

**Booked by Kwame Alexander (Andersen Press)**

In this free verse novel, written in the voice of a twelve year old soccer-loving boy, African American author Kwame Alexander weaves an emotive narrative through poetry and wordplay. Readers are drawn into the hopes and disappointments of the main character and like him, discover the power of poetry and delight in words along the way. An exciting range of poetic forms is explored, enhancing enjoyment of the story.

This collection was shortlisted for the 2017 CLPE Poetry Award.

**Overall aims of this teaching sequence.**

- To develop the skills of reader response through the use of book talk, close reading and critical reflective study of a selection of poems
- To respond to, interpret and deepen appreciation of poetry by using art and drama
- To explore the language and style of poetry through talk, performance, reading and writing
- To learn how to bring out the meaning of a poem through performance

**This teaching sequence is designed for a Year 6 or Year 7 class.**

**Note to schools and teachers:**

This moving verse novel does not shy away from exploring sensitive subject matter, mature content or provocative language. It will be important for teachers to read the whole novel before introducing it to children in order to decide how best to mediate the content. Understanding would need to be shown when introducing the book to a class in which a child may have experienced divorce or separation; although the book could provide a safe and supportive context through which children may be able to express their feelings.

**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. The book is a wonderful example of self-expression, both emotionally and in terms of expressing a sense of identity. Sessions are therefore designed to explore personal response and expression and to help children understand the different ways in which they can respond to poetry. This sequence provides the opportunity to critically reflect upon and respond to the ways in which language is used to express, convey, represent, symbolise and signify pertinent points, themes and messages. Reader response and the use of book talk therefore forms an integral part of a number of the sessions detailed in this sequence. The sequence is designed so that the children’s experience of this novel, 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**

- Booktalk
- Role on the Wall
- Exploring and collecting words
- Reading Aloud
- Performance
- Visualisation

**Outcomes**

- Blackout poetry
- Free verse poetry
- Collaborative poetry
- Poetry performance

**Exploring Poetic Devices**

- Acrostic
- Blackout
- Free verse
- Haiku
- Blackjack (three-line poems with seven syllables in each line for a total of twenty-one syllables p.112)
- Epistolary
- Couplet
- Tercet

- Quatrain
- Borrowed (poems that allude to previous poems or famous works p.268)
- List

#### Cross Curricular Links:

##### Music:

- Throughout the sequence children can explore the beat and rhythm of poetry linking this to their existing knowledge of music. The sequence offers opportunity for improvisation and to compose music for a poetry performance. The children could also look at the musical styles rap, soul and hip hop as part of the teaching sequence.

##### PSHE

- Many of the issues and themes contained in the poems will provide an excellent stimulus for group discussions in PSHE sessions that will allow for the children to explore and extend discussions around issues brought out in the poems.

#### Links to other texts:

- *The Crossover* by Kwame Alexander (Andersen Press)
- *Love that Dog* by Sharon Creech (Bloomsbury)
- *Hate that Cat* by Sharon Creech (Bloomsbury)
- *The Weight of Water* by Sarah Crossan (Bloomsbury)

#### Teacher Resources:

- *Let's Do Poetry in Primary Schools!* (Teacher's Guide) by James Carter (Bloomsbury)
- *Hands on Poetry* edited by Sue Ellis with Myra Barrs. (CLPE)
- <https://www.clpe.org.uk/aboutus/news/poetry-primary-schools-what-we-know-works>

#### Online resources and supporting information:

- <https://www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poetic-forms-and-devices>
- <https://www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline/themes/sport>
- <https://www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline/themes/family>
- <http://kwamealexander.com/>

## Teaching Sessions

### Session 1: Booktalk

#### Focus Poem: *Gameplay* (p1)

*Discussion about books 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.*

- Before this session, ensure that individual poetry journals (small notebooks, which could be handmade) are available for each child.
- Create a focus display or poetry corner, where you can display a photograph of the poet, information about him and other poetry collections and verse novels that the children know or could be inspired by.
- Read aloud the poem 'Gameplay' to the class. Give time for the children to share their initial responses to the text. *What do you think the poem is about? How does the poem make you feel? What makes you feel like this? Why do you think the poet has chosen to write about this event?*
- Now read the poem aloud to the children again and ask them to think about the poem again. *What words or phrases has the poet used that make an impact on you as a reader; that help create atmosphere or evoke emotion? Reflect on the way in which the poem mirrors the energy and movement of a football game.*

- Now give the children a copy of the poem as it is laid out on the page and allow them to read it for themselves, ask the children what they notice. *Can they work out the word spells Soccer?* Clarify the meaning of this for those who may not have heard this word before. *What pictures form in their minds as they read? What is it in the poem that makes them visualise this?* Allow them to text mark and annotate the poem, if this is helpful.
- Read aloud the next 6 poems, up to and including the poem 'Mom'. You may wish to use the following 'Tell Me' Grid to record the children's responses to these poems. You could then add this to an ongoing working wall or poetry display, which the children can continue to add to as the sequence continues.

