

Overheard in a Tower Block by Joseph Coelho, illustrated by Kate Milner (Otter-Barry Books)

This second book of poetry from Joseph Coelho, *Overheard in a Tower Block*, explores further some of the themes from *Werewolf Club Rules* (which won the CLIPPA in 2015). More suited to an older reader than that first collection, this is an extraordinarily powerful and moving book. Each poem offers us glimpses into the life of the main character as he grows, over the course of the collection, from young boy through adolescence to adulthood. The ingenious threading of fantasy, story, myth and magic throughout the poems only illuminates further the challenges and hardships of this young man's life, but ultimately concludes in moments of optimism, joy and possibility.

This collection was shortlisted for the CLPE Poetry award in 2018.

Overall aims of this teaching sequence.

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

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

Note to schools and teachers:

This highly emotive poetry collection does not shy away from exploring sensitive subject matter. It will be important for teachers to read the whole collection 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 familial conflict, 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 and explore important and emotionally significant moments in a young man's childhood, adolescence and eventually adulthood. The sequence is designed so that the children's experience of this collection, and their understanding of a poet's voice and use of language, will support them to use similar techniques, poetic devices and wordplay in their own writing.

Teaching Approaches

- Reading Aloud
- Book Talk
- Visualisation
- Performance
- Role on the Wall
- Debate and Discussion
- Conscience Alley

Writing Outcomes

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

Cross Curricular Links:

Art and Design:

- Throughout the sequence, children will be encouraged to respond through art and producing, "creative work, exploring their ideas and recording their experiences" as stipulated by the aims of the National Curriculum.
- Children might explore in greater depth the accompanying illustrations in the collection which were produced by Kate Milner. They might look at the contrast between some of her more naturalistic, detailed drawings and her more abstract compositions. How does she create the impression of movement and dynamic action? How does she communicate her response to the poems in the collection? How does she use tone and shade? Which art materials does she use and why might they have been chosen?

Geography:

- Children could use their exploration of some of the poems in the sequence ('Binley House', 'Richmond Park', 'Electri-city') as a stimulus to explore, investigate, evaluate and describe their own local environment, producing factual representations of their findings (booklets, posters, reports) as well as more impressionistic ones.

Links to other texts and resources

This is Joseph Coelho's second collection of children's poetry. His first published collection of poetry was *Werewolf Club Rules* (Frances Lincoln Children's Books, 2014) which won the CLIPPA (Centre for Literacy in Primary Poetry Award) in 2015. A teaching sequence for *Werewolf Club Rules* is available at: <https://www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline/teaching-sequences/werewolf-club-rules>

Other books by Joseph Coelho:

- *Luna Loves Library Day* by Joseph Coelho, illustrated by Fiona Lumbers (Andersen Press, 2017)
- *If All the World Were...* by Joseph Coelho, illustrated by Allison Colpoys (Frances Lincoln Children's Books, 2018) *Due to be published June 2018*
- *How To Write Poems (Bloomsbury Activity Books)* by Joseph Coelho, illustrated by Matt Robertson (Bloomsbury, 2017)

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

- *Moon Juice* by Kate Wakeling, illustrated by Elina Elina Brasliņa (The Emma Press, 2016)
- *Dancing in the Rain* by John Lyons (Peepal Tree Press, 2015)
- *Cosmic Disco* by Grace Nichols, illustrated by Alice Wright (Frances Lincoln Children's Books, 2013)
- *Michael Rosen's Big Book of Bad Things* by Michael Rosen (Puffin, 2013)
- *Poetry Pie* by Roger McGough (Puffin, 2015)
- *The Language of Cat* by Rachel Rooney, illustrated by Ellie Jenkins (Frances Lincoln Children's Books, 2011)

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

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

and

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

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

Joseph Coelho has a wealth of resources on his own website to support the reading and writing of poetry in schools: <http://www.thepoetryofjosephcoelho.com/>

Before the Sequence:

- Before teaching from this poetry sequence and prior to reading *Overheard in a Tower Block*, it would be useful to spend time exploring poetry more generally with the children in your class. If this is not part of the whole school ethos, consider immersing the school, and certainly your year

group, in a wide range of poetry. Become familiar with CLPE's Poetryline website www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline and other sites that enable the children to watch poets reading their own poems. It is important for the children to see a poet perform a poem as it was intended to be read. Make available collections of poetry books; collections by the same author and anthologies, planning in regular browsing and independent reading time when the children can access the books.

- Ask children to share their favourite poems with each other, encourage them to bring poems into class and provide a setting in which they can explore their recommendations, such as in a poetry corner. From this starting point you can then begin to explore the poems that the children are drawn to and respond to in the collection *Overheard in a Tower Block*.
- This will also be a useful opportunity to discover what the children like and dislike about poetry, which poems are their favourites, if they have a favourite author that they turn to when reading poetry and if they read poems outside of the school setting.
- Explore what the children already know about poetry. Engage in and discuss children's preconceptions and earlier experiences, both positive and negative. *What do we like about poetry? What don't we like about it? What do we expect from it? Has anybody read any poetry collections recently? When do they expect to hear or read poetry?* Ensure that children's attentions are drawn to any poetry collections, anthologies or books by individual poets and that children have time to explore these independently.
- Add children's initial thoughts and impressions to the working wall, either scribing their ideas onto sentence strips or giving them paper strips or post-it notes for children to write their own ideas.
- It is useful at the start of a poetry sequence to debunk the myth that exploring poetry means only deconstructing the use of language in the poem or only examining the poetic form and devices, it is primarily and initially about responding emotionally and personally to a poem and consider what it means or says to you individually.

Teaching Sessions:

Part 1: Environments and Experiences

Session 1: Booktalk

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.

