems in the collection and work up one of these to perform themselves.
- In preparation for this session, make copies of the following poems:
 - *Whizz Kid* (p20-21)
 - *As Shy As* (p24-25)
 - *Fidget* (p26-27)
 - *Tomboy* (p28-29)
 - *Cool* (p38-39)

- Copycat (p40-41)
 - Joker (p44-45)
 - Ravenous (p54-55)
 - Twins (p58-59)
 - Wordsmith (p64-65)
- Pin these poems up around the classroom or another space for the children to find and explore at their leisure. They can read, pass over, move on and then select one they'd like to talk about with someone else. This encourages the children to enjoy the experience of simply reading a poem, to relish the uncertainties of meanings and the nature of the knowledge and emotional responses that poems invoke in them as readers. Tell them to stand in front of the poem they most want to investigate more and allow groups to take the poem back to tables for further work.
 - Let them discuss their initial responses, why they selected this poem, how it made them feel, what they were particularly drawn to, personal connections they have with the poem, what it made them think about or questions it raised. *What is the picture they see in their minds as they read the poem? Is it the same as or different from others in the group?*
 - Now encourage the children to look more deeply at the poem, exploring the use of language. You can use this as an opportunity to introduce children to the names of specific forms or devices to look at what makes their chosen poem poetic. You might introduce this by way of what Michael Rosen calls 'secret strings' (*What is Poetry?* Walker 2016). He talks about the importance of discovering how the poet might have used assonance, alliteration, imagery, rhythm and sound. *Can they identify any of these in their chosen poem?*
 - Next, give time for the children to work up their chosen poem for performance. *Would it be best performed individually, in pairs or as a group? How will you pace the performance? How will you use your voice(s) to help share a clear picture of this moment? Will you use any movement or action? Will you emphasise the rhythm in the words?* Give time for the pupils to build up their poems, text marking with performance notes and ideas, practising, editing and polishing to a finished performance. Before the 13th June 2019, this could be another opportunity for groups to be filmed and submitted for the CLIPPA shadowing scheme competition to win the opportunity to perform this poem on stage as part of the award ceremony at the National Theatre, see: <https://clpe.org.uk/poetryline/clippa>
 - Give time for the pupils to watch, reflect on and evaluate each other's performances. *What impact did the individual performances have on you as a listener? What did each interpretation add to your understanding of the collection as a whole? Could you see a clear picture of the moment or the 'kid' in the class? Are there any common themes or ideas occurring across poems from the collection?*

Session 6: Visualisation

Developing children's response to poetry requires teachers to be innovative and creative themselves. Teachers need to model and encourage all forms of imaginative responses for pupils, allowing them to express ideas freely through a range of approaches, such as music, drama, dance and art.

- Briefly recap the children's thoughts about the collection so far.

- Use the whiteboard or a visualiser to revisit some of the poems that have already been shared during this sequence. *How do Chris Riddell's illustrations capture his response to the poem? Why do they think there are two illustrations for each poem? What might each represent?* For example, in *Daydreamer* both the poem and the larger blue illustration are thrilled to encapsulate all of the wild imaginings happening inside the boy's mind; in *Keepy-Uppy Kid*, the pressure of maintaining concentration and beating the record is depicted instead as a large monstrous creature.
- Explain that you are going to read aloud another poem from the collection – *Seeker* (p32-33). This time, as you read, you would like them to close their eyes and try to visualise what is being described in their mind's eye. It might not be literally what is described, but it might be an image that comes to mind because of an emotion or a memory – a personal response that you have.
- Hand out art materials – you may wish to give them some element of choice in what they use (watercolours, pastels, coloured pencils, ink, cartridge paper) – and explain that you are going to read the poem 2 or 3 more times and when they have a clear mental picture, maybe after another reading, you would like to draw what they picture in their mind as you are reading. Give sufficient time for children to complete their drawings, perhaps reading aloud the poem again, if necessary, while they are working.
- Once children have completed their art work, ask them to annotate around the edges any words or phrases that they might use to describe what they visualised – these might be words or phrases that they remember from the poem, or their own words inspired by their visualisation.
- Then, ask them to share their drawing with the person next to them, explaining what they were feeling or the imagery they were trying to capture in their art work. *What was it in the poem that helped you visualise it?*
- You may wish to conduct a gallery walk; allowing children time to walk around the room looking at all of the art work created by their peers and considering the similarities and differences amongst the range of work and why these might be.
- After discussing children's initial response and visualisation in relation to the poem, display the poem for children to read for themselves and allow time, either as a whole class or in small groups for children to explore the language and some of the poetic devices used. Starting by asking children which words or phrases or patterns of language they were drawn to, is a good way to start understanding the possibilities of playing and experimenting with poetic devices for their own writing. *What choices in language and layout has the poet made and what might they tell us? What are we starting to think about the life of the character described in the poem? What is important to her? What do we know and what more might we like to find out?*
- Some patterns or ideas that children may raise in their discussions include: the repetition of the verb 'seek' and what that means to them; the incorporation of different senses throughout the poem – the eyes looking forward and backward, the mouth seeking language, the echoes and the song; the concept of home being both a physical place that might be left behind but also an emotional connection that might be brought along; the simile extended into metaphor in the first line. *What does it mean to have eyes which brim with water? How is this connected in the poem to the water between continents and what that might represent?* You might discuss the deliberate

