

## Rhythm and Poetry by Karl Nova (Caboodle Books)

The first published collection from Hip Hop poet Karl Nova has a refreshing directness, honesty and authenticity. Many of the poems are drawn from the workshops he does with children and young people as well as from his performances. Notes accompanying the poems give insights into his process and encourage children to believe that they are poets too. The poems capture the rap beat and tone, demonstrating the currency and significance of rap as a form, especially for young people.

A book that opens doors.

### Overall aims of this teaching sequence.

- To explore and understand the importance of poetry as a genre
- To explore musicality, rhythm and rhyme in poetry
- 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 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 4 or 5 class

#### 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 teaching sequence is split into three sections.

The first section looks at the purpose of poetry, introduces the focus poet, Karl Nova, and explores the importance of rhythm and performance throughout his work and the work of some of his major musical and poetic influences. Children will explore his musical career in parallel with his writing of poetry and look at the influence his musicality has on how he writes and performs his poems. The sequence also explores the work of Maya Angelou and William Shakespeare as formative inspirations and influences.

The second section focuses on giving children the opportunity to explore why he writes and the things that inspire his writing; in particular, writing about poetry and writing, everyday events, personal experiences and emotions.

In the final section, children will explore inspirations for their own poetry and work up poems for performance, finding the rhythm in their own writing and honing their own work for a performance outcome in the form of a poetry fest.

In each section, children have the opportunity to read poetry, listen to poems being read, offer personal responses to the poems, to prepare them for performance and to come up with ideas for poems of their own. The whole sequence builds up towards the chance for the class to write their own poems on subjects of interest to them.

The children will use the knowledge they have gained about rhythm and structure throughout the unit to decide how to perform poetry to an audience as well as present poems on the page. The poems will be published in a class anthology to be shared with the school community in a variety of ways.

Teaching Approaches	Outcomes
Reading Aloud Hearing poems performed by poets Looking at Language Engaging children in rhythm through music Engaging in narrative poetry through drama Modelled writing Responding to writing Publication	Performance of the poet's poetry Identifying poetic language and devices Rhythmic movement Evaluation of performances Poetry Journal with ideas and inspirations for writing Own written poems Performances of children's own original poetry

### Exploring poetic forms and devices:

This collection gives an opportunity to explore the following poetic devices:

- Assonance
- Alliteration
- Rhythm
- Rhyme
- Half rhyme
- Enjambment

### Cross Curricular Links:

#### Geography:

- Throughout the collection, Karl talks about spending a large portion of his childhood living with his father in Lagos, Nigeria. This could provide a good basis for a comparative study of Lagos and London. Use maps to locate the two cities, map differences between them, follow flight paths between the two cities etc.
- Look at similarities and differences in the two cities, Lagos is the largest city in Nigeria and London is the most populous city in England. Compare and contrast buildings, housing and

leisure activities. Immerse the children in experiences of the places such as travel videos and websites so that they really feel they have an experience of both cities.

- Use this to empathise with how Karl may have felt moving away from London with his mother to living in Lagos with his father. *What would have been a familiar comfort? What might have been different? What could he experience in Lagos that he might not have been able to in London? What might he have missed about London?*

#### History:

- ‘The city of my birth’ explores a number of monuments and familiar landmarks in London. Children could look at a history of London over time, how it has grown and developed to be the most populous city in England and why.
- You could investigate why London has always been important for trade and how its face has changed over time, through significant events such as The Great Fire of London, The Great Plague. The reconstruction of Shakespeare’s Globe linked to the session on Shakespeare. The Blitz in World War 2. Redevelopment to house a growing population, such as building tower blocks in the aftermath of the Second World War. The advances in transport to support links to the capital etc.

#### Art:

- Link to Graffiti Culture and Street Art through the lines referencing this in the poem ‘Rhythm and Poetry’, including an artist study on Banksy.
- Make links with the children between poetry, street art and freedom of expression. *What do you think Karl means in the lines:*

like Banksy I'm a street artist  
 peep my graffiti  
 I make 'em with pens and pads  
 not spray cans, do you read me?

- Look at the illustrations by Joseph Witchall in the text that accompany some of the poems. *Do you like the style? Does it fit with the poems?* Encourage the children to develop their own ideas for illustrating favourite poems in the collection or their own poems, choosing and using a style that matches the text.

#### Links to other texts and resources:

This is Karl Nova’s debut collection of children’s poetry, published by Caboodle Books. The book contains verses from workshops he performs in schools, which he regularly visits. To book a visit from Karl, see: <https://www.authorsabroad.com/author/karlnova/>

- Other collections that contain poems with a strong focus on rhythmic language:
  - John Agard: *Goldilocks on CCTV* (Frances Lincoln)
  - John Agard: *The Young Inferno* (Frances Lincoln)
  - John Agard: *The Rainmaker Danced* (Hodder)
  - John Agard and Grace Nichols: *Pumpkin Grumpkin* (Walker)
  - Grace Nichols: *Cosmic Disco* (Frances Lincoln)
  - Benjamin Zephaniah: *Talking Turkeys* (Puffin)
  - Benjamin Zephaniah: *Funky Chickens* (Puffin)

John Lyons: *Dancing in the Rain* (Peepal Tree Press)

Valerie Bloom: *Hot Like Fire* (Bloomsbury)