- Explain that you are going to read them the poem that the poet chose to open this collection: **A Story of a Fear**. Initially, hold back that title and the front cover of the collection from the class so that these potential thematic links can be explored in more depth later in the sequence.
- After you have read the poem aloud, allow them time to talk in small groups about their initial response to the poem. *Was it what they were expecting? How did it make them feel? Were there any words or phrases that stood out?* You may wish to read the poem again to allow them to familiarise themselves with the language and structure.
- Once children have had the opportunity to discuss and share their initial responses, display the poem, perhaps using a visualiser to project it on the whiteboard or hand out copies for children to look at in pairs. Seeing the poem written down allows the children to consider what the poem looks like on the page, how the poet has structured the shape and positioned the words and line breaks. It also allows them to explore the language and imagery in more detail.
- You may need to support the children in unpicking and clarifying some of the language used – *what do we know about this 'story' that the poet is telling us? Is this an introduction to the book? A warning?* Fables, parables and sagas are all stories – *what makes them different from one another?* Fables are short stories that involve a moral lesson (most famous, of course, are Aesop's); parables are simple stories told to convey a moral or spiritual lesson (the stories told by Jesus in the New Testament may be familiar to some of the children); sagas were long stories telling the victories of great heroes (often dating back to Ancient Norse or Saxon, legends like *Beowulf* or, more recently, *The Lord of the Rings* books and films have been described as sagas).
- Either as a class or in small groups, text mark the poem for any words and/or phrases that create clear pictures in your mind, or are unexpected, or prompt questions and curiosity.
- Based on these early discussions, ask children to work up a performance of the poem. They could do this in small groups, pairs or individually. They should consider how they want the listener of the poem to feel and therefore how they might emphasise particular words or phrasing through their use of pace, pitch, volume and timbre. They might identify moments where they want to use combined voices or others where it will be more effective having a single voice speaking. Will the addition of some actions or sound effects enhance the audience's understanding and engagement or will they detract? Children should be given sufficient time to discuss and text mark the poem for performance and rehearse before being given the opportunity to share their readings.
- After the poem has been performed, discuss how or whether our understanding, emotional investment or engagement with the poem has changed throughout the session from hearing it

read aloud, to seeing it on the page, to engaging in discussion, to preparing and watching these performances.

- Based on the discussions around this opening poem, what are our expectations of the rest of the collection? *Is there a particular style that we're expecting? Are you expecting to see a particular story told throughout these poems? What sort of poems, themes, characters do you think you might hear and read?*
- Consider how you might capture children's responses to this first poem – you might scribe any reflections from their discussions onto a large sheet of flipchart paper to start a working wall based on this poet and collection, or you might keep a class journal that can be revisited throughout the sequence. You might think about opportunities for filming the children's performances so that they can be shared more widely or revisited to form part of any final event linked to your study of this text.

Session 2: Visualisation

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.

- Briefly recap the first poem from the book by reading it aloud again and summarise the class' expectations for the collection.
- Now read aloud the second poem from the book: **Binley House**. *Is this what the class expected? Why/why not? How is it similar to/different from the first poem – what connections can you make with the first poem? On an initial reading, do we like or dislike it? Why? How does it make us feel?*
- Explain that you are going to read the poem again and you would like them to close their eyes and try to visualise what is being described in their mind's eye.
- Hand out art materials – you may wish to give them some element of choice in what they use (watercolours, pastels, coloured pencils, ink, cartridge paper) – and explain that you are going to read the poem for a third time and this time you would like to draw what they picture in their mind as you are reading. Give some time for children to complete their drawings, perhaps reading aloud the poem again, if necessary, while they are working.
- Once children have completed their art work, ask them to annotate around the edges any words or phrases that they might use to describe what they visualised – these might be words or phrases that they remember from the poem, or their own words inspired by their visualisation.
- Then, ask them to share their drawing with the person next to them, explaining what they were feeling or the imagery they were trying to capture in their art work. *What was it in the poem that helped you visualise it?*
- You may wish to conduct a gallery walk; allowing children time to walk around the room looking at all of the art work created by their peers and considering the similarities and differences amongst the range of work and why these might be.

- After discussing children’s initial response and visualisation in relation to the poem, display the poem for children to read for themselves and allow time, either as a whole class or in small groups for children to explore the language and some of the poetic devices used. Starting by asking children which words or phrases or patterns of language they were drawn to, is a good way to start understanding the possibilities of playing and experimenting with poetic devices for their own writing. *What choices in language and layout has the poet made and what might they tell us? What are we starting to think about the life of the character narrating the poem? What is important to him; what might his good and bad times include?*
- Some concepts and ideas that children may raise in their discussions include: extended metaphor – the ongoing personification of the tower block as a zombie or monstrous creature that needs feeding: its mouth, hiss and rumble of hunger; the emotional impact of the adjectives – *dead, stone cold, distant, monstrous* – and the verbs – *rusted, stared, soaked, left, overheard*; the repetition of the word ‘*block*’ to describe the building; the repetition of the line ‘*we fed the block our lives.*’
- You may wish to share that the poem is based on a real building where the poet grew up – so although there are aspects of the experience and environment that are fictionalised for the purposes of the poem, they are rooted in a real, lived experience. Binley House is a building in the Alton Estate in Roehampton, Southwest London. This link will take you to the Google Map view of the area, and you could use streetview to look at a photograph of the building and compare that to children’s visualisations:
<https://www.google.com/maps/place/Binley+House,+London+SW15+4PY/@51.4535419,-0.2475259,17z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m5!3m4!1s0x48760ee7c5d724fd:0x9db50f13e65e3eca!8m2!3d51.45353!4d-0.2454319>
- As before, capture children’s responses to the poem and display on the working wall or add to your class journal.
- Give time and space in free writing time for the children to think about important places in their lives that they might like to write about and make a note of these, either in words or drawings in their poetry journals. You might find time to take the children to an alternative environment so that they can start a mind map of different aspects of that space that could be explored in their own work, possibly using a similar idea of an extended metaphor. For example, in the playground, they might simply begin by listing what they can see, smell and hear that could form the basis for a poem at a later date: the expanse of grey tarmac; the lines painted on the ground; the screams of the children; the blowing of a whistle or the ringing of a bell; the burning sun or the blustery wind; the clatter of shoes; the slamming doors; the bins; the toilet block, etc. Some children may even start drafting their own poems immediately.

