

POETRY IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

What we know works

Centre for Literacy in Primary Education



CENTRE FOR LITERACY
IN PRIMARY EDUCATION



Poetry in Primary Schools

What works?

CLPE is the National Poetry Centre for 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 programmes, because we believe it is central to literacy learning and development. We also host a wide range of free resources on our website, including videos of poets and teaching plans to help teachers teach poetry in primary schools.

We are also proud to run the 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.

Our Schools Shadowing Scheme runs alongside the CLiPPA. More than 6000 children from 200 schools across the country take part each year. They use the free teaching resources we create for the shortlisted books to bring poetry to life in the classroom.

Our work with teachers, children and poets over the last fifty years has given us a wealth of knowledge and understanding about teaching poetry in primary schools and what an important and transformative branch of literature it 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. It is a crucial genre for teaching the fundamentals of literacy: understanding language and vocabulary; reading fluency; a broad range of reading comprehension skills, such as the ability to infer, deduce and empathise; expanding the range and breadth of children's reading; pupil's ability to respond to texts and their phonics/decoding ability.

In 2023, CLPE partnered with Macmillan Children's Books (MCB) to work together on a new initiative, The Big Amazing Poetry Project. The project celebrated 30 years of MCB's award-winning poetry list for children and CLPE's 50 year legacy of work and research as the National Poetry Centre for Primary Schools. The project started with a survey to gain a fuller picture of the place of poetry in primary schools and a research project, involving 30 schools, which aimed to support them to embed poetry fully into classrooms and also in children's choices when reading for pleasure.

We have combined learning from the initial survey and from the teachers and schools involved in the research project, as well as insights from the teachers and professional poets who were involved and the legacy research of CLPE to produce this paper. Part of our 'What we know works' series, we identify ten things to be considered and developed in schools to successfully encourage a lifelong love of poetry and literacy learning, with suggestions for practical approaches identified as effective by the schools involved. We hope that you will find it useful.

Charlotte Hacking

Executive Director of Learning and Programmes, CLPE

Find out more about...

Poetry in Primary Schools 2023 Survey
<https://clpe.org.uk/research/poetry-primary-schools-2023>

Macmillan Children's Books
<https://www.panmacmillan.com/mcb>

CLPE's Poetry Resources
<https://clpe.org.uk/poetry>



1 Provide teachers and children with regular exposure and access to poetry from a range of poets, in a range of voices and in a variety of forms

Creating a poetry friendly classroom means developing an ethos and environment where children see, hear and read a wide range of poets and poetry. Exposing children to poetry regularly in informal and formal ways raises engagement with poetry and appreciation of many kinds of writers and forms.

- Ensure children are able to see and hear poets perform, either recorded or live. This draws their attention to the range of people producing poetry for children, in a variety of voices, styles and dialects, allowing them to develop a shared understanding that poetry is for and can be written by everyone.
- Make poetry a prominent part of the environment, e.g. on displays, in book selections, as part of the read aloud programme.
- Provide opportunities for children to listen to and read poems purely for pleasure, garnering genuine responses about what children like and what different poets or poems make them think and feel, without any agenda to analyse or use as a model for writing.
- Paper the classroom with copies of a range of poems by different poets so children can browse, discuss and select poems that appeal or don't appeal to them.



[Learn more](#)

Watch videos of poets performing their poetry

"We've shared lots more poetry than we were previously doing. Making daily time for it has really improved children's knowledge, but also helped them see poetry as an enjoyable genre."



2 Provide professional development opportunities to build teachers' knowledge, confidence and expertise

The Poetry in Primary Schools survey highlighted a significant lack of training and development in this area. 61% of teachers said they never had CPD or training on poetry and only 7% had received training on poetry in the last year. Through The Big Amazing Poetry Project, we provided training specifically focussed on poetry in the primary curriculum for 30 teachers in 30 primary schools across the UK.

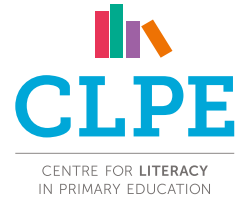
100% of the teachers involved now feel very or mostly confident in teaching poetry in the classroom, compared with 37% of the respondents in the initial survey. Teachers who participated said they now felt empowered to deliver CPD to their own staff teams, developing sustainability in the system moving forwards.