- CLPE's Poetryline website contains a wealth of resources including videos of Karl Nova 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>
- For your own subject knowledge, you may wish to explore the resources and research articles on HipHopEd; an organisation that brings together a community of educators and scholars who challenge traditional educational systems to value the power of youth culture and voice and authenticate Karl Nova's idea that '*rap is poetry and in its highest form, it is great literature.*' Resources from their website are referenced throughout the sequence and their website can be found at: <http://hiphoped.com/>

## Teaching Sessions:

### Before beginning the sequence:

- Before this session, ensure that individual poetry journals (small notebooks, which could be handmade) are available for each child to use throughout the unit to note ideas and inspirations.
- Create a focus display or poetry corner, where you can display a copy of the front cover of the book when it is revealed in Session 2, a photograph of the poet, a copy of the text and other poems or poetry collections that the children know or could be inspired by (see links to other texts).
- Talk to the children about the kinds of music they like and listen to regularly outside of school; including particular favourite styles, artists or songs.

## Section 1: Rhythm and Poetry

### Session 1: Introducing the poet and the collection

*The experience of being read to is likely to be the real foundation of children's knowledge of poetry, and is also going to be a major influence on how they write themselves. So it is important that it should be as rich, interesting and 'ear-catching' as it can be. It is important that voices other than the teacher's should be heard interpreting a poem. In this way, a range of accents, dialects and voices can be introduced into the reading. It can be particularly valuable for children to hear the poets themselves reading their own poems. This allows authentic voices to be heard.*

- Prior to the session, cover the front of the book to reveal as part of this session. Read aloud to the children the first poem in the collection, ‘Poetry?’ (p.8-9) Ask the children what kind of writing they think this is and how they know this.
- Now share the poem on the page (covering the description written by Karl at the end) and read aloud again. Give time for the children to share their initial responses to the text. *What do you like about the poem? How does the poem make you feel? What makes you feel like this? What do you think the poem is about? Is there any unfamiliar language in the poem that we could discuss?*
- Come back together to take children’s feedback. Have they read poetry like this before? If so, what? Who do they think wrote the poem? Why do they think this? What clues are there in the text?
- Come back to the poem on the page to look at examples of language that give us an idea about the writer, such as the references to being someone who thought poetry was boring when they were a kid, someone who was turned around by the lyrical language when they heard an M.C. – do the children know what an M.C. is and what they do? You could play an example of one of the influences cited by Karl in the introduction such as Rakim by sharing Eric B and Rakim’s ‘Don’t Sweat the Technique’ through this link (which doesn’t share the video, which is **not** suitable for classroom viewing): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dM5sIBIRDLQ> (**NB: Lots of the musical references noted by Karl in the collection such as Rakim and Nas will need to be vetted before sharing more widely with the children for suitability of language and appropriateness of imagery in their music videos.**) After listening, ask the children if they think this is an example of poetry? Is the language in the track poetic as the poem suggests? Why or why not? What do they think poetry is?
- Come back to the second half of the poem; how did the experience of seeing the M.C. affect the writer of this poem? Why do they write? From what you know about the person writing, how do you think this poem might be performed?
- Now watch the poet, Karl Nova perform the poem at:  
<https://www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poets/nova-karl> Reflect on this performance; *was it what you were expecting? Did you enjoy it? What questions do you have about the poet or the poem after hearing this?* Add these to the poetry display on sentence strips around a photograph of the poet, Karl Nova. Read aloud the first two paragraphs of the introduction to the collection to the children (p.5). *What more do they learn about the poet from reading this?*
- Now look at Karl Nova as a wider artist, you can access his *Bandcamp* site at:  
<https://karlnova.bandcamp.com/> Play the children the title track from his latest album *For Such a Time as This*. Before you play the track, explain that they will need to focus on the lyrics they hear and how these relate to ‘Poetry?’ You may need to play more than once to focus their attention on the words as well as the music. Children may pick out repeated lines such as:

Rhythm and poetry living in me  
 Rhythm and poetry breathing in me  
 Rhythm and poetry is what I breathe

- Now reveal the notes that Karl has written at the bottom of the poem by reading these aloud. *Have they heard any rap music before? What is it like? Do they like it?* Collect examples to add to the wall display.

- Finish the session by returning to the title of this first poem, ‘Poetry?’. Why do you think he has chosen to punctuate the title in this way? Do you think this is an example of poetry? Do you think everyone would see this as poetry? Why or why not? By this point, children might start to look at the poem in more depth, picking out the fact that there is a rhyme pattern (boring/snoring/foreign/warring, esteem/me/M.C., deep/asleep/leap etc.), there are examples of alliteration (pick up a pen, dug deeper), assonance (gems, buried). Support the children in finding some of the poetic devices used that make this poetry by marking up the text.

