

# POETRY IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

What we know works

Centre for Literacy in Primary Education

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in Primary Education

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# POETRY IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

## What works?

The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education is an independent UK charity with a global reputation for the quality of our work.

Our work raises the achievement of children by helping schools to teach literacy more effectively through our high quality, trusted teacher professional development and our classroom based research. We particularly emphasise the importance of books and literature in enabling children to become confident, happy and enthusiastic readers and writers, with all the benefits this brings.

**CLPE is a National Centre for Poetry in Primary Schools.** We have an extensive collection of poetry for children at our centre and the importance of poetry is central to all our professional development. We also host the **Poetryline** website which is a free site containing an extensive range of resources to help teachers teach poetry in primary schools. Teachers can access 250 films of well known poets reading and talking about their work, teaching sequences for poetry books throughout the primary age range and examples of practice from primary schools. Nearly 12,000 people use Poetryline each week.

We are also proud to run **CLIPPA – the Centre for Literacy in Primary Poetry Award**. This is the only award for published children's poetry in the UK. Each year publishers submit their children's poetry books and a panel of expert judges selects a shortlist and the winner.



Visit Poetryline at [www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline](http://www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline)  
Find out more about CLIPPA at [www.clpe.org.uk/CLIPPA](http://www.clpe.org.uk/CLIPPA)

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In 2015, for the first time we held a schools shadowing competition alongside CLiPPA. More than 1500 children from 50 schools across the country took part using the teaching resources we created for the shortlisted books to bring poetry to life in the classroom. Winning shadowing school groups performed poetry live on stage at the National Theatre at a Poetry Show where the winner was announced.

Our work with teachers, children and poets over the last forty years has given us a wealth of knowledge and understanding about teaching poetry in primary schools. In our work across the country, we see again and again what an important branch of literature poetry is. Poetry provides the gateway for so many young readers and writers in their journey towards becoming literate; delighting, supporting and engaging children as they build a love of literature.

This paper is the second in our 'what we know works' series and brings together ten things teachers have told us need to be considered and developed in schools that are successful to encourage a lifelong love of literacy learning. We hope that you find it useful.

**Louise Johns-Shepherd, Chief Executive, CLPE**

*To download the first paper in this series 'Reading for Pleasure – What we know works' visit [www.clpe.org.uk/resources](http://www.clpe.org.uk/resources)*

**For more information about CLPE visit [www.clpe.org.uk](http://www.clpe.org.uk)**

**For more information about Poetryline visit [www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline](http://www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline)**

**For more information about CLiPPA visit [www.clpe.org.uk/CLiPPA](http://www.clpe.org.uk/CLiPPA)**



# 1 Developing a poetry friendly classroom and school that inspires, excites and enthuses children and celebrates the value of poetry and language

Creating a poetry friendly school means developing an environment and an ethos where children have the opportunity to listen to, share, hear and see a range of poems in a range of circumstances. Exposing children to poetry regularly in formal and informal ways helps them to develop an appreciation of many kinds of writers and forms. Enjoying, reading and hearing public poetry regularly develops a shared culture and an acceptance that poetry is important.

“ Making a classroom 'poetry-friendly' can mean any of the following: reading poetry out loud to children as entertainment... making a poetry box, a poetry corner, a poetry shelf; encouraging children to choose their own poems to read and request; enabling the children to read [and record] favourite poems, to act them out, to make poem-posters, to make their own anthologies, to make music, dance and mime triggered by poems ”  
Michael Rosen, *A Year with Poetry*

**Learn more:** .....

Power of Reading (see examples of classroom practice)

**[clpe.org.uk/powerofreading](http://clpe.org.uk/powerofreading)**

Core Books Online

**[clpe.org.uk/corebooks](http://clpe.org.uk/corebooks)**

Poetryline

**[clpe.org.uk/poetryline](http://clpe.org.uk/poetryline)**



**poetryline**

## 2 Providing many and varied opportunities to lift poems from the page and bring them to life

Children need opportunities to read poetry aloud, perform, dramatise, join in and hear poets perform their own work. 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. The best way to help children to become comfortable with poetry is to make sure they hear poetry as often as possible from as wide a range of books and anthologies as possible and from as many different voices as possible. Poetry is rooted in word games, wordplay, song and rhythm, and it's particularly important that it should be heard as well as read.

