

POETRY IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

What we know works

Centre for Literacy in Primary Education



CENTRE FOR LITERACY
IN PRIMARY EDUCATION



Power of Reading

A CLPE RESOURCE



Poetryline

A CLPE RESOURCE



Power of Pictures

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Corebooks

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POETRY IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS



What works?

The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education is a charity working to improve literacy in primary schools. Our work raises the achievement of children by helping schools to teach literacy creatively and effectively, showing teachers how quality children's literature can be placed at the heart of all learning.

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 because we believe it is central to literacy learning and 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.

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.

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.

Visit Poetryline at www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline
Find out more about CLiPPA at www.clpe.org.uk/CLiPPA



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.

In 2017 we were funded by the Arts Council to run a research project 'The Power of Poetry', evaluated by Prof. Andrew Lambirth. Five poets worked alongside our experts and twenty teachers to investigate and discover how we can really make the most of poetry teaching in primary schools. This project built on the findings of the groundbreaking *A Year With Poetry* (CLPE, 1997 ed. Myra Barrs & Michael Rosen).

The teachers on Power of Poetry took what they had learnt back into their classrooms and used their new knowledge to work with their children to read, study, write and perform poetry. The teachers all produced case studies of their work. We have combined the information from these case studies, the insights from the professional poets and the independent evaluation with published research and the legacy research of CLPE to produce this paper. Part of our 'What We Know Works' series, this paper brings together ten things teachers, poets and academics have told us need to be considered and developed in schools that are successful in encouraging a lifelong love of poetry and therefore literacy learning. We hope that you find it useful.

Louise Johns-Shepherd, Chief Executive, CLPE

To download the other papers in the 'What we know works' series visit clpe.org.uk/library-and-resources/research

For more information about CLPE visit clpe.org.uk

For more information about Poetryline visit clpe.org.uk/poetryline

For more information about CLiPPA visit clpe.org.uk/CLiPPA



1 Develop a poetry friendly classroom and school that enthuses children and celebrates the value of language

Creating a poetry friendly school means developing an environment and an ethos where children have the opportunity to listen to, share 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.

Ensure poetry of all kinds is a prominent part of the reading environment. Take time to drop poems into the school day, without any agenda to analyse or answer questions about them. Paper the classroom with poetry from different poets and times sharing different styles and forms and give children open time to browse, discuss and select poems that resonate with them. Allow time for children to watch or hear poets performing their poetry, either recorded or live.

Learn more:

Poet performances on Poetryline
clpe.org.uk/poets

A Whole School Poetry Focus on Poetryline
clpe.org.uk/poetryline

CLPE Reading and Writing Scales
clpe.org.uk/readingandwritingscales

“ Giving the children the opportunities to explore a range of books, including anthologies and watching videos of poets performing their work, has now given them a wealth of experience. This was crucial in forming connections and the one message they were given was to 'have fun'.
Teacher, Power of Poetry Project ”



2 Provide varied opportunities to lift poems from the page and bring them to life

Poetry is rooted in word games, wordplay, song and rhythm, and it's particularly important that 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 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 a wide range of poetry as often as possible. It is important to hear and feel the distinct rhythms of different voices and dialects, considering what this adds to our own interpretations of poetry. Videos and audio performances of poets performing are a fantastic inspiration for children's own performances.

Allow time and space for children to rehearse and polish performances before presenting to an audience. Provide opportunities for children to perform publicly at school events or as part of competitions like CLPE's CLiPPA shadowing scheme.

Learn more:

CLiPPA Schools Shadowing Scheme
clpe.org.uk/clippa

The Role of Rhyme and Song in Early Phonological Development
clpe.org.uk/rhymeandsong

Poet Performances on Poetryline
clpe.org.uk/poets

“ Share clips of the poets themselves, invite the poets to school, or read out poetry that is written in various dialects, so that children can really grasp that they are allowed and expected to be interested in poetry. It is not something just for other people. ”

“ Learning poetry by heart and performing gave the children great enjoyment. They took ownership of the poems and wanted to understand more. ”



3 Encourage talk about and connect 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 writing poetry 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.