## Session 2: Exploring rhythm

*Music and poetry have always gone together. The earliest poems are likely to have been sung and chanted, and many of the elements that make poems hang together – rhyme, meter, alliteration, repetition and refrain – are musical in character.*

- For this session, you will need to be in a large space where the children can move freely and you have access to music. Start the session by revealing the front cover of the collection and the title *Rhythm and Poetry. What is rhythm? Why do you think Karl Nova has chosen this title for the collection? What do you expect from the rest of the poems in the collection?*
- Revisit Karl’s Bandcamp page <https://karlnova.bandcamp.com/> and listen to the track ‘Don’t Stop’ (for lyrics, see resources). Focus on the lines:
 

*I'm talking with rhythm, I'm walking with rhythm some people think I'm out of order  
But I just keep on going I just keep on flowing  
What can I say man I'm like water*
- What does it mean to talk and walk with rhythm? Listen again to ‘Don’t Stop’ and encourage the children to feel the rhythm and the natural pulse in the music. They may just start with nodding their head, tapping their hand on their leg or tapping their foot on the ground. Part way through, encourage them to walk with rhythm to the music as the lyrics suggest.
- Now change the song to ‘Calm’, also available on Karl’s Bandcamp page, which has a slightly slower pace. How will this change the way they move? Encourage the children to use more of their bodies, hands, arms to move rhythmically to the music in any way they feel.
- Switch to some of the different kinds of music that Karl was inspired by when he was younger; these examples would all be suitable for children of this age:
 

Mos Def: *Sun Moon Stars*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRrhT1L5kKY>  
  A Tribe Called Quest: *Can I Kick It?*: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7D\\_JwgIM-y4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7D_JwgIM-y4)  
  De La Soul: *Action*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QF24oQIU5DI>

Also include examples of female M.C.s and artists, such as:  
  Moni Love: *It's a Shame*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iz4UDt4nOp0>  
  Queen Latifah and Moni Love: *Ladies First*:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=srtJtLzoeo4>
- Switch the songs back and forth, exploring different ways of moving rhythmically.
- Allow the children to respond to the music. What did they like? What did they dislike? Did they have any personal connections with any of the music? Does it sound like anything else they have heard? Did it raise any questions for them?

- Come back to the poem from yesterday's session 'Poetry?' and re-watch Karl's performance. *Can they hear the rhythm in his performance?* Explore which words he places emphasis on as he performs, how the lyrical language flows, lines that rhyme and where he pauses.
- Now, read aloud the title poem 'Rhythm and Poetry' (p55-57). Compare and contrast this poem with 'Poetry?' What do the two poems have in common? How could we learn from Karl's performance of 'Poetry?' in shaping our own performances of 'Rhythm and Poetry'?
- Give time for the children to look at a copy of *Rhythm and Poetry* for themselves in small groups, splitting this lengthier poem into manageable parts and focussing the children on finding the rhythm in their lines to build up their own group performance. They will need to read and re-read their given lines over and over to find the lyrical flow and rhythm needed for the performance. Encouraging the children to walk around rhythmically while they practise will help them to find and secure the rhythm and use the rhyme to help them remember the words. Some may also find it helpful to move their hands to help with this.
- Give plenty of time for the children to rehearse their own lines, then come back together as a group and give time and space to put the whole poem back together as a performance; rehearsing, trying out new ideas and working up to a finished performance.
- Allow time for the children to feed back on the interpretations of different groups, evaluating the effectiveness of different techniques and styles and what these brought to their understanding and interpretation of the poem.

### Session Three: Performing Poetry

*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. Giving voice and sound to poetry is an important key to unlocking the meanings and music contained in each poem. It is through performing poetry that the quality of rhyme and verse form, and the power of language can be explored and realised. Presenting poetry to an audience in this way might also lead children to recognise more clearly the humour in a poem or reflect more thoughtfully on its meaning.*

- Explain that today they are going to explore some of the other poems in the collection and work up one of these to perform themselves.
- In preparation for this session, make copies of the following poems:  
 'My address' (p.10-11)  
 'Waiting for that bell to ring' (p.12)  
 'Homework' (p.13-14)  
 'Headphones' (p.15-16)  
 'The Dancer' (p.17-18)  
 'The Chase' (p.20)
- Pin these poems up around the classroom or another space for the children to find and explore at their leisure. They can read, pass over, move on and then select one they'd like to talk about with someone else. This encourages the children to enjoy the experience of simply reading a poem, to relish the uncertainties of meanings and the nature of the knowledge and emotional responses that poems invoke in them as readers. Tell them to stand in front of the poem they most want to investigate more and allow groups to take the poem back to tables for further work.

- Let them discuss their initial responses, why they selected this poem, how it made them feel, what they were particularly drawn to, personal connections they have with the poem, what it made them think about or questions it raised. These poems are all based around common everyday experiences that the children will easily relate to. Share the first paragraph on p.6 of the text, which is part of the introduction to the collection. Focus on the lines '*I use poetry to capture moments like when I take photographs, when I perform them it is like I am taking out pictures from my phone and showing them to you.*' *What is the picture they see in their minds as they read the poem? Is it the same as or different from others in the group?*
- Now encourage the children to look more deeply at the poem, exploring the use of language. You can use this as an opportunity to introduce children to the names of specific forms or devices to look at what makes their chosen poem poetic. You might introduce this by way of what Michael Rosen calls 'secret strings' (*What is Poetry?* Walker 2016). He talks about the importance of discovering how the poet might have used assonance, alliteration, imagery, rhythm and sound. *Can they identify any of these in their chosen poem?*
- Next, give time for the children to work up their chosen poem for performance. Would it be best performed individually, in pairs or as a group? How will you pace the performance? How will you use your voice(s) to help share a clear picture of this moment? Will you use any movement or action? Will you emphasise the rhythm in the words? Give time for the pupils to build up their poems, text marking with performance notes and ideas, practising, editing and polishing to a finished performance. Before 6th June 2018, this could be filmed and submitted for the CLiPPA shadowing scheme competition to win the opportunity to perform this poem on stage as part of the award ceremony at the National Theatre, see:  
<https://www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline/clippa/clippa-schools-shadowing-scheme>
- Give time for the pupils to watch, reflect on and evaluate each other's performances, this could be done in turn in the order the poems come up in the text. *What did each interpretation add to your understanding of the narrative? Could you see a clear picture of the moment?*