<p><b>Likes</b></p> <p><i>Do you like it because of:</i></p> <p><i>The humour, subject of the poem and how it reminds you of something that happened to you or someone else or another poem, story or a TV film?</i></p> <p><i>The words that are used, the rhyme, the rhythm, the shape of the poem?</i></p> <p><i>The characters in the poem or the character writing the poem?</i></p> <p><i>The message and meaning of the poem?</i></p> <p><i>The way the poem makes you feel?</i></p> <p><i>The images the poem makes you see?</i></p> <p><i>Any figurative language that is used?</i></p> <p><i>The tone of the poem?</i></p>	<p><b>Dislikes</b></p> <p><i>As with 'likes' but disliking these aspects instead.</i></p>
<p><b>Puzzles</b></p> <p><i>The meaning of the poem, a line or a word. The reason the poet wrote the poem. Who the poet was/ is? Why the poet used a particular word?</i></p>	<p><b>Patterns</b></p> <p><i>Are there repetitions of words, lines or stanzas? Which words rhyme? Are there patterns of line length? Is the poem written in a way that makes a shape on the page?</i></p>

- At this point you may want to explore the form of the book and the concept of a verse novel, especially if this is not a style the children have read before. Ask the children what they notice about the way the book is written and how it differs from the narratives and novels they may be more familiar with. *How is the text arranged on the page? What do they notice about the amount of white space? How much information are you given about each event?*
- The author and poet Sarah Crossan describes the verse novel as snapshots or moments and impressions of someone's life. Ask the children if they would agree with this and to consider what moments the reader is given insight into, in the life of the central character Nick.
- You may want to share Sarah Crossan speaking about the verse novel with the children, this video can be found here: <https://www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poet-interviews/thinking-about-types-collection-verse-novels-0>
- Hear Kwame Alexander discuss the difference between poetry and prose here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bMU6HWYbdvE&index=6&list=PLr-pRmuKcD37nTRq0fK2HDQiuKplAm8lr>
- Divide the class into 7 small groups and assign each group one of the poems they have looked at so far.
- Explain to the children that in this session they are going to prepare an unpolished performance of the poems.
- Discuss with the children the different aspects of poetry performance that enhance the experience for an audience such as tone of voice, intonation, volume, facial expression and gesture.
- Give time for the children to mark up a copy of the text in their groups, rehearse and perform to the class. Perform them in the order of the book so that the children also experience the sense of the narrative as they hear the poems performed aloud.
- Once the children have heard the poems performed, ask them to consider the difference this made in their understanding of the poetry and their personal response to it.

**Before next session read aloud until 'The Letter'.**

## Session 2: Exploring and collecting words and Role on the Wall

### Focus Poems: *Why couldn't your dad* (p4) and *In the elementary school spelling bee* (p5)

*One of the most basic pleasures of poetry is the pleasure of playing with words and language and using all the elements of language to the full, so that the shapes and sounds and rhythms of words are enjoyed as well as their meaning.*

- Return to the focus poems suggested and use these to begin to explore one of the themes of the novel, words and language play.
- In the poem '*Why couldn't your dad*', the reader is first introduced to the dictionary used in the book. The dictionary both gives a standard definition of the word, but also gives the reader an insight into Nick's feelings at the time.
- The children could dedicate a section of the working wall to collecting examples of vocabulary used in this dictionary. Allow the children to try and put the words into sentences and to play with the language in the way Nick does. The children may also want to add any new words they discover as part of reading this novel to their ongoing dictionary.
- Explore the title of the novel with the children and the multiple meanings they can attribute to it, reflecting on the wordplay the author has highlighted from the very opening of the novel.
- This novel also explores word origins and etymology, for example Mrs Quattlebaum's name on page 131.
- The book therefore also offers an opportunity to explore the way in which the English language has evolved. At this point you may want to discuss with the children why so many English words have different influences and consider our history as an island.

Supporting resources can be found here:

- [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/interactive/timelines/language\\_timeline/index\\_embed.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/interactive/timelines/language_timeline/index_embed.shtml)
- <http://www.bl.uk/learning/langlit/changlang/across/language/timeline.html>
- The book also offers opportunity to compare American English and U.K. English, for example the use of the name *Soccer* instead of *Football*. When children come across a word they do not use or that is less common in the U.K. in the book, they can look up the definitions and find synonyms that they use. This would also be a good opportunity to ask anyone in the class if they know of any other words used in other countries that speak English, which are not as common here. As an example, words used in Australia or the Caribbean.
- The children can examine the way English has evolved in the countries Great Britain colonised in the past, and also how the language has evolved here. Reiterate how language has evolved over time and will keep evolving.
- In addition to introducing new vocabulary, in having fun with words and wordplay the book also introduces malapropisms to the reader and explores these throughout the text. A malapropism is a humorous misuse of a word.
- You may want to discuss these and challenge the children to identify examples of them in the novel. Examples are featured throughout the book, beginning with the poem '*Busted*' on page 17. You may also want to add these to the working wall.
- Some children may know of their own examples and may know of characters that use them frequently. There are several examples in the plays of Shakespeare, for example Constable Dogberry in *Much Ado About Nothing*: "Our watch, sir, have indeed comprehended two auspicious persons" (apprehended two suspicious persons). A character in popular culture who often uses them that children may be familiar with, is Del Boy in *Only Fools and Horses*. The following have been attributed to the former president of the United States, George Bush: "It will take time to restore chaos and order," "The law I sign today directs new funds... to the task of collecting vital intelligence... on weapons of mass production" and "They have miscalculated me as a leader."
- Re-read '*In the elementary school spelling bee*' and consider the feelings Nick reveals in this poem.
- Ask the children to explore the reasons why Nick hates words and why he compares his father's 'pursuit of excellence' with a prison sentence.