- Expose teachers to a wide range of poets and poetry to develop knowledge of what can be used in the classroom.
- Develop knowledge of key approaches that can be incorporated into teaching.
- Provide opportunities to learn from the work and practices of published poets.
- Develop knowledge of how poetry can be used as a vehicle for children to express themselves and make sense of the world and their experiences.
- Explore how poetry can channel creativity, social and emotional development and empathy and how different poetic forms and devices can stimulate children's independent writing.



Learn more

Explore a range of poetry training from CLPE, including courses with published poets



"I learnt ideas for how to talk about and introduce poetry, practical ideas for writing workshops and got lots of great ideas for high quality poetry books to invest in as a school."



3 Give poetry prominence and a place within and across the curriculum

Many of the teachers in the survey and on the project reflected that poetry wasn't a prominent part of the curriculum and that little time was spent on it. After participating in the shadowing scheme attached to the CLPE Poetry Award (CLIPPA), teachers saw the multiple benefits of including units of work, specifically focussed on children's poetry collections, in their curriculum.

Teachers noticed a marked difference in the depth of children's responses when they were given time to listen to, read, discuss and perform poetry. Teachers and children alike felt that poetry was integral to developing children's enthusiasm for writing, giving them a writing voice and the freedom to express themselves.

- Immerse children in poetry collections, using plans which move children from listening, to reading, to performing, and then to writing. This gave children the chance to explore a range of poems, get to know a poet's voice, engage in creative response, perform to enhance understanding and be inspired to write poems of their own.
- Use forms that link to particular themes and topics across the wider curriculum, such as Kennings when studying the Vikings, or list poems to summarise topic information.
- Use art as a response to a poem heard or read, or as a stimulus for writing a poem.
- Share the links between music and writing to enhance children's understanding of rhythm, repetition, refrain and lyricism.



[Learn more](#)

Access poetry planning focussed on specific collections

"Poetry should not just be an add on or filler. It can develop language and literacy for children as much as other text-types. If poetry is given a chunk of time, instead of just being an ad hoc lesson, then the children develop a positive attitude to poetry."



4 Recognise the benefits of poetry to develop core literacy skills

Poetry is the gateway for many readers and writers in their journey towards becoming literate; delighting, supporting and engaging children as they build a love of literature. It is a crucial genre for exploring key concepts and skills, including: understanding language and vocabulary; reading fluency; inference and deduction; developing response and pupils' ideas and imagination for writing.

Reading and re-reading poems to get to the heart of what has been expressed, so this can then be conveyed to an audience, led to a richer response and understanding of language and vocabulary.

- Incorporate rhyming poetry to develop children's awareness of rhythm. This supports reading fluency and ability to learn poems by heart.
- Use poetry to support application of phonics and spelling, e.g. spelling patterns in rhyming poetry and investigating how words sound, look and are spelled.
- Allow children to read, re-read and perform poetry to support the development of reading fluency.
- Give time and space for children to engage in conversations about poems read, expressing likes and dislikes, looking at language used and exploring what this makes them think about and feel, asking and answering each other's questions about poems and talking about poems in relation to personal connections and experiences.



[Learn more](#)

Develop poetry provision
in the classroom

"Poetry should be a focal point at the start of the academic year to really give children a structure and a broadening of vocabulary as well as a voice to write their thoughts and opinions with."



5 Encourage openness in children's responses to poetry, enabling them to make connections with their own lives and the world.

It is important for children to recognise the poetry in their own lives, hearing poetry by a range of poets that do the same; poetry which encapsulates moments that are funny or familiar or as a more cathartic experience to express feelings such as sadness or loss.

A key technique explored was papering the classroom with a range of poems by a variety of poets. This gave children choice and voice in selecting poems which meant something to them. Discussing poems which related to personal experiences and emotions allowed pupils a greater depth of response, understanding and empathy.