#### **Session 4: Deeper responses to poems read, exploring other poetic influences – Maya Angelou**

*Discussion forms the foundations for working with books. The same is true of working with poems. Children need frequent, regular and sustained opportunities to talk together about the books and poems that they are reading as a whole class. The more experience they have of talking together like this the better they get at making explicit the meaning that a text holds for them.*

- Read the last part of the introduction to the collection on p.6, from '*I called this collection Rhythm and Poetry, which is an acronym for rap...*' to '*I hope they uplift, inform and inspire*'. What more do we learn about the poet from this reading? Have they heard of any of the poetic influences and inspirations he cites?
- Explain that today they are going to focus on poems by one of these named influences, Maya Angelou. If the children haven't heard of her before, it would be worth introducing her more deeply as one of history's most influential poets, singers and civil rights activists. Texts such *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls* by Elena Favilli & Francesca Cavallo (Particular Books), *Fantastically Great Women Who Changed the World* by Kate Pankhurst (Bloomsbury), *Little Leaders: Bold*

*Women in Black History* by Vashti Harrison (Puffin), *Little People, Big Dreams: Maya Angelou* (Frances Lincoln) would give a good introduction to her life and work.

- Read aloud the poem ‘Caged Bird’ by Maya Angelou, see:  
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/48989/caged-bird> Allow time for the children to reflect on the reading and give their initial responses as readers. *Did they like the poem? What did it make them think about or feel?*
- Re-read the poem, this time giving the children a copy of the text to look at individually or in mixed pairs or groups. Allow time and space for them to read and respond to the text, text marking with their thoughts, feelings, questions and ideas about the poem. Allow time to feed these back, annotating a large copy with the most prominent ideas for the working wall display.  
*Knowing what you know about Maya Angelou, what do you think influenced her writing in this poem?*
- Now give a different poem by Maya Angelou to mixed groups to explore and respond to. Suitable poems for this age group could be:  
‘Harlem Hopscotch’: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/58212/harlem-hopscotch>  
‘Life Doesn’t Frighten Me’: <https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/life-doesn-t-frighten-me/>  
‘Alone’: <https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/life-doesn-t-frighten-me/>  
‘Woman Work’: <https://allpoetry.com/Woman-Work>  
‘Human Family’: <https://allpoetry.com/Human-Family>
- Allow time and space for them to read and respond to the text, text marking with their thoughts, feelings, questions and ideas about the piece in mixed pairs or small groups to share ideas and interpretations. At this point, allow the pupils to reflect as readers, without telling them to look specifically for poetic techniques or devices, although it is fine if they do this naturally. They may wish to record their thinking on a supportive framework such as this response to poetry grid, adapted from the Tell Me approach (Aidan Chambers, *Tell Me: Children Reading and Talk with The Reading Environment*, Thimble Press, 2011): <https://www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline/resources/key-teaching-approaches/responding-poetry>
- Give time for each group to feed back on their poem by reading the poem aloud and sharing their responses and interpretations.
- Reflect on these poems, thinking how these reflect on the life and work of Maya Angelou but also, why they might these poems have spoken to Karl Nova as an artist? What qualities do her poems share with his own? What experiences might they have shared?

### Session 5: Performing other lyrical language – Shakespeare

*Children with a tuneful ear are quite adept at making words fit simple beats and melodies. Toasting, rapping, beatboxing or fitting words to musical beats is a skill that many children may have already acquired, and which they could extend by practising poems in this style before performing them and going on to write lyrics of their own.*

- Come back to the introductory paragraph read in the previous session and re-read the last paragraph in the explanation text behind ‘Poetry?’ on p.9: *You can’t escape rap today. Young people are immersed in it. Rap employs all the literary devices and figures of speech that great*

*men like Shakespeare used. I use these facts to tell anyone that rap is poetry and in its highest form, it is great literature.'*

- Ask the children if they have heard any rap music before. *What rappers do they know and what qualities does rap music they have heard have?* Be aware here that some of the rap children might reference or have heard at home may be of the '*negative, vulgar and low in quality*' rap that Karl references in this paragraph and suggestions may need mediating.
- Come back to the idea suggested that '*Rap employs all the literary devices and figures of speech that great men like Shakespeare used.*' What do the children already know about Shakespeare? What do they know about his writing?
- In this session, children will explore the rhythms of iambic pentameter. Each line will have ten beats to it. It is the most common metrical line in English and has a di-DUM, di-DUM, di-DUM, di-DUM, di-DUM rhythm, e.g. in these extremely famous lines from Shakespeare's play *Richard III* (Act 5, Sc.4)

A horse! a horse! my kingdom for a horse!  
di DUM di DUM di DUM di DUM di DUM

- You could go into more technical detail about iambic pentameter; exploring how the five feet or meter are included in each line, or which syllables are stressed and unstressed if your children have a very good knowledge of beat, rhythm or have explored the rhythms of iambic pentameter before, but for the purposes of this unit, simply exploring the concept of having ten beats to each line is enough.
- Read the lines with the children clapping out the rhythm of the line with you, a softer clap for the first beat, the 'di', and a harder clap for the second beat, the 'DUM' Exploring syllabic beat in this way will also draw children's attention to the way words are formed and can support spelling knowledge.
- Now look at how the scene unfolds, sharing a copy of the text with the children:

KING RICHARD:  
A horse! a horse! my kingdom for a horse!