- Again there is wordplay in this poem that the children can examine, this also contradicts what Nick reveals about his feelings about words. Ask the children to consider if he really does hate words or if actually he enjoys playing with language, but in a different way from the way his father expects. Reflect on the performance the children gave of this poem in the previous session - *how did Nick's emotions impact on the performance of this poem?*
- Begin a 'Role on the Wall' for the central characters in the book.
- Draw around one of the children or have a prepared template cut out, pin this to the learning wall.
- Ask the children to write on post-it notes words or phrases they would use to describe Nick's feelings and personality, which can be stuck on the inside of the outline and what the children know about his outward appearance or facts and other information about him to be stuck on the outside.
- Repeat this for his parents and Coby. Later in the book you can also complete a Role on the Wall for April, Ms. Hardwick and Mr. MacDonald.
- Continue to return to the Roles on the Wall as you read the story, adding information in different colours so that you can track the emotional journey the characters take as the story progresses and how a reader's perceptions of a character can alter as a story progresses.

**Before the next session read up to 'The beautiful game'**

### Session 3: Reading aloud and Performance

#### Focus Poems: The beautiful game (P12) The thing about daydreaming (p15) and Busted (p17)

*One of the best ways of involving children in poetry is to make a habit of reading aloud to them as often as possible. The experience of being read to is likely to be the real foundation of their knowledge of poetry, and is also going to be a major influence on how they write themselves. Poetry is rooted in word games, wordplay, song and rhythm, and it's therefore particularly important that it should be heard as well as read.*

- Place the children into mixed ability groups and give each group copies of the following poems: 'The beautiful game' (P12), 'The thing about daydreaming' (p15) and 'Busted' (p17)
  - Allow plenty of time for the children to read and discuss the poems. Building on the way in which you explored the initial poems in the first session, you may want to use these prompts to support their discussion:
    - Read with the eye: look at the poem laid out on the page. Look at a poem as you would a painting, a photograph, a sculpture. What *does* it look like?
    - Read with the ears: read aloud poems that appeal – hear their 'music', their sound.
    - Responding to what is unique: read a poem at least twice – finds its heart, an idea, a feeling.
- Benton and Benton (1999)**
- Ask the children to feed back in their groups their responses to the poems; which ones they like best and why, words or phrases they like or that add meaning or feeling, questions they have around the poems and connections with shared or real life experiences.
  - Ask the children to consider the different ways in which the content of the poem has shaped the author's choice of form. As an example, in the novel conversations are often couplets or tercets whereas text messages are often haikus. Continue to explore this as you read the novel.
  - Hear Kwame Alexander reflect on his choices of form here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DiF03ELKt9Y&list=PLr-pRmuKcD37nTRq0fK2HDQiuKplAm8lr&index=4>
  - Explain to the children that in this session they are going to prepare a performance of the poems. Recap with the children the different aspects of poetry performance that enhance the experience for an audience such as tone of voice, intonation, volume, facial expression and gesture.
  - Divide up the three poems and give time for the children to mark up a copy of the text in their groups, rehearse and perform to the class.
  - Evaluate the performances together looking at specific performance techniques that brought the poem alive and added effect and meaning to the poem. Again, compare and contrast the style of each poem and how this shaped the performance the children made.

**Before the next session read aloud up to 'When you walk inside'**

#### **Session 4: Performance**

##### **Focus Poems: Welcome to the Dragonfly Café (p43) Hey, DJ, Drop That Beat (p45) and Skip Macdonald (p46)**

*Dramatic poetry performance can be a fruitful way of working with poetry, both in terms of encouraging and eliciting responses from children to the poems they read, and also in providing opportunities for poems to be lifted 'off the page' and brought to life.*

- Read aloud the three focus poems.
- Hand out copies of the poems and use the 'Tell Me' framework to support thinking and elicit responses from the children. Focus on the dragonfly box, *what do they think this could refer to? What could be in the box? What could the significance of dragonflies be?* Return to this again as they are mentioned throughout the book, and consider the meaning or symbolism of the insect.
- Create a Role on the Wall for Mr. MacDonald, comparing Nick's relationship with him to the other adults in the novel for example, how does he feel about him in comparison to his father or Ms. Hardwick?
  