- Allow children opportunities to choose poets and poems that speak specifically to them.
- Avoid questions which lead children to the idea that there is a right or wrong answer when discussing poems heard or read.
- Use supportive questions or frameworks to begin discussions, allowing children to break free of these as they become more experienced.
- Avoid preconceptions that a poem is a puzzle to be solved, instead consider what a poem made them think and feel, and what led them to feel this way.
- Make time for group discussions, encouraging children to listen to the views, understanding and experiences of others, all of which continue to shape their own.

"Poetry is a powerful tool for children as readers and children as writers. It is such an important form for opening those 'mirrors, windows and sliding doors' of representation."



Learn more

Engage children in
response to poems read

6 Provide varied opportunities to lift poems from the page and bring them to life, including through performance

Poetry is rooted in word games, wordplay, song and rhythm - it should be heard as well as read. Children need opportunities to read poetry aloud, join in and hear poets perform their own work. If poetry just stays on the page as a printed object, then it is not going to come alive for most children.

It is important to hear and feel the distinct rhythms of different voices and dialects, considering what this adds to our interpretations of poetry. Performing poetry focusses children on the meanings and emotions in a poem as well as developing a wide range of speaking and listening skills, reading fluency, self-confidence and motivation.

- Provide opportunities to listen to poets perform, either live or via audio or video recordings.
- Include poets of different backgrounds and with different experiences, who speak in a range of accents and dialects.
- Provide opportunities for children to perform publicly at school events or as part of competitions like CLPE's CLiPPA shadowing scheme.
- Provide time and space for children to read, re-read and discuss poems that they have selected for performance, to get to the heart of the meaning and how a rehearsed and polished performance can convey this to the listener.



Learn more

Engage children in performance through the CLiPPA Shadowing Scheme



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"The performance aspect of poetry is so important, rather than just jumping in to teaching children about verses and devices."



7 Work alongside professional poets to understand the motivation to read and create poetry

In our work we have found how important it is for children to hear from, work with or watch professional poets. Seeing a poet bring their work to life and understanding what that means in terms of the creation of poetry helps children see themselves as writers.

In the Big Amazing Poetry Project, teachers worked alongside poets Valerie Bloom and Matt Goodfellow, learning from their motivations and understanding the creative process they go through. This was hugely motivating for the teachers and improved their understanding of how to develop an authentic writing process in class.

- Ensure that the range of poems shared opens up what poetry is and what it could be. Include a selection of classic and contemporary poets, including spoken word and lyrical poets, and poems that blur the lines between poetry and music.
- Listen to poets talk about their writing process; what inspires them, how they work, how they draft, edit and redraft – all this helps teachers to consider the freedoms and support we give children in their own writing.
- Consider a school visit from a poet. This can be hugely enriching for children, providing motivation and aspiration to read and write for themselves.
- Watch poets perform on video or live so that children can connect the writing with the writer.

“Working with poets with so much subject knowledge was an extremely valuable experience. It has changed my outlook and own love of poetry ten-fold!”



[Learn more](#)

Hear poets talk about their inspirations and processes



8 Use a range of models and approaches to support children to read and write poetry

Children need support to understand that there are many forms of poetry and it doesn't always rhyme! Poetic form is often an 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 regular forms and strict rhyme schemes.

Teachers can help by introducing children to a variety of poetic forms, including those with defined structures, rhythms and patterns and free verse, that can be used to shape experience and provide a stimulus for writing.

- Share a range of poetry and involve children in discussions about what the form brings to the subject matter.
- Ensure that teachers are aware of a range of forms and devices and can draw on poems written in these forms or containing these devices to introduce and explore them.
- Explore how different forms originated and how they may best be used, e.g. haiku works well to give snapshots of nature; rhyme works for some subjects, but not others.
- Collate a bank of poems which provide models that can be a springboard for children's own writing, but also offer the flexibility for children to break the pattern and not be constrained by it if they have their own ideas.



[Learn more](#)

Find out about a range of poetic forms and devices

"The importance of using a poem as a framework and gradually reducing this to allow freedom in the writers is really supportive as a way into writing."