CATESBY:  
Withdraw, my lord! I'll help you to a horse.

KING RICHARD:  
Slave, I have set my life upon a cast,  
And I will stand the hazard of the die:  
I think there be six Richards in the field:  
Five have I slain to-day instead of him.  
A horse! a horse! my kingdom for a horse!

- Allow them time to practise the lines themselves, tapping and playing out the beats, exploring whether the pattern of ten beats to a line is maintained.
- Now look at this extract from *Julius Caesar*, Act II, Scene II:

CAESAR:

Cowards die many times before their deaths;  
 The valiant never taste of death but once.  
 Of all the wonders that I yet have heard,  
 It seems to me most strange that men should fear  
 Seeing that death, a necessary end,  
 Will come when it will come.

- Does this quote follow the same ten beat pattern all the way through? Where is the pattern broken? What is the impact of breaking the pattern on this line for you as a reader? What does it emphasise? Why do you think the rhythm and beat of Shakespeare may have been spoken to Karl Nova as he was growing up?
- Come back now to a short poem of Karl Nova's, 'Famous?' (p.73). Give the children a copy of the poem to share in pairs. Read the poem aloud, first without emphasising the rhythm so they are clear on the words as they follow along as you read.
- Share a freestyle rap beat with the class, allowing them to tap their feet on the floor or their finger on the table to find the natural pulse: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A8ri9nw6LA4>
- Now help them to find the rhythm in the words, by just looking at the first three lines:  
 Somebody asked me  
 "why ain't you **famous**?"  
 I told him I'm a secret **agent**.
- When reading, place an emphasis on the final rhyming (or half rhyming) words in the line, as emphasised in bold. When you have found the right rhythm that fits the words to the beat, have the children practise these two lines with you.
- Now allow them time to work through the rest of the poem in mixed pairs. Can all the lines be performed to this pattern or does it break somewhere, as in the extract from Julius Caesar that you explored earlier? Give time and space for the children to work with the final lines of the poem to explore and experiment with how to fit these into the beat. Would removing a word help? Can you do this without changing the meaning? (e.g. removing the 'I' from the line 'other reasons I flow from my soul' might help).
- Allow time for children to perform their own versions to the rest of the class, if they wish.

## Section 2: Lyrical Exercises

### Session 6: Self-identity

*Personal experiences and memories can provide a powerful stimulus for children's poetry writing. Through poetry writing children are encouraged to reflect on their experience, to recreate it, shape it and make sense of it.*

- Read the poem 'I'm Different' (p.61-62). Allow time for the children to respond to this poem initially, discussing their likes and dislikes, what it makes them think of or feel, personal

connections they make with the poem and questions they have about it. *Why do you think Karl wrote this poem? What more does it tell us about him and his character?*

- Provide copies of each of the following poems for mixed groups to look at together:
  - ‘For Not Against’ (p.53-54)
  - ‘Text Message from the future’ (p.34-35)
  - ‘Younger Me’ (p.29-30)
  - ‘Wings’ (p.80-81)
  - ‘Underrated’ (p.76-77)
- Give time for the children to read through each poem and pick one that they would like to look at in more detail. Why did you initially decide on this poem? What do you feel about the poem now you have explored it in more detail? What language or patterns in the poem capture your attention? Why? What questions would you want to ask about this poem?
- Allow the groups to reflect on their chosen poems in more depth then take feedback from all groups on their responses. What more do we know about Karl from these poems? What inferences might they make about him and his character, using the poem to justify their opinions?
- Give the children time and space to explore some initial ideas in their poetry journals around writing poetry for themselves, they might try out ideas for a message to their younger selves; *what would you tell yourself now you know what’s to come?* They could explore lines that tell others about their own character, as in ‘For Not Against’ (p.53-54). As the children do this it is important for you to also keep your own journal alongside modelling ideation and composition for them.

### Session 7: Nature in poetry

*Imagery, in a literary or poetic sense, is the author's use of description and vivid language, deepening the reader's understanding of the work, by appealing to the senses.*

*There are different types of imagery. These include:*

- *Visual imagery which refers to sights and allows the reader to visualise the subject, objects or events in the poem.*
- *Auditory imagery refers to sounds and reminds the reader of common or specific sounds as a point of reference to deepen understanding.*
- *Kinaesthetic imagery is related to movement and reminds the reader of body movement or positions that are familiar or imagined – such as the feeling of flying.*
- *Smells and tastes can be referred to as olfactory or gustatory imagery respectively.*
- *Tactile imagery refers to texture and feeling.*

*All imagery is aided through the use of other poetic devices, such as simile, metaphor, personification, onomatopoeia, etc.*

- Listen to Karl Nova perform the poem ‘Four Seasons’: <https://www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poets/nova-karl>. Allow time for them to reflect on their initial responses. *Did they like the poem? Could they relate to it – which is their favourite season and why?*
- Give pairs of children a copy of the poem to re-read and explore how the poet uses description and figurative language such as simile and personification for effect in this poem, ensuring

children have an understanding of these terms and can relate them to specific language in the text, e.g. *covering the ground like a shawl, Jack Frost loses his icy grip,*