- Return to the poem 'Hey, DJ, Drop That Beat' and allow the children the chance to read it aloud in small groups. Discuss the rhythm, rhyme and the patterns of language.
- Ask the children to read it aloud again, encouraging the children to move or beat to the repeated rhythm, listening out for emphasised words or joining in with the predictable words.
- Display the text of the poem on IWB or visualiser, this time reading it aloud to the children, perhaps more slowly, so they can join in, emphasising the repeated rhythmic structure.
- Repeat through shared reading, allowing the children to enjoy being able to recite parts, or all, of the poem by heart, engaging them in the rhythm and rhyme.
- Ask the children to begin to recognise the pulse in the poem and to keep a steady pulse whilst listening to the poem. Then ask the children to keep a steady pulse whilst reciting the poem.
- After this, ask the children to notice the difference in the rhythm of the poem (syllabic beat). Can they now beat this out while reciting the poem?
- To support a performance of this poem, share with the children a video of Kwame Alexander performing his poetry alongside a child beat boxing: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oyc74I8Str4>
- Ask children to work on reciting the poem by heart in small groups, organising themselves anyway they like, e.g. in unison throughout or each taking a verse. They may also want to use beat boxing or an accompanying beat, for example using an App such as Garage Band.
- Support children with an enlarged copy of the poem with visual prompts if appropriate. Ask the children to choose movement and actions that they think would enhance their performance.
- At the end of the session confident groups can perform to the class. Compare performance styles and consider how music could accompany or enhance the performances.

Introduce the poetry journals to the children at this point as a place to draw, write and store all their new ideas throughout this unit. Following the lesson, the children may want to write their own poems, raps and lyrics based on the ideas explored in this session.

**Before the next session read up to 'Class ends'**

#### **Session 5: Writing Poetry**

##### **Focus Poem: Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (p51)**

*After listening to poetry, children may want to write their own poems. These, too, can be recorded with music or sound effects, and be kept together with a class anthology.*

**Teacher Guidance:** This poem features the word 'orgie' which has both an original definition and modern definition. You



may want to provide the children with the original definition: Ancient Greek religious rituals, especially in the worship of Demeter or Dionysus, characterised in later times by wild dancing, singing, and drinking. However, teachers should be aware children may know the modern definition and this may prompt discussion.

- This is the first instance of blackout poetry in the novel. Ask the children to consider the form and if they are unfamiliar with this type of poetry ask the children if they can work out how Nick has created the poem.
- At this point you may want to give the children the opportunity to create their own blackout poems.
- This is a good opportunity to recycle old books that may be too damaged to keep in the school library or book corners or to recycle books that are out of date and no longer appropriate to keep in modern classrooms.
- When you have a selection of old books, allow the children to explore the books and to choose a page or several pages that they can use to create their poetry. Alternatively, photocopy a range of pages from books the children know well.
- First, the children can scan the pages to find a word with particular significance or that stands out to them, this may be a word with emotional resonance or it may be a word that they like the sound of or look of.
- Once the children have a key word they can then return to the page and highlight any other words that feel pertinent or linked.
- Following this, the children can work out in what way they can shape the poem, keeping the words chosen as highlighted and covering the rest of the words in coloured pen.
- Once the children have created their own poems, allow them the opportunity to share them with each other, perform them and display them on the working wall for others to read.

This poem is one of the many intertextual links made in the novel and you may want to create a book display in your classroom of the books referenced in the novel, so that the children can explore these alongside their reading of the book. (Teachers are advised to read these before sharing with the children to ensure they are appropriate for the age and stage they teach.)

### Session 6: Booktalk

#### Focus Poems: No Heads-Up (p57) and Thought (p59)

*Discussion about books 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.*

- Read aloud from 'Usually at dinner' page 53 until 'For the rest of the week' page 61. Return to the Role on the Wall created for the three characters, Nick and his parents, and add to these based on what the children have heard.
- Return to the poems 'No Heads-Up' and 'Thought' and hand out copies of these to the children, asking the children to work in mixed ability pairs.
- Allow plenty of time for the children to read and discuss the poems. Again, you may want to use these prompts to support their discussion:
  - Read with the eye: look at the poem laid out on the page. Look at a poem as you would a painting, a photograph, a sculpture. What *does* it look like?
  - Read with the ears: read aloud poems that appeal – hear their 'music', their sound.
  - Responding to what is unique: read a poem at least twice – finds its heart, an idea, a feeling.
- Ask the children to reflect on the imagery in the poems, reflecting on what this reveals to us about Nick's emotional state.
- Spend time considering the poem 'Thought' and the way in which the brevity of the poem creates so much impact.
- Ask the children to work in pairs or if confident as individuals to create a performance of the poem 'Thought'.
- Reflect on how this will differ from the performance created for 'Hey, DJ, Drop That Beat'. The following performances would support the preparation of 'Thought' due to their emotional content and performance style

of the poet:

- <https://www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poems/all-night>
- <https://www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poems/keeping-wicket>
- Share the children's performances and reflect on the different performance styles and the impact both have on an audience.

*Following this lesson, you may want to continue to explore the theme of divorce and separation in additional PSHE lessons.*

**Before the next session read up to 'Problemo'**

### Session 7: Writing Poetry

#### Focus Poems: Playing Soccer (p64) Game two (p65) No problemo (p66) and Problemo (P67)

*After listening to poetry, children may want to write their own poems. These, too, can be recorded with music or sound effects, and be kept together with a class anthology.*

- Re-read the focus poems and have copies of the printed poems. Look again at the poems to consider the ways in which they have been written. You can use the following questions to frame the children's discussion:
  - *What type of poem is it?*
  - *Can you recognise the form of the poem? How is it laid out?*
  - *How does the poem sound to you?*
  - *What does the language of the poem do?*
  - *Do you like any particular words or phrases? Why?*
  - *Does it have rhythm? How does it feel?*
  - *Whose is the voice of the poem?*
  - *What is the theme of the poem?*
  - *What does the poem say to you as a reader?*
  - *Would you like to write a poem like this?*