It is important for children to be able to recognise the poetry in their own lives by hearing poetry by a range of poets that does the same. They need to see that poetry can be used to encapsulate moments that are new, funny or familiar or as a more cathartic experience to express feelings such as guilt, sadness or loss. Giving children personal writing journals that they have control over sharing allows them to collect and try out personal ideas before sharing with a wider audience.

Learn more:

Teaching Sequences on Poetryline
clpe.org.uk/poetryline

Meeting the Needs of Children with EAL
clpe.org.uk/EAL

The Power of Poetry Research Summary
clpe.org.uk/poetrysummary

“ The children are now aware that they 'own' poetry within them – the subjects to be illustrated are their own identities, places, moments and feelings; the tools to express themselves are within their ability to select, change and edit; the impact is in sharing something creative, imaginary and personal with others through reading aloud and performing. ”



4 Develop teachers' confidence and expertise 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.

As a teacher of poetry, it is important to showcase its value and prominence in the curriculum. Make time for poetry and don't allow it to be marginalised. If we as adults have negative attitudes or are hesitant or fearful about poetry, this can be easily passed on to the children. Instead make time to read poetry yourself and listen to poets talking about their authentic process and replicate ideas in the classroom.

Learn more:

Let's Write! Improving Reading and Writing using Poetry with Joseph Coelho
clpe.org.uk/creativewriting

The Power of Poetry Research Summary
clpe.org.uk/poetrysummary

Poet Interviews on Poetryline
clpe.org.uk/poetinterviews

Power of Reading in the Early Years
clpe.org.uk/porey

Power of Reading
clpe.org.uk/powerofreading

“ One of the most thought provoking things to come out of the course for us was how little knowledge we had of poets and the vulnerable position that this put us in as educators. We now have a far greater breadth and depth of knowledge of poets and have found ourselves recognising how meaningful some of the poems have been for us personally. ”



5 Build poetry into every aspect of the curriculum, not just 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.

Share a range of poems that link to concepts in other curriculum areas as a stimulus for discussion and as part of displays of work and artefacts. Allow children time and space to respond to ideas and concepts or share learning across subjects through poetry. Study forms that link to particular themes and times, e.g. Kennings in history when studying the Vikings.

Learn more:

Planning Creatively Around a Text in EYFS
clpe.org.uk/planningEY

Planning Creatively Around a Text KS1
clpe.org.uk/planningks1

Planning Creatively Around a Text KS2
clpe.org.uk/planningks2

Let's Write! Improving Reading and Writing using Poetry with Joseph Coelho
clpe.org.uk/creativewriting

“ 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 ”

“ I soon started dropping poetry into other parts of the curriculum, in maths or science. I could see the children's curiosity widen, I noticed that the children were enjoying poetry more and more. ”



6 Know how to write and read poetry in a range of forms

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 introducing children to a variety of poetic forms that can be used to shape experience and provide an extra stimulus for writing.

Share a range of poetry and allow children time and space to be involved in discussions about what the form brings to the subject matter of the piece. Explore how different forms originated and how they may best be used. Haiku works well to give short snapshots of nature. Rhyme works for some subjects, but not others. It is important that the form enhances the experience and doesn't constrain writers.

Learn more:

Power of Reading in the Early Years
clpe.org.uk/porey

Power of Reading
clpe.org.uk/powerofreading

Let's Write! Improving Reading and Writing using Poetry with Joseph Coelho
clpe.org.uk/creativewriting

Poetic Forms and Devices on Poetryline
clpe.org.uk/formsdevices

“ Poems based on the children's own experiences came more easily to the children. They could clearly articulate why they had chosen to use certain structures (e.g. syllable patterns); most chose not to rhyme and their poems were more successful as a result. One child wrote 'I decided on a free verse poem because it's hard to write sad rhyming poems.' ”



7 Appreciate that poetry study supports reading, phonics and language development

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. Wordplay is one of the most basic pleasures of poetry, giving the opportunity for playing games with language so that the shapes, sounds, and rhythms of words are enjoyed as well as their meaning.