but nonstandard punctuation of some of the lines and how this adds ambiguity to the poem. *In the last stanza what 'echoes' and what 'skips'? Is she literally skipping or is her heart skipping?* In his illustration, Chris Riddell has portrayed the girl as literally skipping in the playground. *How might this affect the response of a reader?*

- *How did the poem make them feel? Do they feel it's a happy poem or a sad one, hopeful or hopeless?* If there are a wide range of responses, you might use a decision line to allow children to share their personal response and reasons for that.
- Capture children's responses to the poem and display on the Working Wall or add to your class journal.
- On the Poetryline website, watch the video of Rachel Rooney talking about and reading *Seeker*. <https://clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poets/rooney-rachel>

Part 3 – Form, Structure, Theme

Session 7: Exploring Poetic Form

It is important for children to be introduced to a range of forms, particularly those that are less technically demanding in rhyme and regular metre, but that can be used to shape experience of language and provide an extra stimulus for writing

- Read aloud the poem *Joe Bloggs* (p22-23). Allow time for the children to respond to this poem initially, discussing their likes and dislikes, what it makes them think of or feel, any personal connections they make with the poem and questions they have about it.
- *How did the poem sound when they heard it? Would they compare it to any of the other poems they have explored so far?*
- Share the poem on the page so that children can see how it is laid out and look at the language more closely. Read the poem aloud again while children follow it on the page. *What do they notice?* Compare the pulse and beat of the poem, the rhythm of each verse with the poems explored in Session 4.
- Encourage the children to work with a partner and play with the pulse of the poem. Give each group a paper copy to annotate. As they read the poem together, they may wish to walk around or tap out the rhythm as in previous sessions. *Does each line have the same rhythm? Does each line have the same pulse or beat? What do they notice about the sounds of the poem?* They are likely to recognise that it rhymes and you might demonstrate a strategy for recording the rhyme structure (in this case, each verse follows an AABB rhyme scheme).
- *How do they feel about rhyming poetry? Do they like or dislike it? Does it depend on how it is used? Do they like to write rhyming poetry? Why/why not?* Although rhyme is one of the first poetic devices that we become familiar with it can be a tricky poetic device to work with. Matching content to a rhyming pattern takes a lot of skill, especially – as in this case – when it is being used within a tightly controlled rhythmic pattern as well.

- As well as annotating their copy of the poem for rhythm and rhyme, children could also investigate some of the other 'secret strings'. *Are there any commonly occurring sounds that aren't rhymes – perhaps half rhymes, assonance or internal rhymes?* Assonance refers to words which share the same vowel sound whilst not necessarily rhyming, for example, in this poem the /UR/ (as in fur) phoneme occurs quite regularly: person, over, neither, average, nerd, joker, first, mediocre, September, remember. *Are there any other regularly repeated sounds? What is the impact of these? Is there a pattern as to where they fall within the structure of each line or stanza?* [Be aware that repeated sound patterns identified by the class may vary according to dialect or regional accent.]