Questions taken from James Carter's *Let's Do Poetry in Primary Schools!* (Bloomsbury)

- Consider with the children how the different forms used in the novel allow the book to vary in pace for example, considering how 'Thought' is very different from 'Gameplay'.
- Move on to considering the way in which these focus poems specifically reflect the pace of the football game. At this point you may want to share with the children an example of another poem written by Kwame Alexander, 'Dribbling' but this time focused on the sport basketball. (Appendix 1)
- Ask the children to compare and contrast the poems, again considering how the nature of the game is reflected in the use of language, the structure and the way the words are arranged on the page.
- Give the children the opportunity to watch some examples of people playing football, supporting resources can be found here: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/pe/video/football/>
- You may also want to show the children examples of professional footballers, both male and female, in action.
- Following this, ask the children to collect vocabulary to describe the movement and energy of a football game and ask each child to write a word, phrase or sentence on a strip of paper to describe football.
- As a group, organise the strips to create a verse of a poem; refining and making decisions based on how the words and phrases impact on the reader when they are read aloud.
- Following this, read the poem aloud and compare and contrast this poem with the poetry they have explored in the session. Can they make any alterations to their poem to improve it, for example, *could they change the form or the way in which it is organised on the page? Could they make some words stand out? Can they change the direction of a word or phrase?*
- Allow each child to write their own version, using the free verse as a starting point.
- Following this, allow the children to spend time refining, re-drafting and editing their work.
- The children could then record their poems adding music or they could illustrate them.



**Before the next session read up to 'Conversation with The Mac'**

**Session 8: Visualisation**

**Focus Poems: The Way a Door Closes (p75) and Conversation with The Mac (p79)**

*Asking children to picture or visualise a character or a place from a story or poem is a powerful way of encouraging them to move into a fictional world. Children can be asked to picture the scene in their mind's eye or walk round it in their imaginations. Finally, they can bring it to life by describing it in words or recreating it in drawing or painting.*

- Re-read 'The Way a Door Closes' and consider the poem on the page as well as how it sounds read aloud. Return to the 'Tell Me' grid to guide the children's discussions and reflections. Add to the Role on the Wall for Nick and consider his feelings at this moment in the text.
- Read aloud 'Conversation with The Mac'. Give the children time to respond to what they have heard.
- Ask the children to work in pairs to prepare a performance of this poem, reflecting on the fact that it is a dialogue and how they might use body language, gesture and intonation to show the relationship between the two characters.
- Share some examples around the class and again consider the difference in performance style of this poem and how the form has to some extent, led the performance.
- Re-read the poem again, but this time ask the children to close their eyes and invite them to try to visualise the dragonfly box and its contents. Ask the children what pictures or images they see when they visualise the dragonfly box.
- Give the children pieces of paper and appropriate and available art materials, pastels would work well for this activity. Then ask the children to sketch the box and the contents that they pictured as you were reading aloud. You could read the poem again several times while the children draw their pictures.
- Give the children time to share their work with one another and to compare and contrast their images. Invite children to comment on what is similar and what is different about what they have illustrated and why they think this is.

**Before the next session read up to 'Stand Up'**

**Session 9: Booktalk**

**Focus Poems: Stand up (p103) Back to Life (P105)**

*Discussion about books 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.*

**Teacher Guidance:** In the focus poems the characters become involved in a verbal and physical fight. This involves name calling, mild swearing and racist insults. The term 'BLasian' is used in the poem 'Back to Life' which means half-black/half-Asian. This is used in a derogatory sense in the poem but is a term that has been appropriated by some people in this community as a positive term. The following sessions will allow you to explore these themes sensitively.

- Give out copies of the focus poems to the class and read aloud each one in turn, pausing after each poem has been read aloud to allow the children to comment, ask questions and to respond to the themes and issues raised.
- Following the reading of 'Stand Up' ask the children to reflect on moments in their own lives where they have been faced with a bully, or a person speaking to them in a way they did not want.
- Ask them to consider Nick's imaginary response; *have they ever re-lived a moment like this and replayed the event again and again, imagining what they should have said or could have said? What do they think his actual reaction will be in comparison to his imagined reaction?*
- Move onto reading aloud 'Back to Life'. Allow the children to comment, ask questions and to respond to the themes and issues raised.
- Ask the children to consider the title, *what does this refer to? Do any of the children know the song the title also*

*refers to?* Back to Life (However do you want me) by Soul II Soul.

- Share the lyrics of the song with the children and consider what relevance they have to this moment in the book. (Appendix two)
- Consider both Nick's relationship with Coby and with April in this moment and in what way this is reflected in the lyrics. *Whose voice or which voices do the children think could be reflected in the lyrics?*
- Prepare a performance of both the poem 'Back to Life' and the lyrics of the song.
- Divide the class into groups to reflect the characters featured; Nick, April, Coby, Don and Dean as well as some onlookers.
- Get the groups to organise the performance using the poem to guide the parts they will be saying, you may want to divide the lyrics up between the groups as suggested (Appendix 3) or you could let the children choose whose voice they think is best suited to the different lyrics.
- Let the children decide if they want to perform the poem first and then the lyrics, or if they want to perform them simultaneously, or staggered.
- Allow plenty of time for the rehearsal of the performance and then allow the children the opportunity to perform. A real audience such as a parallel year group or a school assembly would give this real purpose.
- After the performance, reflect on the themes and issues raised. You can further explore these by dramatically performing the two poems 'Stand Up' and 'Back to Life' in the school hall, ideally when it is set up for lunch with children taking on the roles of the main characters and the other bystanders to step inside this part of the story and increase their understanding of the story and empathy with the characters and their situations.
- Return to the Role on the Wall for Nick and Coby and reflect on their friendship at this point in the story.