9 Allow children to have choice and voice, developing tastes and preferences, writing from their own motivations and experiences

Children need opportunities to write about themselves, their feelings and important events using a variety of forms. Give access to poems centred on different experiences, which evoke a range of emotions and that are linked to children's lives, interests and preferences, as well as those which take them beyond that direct experience.

Experiences and memories can provide a powerful stimulus for children's poetry. Episodes from family life and childhood are often rich and vivid sources of experience which can be recalled and explored. Through writing poetry, children can recreate, shape and make sense of those experiences. A poem can give form and significance to an event or feeling and then communicate this to others.

- Share poetry which encapsulates moments that are funny or familiar or as a more cathartic experience to express feelings such as sadness or loss.
- Allow time and space for children to discuss poems, making connections to their own lives and their knowledge and understanding of the world.
- Encourage children to draw on stimulus such as photographs, objects and memories as a way into writing poems.
- Provide children with writing journals, allowing them to collect and try out personal ideas before choosing whether to develop or share these with a wider audience.



Learn more

Explore a wide variety of poems to inspire children as readers and writers



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"It's important to recognise writing for pleasure as much as reading for pleasure. The use of 'thought journals' has been particularly effective for children to gather ideas informally about anything and everything."



10 Give children's own poetry an audience, so that they see themselves as poets

Publishing children's poetry widens the readership, gives it higher status, and makes their work feel permanent and attractive. Public displays which share final published pieces bring prominence and audience to children's writing. Children enjoy making their own books which can celebrate a variety of poems written by an individual, or a range of children's work brought together in anthologies.

Dramatic performances – either live or filmed – can give children the opportunity to reach a wider audience and provide a sense of purpose.

- Allow children time and space to work up ideas for publication in a variety of ways. Using ICT allows them to play with words and the space on the page and consider the impact such decisions may have on the reader.
- Use final published pieces to develop handwriting: a clear, legible style makes work accessible to an audience.
- Provide opportunities for children who wish to perform their work to an audience. Use prominent events or create audio or video recordings of children who choose to publish their work in this way.
- Create anthologies around themes or shared interests.
- Give children's own published poetry a prominent place in the reading environment, alongside the poets who have inspired them.



[Learn more](#)

[Publishing and performing poetry](#)

"The learners who came to the fore were those who usually need the most support and scaffolding. Their finished poems reflected the freedom they were given to express themselves and shattered pre-conceptions about what they might be able to achieve."



Poetry in Primary Schools

What we know works

1. Provide teachers and children with regular exposure and access to poetry, from a range of poets, in a range of voices and in a variety of forms.
2. Provide professional development opportunities to build teachers' knowledge, confidence and expertise.
3. Give poetry a place within and across the curriculum.
4. Recognise the benefits of poetry to develop core literacy skills.
5. Encourage openness in children's responses to poetry, enabling them to make connections with their own lives and the world.
6. Provide varied opportunities to lift poems from the page and bring them to life, including through performance.
7. Work alongside professional poets to understand the motivation to read and create poetry.
8. Use a range of models and approaches to support children to read and write poetry.
9. Allow children to have choice and voice, develop tastes and preferences and write from their own motivations and experiences.
10. Give children's own poetry an audience, so that they see themselves as poets.

CLPE is the National Centre for Poetry in Primary Schools



Poetry is central to literacy learning and development, this is why we support teachers to bring poetry to life in the classroom. Find out how CLPE can support you:



Free Poetry Resources

A free collection of high-quality teaching resources and videos to support the teaching of poetry in primary schools, associated with our yearly poetry award, CLIPPA, and the connected shadowing scheme.

Find out more:



Poetry Training

We offer both online and face-to-face training for teachers and leaders around the subject of poetry, empowering educators to inspire a love of poetry in the classroom.

Find out more:



Centre for Literacy in Primary Poetry Award (CLIPPA) and the associated Schools Shadowing Scheme

The CLIPPA is the only award for published children's poetry in the UK. The Award and Shadowing Scheme inspire teachers and children to celebrate poetry, with the support of free resources to get involved. Winning schools are invited to perform on stage at a prestigious venue, inspiring the poets of the future.

Find out more:



