

## Children and young people's engagement with poetry in 2022

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It has been a while since we explored children and young people's engagement with poetry, either as readers or as creators. Our last study (Clark & Lant, 2018) highlighted just how much creativity pervaded every aspect of children and young people's views and experiences of poetry. Playfulness was another theme that emerged, which appeared to be particularly important for FSM pupils as a reason for consuming and creating poetry.

To re-explore this, we asked over 60,000 children and young people aged 8 to 18 from 327 schools in England, Scotland and Wales in early 2022 about whether they read or write poetry as part of a wider survey on their literacy attitudes and habits.

Some of the key findings from 2022 include:

### Children and young people as readers of poetry

- 3 in 10 (28.0%) children and young people said in 2022 that they read poetry in their free time at least once a month.
- There has been a steady increase in the number of children and young people who read poetry in their free time at least once a month over the past 12 years. Indeed, a third (35.3%) more children and young people said that they read poetry at least once a month in 2022 compared with 2010, rising from 20.7% in 2010 to 28.0% in 2022.
- More girls than boys read poetry in their free time (31.6% vs 20.4%).
- In line with our previous findings, more children and young people who receive FSMs read poetry in their free time than their peers who don't receive FSMs (31.9% vs 24.6%).
- The percentage of those who read poetry decreased with age, with twice as many children aged 8 to 11 (42.9%) saying that they read poetry in their free time compared with those aged 14 and older (around 20%).

- Children and young people who read poetry had higher reading engagement. Compared with their peers who don't read poetry, more enjoyed reading (62.3% vs. 42.0%), more read daily (37.7% vs. 24.3%) and more saw themselves as good readers (85.5% vs. 78.2%).
- Most poetry readers told us that they read for functional purposes, with 2 in 3 agreeing that reading helps them learn new words (67.6%) or learn about new things (65.8%). Additionally, poetry readers were motivated by curiosity, with 1 in 2 saying that they read because it helps them learn about other people and cultures (51.8%) or because it helps them understand the views of others (51.5%).

### Children and young people as writers of poetry

- Nearly 1 in 5 (18.5%) children and young people said they write poetry in their free time.
- While we saw an increase in the number of children and young people who read poetry in their free time between 2010 and 2022, the number of children and young people who said that they write poems in their free time at least once a month had remained roughly the same in that time period, increasing to 18.5% in 2022 from 17.7% in 2010.
- More girls than boys wrote poetry in their free time (22.0% vs 14.3%).
- As with reading poetry, slightly more children who receive FSMs said that they write poetry in their free time than their peers who do not receive FSMs (22.7% vs 17.1%).
- The percentage of those who write poetry decreased with age. Three times as many children aged 8 to 11 (33.5%) said that they write poetry in their free time compared with those aged 16 and older (11.1%).
- Poetry writers showed higher writing engagement than non-poetry writers, with twice as many saying that they enjoy writing (59.1% vs 29.1%), more writing daily (27.9% vs 15.6%) and more seeing themselves as good writers (80.4% vs 66.7%).
- Most poetry writers said that they were motivated to write to express their creativity, with most saying that writing helped them feel creative (74.0%), helped them express their imagination (67.8%) or helped them express their feelings (63.4%). Motivations associated with a mindful writer also figured highly, with nearly 3 in 5 saying that writing helps them relax (57.4%), and 1 in 2 saying that writing makes them feel happy (49.3%) or confident (48.1%). Far fewer poetry writers were motivated to write by social aspects, such as writing to support causes they care about (31.1%) or to feel connected with the world (35.7%).

### When readers of poetry are also writers of poetry

- 1 in 2 (50.9%) children and young people who read poetry in their free time also told us that they write poetry in their free time, which compares with only 7.1% of children and young people who don't read poetry in their free time.
- The relationship between reading and writing poetry is reflected in some of the insight that children and young people shared with us, such as: **“What makes me want to read is when I'm trying to write poems.”** (Girl, Y8)