### Session 10: Booktalk

#### Focus Poems: Do-Over (p107) and The day after (p109)

*Discussion about books 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.*

**Teacher Guidance:** This session contains reflections on racism. It is important that prior to this session, teachers are aware of any children in the class who may have experienced racism or who may have suffered bullying of any kind, as this may be a sensitive topic. Use PSHE sessions to explore fully the issues around this subject, alongside the focus poems, which are a good springboard for beginning discussions.

- Read aloud 'Do-Over'. Give time for the children to share their initial responses to the text. *How does the poem make you feel? What makes you feel like this? Consider Nick's reaction to the fight and how his relationship with Coby and April must have been affected.*
- Now read the poem aloud to the children again and ask them to think about the poem again. *What words or phrases has the poet used that make an impact on you as a reader; that help create atmosphere or evoke emotion?*
- Now give the children a copy of the poem as it is laid out on the page and allow them to read it for themselves, ask the children what they notice. Reflect on the fact that the poem is one long question, *how does this reflect Nick's emotions and thoughts at this point? Is this similar to an experience that they have had? What does it feel like when you re-live a moment over and over again? When you regret your actions? When you feel guilty about the way you reacted?*
- Consider the focus poem 'The day after' and Nick's apparent indifference to the teacher's response to the incident in the canteen. *Why does he seem almost bored by their reaction? Do you think he is really bored or is he hiding his true emotions? Could this link to his regret at his reaction to the fight? Who was it that was on the receiving end of the racist insults? Why do you think Nick has seen Martin Luther's speech so many times? What does this tell us about his parents' values and beliefs?*
- Listen to the speech referenced in the poem: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p04xggn9> and discuss the speech with the children using some of the following prompts:

- What is the purpose of this speech?
- How does it make you feel and why?
- In what ways has he considered his audience?
- What do you think makes it a good speech?
- How does he use his words?
- How does the order of what is said have an effect?
- How does he use his voice?
- How does he use his body language?
- Divide the speech into equal sections and provide each section to a group of children. Encourage the children to read their section of the transcript and text mark the parts of the speech that in their view are most powerful or effective.
- Upon completion invite the groups to feedback what they highlighted and comment on why those words, phrases or sections were appealing. A transcript of the speech can be found here:  
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/3170387.stm>
- Following this, watch a poem performed by Kwame Alexander, 'The Undefeated', in response to the institutional racism that has occurred and is still occurring in the United States today:  
<http://kwamealexander.com/>
- Consider how his poem is similar and in what ways it differs from Martin Luther King's speech:
  - What is the purpose of each performance?
  - How do they make you feel and why?
  - In what ways have they both considered their audience?
  - What do you think makes it an effective and compelling performance?
  - How does Kwame Alexander use his words?
  - How does the order or repetition of what is said have an effect?
  - How does Kwame Alexander use his voice?
  - How does he use his body language?
- Following this you may want to spend time exploring contemporary civil rights movements across the world which are challenging racism at both an individual and state level, for example looking at the 'blacklivesmatter' movement.
- After this session, children may want to return to their poetry journals to write about the issues discussed and to reflect on their own personal experiences, this may include reactions to racism, sexism, homophobia, bullying and name calling.

**Before the next session read on until 'The only thing'**

### **Session 11: Booktalk and Collaborative Poetry**

*Creating poems collaboratively provides opportunities for children to discuss the effect of the words that they are choosing and using in their poetry. Encourage the children to discuss the words, explaining to each other why they were chosen and the effect they have. Consider and reflect on the poetic devices present and why they were used by the author.*

- Re-read a selection of poems in the books that are conversations between different characters. For example, the poems on page 36, 43, 62, 68, 79, 87, 93, 128 and 130.
- Ask the children to work in pairs, reading these aloud, re-reading them and performing them to reflect the characters having the conversation and the tone of the dialogue.
- Ask the children to consider what is revealed to us about the different relationships Nick has with each character from these conversations.
- Ask the children to take one of the poems and to re-cast the conversations from different characters' points of view. For example, in 'Put. The. Phone. Away, Nicholas' we experience this moment from Nick's point of view, *but what would it have felt like from his father's point of view? What would Nick's behaviour look like?*
- Similarly, in the conversations Nick has with April she is rather dotting on him – ask the children to consider if she is really like this or if this is his interpretation? *How might the same conversation appear from her point of view?*

- Allow the children time to explore the poem through talk and discussion and then ask them to commit the new conversation to paper.
- Give the children the chance to swap their poems with another pair and to read aloud and perform their new conversations, *how has the dynamic shifted now if from another character's perspective?*