For the teacher's information, the rhythmic structure of each line in this poem is an Iambic Tetrameter. The iamb is an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable – de dum de dum de dum de dum – and the tetrameter refers to the fact that this occurs four times for each line (sometimes referred to as having four feet). Shakespeare's verse is known for its use of Iambic Pentameter – unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable with 5 feet per line. The rhythm of the iamb, particularly uninterrupted can be quite lyrical or even conversational. There are a few places in the poem when the syllable count varies slightly but it is mostly a very regular 8 syllable count per line. For example:

| | | | | | | | | |
|-----|---------------|-------|--------------|------|-------------|-----|--------------|----------|
| | See | that | per- | son | o | ver | there | 7 |
| The | av (e) | rage | child | with | mou | sy | hair | 9 |
| The | boy | who's | nei | ther | tall | nor | short | 8 |
| Not | thin | or | fat | a | so | so | sort | 8 |

- Allow each group to feed back what they have noticed and annotated on their copy of the poem. *Why do they think that Rachel Rooney might have chosen this form? Does the form in which she has written the poem relate to the content or vice versa?* They might draw comparison between the child who is neither slow nor fast, neither first nor last but average and the metre of the poem which is very regular and structured. *Does the structure, the rhythm, the rhyme of the poem surprise you anywhere? Would the character of Joe Bloggs, as depicted in the poem, be equally predictable?*
- At the end of this session, you might compare the use of poetic form in Joe Bloggs with the way in which Rachel Rooney uses – and plays with – form in another poem: *Joker* (p44-45). She takes the form of the limerick which is highly structured and predictable in terms of its rhyme and rhythm and then breaks with that form for the final line – the 'punchline' of the limerick. Traditionally, limericks are five-line comic verse following the syllable pattern 8, 8, 6, 6, 8 with the rhyme scheme AABBA. *What is the impact of her breaking the rules here? Why might she have made that decision? What might it tell us about either the character of the 'joker' or the person telling us about him?* Perhaps the 'too long' last line might help us to sympathise with the poet's feelings about the joker's weak and long punchlines when he relates jokes in which the 'timing is wrong'.

- If the class are unfamiliar with the limerick form, you might help them to find examples in other collections such as Edward Lear: *The Complete Nonsense of Edward Lear* (Faber Children's Classics).

Session 8: Poetic Form

- Refer back to wider conversations about poetry that took place before the sequence started, including how they feel about poetry and their awareness and preference for different forms of poetry. *Do they have a preference for structured poetry or more of a free verse approach? Do they have different preference depending on whether they are writing or reading the poetry? Do they have a different preference depending on the subject matter or tone? What poetic forms are they familiar with?* For example, they may have previously read or written acrostic poetry, haiku, kennings, limericks or list poems, amongst others.
- As examples of how Rachel Rooney uses poetic form in this collection, share a range of poems which draw on different structures and patterns, including Kennings (*Fidget*), Haiku (*Her-Ku*), Conversation Poem (*Copycat*), List Poem (*The Questioner*) and Shakespearean Sonnet (*The Crush*).
- Give copies of the poems to each group and give them time to read and discuss their initial responses, annotating each poem with their initial thoughts: how it made them feel, what they were particularly drawn to, personal connections they have with the poem, what it made them think about or questions it raised.
- Then encourage the children to look more deeply at the poems, exploring the use of language and patterns. You can use this as an opportunity to introduce children to the names of specific forms or devices to look at what makes their chosen poem poetic. You might introduce this by way of what Michael Rosen calls 'secret strings' (*What is Poetry?* Walker 2016). He talks about the importance of discovering how the poet might have used assonance, alliteration, imagery, rhythm and sound. *Can they identify any of these in their chosen poem? What patterns can they see (they might consider line length, rhythm, syllabic beats, repetition, verse structure, and rhyme)?*
- *Why might these particular forms have been chosen for these subjects? Can a link be made between subject matter and form? Or tone and form?*
- Having explored some of these forms, discuss with the class whether they have a preference for any of the forms discussed, including the limerick discussed in the previous session. *Is there a form that they feel they would enjoy using in their own writing?* You might support children in finding further poems by a range of poets using that particular form. Some anthologies include indexes arranged by form and the Poetryline website includes explanations and examples of a wide variety of different poetic forms: <https://clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poetic-forms-and-devices>
- At this stage, if possible, hand out small notebooks to each child for them to use as their own poetry notebooks. Discuss the different ways in which authors might use a notebook to collect their thoughts or to capture an idea.
- Explain that children can use these to collect ideas, words, overheard phrases, favourite saying, rough drafts of poems, etc. Ask them to consider when and how they will use their notebooks.