“ The children were really enthusiastic about writing and poetry. They shared what they had learnt with their friends and read poems from the books given to them to the whole class – and wrote their own poems ”  
Teacher, CLPE CPD

**Learn more:** .....

Poetryline (see children's performance films)

**[clpe.org.uk/poetryline](http://clpe.org.uk/poetryline)**

The Role of Rhyme and Song in Early Phonological Development  
with Steve Grocott

**[clpe.org.uk/rhymeandsong](http://clpe.org.uk/rhymeandsong)**

Developing the Role of English Subject Leader

**[clpe.org.uk/ESL](http://clpe.org.uk/ESL)**



poetryline

### 3 Encouraging talk about and connecting to children's personal experience

Children need the permission and opportunities to share and write about themselves, their feelings and important events using poetic forms. Personal experiences and memories can provide a powerful stimulus for children's own poetry writing. Episodes from family life and childhood are often particularly rich and vivid sources of experience which can be recalled and explored. Through poetry writing children are encouraged to reflect on their experience, to recreate it, shape it, and make sense of it. In a poem it is possible to give form and significance to a particular event or feeling and to communicate this to the reader or to the listener.

*"... sometimes when you think about something, you write it down and forget about other things."*

**Learn more:** .....

Teaching Sequences on **Poetryline**  
[clpe.org.uk/poetryline](http://clpe.org.uk/poetryline)

Meeting the Needs of Children with EAL  
[clpe.org.uk/EAL](http://clpe.org.uk/EAL)

Power of Reading  
[clpe.org.uk/POR](http://clpe.org.uk/POR)

*" I feel good because I can express my feelings, all kinds.  
Children participating in CLPE poetry workshop*

*" Writing poetry is a very personal activity. Poets often turn to writing a poem when they experience a strong emotion and have the need to express it. The reading of other people's poetry can also give comfort or a sense that you are not alone in how you are feeling.  
Rachel Rooney, Writing Tips in The Guardian*



# 4 Developing teachers' knowledge, confidence and expertise in their own poetry repertoire and about the teaching of poetry

Teachers often feel that they lack the confidence to teach poetry, particularly the writing of poetry. Generally they tend to stick to the modelling of poetic form and an expectation that children will then produce something similar. Through reading, talking, and playing with ideas for making poems and working with poets, poetry can be seen as a more accessible medium. Teachers who feel more confident understand the value of teaching poetry and its impact on learning in all aspects of literacy.

“ I have more confidence and ideas for freeing up writing and feel more confident to reduce the structure provided  
Teacher, CLPE CPD ”

“ I am more confident to be more creative in how I introduce poetry and I will think about child ownership, where we write, what we write with and what we write on, collaborative working and writing in role  
Teacher, CLPE CPD ”

Learn more: .....

Developing the Role of English Subject Leader

[clpe.org.uk/ESL](http://clpe.org.uk/ESL)

Let's Write! Cross Curricular Approaches for Creative Writing with James Carter

[clpe.org.uk/creativewriting](http://clpe.org.uk/creativewriting)

Core Books

[clpe.org.uk/corebooks](http://clpe.org.uk/corebooks)

Raising Achievement in Writing

[clpe.co.uk/RAW](http://clpe.co.uk/RAW)



# 5 Building poetry into every aspect of the curriculum and not limiting the study or writing of poetry to the literacy curriculum

Many of the cross-curricular themes and topics that act as a focus for learning and teaching in the primary classroom are capable of being illustrated through poetry. Poems offer a special way of thinking. They can be a reflective and a succinct way to get a point or information across, remember facts, present a viewpoint or argument or as an end product to show what you know about a topic.

“ Poetry taken out of context, away from the library, away from the English lesson, in chemistry, in art or in music can be delightful to a child  
Roger McGough, Poet. 'How to inspire children to read and write poetry' film on Poetryline ”

“ It's nice if you can 'slip poetry in' so that it is part of the everyday vocabulary of the day  
Rachel Rooney, Poet. 'Advice for teachers' film on Poetryline ”

Learn more: .....