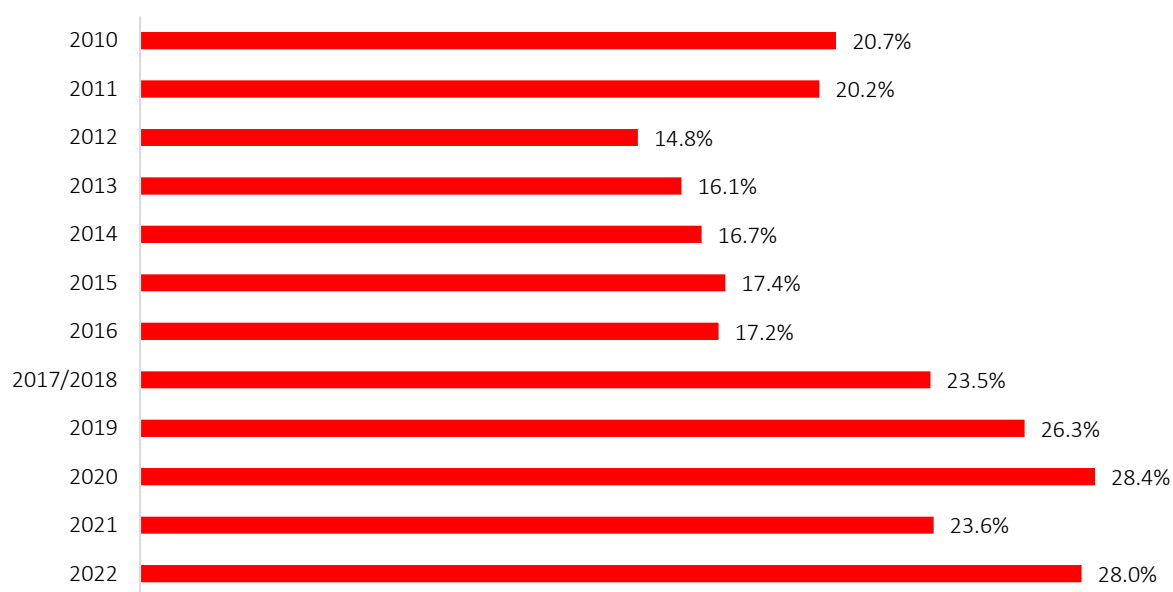
## Children and young people as readers of poetry

In 2022, nearly 3 in 10 (28.0%) children and young people said they had read poetry in their free time at least once a month.

Figure 1 shows that there had been quite a bit of variation over the past 12 years in the percentage of children and young people who said that they read poetry in their free time. Indeed, we evidenced the lowest percentage in 2012, when only around 1 in 7 said that they read poetry in their spare time at least once a month. Encouragingly, since then there has been steady improvement in the number of children and young people reading poetry, with the highest number of nearly 3 in 10 doing so just before the first national lockdown in 2020. Levels fell in 2021 but they recovered again in 2022.

Overall, a third (35.3%) more children and young people said that they read poetry at least once a month in 2022 compared with 2010.

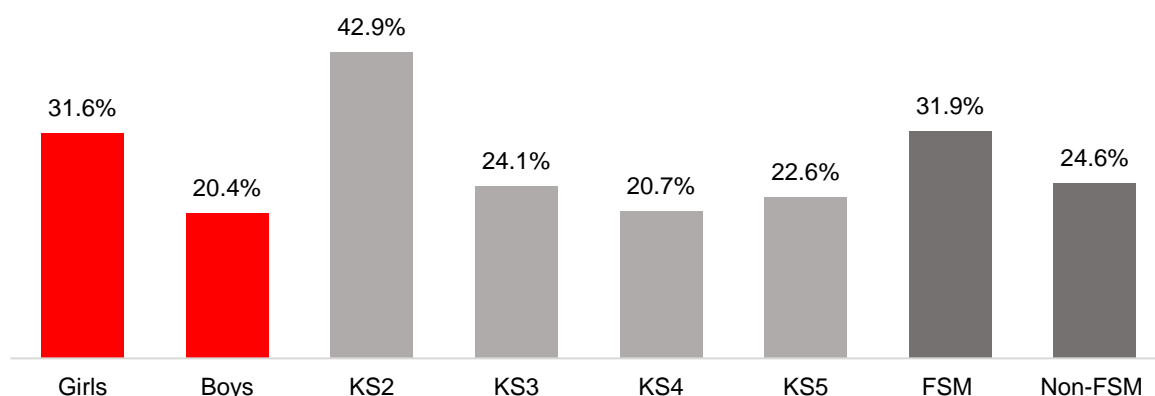
**Figure 1: Percentage of children and young people who read poetry in their spare time at least once a month between 2010 and 2022**



## Who are the children and young people who read poetry?

As shown in Figure 2, some children and young people were engaging with poetry more than others. For example, more girls than boys said that they read poetry in their free time at least once a month. The differences between children and young people were most marked when looking at age groups, with twice as many children aged 8 to 11 than any of the other age groups saying that they read poetry in their spare time. In line with our previous findings, more of those who receive FSMs said that they read poetry (31.9%) in their spare time compared with those who do not (24.6%).