**Before the next session read on until 'You miss'**

### Session 12: Performance

#### Focus Poems: 1 on 1 (p146) and You Miss (p157)

*Dramatic poetry performance can be a fruitful way of working with poetry, both in terms of encouraging and eliciting responses from children to the poems they read, and also in providing opportunities for poems to be lifted 'off the page' and brought to life.*

- Ask the children to work in small groups to prepare a performance of both the focus poems.
- Allow the children time to explore the poems first, using the discussion prompts used previously.
- Following this, allow the children time to consider how the theme, ideas and content of the poems will shape the performances they create. For example, ask *how does '1 on 1' differ in tone and style from 'You miss'? What side of Nick do we see in the first poem and what side of him do we see in the second? How are his emotions different? How can you reflect this in the performance?*
- To prepare the children for this and to support their performances you may want to show them performances by different poets which reflect a difference in performance style. Examples can be found on the Poetryline website: <https://www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poets>
- Once the children have prepared their performances, allow them to share these, reflecting on the difference in performance for each poem and the impact this has on the audience.

**Before the next session read aloud until 'Booked'**

### Session 13: Poetry Jigsaws

#### Focus Poems: Booked (p189) and Only (p200)

*One way to support children with their understanding of rhythmic or rhyming patterns in poetry is creating poetry jigsaws. Choose poems with a strong rhyme scheme, pattern or narrative. You can photocopy the poem or it may be better to type it up with more line spacing and print a copy. Laminate and cut into strips (for example choosing to segment into verses or perhaps pairs of lines) to make a poetry 'jigsaw' enabling children to use the pattern or rhyme to make the poem whole.*

- Pre-prepare the poem 'Booked' and the poem 'Only' by laminating them and cutting them up into sections.
- Place the children in mixed ability pairs or small groups and give out the cut up poems to the children. Ask the children to work together to decide how they think the poems were organised originally or how they think the sections or lines best fit together.
- Give the children time to put the poems back together, discussing as they are doing so what they notice about both the content and form.
- As the poems are put back together and the meaning revealed the children should slowly appreciate the impact of what has happened to Nick and the emotional consequences of the fact he is injured/sick and cannot compete in the tournament he was so desperate to be a part of.
- Once the children have made the poems complete again, share their suggestions and compare and contrast the ways in which the different groups have organised the poems.
- Reveal the original poems and compare them with the children's ideas.
- After this, return to the significance of the events that are revealed through these poems. Consider what has happened to Nick and return to his Role on the Wall to consider his emotional journey in the novel so far.
- Reveal to the children that the next poem is called 'The End'. Ask the children to write their own poem, in role as Nick and in response to the recent events using this title as a stimulus.

- Allow the children to use the form and style they think best suits the mood or emotion they are trying to convey as well as what they have learned through the considerations of Kwame Alexander's choices. For example, *if they are writing a conversation what form might they use? How might this differ if they decide to write a stream of consciousness?*
- Share the children's finished poems and contrast the different styles and forms they have adopted.

**Before the next session read aloud until 'He Sounds'**

#### **Session 14: Performance**

##### **Focus Poem: He sounds (p230)**

*Dramatic poetry performance can be a fruitful way of working with poetry, both in terms of encouraging and eliciting responses from children to the poems they read, and also in providing opportunities for poems to be lifted 'off the page' and brought to life.*

- Read aloud the poem 'He sounds' and consider the way in which The Mac is presented throughout the book.
- Consider his style as a performer and rap artist and ask the children to consider how this influences the way the poems about him are written and also how they are then read aloud and performed.
- You may want to use this as an opportunity to explore the links between music and poetry and specifically spoken word, slam poetry and rap battles.

Supporting resources can be found on the following websites:

- <http://www.scottishbooktrust.com/learning/learning-resources/resource/poetry-slam-resources>
- <http://www.applesandsnakes.org/page/84/Ali+Frisko+Dan/216>
- <http://www.scottishbooktrust.com/blog/teachers-librarians/2015/08/8-brilliant-slam-poetry-performances-on-youtube>
- <http://www.scottishbooktrust.com/video/authors-live/poetry-slam>

Some particularly effective examples are Kate Tempest performing *Icarus* on the Scottish Booktrust website and Disraeli performing at the Scottish Booktrust poetry slam (see video 17.08 minutes).

- Ask the children to consider the way in which the poems considered spoken word or that feature in poetry slams are performed; *how are they similar to or different from the performances that the children have prepared so far in this sequence? Does this style of performance appeal to them? Why? Why not?*
- Return to the poems in which Nick is on the football pitch or talking about football and often 'trash talking' or bragging about his own abilities. For example, pages 1, 34, 176, 179, 180 and 185.
- Consider the way in which the language and structure of the poems are similar to the poems in the poetry slams or rap battles which feature braggadocio and put-downs and that are also a test of skills in wordplay, imagery, rhyme and rhythm.
- Give the children the opportunity to have a go at performing some of the poetry featured in the book in this style, looking at the ways in which the spoken word artists and poets performing in a poetry slam craft their performance.
- The children might also want to write their own poems for performance.
- You may want to use this as an opportunity to organise a poetry slam for the whole school to take part in.