Session 3: Performance

- Read two further poems from the collection that engage with the urban environment: **City Kids** and **Electri-city**.

- As in previous sessions, allow the children to share their initial personal responses to both poems. There might, for example, be one poem out of the two that they prefer; engage in a wider discussion about why they have a preference for one poem over the other and compare this with the experience of other children in the class.
- Hand out copies for them to read and reread in small groups. Ask the children to compare and contrast the two poems. *What language or patterns are they drawn to? What do we know about the children in these cities? How are the adults depicted? What might the themes of messages of these poems be?*
- They might note the shift in the structure of the verses in 'City Kids' – the repeated three-line structure increasing to four, six, eight lines and what impact this has on the reader; the multi-sensory nature of the description; the almost mythical depiction of superpowers in the descriptions of how these children act or view the world – their ability to see the world as it truly is in comparison to the 'screen-buried' adults? With 'Electri-city', some children may be drawn to the more regular patterning in terms of language, structure, rhyme and rhythm.
- You may wish to share Kate Milner's illustrations which accompany these two poems. *How do her responses to the poems through drawing reflect or differ from our own feelings? What imagery, energy or emotional response do children feel comes through in her art work? How do they feel it ties in or contrasts with their response to the poetry?*
- Ask children to arrange themselves in small groups based on the poem that they would prefer to perform. You might allow children to work up a performance individually or in pairs if that is their preference. As before, allow children time to discuss and decide how they are going to organise their performance and why. If necessary, offer them suggestions and prompts as you did in Session 1. See the Poetryline website for further advice on creating a successful performance: <https://www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline/clippa>
- Ensure children have sufficient time to read and reread the poem, to try out different ways of reading aloud. They might partner with another group to show their tentative performances to each other, before returning to the text to refine and polish their chosen performances.
- When the groups are ready, ask them to share their readings, filming the finished performances so that they are able to view and reflect on their own presentation.
- Finish by returning to each poem and considering how this depiction of the city contrasts with the environment portrayed in 'Binley House'.

Session 4: Book Talk

- Many of the poems in the collection are written from the point of view of a particular child, rather than children generally. We are seeing his world through his eyes, hearing his story through his voice. Reading and writing poetry can often help us to make sense of our own experiences both positive and negative, it can be a cathartic experience in which we are able to share and reflect on both the joy and pain in our lives.
- Hand out copies of the poem **Tables Red, Green and Blue**.

- Initially individually and then in twos or threes, ask pupils to read, reread, and then read aloud the poem.
- Introduce the children to the book talk grid for poetry (adapted from *Tell Me: Children, Reading and Talk and the Reading Environment*, Chambers, 2011), which can be found at: <https://www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline/resources/key-teaching-approaches/responding-poetry>.
- Talk through some possible responses, then give time and space for the children to discuss their own ideas and fill in their own copy of the grid, sharing and discussing responses.
- Come back together to discuss why Joseph Coelho might have written this poem. Discuss the idea of writing poetry as a way of expressing and sometimes dealing with our emotions or making sense of early experiences. Ask the children if they have ever had an experience where they have felt better about something by writing it down.
- Work with the class to explore more deeply any patterns or language choices that stood out during their readings of the poem. Children might reflect on the impact of the repetition, such as the chorus or refrain which is repeated 3 times, as well as the patterns of three verses in between – ‘I tried to move...’, ‘I placed my chair...’. This pattern of three is continued in the penultimate verse in which the child narrating the poem finally throws, screams and draws and the list of tables which concludes the poem. *How do they feel about the use of direct speech within the poem? What impact do the verb choices have on our emotional response and our understanding of the situation in the class – the narrator initially ‘tried’ and ‘placed’ while Tony ‘kicked’, ‘screwed’, ‘drew’ and ‘stole’. How might the alliteration in the phrase ‘teacher turned’ affect our reading of the poem?*
- Finally, compare this to another poem in the collection related to school: **Caught**. *What do they notice about this poem in comparison to some of the others that we have read so far? What more do we learn about the child narrator of the poems? What might we discover in what the poem doesn’t tell us? What do you imagine in the space the poet leaves around the poem?*
- Discuss with the class how poetry can be used to retell, reflect and explore early childhood experiences, particularly those that had an emotional impact on us – both positive and negative. Continue to allow children time and space in free writing with their poetry journals to make notes, develop ideas, and jot down words or phrases that might be used to cultivate their own writing. Some children might start developing a first draft of a poem straight away, perhaps drawing on some of the structures and patterns of language that they have seen in Joseph Coelho’s poetry or other poets with which they are familiar. Other children might need longer to explore ideas first: they may wish to visualise a moment, object, person or experience from their life, sketching it into their journal, annotating that with words or phrases or discussing it with a partner before they are ready to start developing it into a poem.
- When children are ready to start drafting their poems, encourage them to read their ideas aloud, testing to see which ones work most effectively and convey the right emotion for the piece. Share how to edit words to intensify meanings or feelings, painting the right picture for the reader or listener. Explore different possibilities for presenting the poem on the page; where you could leave line breaks to allow for space for the reader to pause and reflect. At this stage, some children may not want to share their poems with a wider audience, perhaps wanting to write only

for themselves or to share with a peer. Their autonomy over what and when to share will be important to their experience of writing.

- Other poems in *Overheard in a Tower Block* that relate to early childhood memories include 'Smashing Snails in the Rain' and 'Welly'. Joseph Coelho's first collection, *Werewolf Club Rules*, also includes poems about school experiences, including: 'Miss Flotsam', 'Timmy Tell-Tale', 'An A* from Miss Coo', and 'Gingerbread man'.