- Now listen to 'Boys in the Wood': <https://www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poets/nova-karl> *How is this poem similar to or different from 'Four Seasons'? Which did you prefer? Why?*
- Now give a copy of the poem to mixed pairs or groups of children for them to explore in more depth. What came to mind when you listened to this poem? Why do you think that he has made the analogy between the boys and the trees? What messages do you think might be contained in this poem? Why do you think he has chosen an aspect of nature to convey these messages through?
- Many poets convey their ideas and messages through nature; paper the classroom with other examples of poems, exploring nature such as:  
 'The Sea's Hands' by George Szirtes:  
<https://www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poems/sea%E2%80%99s-hands>  
 'Winter Trees' by George Szirtes: <https://www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poems/winter-trees> Apple  
 'Tree' by George Szirtes: <https://www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poems/apple-tree>  
 'The Cloud's Hair' by George Szirtes:  
<https://www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poems/cloud%E2%80%99s-hair>  
 'Natural Dancing Partners' by John Lyons: <https://www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poems/natural-dancing-partners>  
 'Happy Hummingbird Food' by John Lyons: <https://www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poems/happy-hummingbird-food>  
 'Waiting for Snow' by Jennifer Watson: <https://www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poems/waiting-snow>  
 'Halloween's Crumble' by Joseph Coelho: <https://www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poems/halloweens-crumble>  
 'Conquer' by Joseph Coelho: <https://www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poems/conquer>  
 'The Seagulls' by Michael Rosen: <https://www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poems/seagulls>  
 'Jellyfish' by Michael Rosen: <https://www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poems/jellyfish-0>  
 'Kale' by Hilda Offen: <https://www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poems/kale>  
 'Sun is Laughing' by Grace Nichols: <https://www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poems/sun-laughing>  
 'For Forest' by Grace Nichols: <https://www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poems/forest>  
 'Two Seasons' by Valerie Bloom: <https://www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poems/two-seasons>  
 'Seasons' by Valerie Bloom: <https://www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poems/seasons>
- Select a number of different poems, illustrating different poets, styles and forms. Photocopy the poems and pin them up around the classroom or another space for the children to find and explore at their leisure. They can read, pass over, move on and then select one they'd like to talk about with someone else. This encourages the children to enjoy the experience of simply reading a poem, to relish the uncertainties of meanings and the nature of the knowledge and emotional responses that poems invoke in them as readers. Let them look for connections, ask questions, explore what they like about poems and the use of language.
- Take the children out into a space in the natural environment, to find things to draw, sketch or take photographs of as inspirations for writing. Begin to make notes in your poetry journals about how to capture these things and moments in words. Some children may write words, phrases or wisps of lines, other may begin to draft more fully fledged poems, drawing on poems they have heard or read. As the children do this it is important for you to also continue to keep your own

journal alongside modelling ideation and composition for them, sharing your ideas and thought processes as you write.

### Session 8: Exploring events in poetic narratives through drama

*Many poems are narrative and provide examples of compact dramas, waiting to be opened up into their full dramatic form. This is not true of all poems; but there are some that are capable of being expanded into dramatic performances. Dramatisation need not stop at the single incident described in the poem, but can range forwards and backwards in time around the poetic moment.*

- Read aloud ‘The Puddle’ (p.21). *How did this poem make you feel when you heard it? How is it similar to other poems by Karl Nova that you have read so far? How is it different?*
- Provide mixed pairs or groups with a copy of the poem to discuss and explore in more detail. *Why do you think that the poet has chosen to share this quite uncomfortable moment in writing for an audience? Why has he written it in this way? Explore poetry as a means of expression, and also as a release of feelings, good or bad. How do you think the poet feels, reflecting back on this childhood experience now? Look at specific words and phrases in the text that show how he is feeling about the experience.*
- Act out the poem in threes, to show how both the child in the poem and the person who pushed him in are behaving and feeling, while one child reads the poem aloud. Ensure that children work with carefully staged pushes and falls in trusted partnerships. The children may also add action to the beginning or end of the poem to infer extra meaning. *How will you perform the poem alongside, as you act it out?*
- Now listen to Karl perform the poem ‘Winter Fall’ (p.27-28) <https://www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poets/nova-karl>. Provide mixed pairs or groups with a copy of the text. *What connections do they make between the two poems? Why do they think this experience took the poet back to the moment in ‘The Puddle’? What linked feelings and experiences are there between these two moments, how are these conveyed through the choice of use of language in the text?*
- You could hold an open discussion to talk about experiences of being picked on in a safe and secure environment, reinforcing the expectation that this is a forum for listening, not judging, and that nothing shared will be shared outside the room or used against anyone or that no one will react in a way that makes anyone sharing experience feelings of shame or disgrace, or be treated in a less favourable way because of anything they choose to share. *Have they ever been picked on? Picked on anybody? Or even been a bystander? How does it feel from all these perspectives? Has anything ever happened to them which left them feeling embarrassed in front of others?*
- You may also feel that a session writing some words in their poetry journals may help to explore and work through these issues. Children may want to decide if theirs is a poem they want to share or write just for themselves if dealing with sensitive issues. As the children do this it is important for you to keep up your own journal alongside modelling ideation and composition and how to develop ideas into drafts, talking through stuck points and where ideas may not be working and have to be abandoned or how these can be worked around.

