Poetry and word games for KS1 and KS2

A National Literacy Trust membership resource

Thanks to Mike Garry for sharing some of his favourite games here.

Mike Garry is a talented Mancunian poet. He has performed poetry since 1994, worked in hundreds of schools and held residencies in prisons, hospitals and art galleries as well as being a librarian for many years.

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Favourite words

Kids love words – especially new words: they're like little sound sweeties popped into the mouth, sucked, swallowed and repeated with glee and rapture.

Get a list of your own favourite words together and read them aloud. Some of mine are:

Plop

Hop

Bob

Boom

Shakka

Delicious

Surreptitious

Ambidextrous

Coccyx

Genre

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T: 020 7587 1842 W: literacytrust.org.uk Twitter: @Literacy_Trust Facebook: nationalliteracytrust

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Sesquipedalian

Wobble

Austere

Get the children to ask other people what their favourite words are and write them down.

Onomatopoeia

Think about onomatopoeia and how words can reflect their sound and meaning. Think about bubbles, plops, claps, bangs throbs and whispers. Why they are such lovely words to use? What is it we like about the sounds words make? Questions like 'Have you ever seen a snake run?' and 'Does a sausage boil in a frying pan?' will lead to discussing the onomatopoeic nature of words like 'slither' and 'sizzle'.

Be conscious of your mouth and how it moves – sit with a partner and get them to say their favourite words and watch how the lips, mouth, tongue, teeth and eyes are employed.

Exercise

Get a dictionary and ask children to look through it and find words they like the sound of. Ask them to write them down and ask themselves why they like them. What is it that attracts them to the word?

The pen is mightier than the sword.

A picture paints a thousand words.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Make up your own class dictionary by making up five words a day – puddlewonderfull, squongey skwiff and kerfuddle. Make up meanings for the new words.

Look at slang words - Bazzing, Mint, Wicked - how do they come about?

Play with sound and have fun inventing language.

The Art of Naming

Aren't nouns great? What is a noun? It comes from the Latin word 'nomen' which simply means 'name'.

A noun is a word used to name a person, animal, place or thing. Nouns are usually the first words which small children learn – *Mummy, Daddy, Dog, Cat, Book, Manchester.*

You might offer children a prize for creating a sentence without a noun. Look how a sentence is constructed and the role of the noun. Use this opportunity to reiterate the basics of noun, verb and adjective.

Lisa strokes the black cat.

Lisa and *cat* = nouns, *strokes* = verb and *black* = adjective.

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What is the shortest sentence in the world? ('Go', not 'I am'.)

Look at **collective nouns**. There lots of different collective nouns that all mean 'group' but that are specific to the particular thing there is a group of, such as 'a herd of elephants' or 'a crowd of people'.

There is great diversity of collective nouns associated with animals, from 'a sleuth of bears' to 'a murder of crows', 'a murmuration of starlings' to 'a muster of storks'.

Favourite names

If you could change your name by deed poll what would you change it to? Look at name origins such as Cooper, Jackson and Fletcher. What were the original meanings?

Get the class register out and focus on specific names and meanings, e.g. Kaja means 'echo' in Estonian. Amira means 'princess' in Arabic. Look at the poem *Isn't Your Name Magical* by James Berry.

Exercises

Invent a funny school register with made up names.

Do a list poem of place names/pop songs/cars. Why do some place names sound so good? – New York, London, Paris, Munich, Gorton?

Why do some place names sound so bad? Hull, Accrington, Birmingham, Bury, Herod? Learn to play with the sounds of the words.

Kennings

A kenning is a compound figurative or phrase that aims to replace the noun. It consists of two words that describe the noun. Kennings originate from the Anglo Saxon Norse spoken by Vikings and slowly integrated within English.

Very simply, it is a way of describing something indirectly, like a metaphor or simile, and making kennings are a great way to introduce children to figurative speech.

One of the earliest forms of kenning in literature comes from the poem *Beowulf* where 'seal's field' describes the sea and 'skull splitter' describes an axe. Kennings, when written or spoken as a list, can create short riddles:

Squidgy ball

Dotty skin

Yellowy red

Sticky fingers

Sweet lips

Jigsaw pieces

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What am I? (an orange)

Animals are good to describe in kenning form:

Quiet prowler

Night howler

Free mealer

Chicken stealer

Rusty splasher

Hunter dasher

What am I? (a fox)

Kennings are now part of the English language - lighthouse, rucksack, eyeball.

Exercise

Ask children to think of any noun – glasses, octopus, tomato. Now ask them to gather together groups of kennings that describe the noun.

Now put those kennings in a list and try to use alliteration, rhyme and rhythm to make the list sound poetic. When the children have a list, get them to read them to each other and see if they can guess what the other is describing.

The poem *Daughter of the Sea* by Philip Gross shows how kennings can be integrated into longer poems.

Riddles

Riddles are fun and a great way to introduce adults and children to poetry. They raise awareness of metaphor, personification and writing in the first person.