Part 2 – People and Relationships

Session 5: Playing with Language

- Read aloud **The Duelling Duo** and allow children an opportunity to give their initial impression: do they like or dislike the poem? *Why? What questions do they have? Were there any words or phrases that were particularly impactful?*
- Hand out copies of the poem and reread. Do they have a different response to the poem when they are looking at it on the page? Allow children to discuss the poem in greater depth and give a further response. What have they noticed about the use of language? Some children may note the use of repetition in particular words and phrases and the difference between how this repetition works when hearing the poem as opposed to when seeing it in print. Allow the children some time in small groups to pick out where homonyms (or near homonyms, e.g. 'duo', 'duelled', 'dual') are used and then to consider why the poet might have used so many of them throughout this poem.
- Return as a whole class to the narrative being told through the poem and to how it might fit in with our expectations of the collection. Relating, for example, back to the first poem – *is there a lesson to be learnt from this story of two knights fighting? Is this the 'story of a fear'? Why are they arguing/fighting? What happens when two opposing parties are convinced beyond doubt that they are right?* Children may choose to link this to personal experiences; perhaps they remember arguing with a friend in school because they both thought they were in the right. *What happened? How was it resolved?*
- To support the children in further developing their understanding of the language, the playful use of homonyms, rhyme and rhythm, allow them to work in groups to develop a performance as you have in previous sessions.
- After sufficient discussion and rehearsal time, watch the performances and discuss how the enactment of the words supported a deeper understanding of the poem. You may also wish to watch Joseph Coelho perform the poem and compare this with the children's choices (<https://vimeo.com/235541703>). *Does his reading highlight any language or aspects of the poem that they hadn't noticed previously? Has it altered their perception of the poem or of the poet to hear him perform his own work?*

- At the end of the session, allow children to return to their poetry journals and encourage them to have a try at playing with language in a similar manner. They might want to start by working collaboratively to make lists of homonyms like those used in ‘The Duelling Duo’ or of antonyms (left/right, right/wrong, hit/miss, night/morning) and then to consider how they might use them.

Session 6: Poetic Devices

- Read aloud and discuss the poem **Argument** (page 29). *What are the children’s initial responses to the poem? What do they like? What have they noticed? Are there any patterns or language choices or poetic devices which interest them? Do they have any questions?*
- Discuss how the poem fits in with our current understanding of the collection as a whole: through what lens is Joseph Coelho exploring, examining or reflecting on experiences and relationships? *Why might he choose to compare an argument to a monster (or vice versa) in this way? How is it or isn’t it effective?* Children may make links with some of the poems that they have already discussed: ‘A Story of a Fear’, ‘Binley House’, ‘The Duelling Duo’, ‘Tables Red, Blue and Green’.
- Consider the choices Joseph Coelho makes in how he uses metaphor and simile in this poem. At the start of the poem, he uses a metaphor to conjure the image of the monster, then extends this metaphor using a series of similes. Discuss the differing impact of metaphor and simile as a poetic device.
- Normally similes are used by comparing what we are describing with something else (in this case, comparing an argument with a monster). However, Joseph Coelho quickly turns it around, comparing the monster with an argument instead. For instance, to use a clichéd example, rather than saying “Her eyes sparkled like the stars”, the inverse might read “The stars sparkled like her eyes.” *Did the way the poet has structured the language change how they read or visualised the poem?* For a direct comparison, you might work with the children to invert the given similes so that they are presented in their ‘expected’ order (see below for example). *Is this as effective? Why/why not?*

| Argument | original version | adapted version |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The monster With a roar made up of shouts. Its jaws snap Like slamming doors. Its stomach rumbles Like cars driving away. Its scales scrape Like boxes being packed. Its claws clatter Like kitchen drawers. | | <i>The argument is like a monster Its roar made up of shouts Doors slam Like its jaws snapping shut Cars drive away Like its rumbling stomach Boxes being packed Scrape like scales Kitchen drawers clatter Like its claws.</i> |

- Share the poem **Disappearing Act** (page 54) and, after allowing for children's initial personal responses, ask them to consider how it might relate to other poems in the collection that we have read so far. *Does it remind them of any of the other poems we've read? What do you think the title might refer to? What is a 'disappearing act'? Who or what has disappeared?*
- Give children a copy of the poem to look at in small groups or pairs. *Are there any words or phrases that made a particular impression? Was there anything that surprised you?* Children might discuss the similar sentence structures used in the list and the impact of this, or they might highlight the verb choices (materialised, amazed, dazzled, trapezed, popped, lit). *What might we associate these verbs with? Why might Joseph Coelho have selected these verbs rather than others?*
- As in some of the poems already explored, this is told from a first person point of view of the child. If this is the same child who narrates poem such as 'Table Red, Blue and Green', what more do we know about him? *What do we know/think we know about the narrator's father? What might we begin to assume about their relationship? Is there anything in this poem, or in other poems that we have read, that have led us to these assumptions? How does it fit with our early thoughts about the overall themes being explored in the collection?*
- Allow time for children to return to their poetry journals and continue to play with language and ideas as they have in previous sessions. They may want to continue working on ideas they have already begun to explore or they might want to try experimenting with writing and restructuring similes in a similar fashion to those used in 'Argument'.

Session 7: Personal Response

- In this session, children have the opportunity to read and respond to a wide range of poems from the collection in which the child/young adult narrator of the poems refers to his relationship with his father. As mentioned at the start of the sequence, it is clear through the poems that the father figure in this family separates from the mother and is often absent from the child's life; the love for his father is present in many of the poems but it also depicts the pain of separation and the difficulty of the child's situation, torn between his parents. Be aware of any children in the class who might have been through similar situations, or might currently be experiencing similar emotions and difficulties in their lives.
- As there are a wide range of poems for children to respond to in this session, you might start by photocopying from the collection the poems related to the narrator's relationship with his father (**Trainers, Learn the Basics of Electronics..., Hide and Seek in the Woods, Driving, Wandering, When Your Letters Came, This Is Your Um...**) and attach them to the walls all around the classroom space. At the start of the session, allow children plenty of time to walk around the space, reading the poems and finding those that invoke the most reaction in them.
- Once children have been able to visit, read, reflect and have begun to discuss informally a range of the poetry displayed, ask them to share with the class which poem(s) have made the greatest impact on them and why they think that might be.