Planning Creatively Around Texts KS1 and KS2

[clpe.org.uk/planningks1](http://clpe.org.uk/planningks1)

[clpe.org.uk/planningks2](http://clpe.org.uk/planningks2)

Let's Write! Cross Curricular Approaches for Creative Writing with James Carter

[clpe.org.uk/creativewriting](http://clpe.org.uk/creativewriting)

Poetryline

[clpe.org.uk/poetryline](http://clpe.org.uk/poetryline)



poetryline

## 6 Knowing about and being confident to write and read poetry in a range of models

Children need support to understand that there are many forms, shapes and sizes of poetry and it doesn't always need to rhyme! Poetic form is often a big obstacle to children who are beginning to write poetry. This is because most people's ideas of what a poem ought to look like are based on traditional poetry, on its regular verse forms and strict rhyme schemes. Teachers can support by helping children to recognise the importance of pattern in poetry and introduce children to a variety of poetic forms that can be used to shape experience and can provide an extra stimulus for writing.

“ *Understanding the music of language is something that we can instill and support children to understand and love* ”  
Teacher, CLPE CPD

“ *We have had an amazing two weeks, exploring and using some of the poems as models for the children's own writing* ”  
CLIPPA 2015 shadowing scheme teacher

**Learn more:** .....

Inspiring Writers KS1 and KS2  
[clpe.org.uk/writingks1](http://clpe.org.uk/writingks1)  
[clpe.org.uk/writingks2](http://clpe.org.uk/writingks2)

Raising Achievement in Writing  
[clpe.org.uk/RAW](http://clpe.org.uk/RAW)



# 7 Appreciating that poetry study supports reading, phonics and language development throughout the primary school age range

One of the most basic pleasures of poetry is the pleasure of wordplay and the opportunity for playing games with language so that the shapes, sounds, and rhythms of words are enjoyed as well as their meaning. Poetry is many children's route into reading. Its rhythms and patterns introduce children to a range of reading skills. Children naturally pick up rhymes and rhythms, they want to join in, they enjoy the experience – and a rich experience of hearing and learning poems is a fantastic way of learning how language works.

“ Poetry and song are fundamentally important reading contexts, feeding into children's interest in wordplay and helping to focus their attention both on the sounds of language and on patterns of letters ”  
CLPE, Whole to Part Phonics

**Learn more:** .....

The Role of Rhyme and Song in Early Phonological Development  
with Steve Grocott

[clpe.org.uk/rhymeandsong](http://clpe.org.uk/rhymeandsong)

Phonics in a Rich Reading Curriculum

[clpe.org.uk/phonics](http://clpe.org.uk/phonics)

Gaps in Phonics

[clpe.org.uk/gapsphonics](http://clpe.org.uk/gapsphonics)



poetryline

## 8 Working with professional poets so that children can understand the process of poetry creation, performance and presentation

In our work we have found how important it is for children to hear from, to work with or to watch professional poets. Seeing a poet bring their own work to life and beginning to understand what that means in terms of the creation of poetry helps them to see themselves as writers. Teachers too have benefited from working alongside poets as they have found their teaching is improved by understanding the creative process.

“ It was really lovely to work so closely with the poet and so nice for the children because it closes the gap between us and them (the poets). I have enjoyed the relaxed approach that John has – allowing a lot more freedom and creativity in the children. There’s more interest in other children’s work and where they get ideas from – bouncing off each other and John’s energy ”  
Teacher on John Hegley workshop, CLPE

**Learn more:** .....

Power of Reading Plus  
**[clpe.org.uk/porplus](http://clpe.org.uk/porplus)**

Poetryline  
**[clpe.org.uk/poetryline](http://clpe.org.uk/poetryline)**

Let’s Write! Cross Curricular Approaches for Creative Writing  
with James Carter  
**[clpe.org.uk/creativewriting](http://clpe.org.uk/creativewriting)**



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# 9 Understanding the importance of art, drama, music and dance to support and enhance children's poetry writing and develop responses

Poetry is a literary form which has a great deal in common with drama and other creative arts. It is a natural progression to perform a poem and to add to performances using rhythmic or musical accompaniment to the words or dance. Planning for children to respond creatively to a poem, through dance, drama music or art will help children to deepen their sense of the poem and make an imagined world more real. Similarly, teachers can successfully use these creative forms as a stimulus to children's own writing.