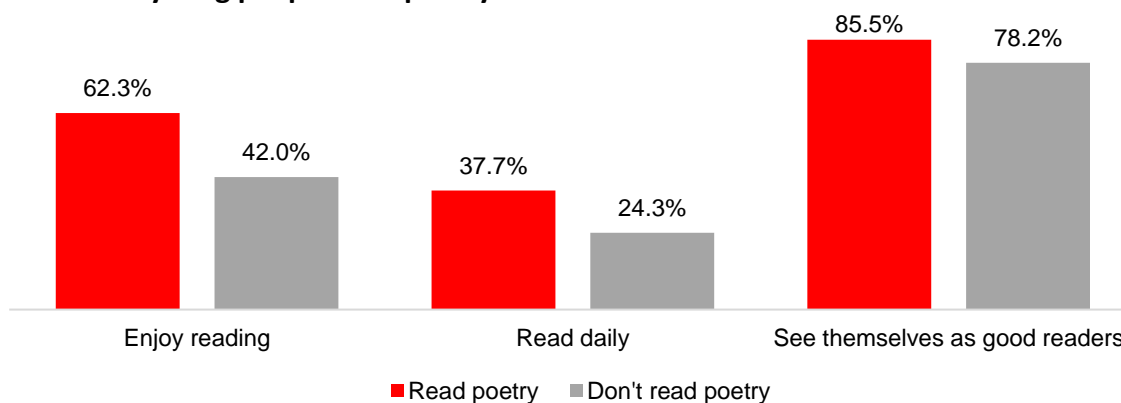
**Figure 2: Percentage of children and young people who read poetry in their free time at least once a month by gender, key stage and FSM status**