- Allow time at the end of the session for children to begin using their journals, perhaps by experimenting with one or more of the forms discussed during the session. Ensure the focus here is on playing with language and ideas, drafting, reading aloud to hear rhythm and for peer response and redrafting. However, children may wish to return to these initial ideas and experiments with form later in the sequence to eventually refine and work up towards a finished piece.

Session 9: Free Verse

- Display and read aloud *The Artist* (from page 68-69). Start with the class' initial response and then move on to considering the poem in relation to the other poems in the collection that we have shared so far.
- *In what ways is The Artist different from and similar to the other poems we have shared?* The children may raise the title which is similar to some of the other titles in the collection, such as *The Poet*, *The Questioner*, *Joker*, etc. They might also draw out some of the ways in which rhyme is used. In terms of its differences, this is one of the few poems in the collection that does not follow a structure in terms of line length, rhyme structure or syllabic count/beats. If children haven't come across the form before, introduce them to the term 'Free Verse'.

Free Verse poems have no rhyming structure and often don't have a particular rhythm or syllable patterns; like their name suggests they are simply 'free'. Free verse, like abstract art, is where the definition of poetry becomes complicated. Reading free verse poetry and discussing with the children why it is a poem, what about where the lines break and the use of longer or shorter lines support meaning making in the poem can support children's understanding. It is very important that children have the opportunity to practise reading these poems aloud using the punctuation and the line breaks to support their reading. Free verse is by far the most common form that contemporary poetry is written in. Further examples of free verse poetry can be found on the Poetryline website: <https://clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poeticforms/free-verse>

- Discuss what makes free verse 'poetic' rather than a prose description: *what makes this a poem?*
- As in the previous session, in groups allow children time to look at the language and structure of the poem more closely, investigating and digging for any signs of those 'secret strings'. These poetic devices Michael Rosen lists as: assonance, alliteration, rhythm, repetition, imagery and opposites (*What is Poetry?* Walker 2016).
- After sufficient time to text mark and discuss, ask groups to feed back to the class what they have noticed. They might note the use of rhyme, half-rhyme and assonance (the same internal vowel sound) within many of the lines in the poem. For example, the repeated short /e/ sound in pens, red, wren and left in the second line. The rhymes within lines such as doodles and poodles in the first line, stick and brick in the 4th line and yeti with spaghetti in the 3rd line of the 2nd verse. They might also have annotated the alliteration such as 'black and blue' and 'squiggles a squid'. They

might notice that after lines of varying length throughout the poem, she finishes with two lines that have a strong, similar rhythm (seven syllables in each). Look at the range of synonyms for verbs related to drawing, being an artist: doodles, pens, chalks, inks, shapes, tattoos, squiggles, etc that Rachel Rooney incorporates into the poem.

- Draw together all of the language and poetic features that the children have noticed and consider the impact on the reader. *How do they affect our enjoyment of the poem; our reading of the poem; and our view of the character of the artist?*
- At the end of the session, give children time to experiment with free verse poetry and some of the secret strings. This poem was about 'the artist', could they draft ideas for a poem about the scientist, the historian, the geographer, the actor, the footballer, the gymnast, etc. Refer the class back to Rachel Rooney's opening letter *Dear Reader* (p.9) and the idea that we might see parts of ourselves in many of the poems. In that respect, we are less interested in writing about somebody we actually know, and instead we are drawing on elements of what we know, what we observe (in school, at home, in fictional worlds like books and films, etc.) and combining the characteristics and behaviours of different people to create a fiction, to create a character. Once they have selected the 'character' that they are interested in jotting down ideas and phrases about, they might start with a mind map or spider diagram simply putting down on paper as many words as possible to describe what they might do as part of that 'role' building up the language and terminology that could be drawn on later when writing the poem.