**Learn more:** .....

Inspiring Writers KS1 and KS2

[clpe.org.uk/writingks1](http://clpe.org.uk/writingks1)

[clpe.org.uk/writingks2](http://clpe.org.uk/writingks2)

Power of Reading

[clpe.org.uk/POR](http://clpe.org.uk/POR)

Power of Reading Plus

[clpe.org.uk/porplus](http://clpe.org.uk/porplus)

Power of Reading in the Early Years

[clpe.org.uk/porey](http://clpe.org.uk/porey)

“ I found that incorporating art and drawing into the literacy and extended writing sessions was really effective because the children all became really gripped on developing their characters and sparked so much interest and enthusiasm ”  
Teacher, CLPE CPD



# 10 Giving children's own poetry an audience using a variety of forms

Publishing children's own poetry widens the readership and makes their work more permanent and attractive – giving it a higher status. Children enjoy making their own books and children's work can be brought together in class anthologies. Dramatic performances or recitals – either live or filmed, recordings of poems or animations of poems all provide children with the opportunity to reach a wider audience and provide a sense of purpose for their writing.

“ Today was life-changing for my Young Poet. He told me exactly what he will buy with his future £1000 winner's cheque. Shadowing school teacher at CLIPPA 2015 Poetry Award ”

“ It was good to have a goal; we decided we were going to make a book with the children and it's good to have something to work towards. It really helped us all. The children were very excited about that; they said 'do we get one each?' ”  
John Hegley, Poet, Children's Writing Workshop at CLPE

Learn more: .....

Get Writing! Book making with Paul Johnson  
[clpe.org.uk/bookmaking](http://clpe.org.uk/bookmaking)

Submit a poem and see children's performances on Poetryline  
[clpe.org.uk/poetryline](http://clpe.org.uk/poetryline)



poetryline

# WHAT WE KNOW WORKS

1. **Developing a poetry friendly classroom and school that inspires, excites and enthuses children and celebrates the value of poetry and language.**
2. **Providing many and varied opportunities to lift poems from the page and bring them to life – reading poetry aloud, performing, dramatising, joining in and hearing poets perform their own work.**
3. **Encouraging talk about and connecting to children’s personal experience, giving children permission and opportunities to share and write about themselves, their feelings and important events using poetic forms.**
4. **Developing teachers’ knowledge, confidence and expertise in their own poetry repertoire and about the teaching of poetry.**
5. **Building poetry into every aspect of the curriculum and not limiting the study or writing of poetry to the literacy curriculum.**
6. **Knowing about and being confident to write and read poetry in a range of models. Understanding that there are many forms, shapes and sizes of poetry and it doesn’t always have to rhyme!**
7. **Appreciating that poetry study supports reading, phonics and language development throughout the primary school age range.**
8. **Working with professional poets so that children can understand the process of poetry creation, performance and presentation.**
9. **Understanding the importance of art, drama, music and dance to support and enhance children’s poetry writing and develop responses.**
10. **Giving children’s own poetry an audience using a variety of forms.**





## Poetry Award

# The Shadowing Scheme

Get involved in the CLiPPA Shadowing Scheme 2016 and we will support you and your class with poets' performance films, poets' writing tips and teaching sequences. Your class will be motivated to write their own poetry inspired by the shortlist. They may even win a chance to attend the CLiPPA Poetry Award 2016 where they will perform poetry, meet the shortlisted poets and hear the announcement of the winner.



Don't want to miss out? Register your interest at [poetry@clpe.org.uk](mailto:poetry@clpe.org.uk)

Visit [clpe.org.uk/CLiPPA](http://clpe.org.uk/CLiPPA) to find out about the Schools Shadowing Scheme in 2015

Visit Poetryline for inspiration and support for teaching poetry [clpe.org.uk/poetryline](http://clpe.org.uk/poetryline)



## References

Sue Ellis and Myra Barrs (1995) *Hands on Poetry* London: CLPE

Myra Barrs and Michael Rosen (1997) *A Year with Poetry* London: CLPE

Poetryline: [clpe.org.uk/poetryline](http://clpe.org.uk/poetryline)

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[www.walcotfoundation.org.uk](http://www.walcotfoundation.org.uk)

## Keep in touch



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