## Session 9: Overcoming negativity

*Children need the permission and opportunities to share and write about themselves, their feelings and important events using poetic forms. 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.
- Listen to Karl Nova perform the poem 'Peer Pressure':  
<https://www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poets/nova-karl>
- Do they know what the phrase peer pressure means? Start an open trust conversation. Make clear to the students that they don't have to share if they don't want to and, if they do share ideas, supportive discussions will take place about points raised. Discuss and note any pressures that the children feel make an impact on them, this might be things like pressures to act or behave in a certain way, keeping up with consumer trends, some may mention being picked on or bullying; you may even have some children who are already talking about negative impact of technology or social media or negative perceptions about body image. If this arises, you could explore a poem like Grace Nichols' 'Sally Size Zero', from her 2014 CliPPA shortlisted collection *Cosmic Disco* (Frances Lincoln), with the children as a further example of using poetry as social commentary about negative perceptions. *How do you think writing about these issues might help? Why is it important that we feel free to express ourselves through writing?*
- In mixed groups, give the children copies of the following poems to read and discuss:
  - 'Stating the Obvious' (p.39)
  - 'Words' (p.36-37)
  - 'Don't feed the trolls' (p.71-72)
- After reading these poems and sharing their initial responses, give time for the children to discuss these in more depth. What more do you learn about the poet's character? What kinds of negative influences does he recognise in everyday life? How does he feel about words and language? What does he use his words for?
- Give the children time and space to explore some initial ideas in their poetry journals around writing poetry to overcome any negativity they see in the world around them. They might draw on recent events in the news or local events, things that are affecting them personally, things they see their friends being affected by, or some kind of social commentary on wider world issues. Be really clear that their poetry journals are just for them to keep and try out their own ideas for writing and that it is up to them at this stage if they want to share their personal writing with a response partner or adult. As the children do this, it is important for you to keep up your own journal alongside modelling ideation, development of ideas and composition, developing ideas into drafts, gaining a response from the children, talking through stuck points and where ideas may not be working and have to be abandoned or how these can be worked around.

## Session 10: Special Moments, Special People

A *places, people and families* theme could offer a clear focus for the personal memories of each writer and can provide a variety of ways in which it is possible to represent early childhood experiences and give them new life. Often, places hold particular memories for families. They may be tied to a special occasion like a wedding, a birth place or a holiday.

- Listen to Karl perform the poem ‘For You’ (p.91): <https://www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poets/nova-karl> *What are your initial thoughts about this poem? Why do you think he has written this poem?*
- Give individuals, mixed pairs or groups a copy of the poem to annotate with their thoughts, responding using evidence from the text. *What important words or phrases help us picture his mother and gain an idea of what she is like or how the poet feels about her? What words or phrases would you use to describe her? Why?*
- Provide the children in their pairs or groups with copies of three other poems that reflect other personal experiences for the poet: ‘New Year?’, ‘Friends’ and ‘The city of my birth’. You can watch Karl perform ‘The city of my birth’ at: <https://www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poets/nova-karl>
- Give the children time and space to explore the three poems and discuss why he might have chosen these things to write about. *What language does he use to show you how he feels about these things? Are they good experiences? Think particularly about the title of ‘The city of my birth’ – what does this tell us?*
- Invite children to relate to their own personal experiences that they could draw on for their own writing. What or who is special to them? Why is this person, place or thing special? How would they describe them/it? What would you want to tell others about this person, place or thing?
- Lead the conversation on to recording ideas and inspirations in their poetry journey, either as drawings, collections of words, phrases and snippets of ideas or initial drafts of poems in their poetry journal about things that are special to them in their wider life. Allow time for children to think about different places, people and/or things they might want to write about and why, and to draft and write ideas, focussing on descriptive language and language that evokes emotion, drawing on understandings gained from the poems they have studied. As the children do this, it is important for you to keep up your own journal alongside, modelling ideation, development of ideas and composition, developing ideas into drafts, gaining a response from the children, talking through stuck points and where ideas may not be working and have to be abandoned or how these can be worked around.

## Session 11: Writing about writing

Throughout the writing process it is important for children to be given materials and space to allow them to plan and compose ideas in different ways. Some children might come straight to drafting full ideas for poems, others might need to draw or bring in an object to inspire language and ideas. Some may need to collect words and phrases, snippets of conversations, or memories as a starting point, others might like to free write and splurge ideas onto the page, coming back to make sense of it and pull out what works after writing. The writing community developed in the classroom should be sufficiently flexible to take these different needs into account in the early drafting process.