- Ask children to arrange themselves in small groups based on their chosen poem from those displayed. As a group, ask them to reread the poems, text marking any language choices, poetic devices or patterns that they have noticed and the impact of these on them as a reader. Explain that each group will have the opportunity to reintroduce their chosen poem to the class and report back on any of these features that they feel are relevant to our appreciation of the poem and/or offer us insights into an understanding of the characters and their situation, including any that might appear to contradict our expectations or might prompt us to ask further questions.
- Depending on the age and experience of the pupils, they may benefit from some prompt questions relating to the points raised above to guide their discussion, or you may choose to re-use the book talk grid from Session 4.
- After a sufficient period of time for discussion, allow each group to report back to the class. Then, bring the groups back together to discuss the poems as a collection – *what more do we think we know about the character of the father based on these poems? Have we learnt anything further about the child narrator?*
- Watch the video of Joe performing ‘Learn The Basics of Electronics...’ (<https://vimeo.com/236921778>). *Has watching and listening to a performance of the poem given you any further insights, reflections or responses to the poem?*
- In different groups to those used in the early discussion, ask children to create role on the wall posters for the child narrator of the poems and for the father. If the class are not familiar with the role on the wall technique, they may require this process to be modelled before they begin to work in their groups. On large paper, the IWB or a flip chart draw a simple outline of the human figure. Explain that we are going to write down what we think we know so far about the characters using this outline. Within the outline, we can write down words and phrases to describe his inner characteristics: how he might be feeling, what he might be thinking and words to describe his personality. On the outside, we can note his external characters, how he is seen by others: his actions and behaviours, things that he says or words to describe appearance. Give children the opportunity make links between the external and the internal – *how does what a character does or say inform us about what he might be thinking or feeling and vice versa?*
- Discuss: *How might the content, language, structure, forms and poetic devices used throughout the poems discussed led us to these views of the characters?*
- Now that the children have had a chance to consider the potential impact of the wide range of poetic devices and forms that Joseph Coelho has used in these poems (including rhyme, rhythm, assonance, alliteration, repetition of words, lines and verses, metaphor and simile, direct speech), provide them with the opportunity to return to their poetry journals so that they can experiment with using some of these techniques in their own poetry. Some children may be drawn to the free verse structure of poems like ‘Learn The Basics of Electronics...’, while others may wish to experiment with a more formal structure such as the rhyme scheme and strict syllabic count used in ‘Hide and Seek in the Woods’. Children may wish to start noting ideas or drafting poems directly inspired by the themes of loss and separation depicted in the poems discussed in this session while others may prefer to write poems reflecting more broadly about the theme of loss – perhaps a favourite object or toy from childhood left behind; perhaps they have moved home and

want to write about their memories and feelings associated with that transition; or perhaps they miss a close friend who has moved away as they have grown older. In any of these instances, children will be writing about sensitive and personal memories and relationships and so any responses will need to be undertaken with care. Ensure that children have a say in when and how their tentative poems are read or shared. If children do not wish to write on the theme of loss, they might return instead to previously explored themes: environment, buildings, personal memories, etc.

Session 8: Performing Poetry

- In this session, take time to read, discuss and perform **Child of Opposites** (page 12) in which the child narrator reflects not only on his parents, but also on their parents and prompts reflection on how the characteristics inherent in a parent's nature or upbringing might influence their children's experiences.
- Begin by reading the poem aloud to the class. This is a longer poem than many that have been read and discussed so far, so allow time for children to absorb the language and the content by reading it more than once and then allowing them to see the words on the page. The shift between 'my father' and 'his mother', 'my mother' and 'her mother' may need clarifying between readings.
- After their initial response, discussed in small groups or as a class, allow children to share and ask questions about the poem as well as our initial impression of the parents and grandmothers being depicted.
- Preparing a performance of the poem will allow for a closer reading of the language as well as an opportunity to help the poem come to life, to lift the words off the page. Create a whole class performance by dividing the poem between small groups of children. You might divide the poem sequentially – 2 or 3 verses per group – or you could divide it based on the family members (e.g. verses 1 and 5 to Group A, verses 2 and 8 to Group B, verses 3 and 6 to Group C, verses 4 and 9 to Group D and the last two verses to Group E).
- As in Sessions 3 and 5, allow sufficient time for children to discuss and text mark their allocated verses, deciding which language they want to highlight, how they want the listener to feel and the best tone/style to adopt to support that response. Allow sufficient space for children to incorporate movement if they wish and enough time to rehearse and refine their performance, before bringing them together to collaborate on performing the whole poem. As all the groups are working together to create one cohesive performance, some discussion and self-evaluation may be required after the initial read through, before groups return to rehearsing and refining ready for a final performance.
- Once the class are ready to perform, decide on an appropriated audience: will it be shared in an assembly, with their phase group, with a neighbouring class, with parents or will video/audio recordings be made and shared digitally?

- After the poem has been performed, return to our discussion of the poem, what we like about it, any patterns or language that interest or appeal, and how we feel it might inform the wider collection and themes of the book. *How are the parents and the child depicted? What do they see in their mind's eye as they read verses 1 and 3? The qualities of the parents at the start might appear almost mythical in their magic and heroic nature, like superpowers – how are these qualities altered or undermined as the poem progresses? What might have happened to affect the parents? How do they feel about the way in which the qualities of the parents are viewed by their own parents? Or about how they are transformed from positive to negative in the child's view of himself?* As the poems explored most recently have been about the character of the father, we might consider how the image presented of the father in this poem reflects or contrasts with our view of him in the poems explored in the prior session. Children may wish to add to the Role on the Wall work undertaken for the father and the child in the previous session.
- Other poems in the collection that explore the wider family around the child, include 'Grandfather's Seal' and 'Eastbourne'.