Supporting resources can be found here:

[http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/assets/0001/6013/Write\\_On\\_poetry\\_slam\\_toolkit\\_v2.pdf](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/assets/0001/6013/Write_On_poetry_slam_toolkit_v2.pdf)

**Before the next session read aloud until 'Blue Moon River'**

#### **Session 15: BookTalk**

##### **Focus Poems: Inside the bag Is, Get This, FREEDOM (p303) and Freedom (p313)**

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- Read aloud until the end of the book.
- Discuss children's responses to the ending of the novel. *What did they like or dislike? What puzzled them? What connections can they make to the text?*
- Return to the focus poems and consider particularly the poem 'Inside the bag Is, Get This, FREEDOM'
- Ask the children to think about what might be in the box. Nick describes the contents as 'freedom'. Ask the children to talk to each other about what freedom means to them and what they think it could mean to Nick.
- Discuss as a whole class what the contents of the box could be and allow them to come to their own interpretation.
- To draw together all the work done in this unit, then hold a discussion about the collection as a whole. Asking:
  - *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 novel? Why? Why not?*
  - *What did you think about the verse novel?*
  - *How does this compare with narrative novels? Which do you prefer? Why?*
  - *If you were to write a letter to the author, what would you say about the novel?*
  - *What lingering questions would you ask him?* (You could get children to write these up and send some to the poet or email questions to him.)
- This may be a good opportunity to introduce the children to other verse novels and books with similar themes such as *The Crossover* by Kwame Alexander (Andersen Press), *Love that Dog* by Sharon Creech (Bloomsbury), *Hate that Cat* by Sharon Creech (Bloomsbury), *The Weight of Water* by Sarah Crossan (Bloomsbury) and *Home of the Brave* by Katherine Applegate (Square Fish). (Teachers are advised to read these before sharing with the children to ensure they are appropriate for the age and stage they teach.)

#### Appendix one:



## Dribbling

At the top of the key, I'm

MOVING & GROOVING,

POPPing and ROCKING—

Why you BUMPING?

Why you LOCKING?

Man, take this THUMPING.

Be careful though,

'cause now I'm CRUNKing

*Criis* CROSSING

FLOSSING

flipping

and my dipping will leave you

S

L

I

P

P

I

N

G on the floor, while I

SWOOP in

to the *finish* with a *fierce finger* roll . . .

Straight in the hole:

Swooooooooooooosh.

3

### Appendix two:

**Back to Life (However do you want me) by Soul II Soul**

Back to life, back to reality,  
back to life, back to reality,  
back to life, back to reality,  
back to the here and now yeah

Show me how, decide what you want from me,  
tell me maybe I could be there for you.

However do you want me,  
however do you need me.

How, however do you want me,  
however do you need me.

However do you want me,  
however do you need me.

How, however do you want me,  
however do you need me.

Back to life, back to the present time,  
back from a fantasy.

Yeah Tell me now, take the initiative,  
I'll leave it in your hands until you're ready.

Oh however do you want me,  
however do you need me.

How, however do you want me,  
however do you need me.

However do you want me,  
however do you need me.

How, however do you want me,  
however do you need me.

However do you need me.

However do you need me.

However do you need me.

I live at the top of the block,  
no more room for trouble or fuss.  
Need a change, a positive change,  
look, look it's me writing on the wall.

However do you want me,  
however do you need me.

How, however do you want me,  
however do you need me.

However do you want me,  
however do you need me.

How, however do you want me,  
however do you need me.

Back to life back to the day we have  
Let's end this foolish game  
Hear me out don't let me waste away  
Make up your mind so I know where I stand

However do you want me,  
however do you need me.

How, however do you want me,  
however do you need me.

However do you want me,  
however do you need me.

How, however do you want me,

however do you need me.

### Appendix three:

#### Coby:

Back to life, back to reality,  
back to life, back to reality,  
back to life, back to reality,  
back to the here and now yeah  
Show me how, decide what you want from me,  
tell me maybe I could be there for you.

#### Choral:

However do you want me,  
however do you need me.  
How, however do you want me,  
however do you need me.  
However do you want me,  
however do you need me.  
How, however do you want me,  
however do you need me.

#### April:

Back to life, back to the present time,  
back from a fantasy.  
Yeah Tell me now, take the initiative,  
I'll leave it in your hands until you're ready.

#### Choral:

Oh however do you want me,  
however do you need me.  
How, however do you want me,  
however do you need me.  
However do you want me,  
however do you need me.  
How, however do you want me,  
however do you need me.  
However do you need me.  
However do you need me.  
However do you need me.  
However do you need me.  
However do you need me.

#### Nick:

I live at the top of the block,  
no more room for trouble or fuss.  
Need a change, a positive change,  
look, look it's me writing on the wall.

#### Choral:

However do you want me,  
however do you need me.  
How, however do you want me,  
however do you need me.  
However do you want me,  
however do you need me.

How, however do you want me,  
however do you need me.

**Coby:**

Back to life back to the day we have  
Let's end this foolish game  
Hear me out don't let me waste away  
Make up your mind so I know where I stand

**Choral:**

However do you want me,  
however do you need me.  
How, however do you want me,  
however do you need me.  
However do you want me,  
however do you need me.  
How, however do you want me,  
however do you need me.