Session 10: Deeper Response

NOTE: *Some of the selected poems for this session explore themes and subject matter which will require a degree of emotional maturity and experience. Take the time to read these in advance to determine whether or not your pupils have the appropriate level of maturity and experience to engage.*

- Read aloud the poem *Friendship Bench* (from p30-31) and invite children to share their initial responses. *What do they like about the poem? What do they notice? How does it make them feel? Do they have any questions? Who do they think the poem is about: the narrator remembering the girl commemorated by the bench or the girl herself, or both?*
- Share the poem as it appears on the page, including Chris Riddell's accompanying illustration. *What else do we notice? Does this change our response? What else do they notice in the poem? Children may note the use of rhyme within each line as well as at the end of each line. Does that effect how the poem sounds when read aloud? What is the impact of the question which closes the poem? Did you reflect on potential answers to that question when it was first read aloud?*
- Watch Rachel Rooney's video of 'Advice to Young Poets' from the Poet Interviews section of the Poetryline website (<https://clpe.org.uk/content/rooney-rachel-1>)
- Share and discuss this quote from the interview: *"Don't forget to write from the heart. Write what you really feel and you really see. Don't write what you think other people want to hear, write what you believe in; even if that involves telling lies in order to get a truth across - which is often the way - or exaggerating... write what you believe in."*

- Discuss in what way they feel that Friendship Bench reflects writing ‘from the heart’, ‘what you really feel’, what you ‘really see’. *Why do they think she repeats her advice that you should ‘write what you believe in’?*
- Split the class into five groups and give each group a different poem to read, response and discuss: *Cool* (p38-39), *Don’t Walk, Run!* (p46-47), *Best Friender* (p52-53), *Tough Kid* (p56-57) and *Sticker* (p66-67). Create sufficient copies of each poem so that they can text mark and annotate their observations.
- Give the group time to read the poem aloud as well as look at it on the page, and then to work together to text mark and annotate for any language features, words or phrases that they notice or any poetic devices. *How do we feel about the child who is the subject of the poem? What questions do we have about the subject of this poem? Do our feelings change as we read or as we discuss? Why do we feel that way? What have we noticed in the poem that is influencing our feelings or our response?*
- As the groups are discussing their poem, draw their conversations back to the idea that Rachel Rooney discusses in her video – write about what ‘you really see’. *What do they think she is seeing in the child? What do you think she feels about him/her? What is she doing in her language choices that tell you that? Why do you think she might have included this poem in the collection?*
- Ask each group to prepare a short presentation in which they will share the poem with the rest of the class and then what they have noticed/annotated within the poem and why.
- After each group has fed back to the class, support them in looking at similarities and differences, comparing the 5 poems, their subjects and how they are portrayed.
- They might consider the impact of the line break before the last line of *Tough Kid*. *What is the impact of emphasising and isolating the last line of the poem like this? Does the way the subject is portrayed change at this point in the poem?* They might also consider the impact of having this last line ‘set up’ by the rhyming lines earlier in the poem; the rhymes getting gradually further apart as the poem progresses. *How does the first line set up the character? What is the impact of repeating tough at the start and end of the verse?* This could lead you to compare the use of these features (line breaks, rhyme, repetition and opening line choices) within the other poems selected. *What is the impact of the line break and the change of rhythm in both Cool and Best Friender?* Both of these also introduce the important characteristics in the first line. *Don’t Walk, Run!* does something similar with the first line and last line but without the line break. The structured list and repetition of phrases in *Sticker*, *Best Friender* and *Don’t Walk, Run!* could also be compared.
- Return to the quote from the interview. *How do they feel this is reflected across the poems they’ve looked at today? Which poem do they prefer? Why?*