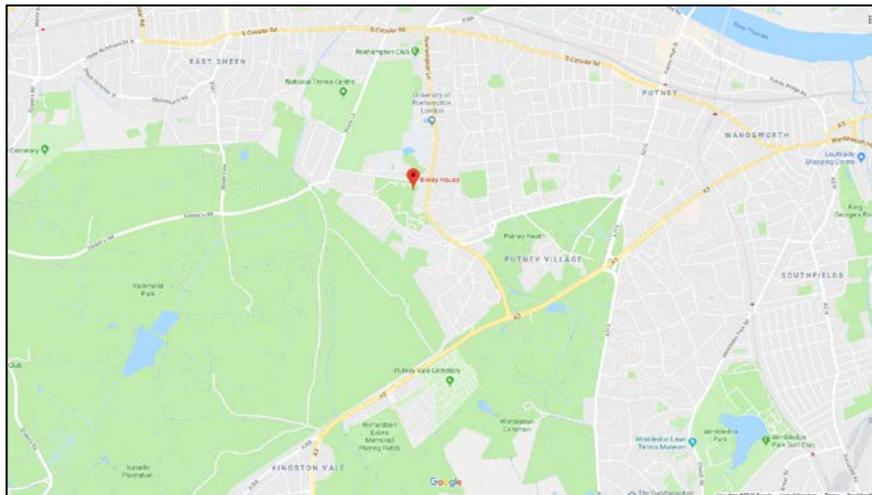
Part 3 – Finding Spaces / Growing and Changing

Session 9: Visualisation

- Refer back to the work undertaken in Session 2 on 'Binley House' and our impressions about the descriptions of that environment. Explain that we're going to continue to explore the environment of our narrator's childhood.
- Read aloud the poem **Richmond Park** (page 40).
- Allow them a few moments for personal silent reflection of what they have heard. Then, explain that you are going to read the poem again and after that they will have the chance to note their responses to what they have visualised, as they did in Session 2 for 'Binley House'.
- As previously, hand out art materials and give children time to draw and annotate their visualisation. When they have had sufficient time to complete their drawings, give them the opportunity to share their visualisation with the other children in their group. *How are their drawings similar and different to one another? What stood out in the poem? How did it make you feel and how did you try and communicate that in your drawing? How do you think the park might make the protagonist feel? Why?*
- Be prepared to respond to any questions children might have about some of the language in the poem or some of the comparisons that are made. Children might benefit at this point from exploring and discussing selected photos of Richmond Park, including the trees, the deer, the ponds and the city skyline. If you have easy access to an urban park, then taking the class to that space and giving them time to experience, observe and listen to the environment and considering how it makes them feel might support their understanding of the narrator's connection with Richmond Park and why it might have been important to him.

- Share, on the whiteboard or as a handout, a map of the area surrounding Binley House and Richmond Park, such as this from:

<https://www.google.com/maps/place/Binley+House,+London+SW15+4PY/@51.4481195,-0.2412967,14.53z/data=!4m5!3m4!1s0x48760ee7c5d724fd:0x9db50f13e65e3eca!8m2!3d51.45353!4d-0.2454319>



- What do the children notice about the location of Binley House and Richmond Park? Based on what we have read so far, why might the park have become an important space for the narrator? Why might it have been important to replace the shouts, and replace the monsters? Do the events, subjects and/or language in this poem remind them of any others they have read? They might draw links with 'Argument', 'Trainers' and 'Hide and Seek in the Woods'. You might also read the poem that immediately follows 'Richmond Park' in the collection - 'The Pen Ponds'.*
- Give the children an opportunity to reflect on their own preferred space; if they have a place they like to go to, for reflection, for space and time to think, for adventure and excitement, for fun. Allow them to share these if they want to.
- Elsewhere in the collection, Joseph Coelho reflects on the power of literature as a form of escape and support in difficult circumstances (**Books Have Helped Me**, page 55). Read this aloud to the children without the need for any formal response. Make copies of the poem available for children to access independently if they wish to.

Session 10: Discussion and Debate, Conscience Alley

- The poems explored in this session retell (or reimagine) the Ancient Greek myth of Prometheus who was punished by Zeus for stealing fire from the gods and giving it to the humans. He was chained to a mountain where an eagle ate his liver every day. Because Prometheus was immortal, his liver healed in the night and grew back. It was intended that this punishment would be for eternity, but he was eventually rescued by Heracles.

- If the class are unfamiliar with the myth start by telling them the story. You might choose to read it aloud from a collection of myths (there is a brief retelling in *Atticus The Storyteller's 100 Greek Myths* by Lucy Coats, illustrated by Anthony Lewis, Orion Children's Books, 2003 or a comic book version in *Greek Myths* by Marcia Williams, Walker Books, 2006), or you could use the basic outline to tell the story in your own words (there are also some short videos summarising the basic events in the story in case children want to revisit them, for example, this video from Ted Ed: <https://ed.ted.com/lessons/the-myth-of-prometheus-iseult-gillespie>)
- Read aloud the three **Prometheus** poems (interspersed throughout the book on pages 22, 52 and 89).
- Ask children to arrange themselves in pairs and then provide each pair with one of the poems from the 'Prometheus' sequence. Allow them time to reread and respond using the book talk questions and noting responses in the grid introduced in Session 4.
- Then, ask each pair to join with two other pairs of children so that they are able to talk about all three poems together. Ask each pair in turn to introduce the other four children to their thoughts around the poem they have been discussing: what they liked or disliked, sharing any words/phrases/verses that appealed to them and why, highlighting any poetic devices or patterns that they found effective, highlighting anything that puzzled them.
- Once each group has had the chance to talk about their poem, bring the class back together to review our initial thoughts about the poems and enable them to ask and answer questions. Children might need support in understanding some of the references made: for example, in 'Light Bringer – Prometheus 1', Coelho likens the actions of Prometheus to famed scientists: Albert Einstein, James Watson and Francis Crick, and Stephen Hawking; as well as how Coelho chooses to link the gift of fire with scientific discovery and the progression of human civilisation (whether for better or worse).
- Children may note, discuss and wish to explore further the pattern of 'Prometheus Bound – 2' which is indeed bound within a very precise structure. It is a sestina - a poem with six stanzas each of six lines. The lines all end with the same six words in a different sequence each time. The final stanza is a triplet in which all six words are also used. The exact rules can be easily found online (for example: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/learn/glossary-terms/sestina>). Some children may be interested in the precision required for a strict structure like this and wish to experiment with it; however, it's also worth noting that these rules can be broken if the poet feels it necessary to do so (Joseph Coelho himself uses the sestina again later in the collection – 'There are Things that Lurk in the Library' – in which, despite being much stricter with following the rules for sequencing the final words of each line, he chooses to use a rhyme occasionally rather than a homonym, and doesn't include the final triplet).
- Being increasingly familiar with the myth, they may also note how often Joseph Coelho chooses to use language related to fire, light or heat and how that decision affects their reading and response to the poem (for example, in the first poem, words and phrases include: light-fingered, candle-shadow-flicker-dance, star-ray light, candles, fireworks, sparks, lightning-struck, blazed, fired-up flare, lava, beaks of flames, feathered heat, fistful of fire).