- Start the session by hearing Karl perform ‘I write these poems’ (p.65-66)   
<https://www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poets/nova-karl>
- Provide children with a copy of the text in pairs (covering up the reflection paragraph at the bottom) and ask them to re-read the text for themselves. You could replay Karl’s audio reading to support early readers. *From hearing and reading this poem, how do you think he feels about writing? What does writing do for him? What in the poem tells you this?*
- Give time for the children to collect and feed back their ideas. Now read aloud the reflection Karl wrote underneath the poem. *Does this match their thinking? What might you learn about writing from his reflection?*
- If someone was to ask you how you feel about writing, what would you say? Do you like it? Are there any types of writing you prefer doing? What feelings do you experience before a piece of writing? During writing? After you’ve finished a piece of writing?
- *Do you think Karl always feels like this about writing? Do you think he always finds it easy?* Read aloud ‘Writer’s Block’ (p.63-64), including the reflective passage at the end of the poem. What sorts of things inspire him to write when he’s feeling stuck?
- Watch the following video, showing how a high school teacher in New York uses hip hop to help his pupils find their voice in writing:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=135&v=iL82x-diQAY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=135&v=iL82x-diQAY) *How do these boys feel about their experiences of writing? What are they able to do in their writing? What else does being able to write in this way bring to them?*
- Revisit the collection as a whole. What sorts of things does Karl Nova choose to write about in his poems? What do you think he gains from his writing? Do you think he shares the same thoughts as the pupils in the video? Draw out some of the common themes such as:  
 Self-identity  
 Writing about writing  
 Writing about the natural world  
 Writing about uncomfortable moments  
 Overcoming negativity  
 Writing about special times, people or places
- Explain to the children that in the next few sessions, they are going to be writing their own poems on topics or themes that they are interested in. *Where might their inspirations come from? Might they choose to write about some of the same things Karl Nova has explored?*
- Listen to Karl and other poets talk about their inspirations for writing poetry:  
<https://www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poet-interviews/what-inspires-you-poet> and how they go about writing their poetry: <https://www.clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poet-interviews/how-do-you-go-about-writing-your-poetry-0> What ideas can they pick up from this? 2015 CLIPPA winner Joseph Coelho, talks about the importance of keeping a note of ideas in a notebook or on a phone, before selecting those to work up into a draft, 2017 winner Kate Wakeling talks about splurging ideas onto a page, writing really freely and seeing what comes out. *How do these compare with Karl’s reflections? How do you like to write, or which way do you think you might like to try out?*
- Give time for children to work with their poetry journals, making notes of different ideas for poems or having a go at ‘splurging’ some ideas onto the page.
- Now give time for the children to reflect back on the ideas they’ve collected and think about which they feel might be most successful to take forward to a draft piece of writing in the next session.

- It is important for you as a teacher of writing to reflect on your own feelings about writing alongside the children and review ideas you have collected in your journal in this section of the sequence. Our [recent research](#) highlights the importance of teachers as writers of poetry.

### Session 12: 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.*

- 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 from your own journal that you could explore in a poem. Model writing a poem based on one of the topics discussed during one of the sessions, 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 you follow the rhythmic style of Karl Nova or write in your own way? Will you use any of the poetic devices you have explored in Karl's poetry, such as rhyme, repetition, alliteration, assonance? You may have children in the class who are very adept at using rhythm and rhyme in their writing; they may, for example write lyrics in their own time and may have been switched on to writing by this text, which might be very different from other poetry texts they have seen in school and presents an open invitation for self-expression. Other writers may not be so adept at this very lyrical way of writing and may need support to find their own authentic voice and rhythm and be able to rhyme authentically if they wish to write in this way. Some may be more comfortable to write in free verse and find it easier to express their thoughts and feelings in this way.
- Allow time for children to draft their own poems around the themes and subjects of their choice, then allow them to read these aloud to themselves, perhaps while walking around or moving so they can feel the rhythms of their writing before sharing with 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, adjusting rhythms or making 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 13: Editing and presenting of own poems, including through performance

*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. *What form will it take? How will it look on the page? 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. Publish your own work as a teacher writer alongside that of the children.
- When they are happy with the way their poem looks 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 14: Hosting a poetry festival

*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, perform, dramatise, join in and hear poets perform their own work. If poetry is not given a voice, if it just stays on the page as a printed object, then it is not going to come alive for most children.*

*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.*

- Following this, hold a poetry festival for children to perform their own original compositions to parents or other classes in the school.
- 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 techniques they have learnt from seeing Karl Nova's. *What they will need to consider when performing their own poems?*
- Read Karl Nova's poem 'Backstage thoughts' (p59-60). Use the poem to reflect how he, as an accomplished performer, feels about performing and to discuss children's own feelings about performance. Some children might be keen to perform, others may not want to, so could work on illustrating their poems for display at the event, making a programme for the event, filming or photographing performances to write up for the school newsletter or website or being responsible

for gathering props others might need. Some children might not want to perform their own work but might be comfortable to introduce others. Negotiate roles so that all children feel comfortably involved with the event.

- It would be wonderful if teachers and other adults who have worked alongside the children as part of the sequence also felt confident to perform some of their own poetry as models of writing at the event. With appropriate permissions you could share video performances with us at [poetry@clpe.org.uk](mailto:poetry@clpe.org.uk).

### Session 15: Reflection on the collection as a whole

*After listening to poetry, children may want to write their own poems. These, too, can be recorded with music or sound-effects, and kept together with a class anthology in the listening corner. Alternatively, individual collections of poems can be built up by each child and presented both in book form and performed or recorded; collections of this kind can show the range of subjects and forms explored.*

- 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. *Did you engage with this style of writing? What are your most memorable poems? Which spoke to you the most? 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?*
- Now focus on the poems that the children have written. How did you feel about writing poetry before looking at this text? How do you feel about it now? If your feelings changed, why was this? What kinds of poems were your favourite to write? What did you find it easiest to write about?
- Display the children's own poems prominently in the reading corner, library or a shared area so they can be read by a wider audience, with some of their favourite poems from the collections and written reflections about their own writing displayed alongside.