Session 11: Collaborative Poetry

- Read aloud the poem *Tips for the New Boy* (p14-15) or share the video of Rachel Rooney reading aloud the poem from the Poetryline website: <https://clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poets/rooney-rachel>
- As previously, allow children time in groups and then as a whole class to respond to the poem: how it made them feel, what they were particularly drawn to, personal connections they have with the poem, what it made them think about or questions it raised.
- Hand out copies of the poem for children to reread independently and then allow them to look at the use of language and patterns in the poem – *what do they notice? What words or phrases did they enjoy? What 'secret strings' have they spotted?*
- If no one draws the comparison, suggest that this is another example of a list poem. *In what ways is it similar to and different from The Questioner (another list poem in this collection that we read in Session 8)? Will all list poems look the same? What would we expect from a poem in this form?*
- Read aloud and share other examples of list poems, from this collection and beyond. Other poems within this collection that have list elements include *Accident Prone*, *Whizz Kid*, *As Shy As*, *Best Friender*, *Drama Queen Award* and *Prefect*. A further selection of list poems by a wide range of poets can be found on Poetryline under the Poetic Forms and Devices tab: <https://clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poeticforms/list-poem>
- In groups of 4-6, ask children to jot down suggestions for ideas that might make potential subjects for other list poems.
- Ask each group to share their ideas with the class to create a class collection of ideas. Suggest that each group then select one idea from the collection to collaborate on.
- Within each group, children can work individually or in pairs to draft lines for their group poem, writing each line out on to separate strips of paper or card.
- Next, once each pair has completed two or three lines, they can share what they have composed with the group and then work together to discuss the most effective order for their list. They can also make small tweaks to each line, if necessary, to support the flow and rhythm of the poem. Encourage them to keep reading their poem aloud so that they can hear how it sounds as well as how it looks. They may also need to decide as a group whether their poems needs an additional line or verse to introduce the list or to conclude their poem. The title of a list poem is also very often invaluable in supporting understanding so they may wish to refine the title.
- Provide an opportunity for each group to share their work; either creating a finished copy of the poem for display or rehearsing a performance of the poem to share with the class.
- Allow time either at the end of the session or after the session for children to jot down any ideas they might have about potential poems (list form or otherwise) in their notebooks or poetry journals. They may also choose to continue to work up and refine ideas that they had started to develop in their collaborative work.

Part 4 – Writing Poetry

Session 12: Ideation

- Start a discussion with the children about what they like or don't like about writing. *What do they think is the hardest thing about being a writer?*
- Often, when people talk to writers about their work, one of the most commonly asked questions is where they get their ideas from? Ask children to talk in pairs or small groups to list as many places as they can think of where a person can get ideas to help their writing. After a couple of minutes, get children to report back and create a class list. *Where can we get ideas from?* Children might mention: things that we see/notice, something heard, memories, other books that we've read, a song that we heard, dreams, imagination, day-dreaming, playing, films, toys, family events, arguments, etc.
- Visit the Poet Interviews section of the Poetryline website – there are videos available with a range of poets, including Rachel Rooney, talking about how they go about writing their poetry, how they work on their poems, what inspires them as a poet and what advice they would give to aspiring poets. On the Poet Interviews page (<https://clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poets-videos/poet-interviews>) you can select interview videos according to the question on the left hand menu (such as 'What inspires you as a poet?' and 'How do you go about writing your poems?'). *After watching a few videos, have we got any other ideas for where ideas or inspiration can come from?* Add to the class list.
- Give them some time to either begin to write down ideas or to sit and think about what they might write later. Some children may choose to start by drawing, doodling or sketching ideas initially. Refer back to Chris Riddell's illustrations in the text. His drawings have been inspired by the words that Rachel Rooney has written, but drawings can often inspire the words too. They might start by jotting down favourite words or phrases. *Will they write down things that their friends say in the playground? Will they write down lists of words that they enjoy? Could they write down their craziest daydreams? Could they write down their earliest / silliest / scariest / happiest memories?*
- Let the children know that these books are only for them – there's not a particular amount of writing you expect them to do and you won't be marking them.
- Discuss the sort of subject matter they could choose to write about, exploring why it probably wouldn't be a good idea to write about an actual pupil in your class. Although Rachel Rooney may have been inspired by her own memories of school as well as the many pupils she has met working in schools, the poems are anonymised amalgamations of these memories combined with her own imaginings. Children could choose to write poems about an invented pupil, a school memory, what they imagine their mum or dad might have been like when they were at school, etc. Inspired by Rachel Rooney's poetry forms, language, patterning, rhythm and imagery, children could step away from the 'classroom' setting and write instead about family members, favourite figures from popular culture, family pets or personal memories.

- Remind them that they don't have to start writing a poem straight away, they might just begin by collecting words, phrases, ideas and images that can be used later. However, if they have an idea that they want to start exploring immediately in a poetic form that is also fine.

Session 13: Writing Own Poems, Gaining a Response

It is important to develop children as reflective writers by giving ample opportunity throughout the writing process to talk about themselves as writers, enable them to voice their views, listen to others and develop new knowledge and understanding.