Encourage children to play with song, rhyme and verse throughout the primary years. Support them in hearing the pulse and syllabic beats in poems, look at rhyme patterns in poetry and link this to knowledge of how words look and are spelt. Play with words: many poems contain 'nonsense words'. Look at how these are used and how we read their meaning in the context of the poem.

Learn more:

The Role of Rhyme and Song in Early Phonological Development
clpe.org.uk/rhymeandsong

Phonics in a Rich Reading Curriculum
clpe.org.uk/phonics

Effective Spelling in a Rich Reading Curriculum
clpe.org.uk/spelling

“ We read ‘Jabberwocky’ as a class. I chose this poem as it’s full of fun, nonsense words and gave me the opportunity to say to the class ‘there’s no right or wrong answer.’ The children visibly enjoyed the session and became surprisingly confident in visualising what the creatures looked like and how they moved; ‘The Bandersnatch is a mummy, wrapped in bandages who is a robber (snatches things).’ ”

“ A seminal moment was sharing Gerard Manley Hopkins’s ‘Pied Beauty’ with a Y6 boy who eats, sleeps and breathes rap – the sprung rhythm took us into some beat boxing. Another key into exploring and developing rhythm in his writing. ”



8 Work 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.

Most poets immerse themselves in poetry and enjoy the pleasures of reading and sharing poetry; replicate this in the classroom. Listen to poets talk about their writing process; what inspires them, how they work, how they draft, edit and redraft – all this yields a wealth of information to consider the freedoms and support we give children in their own writing. A visit from a poet brings this experience directly to the children and can be hugely enriching and inspiring.

Learn more:

Let's Write! Improving Reading and Writing using Poetry with Joseph Coelho
clpe.org.uk/creativewriting

Poet Interviews on Poetryline
clpe.org.uk/poetinterviews

The Power of Poetry Research Summary
clpe.org.uk/poetrysummary

“ Joseph Coelho visited our school. He spent the day doing workshops with the children in Key Stage 2 but also engaged the whole school with an assembly and signed books after school. A wonderful opportunity for parents to see how enthusiastic the children were about having a 'real' poet visiting! The writing they produced as a result of his workshops was clearly inspired writing and set the tone for what they were capable of. ”



9 Understand the importance of art, drama, music and dance to support children's poetry writing

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.

Allow time and space for children to respond to poetry in a variety of ways. A poem read aloud may provide them with a strong image in their mind which they may want to transfer to paper. Alternatively, an image produced may be a springboard for the writing. Music may inspire children to engage rhythmically, feeling beats and patterns, allowing them to hear the rhythms of their writing more effectively. Acting out a poem could unlock a deeper understanding.

Learn more:

Inspiring Writers KS1 and KS2

clpe.org.uk/writingks1

clpe.org.uk/writingks2

Power of Reading

clpe.org.uk/powerofreading

Power of Reading in the Early Years

clpe.org.uk/POREY

“ The children spoke of a greater inspiration to write – a ‘poetry chain’ which links art and imagination and writing and feeds on itself to form a collection of poems, then a book, then even more. ”

“ The poetry journals were a place to record their inspiration; through writing, drawing, ‘overheard moments’, mind maps and cut outs. ‘A bit like a diary, but not secret’ in the words of one child. ”



10 Give 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.

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. Some poems may be made to come off the page and be performed. Use prominent events or take videos of children who wish to publish their work in this way. Create anthologies around themes that are shared interests. Give children's own published poetry a prominent place in the reading environment alongside that of the poets who have inspired them.

Learn more:

CLiPPA Schools Shadowing Scheme
clpe.org.uk/clippa

Get Writing! Book making with Paul Johnson
clpe.org.uk/bookmaking

CLPE Reading and Writing Scales
clpe.org.uk/readingandwritingscales

“ *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 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



POETRY IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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.**



CLIPPA

Poetry Award

The Shadowing Scheme

Get involved in the CLiPPA Shadowing Scheme 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 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

Visit clpe.org.uk/CLiPPA to find out
about the Schools Shadowing Scheme

Visit Poetryline for inspiration and support
for teaching poetry clpe.org.uk/poetryline



Keep in touch



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