Present a one-line riddle to the group, such as:

A gold coin in blue - what am I?

Think about simile – what's circular and golden like a gold coin? A further clue is the fact that it is surrounded by blue (or grey depending on the weather). You've got it - the sun.

Four fingers and a thumb – but flesh and bone, I have none. What am I?

This thing is like a hand, but not a hand because it doesn't have any bones or flesh. It has a type of skin - when worn, it is like a second skin - a glove.

There are also longer riddles. Here's one from *The Hobbit:*

"What has roots as nobody sees

Is taller than trees

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Up, up it goes,

And yet never grows?

What am I?" (a mountain)

And a favourite of mine is:

"In marble walls as white as milk,

Lined with a skin as smooth as silk,

Within a fountain colour clear.

A golden sphere doth there appear.

No doors are found in this stronghold,

Yet thieves break in and steal the gold.

What am I?" (an egg)

Exercise

After doing some practice riddles with the class, make up some of your own. Choose a topic from an envelope or a 'Riddle Bag' that you have made in advance (parts of the body/fruits/animals work well).

As a class or as individuals, try to write a four-line riddle on the chosen topic using the following model:

- A direct comparison with something unusual
- Something it is and something it isn't
- What it is used for/what people do with it
- Something descriptive (e.g. its colour, feel, sound, smell, shape)

Read the riddles to each other, or parents, and see if they can guess what it is. The key is not to make them too easy.

Found Poems

Found poems are, literally, poems made from found materials.

A famous example of this is The Beatles' song *Being for the Benefit of Mr. Kite*, where John Lennon found a poster advertising a circus event in Rochdale.

"Being for the benefit of Mr. Kite

There will be a show tonight on trampoline

The Hendersons will all be there

Late of Pablo-Fanques Fair, what a scene (Have you seen it? It's great, they got stuff.)

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Over men and horses hoops and garters

Lastly through a hogshead of real fire!

In this way Mr. K. will challenge the world!

The celebrated Mr. K.

Performs his feat on Saturday at Bishopsgate

The Hendersons will dance and sing

As Mr. Kite flies through the ring, don't be late

Messrs. K and H. assure the public

Their production will be second to none

And of course Henry the Horse dances the waltz!

The band begins at ten to six

When Mr. K. performs his tricks without a sound

And Mr. H. will demonstrate

Ten somersaults he'll undertake on solid ground

'ving been some days in preparation

A splendid time is guaranteed for all

And tonight Mr. Kite is topping the bill.

(It's me. In the thing.)"

The words of the song were simply taken from the poster and rearranged into a song. The effect is brilliant. Found poetry has been used by musicians and poets, with some of the most notable being The Beatles, David Bowie and Simon Armitage.

Here's one from US Secretary of State Donald Rumsfeld during a speech on counter-intelligence in Iraq.

"The Unknown

As we know

There are known knowns

There are things we know we know

We also know

There are known unknowns

That is to say

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We know there are some things

We do not know

But there are also unknown unknowns

The ones we don't know

We don't know."

Exercise

Get a collection of newspapers, magazines, posters and general text. Ask children to cut out 20 - 25 headlines they like the sound of. Put them all together in a pile and then get children to play with piecing them together as a complete poem. Newspaper headlines are excellent in this task because they tend to employ poetic techniques such as rhyme, onomatopoeia and alliteration. The children can also add their own conjunctions, words or phrases to add to the effect of the poem.

Remember, meaning is not essential – the poem does not have to 'make sense' It can, but it doesn't have to. It's also just nice to hear what the juxtapositions of strange bundles of words do next to each other.

When this is achieved, get a piece of A3 or A4 paper and stick the cut-outs to the paper. The combination of different fonts, sizes and coloured text gives a stunning visual representation of the poem which, when framed, can be a piece of art in itself.

Haiku

Haiku is a form of Japanese poetry consisting of 3 lines of 5, 7 and 5 syllables respectively. They focus on simple everyday things in an attempt to give the reader a new experience and deeper appreciation of those simple everyday things.

Originally called Hokku, which means, 'starting verse', they are divided into two sections. The first section is the first two lines which captures the image for the reader. The second section is the last line that frames the image and sheds further light on it in a figurative way. For instance:

Manchester Haiku

Football fans slumber

Imagining miracles

A curious joy

Haiku is a great way to warm up for further writing. It is a clear focus of an image or an event and a starting point to focus upon.

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Exercise

Collect a number of photos or images. Ask children to choose one they like and then ask them to try to capture the image in words. These words should form the first two lines of a haiku. Remember, the final line should relate to the first two lines, but not directly.

To start with, don't worry too much about the syllable count. Focus on capturing a clear image. Then focus on the final line which must stand alone but relate to the first two lines.

When the children have a rough sketch of the haiku, try to concentrate on the syllable count by editing and tidying up the poem. Remember, the first line should contain five syllables, the second line seven and the last line five. However, you can be flexible.

If the children find this easy, get them to write a tri-haiku, which is three haiku poems that all relate to each other.

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