Children's writing can be improved if they, a partner or their teacher reads it aloud at an early stage, giving it life and breath and helping the young poet see the patterns and tunes they have created. Just as an author would work with an editor, children should be given opportunities to help each other by reading their writing aloud and responding as readers. This allows them to support each other as they compose and structure their ideas. Writers can tell response partners what they are pleased with in their writing, particular devices or parts of the poem they may be struggling with and gaining a picture from the reader of how their writing impacts on them. Response partners should be encouraged to reflect on the impact of the poem on them as a reader. Children can then re-draft parts of their work, based on these conversations.

- Allow further time for children to select ideas and drafts of poems from their poetry journals or notebooks and to continue to work these up into poems that they are ready to share with a trusted response partner.
- Once the pupils have an initial draft or drafts, allow them to read aloud their poetry to a response partner to lift the words off the page, hearing how they sound when performed.
- Give time for response partners to ask the writers questions, discuss parts they aren't sure are working or make suggestions to improve the writing. For example, writers can tell response partners what they are pleased with in their writing, particular devices or parts of the poem they may be struggling with and gaining a picture from the reader of how their writing impacts on them.
- Response partners should be encouraged to reflect on the impact of the poem on them as a reader. Pupils can then re-draft parts of their work, based on these conversations.

Session 14: Editing and Publishing Own Poems

At the final stage of the writing process, it is important that children are given time to support each other with transcription proofreading, looking at spelling, punctuation and grammar and consider the quality of the writing as a whole, prior to publication.

- Give further time for children to redraft any parts of their poems that they discussed with their response partner in the previous session, or to work on their poems further if they need time to do this.
- When they have a poem that they have read aloud to a partner, discussed and explored changes so that they are happy to present to a wider audience, start to think about how that poem could

be best presented. *How will it look on the page? What form will it take? How will you use line breaks, spacing on the page to enhance the meaning or emotions behind your poem? Will you hand write it? Will you publish using ICT? What script or font will you choose? Will you make any specific decisions about the way certain words look or are placed on the page? Will you illustrate the poem? If so, how will the words and illustration sit and work together?*

- Allow plenty of time and space for the children to make a final draft and then publish their work accordingly.
- When they are happy with the way their poems look on the page, think about how this could be lifted off the page and be performed to an audience. Give each child a photocopy of their finished poem and allow them to mark this up with performance ideas. *Will you perform on your own? Do you need others to support you? How will you use voice, body movements and facial expression to enhance the listener's engagement and understanding?*
- Ensure time is given to try out ideas and rehearse performances of children's own poems.

Session 15: Reflecting on the Collection

- Revisit the poems that have been explored throughout the sequence. To draw together all the work done in this unit, hold a discussion about the collection as a whole. *What are your most memorable poems? Why? What have you learnt about poetry that you didn't know before? Would you be encouraged to read more poetry after studying this collection? Why? Why not?*
- Revisit Rachel Rooney's introduction to the collection – her letter to the reader (p.9). *Do they agree with her thoughts? Do they see aspects of themselves across several of the poems? Which ones? Allow time for some personal reflection with the option to share their thoughts if they would like to.*
- Discuss how they might categorise the collection overall. There are funny poems and sad poems, serious and silly poems, thoughtful and thought-provoking; some follow the structure of poetic form, others are free verse, some rhyme and some do not. *Do they have a preference for a certain type of poem in the collection?*
- *What do they think about the point of view that each poem is written from? Who is writing or narrating the poem? Very few of the poems are written from the point of view of the subject of the poem - did they feel they were viewing the pupil from the point of view of the other pupils in the class, from the teacher's viewpoint or something else? Why do they think so few of them feature the child writing about themselves? What difference might that make to how they felt about the poems?*
- Spend some time now reflecting on the poems that the children have written. *What kinds of poems were your favourite to write? What did you find it easiest to write about?*
- Following this, you might hold a poetry festival for children to do readings from their collections to parents or other classes in the school or display their work as part of an exhibition, including the published poems and accompanying illustrations. For the children performing at the event, ask them to consider what they learnt from listening to the poems being read aloud and performed by

other poets as well as trying out ideas in their performances of Rachel Rooney's poems that they will need to remember when reading their own poems.

- Display the children's own poems prominently in the library or a shared area so they can be read by a wider audience.