- Lead the class from this wider discussion of the poems, to a deeper exploration of the characterisation of Prometheus. Returning to their groups, ask them to consider what words they might use to describe Prometheus in each of the poems: *what does he do, what might he be thinking, how might he be feeling, why do we think that is?* Children might make informal notes, or use a Role on the Wall outline again, perhaps using a different colour to note his inner and outer characteristic for each poem.
- Bring the class back together to discuss the regret expressed by the Prometheus of the poems for giving fire the humans. *Why do we think he might feel that regret? What has he felt and seen? How does Coelho help us to understand the extremity of those feelings?*
- Ask the question and discuss: *does every scientific discovery have potentially negative consequences?*
- Ask the class to imagine that they had the opportunity to travel back to when Prometheus was preparing to break into the vaults of the gods. Would they encourage him to pursue this goal or discourage him? Discuss possible ideas, then ask pupils to work in small groups to decide what they would do and what they might say. Get feedback from each group and start noting down the benefits and drawbacks of each option. If children need more time to discuss and explore the possible outcomes, you could move into a more formal debate about the misuse of science.
- Once you've explored all the possibilities, use conscience alley to help 'Prometheus' decide what to do. Place the children in two lines, facing each other with a gap down the middle. Explain to one line that they need to persuade and encourage Prometheus; the other line needs to discourage him. Give them a moment to decide what they are going to say and then ask one child in role as Prometheus to walk slowly between the two lines listening to all of the advice that the class has for them. When they get to the end, you can ask them what decision they have reached and why.
- Offer children a range of writing outcomes to choose from in response to our work on this sequence of poems. They could:
 - respond to Prometheus directly in the form of a letter or a poem to either:
 - thank him for the gifts that science has given and reassure him that his sacrifice is appreciated
 - or to chastise him for his short-sightedness and recommend reparative actions.
 - write a Part 4 to the sequence of poems with Prometheus responding what he might see as the positive and negative aspects of the growing digital world, hinted at in the final line of 'Prometheus Unbound – 3'.
- At the end of the session, consider the placing of these poems throughout this collection and how we feel about them in relation to the other poems that we have read. *Why might Joseph Coelho have included these poems as part of this collection? Do they stand in contrast to the rest of the poems, are they reflective of the rest of the poems, or do they comment on the collection as a whole?*
- If you wish to explore more of the poet's use of story narrative to reflect on common themes from the collection, see also the 2-part story depicted in **The Watchers** and **Teetering Towers** which take place in an almost sci-fi / fantasy / dystopian environment.

Session 11:

- Recall the work undertaken earlier in the second part of the sequence exploring the characterisation of the father and the child's relationship with him. What are our impressions so far of the family? How do they feel about the complex and changing nature of the relationships depicted?
- Explain that today we're going to read more of the poems that explore family relationships, this time focusing primarily on the character of the mother and the son's relationship with her.
- Introduce this series of poems by watching Joseph Coelho perform his poem 'Eastbourne' (<https://vimeo.com/236921106>).
- Following this introduction, use a similar series of activities as those that were used in Session 7 when the children had the opportunity to read and respond to the poems relating to the character of the father. Poems that might be incorporated into this session include revisiting **Child of Opposites**, and introducing them to **The Mermaid Queen** (page 56), **Seagulls to Confetti** (page 58), **Crockery** (page 60), and **Eastbourne** (page 71).
- As before, allow children time to read, reflect and respond to the range of poems. Once they are familiar with each of the poems, ask them to work as a group to select one poem that they would like to explore further.
- Then, give them sufficient time to talk about the poem, text marking any language, patterns or poetic devices that interested them, or made an emotional impact and why they think that might be.
- Ask each group to prepare a short presentation for the class in which they will explain which poem they have selected and why, as well as summarising their overall thoughts about it. Some children may benefit from a series of open questions around which to structure their presentation. Some groups may wish to include a performance of the poem, or selected lines from it, as part of their presentation.
- Following these presentation, draw the class discussion back to how these reflect our overall understanding and views of the family, the mother, the child, and the overall collection. *What more do we think we know about the mother? Have we learnt anything further about the child narrator? Are there any puzzles, complications or contradictions that you noticed or that intrigue you?*
- NOTE: As part of the discussion, children may note the use of rhyme in 'The Mermaid Queen'. This uses the structure and patterning of the sonnet form. Joseph Coelho ran sonnet workshops in 2017 at the Globe Theatre in London and there is a video of him performing this poem here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AkVoODwOKk0>. In his book *How to Write Poems* (Bloomsbury, 2017), Joseph Coelho offers guidance for budding poets in using the sonnet form.
- Having explored so many poems about parents and family by this stage, children may want to use this as a stimulus for their own writing. They might spend some time reflecting on important people in their lives, significant relationships past and present or simply memorable moments from their lives, such as the one Joseph Coelho presents to us in 'Eastbourne'.

Session 12: Growing and Changing

- Towards the end of the collection, there are a number of poems that relay the experiences of growing older and the changes – physical, emotional and situational – that occur during and after adolescence.
- Hand out a selection of these poems to the children for them to read in groups (At your discretion, amongst other poems, you could include: **Man... I Had It Made** (page 82), **Wind** (page 88), **First Kiss** (page 91) and **Leaving The Nest** (page 98)).
- You might offer each group some guidance on how they might approach exploring these poems further, including opportunities for them to read, reread, read aloud, consider the appearance of the poem on the page compared and contrasted with how it sounds to the ear. They might discuss and compare preferences for the poems, why they feel they might have those preferences and any personal connections they make to the events described in the poems. Encourage them to continue to be open to alternate views and opinions. Provide coloured pens or pencils so that they can annotate the poems, text marking language choices or patterns that they have noted, jotting and sharing any questions they might have. They might want to draw what they visualise when they hear/read the poem, if that helps them to describe and share their personal response more effectively with the others in their group.
- To support the children in developing an understanding of how a poem might differ on and off the page, you might share this video of Joseph Coelho performing ‘Man... I Had It Made’:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FlxNVb8mpho>
- As a class, discuss how our impression or understanding of the narrator might have changed over the course of these poems. Note some words that you might use to describe his characteristics, behaviour, expectations, hopes and attitudes. Compare these to the Role on the Wall work undertaken after sessions 7 and 8. *How has the character changed? What do you think has happened to prompt these changes? Does it change your opinions about the collection as a whole?*

Part 4 – Writing Poetry

Session 13: Writing Own Poems, Gaining a Response

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

Children’s writing can be improved if they, a partner or their teacher reads it aloud at an early stage, giving it life and breath and helping the young poet see the patterns and tunes they have created. Just as an author would work with an editor, children should be given opportunities to help each other by reading their writing aloud and responding as readers. This allows them to support each other as they compose and structure their ideas. Writers can tell response partners what they are pleased with in

their writing, particular devices or parts of the poem they may be struggling with and gaining a picture from the reader of how their writing impacts on them. Response partners should be encouraged to reflect on the impact of the poem on them as a reader. Children can then re-draft parts of their work, based on these conversations.

- Revisit the collections as a whole. What sorts of things does Joseph Coelho choose to write about in his poems? Draw out some of the common themes such as:
 - Settings and environment: where you live, important places, places that give you ‘breathing spaces’;
 - School experiences;
 - Fantasy and myth: familiar stories, characters or genre tropes that allow the reader and the writer to explore potentially difficult subject matter;
 - People and relationships;
 - Cathartic writing; writing that allows you to find your voices, writing about worries, concerns and moments of sadness.
- Reflect on the ideas that the children have been noting in their poetry journals throughout the unit. Which ones do they feel strongly enough about to take through to writing?
- Think about a theme or topic you could explore in a poem. Model writing a poem based on one of the topics discussed, talking through the choices that you are making as a writer to bring the experience alive for the reader. Think about the form the poem will take; will it rhyme to add humour or rhythmic patterns? Will you arrange it as a prose poem as it tells a story? What language can you use to make your writing poetic?
- Allow time for children to draft their own poems around the themes and subjects of their choice, then allow them to read aloud to a response partner to lift the words off the page, hearing how they sound when performed. Give time for response partners to ask the writers questions, discuss parts they aren’t sure are working or make suggestions to improve the writing. Think together about how the poem could be presented on the page to enhance the meaning and the reader’s understanding.

Session 14: Editing and Presenting Own Poems

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

- Give further time for children to redraft any parts of their poems that they discussed with their response partner in the previous session, or to work on their poems further if they need time to do this.
- When you have a poem that you have read aloud to a partner, discussed and explored changes that you are happy to present to a wider audience, start to think about how that poem could be best presented. How will it look on the page? What form will it take? How will you use line breaks, spacing on the page to enhance the meaning or emotions behind your poem? Will you hand write

it? Will you publish using ICT? What script or font will you choose? Will you make any specific decisions about the way certain words look or are placed on the page? Will you illustrate the poem? If so, how will the words and illustration sit and work together?

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

Session 15: Reflecting on the Collection

- Revisit the poems that have been explored throughout the sequence. To draw together all the work done in this unit, hold a discussion about the collection as a whole. What are your most memorable poems? Why? What have you learnt about poetry that you didn't know before? Would you be encouraged to read more poetry after studying this collection? Why? Why not?
- Return to the first poem in the collection: **A Story of a Fear**. Why do you think now that this poem was the first? Has its meaning changed for you?
- You might also reflect on the title of the collection: what connections do you make with the word 'overheard' – what connotations does it have? How does this reflect the content of the poems within the book?
- Read aloud the poem that closes the collection (**There are Things That Lurk in the Library**) or watch the video of Joseph Coelho performing it (<https://vimeo.com/236922296>). Allow time for children to respond to this poem. How does it make them feel? What message did they feel the poet was leaving for them at the end of the collection? Why might it have been chosen to close the book?
- Now focus on the poems that the children have written. What kinds of poems were your favourite to write? What did you find it easiest to write about?
- Have each child choose their favourite poems they have written to work up and present. Will you handwrite or type? Will you illustrate some? What materials and images will you use that will help distil the essence of your poem?
- Give time for the children to compile and present the poems they would like to share.
- Following this, hold a poetry fest for children to do readings from their collections to parents or other classes in the school or display their work as part of an exhibition, including the published poems and accompanying illustrations. For the children performing at the event, ask them to consider what they learnt from listening to the poems being read aloud and performed by other poets as well as trying out ideas in their performances of Joseph Coelho's poems that they will need to remember when reading their own poems?

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

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