### Reading engagement of poetry readers

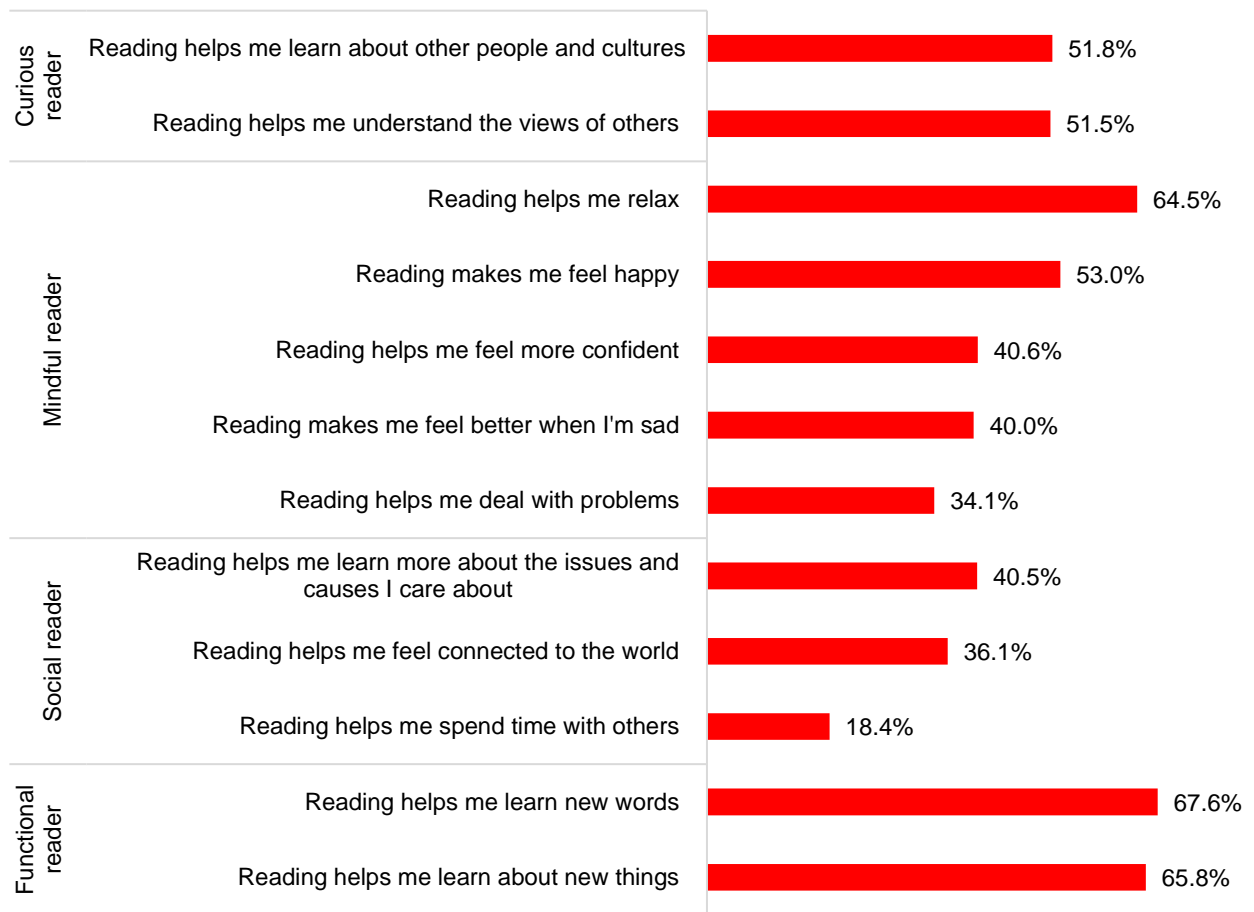
We were interested in the general reading engagement of poetry readers compared with non-poetry readers. As shown in Figure 3, poetry readers showed higher reading engagement than those who do not read poetry, with 3 in 5 saying that they enjoy reading compared with 2 in 5 of their peers who don't read poetry in their spare time. More poetry readers also read daily compared with their non-poetry-reading peers and more saw themselves as good readers.

**Figure 3: Reading enjoyment, daily reading and self-reported reading skill by whether or not children and young people read poetry**



We were also interested in poetry readers' general motivations for reading. As shown in Figure 4, most readers of poetry told us that they read for functional purposes, with 2 in 3 agreeing that reading helps them learn new words or learn about new things. Additionally, readers of poetry were motivated by curiosity, with 1 in 2 saying that they read because it helps them learn about other people and cultures or because it helps them understand the views of others. Around 2 in 5 were motivated by mindfulness, with these children and young people reading poetry because it helps them relax or makes them feel happy or confident. Finally, fewer poetry readers were reading because of social motivations, such as feeling connected to the world or reading to spend time with other people.

**Figure 4: Poetry readers' motivations for reading**



Children and young people also told us in their own words why they read poetry more specifically. Some children and young people said they read poems simply because they enjoy that form of writing:

“What makes me read are poems and fiction books because for poems I like the alliteration and rhymes also they both make me feel in different places.”  
(Girl, Y6)

“If it’s a poem because I find them interesting and fun and enjoyable.” (Girl, Y9)

“I like poem books.” (Not specified, Y5)

“I like to read short stories and poems for enjoyment and for my mental health.” (Boy, Y7)

“I enjoy reading poems.” (Girl, Y8)

“I like the descriptions in books about places, that’s probably why I’m a fan of poetry.” (Boy, Y8)

“I like to read things to do with acting, like spoken word or poetry so anything that I liked to read in my acting class I research later.” (Girl, Y9)

“I’m really into poetry so it encourages me to read more.” (Girl, Y11)

“I also love poetry of the archaic kind, such as John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* or *Jabberwocky* by Lewis Carroll, one of my favourite authors.” (Boy, Y7)

“If something is poetic and deep in meaning.” (Boy, Y8)

Others told us that they like how poetry can have different meanings:

“I like reading poems and it helps me learn different kinds of meanings for things.” (Girl, Y9)

“It makes me look at the world from another angle because sometimes if someone expresses their views by writing a story or a poem then it could open up a new angle on your opinion of the world.” (Not specified, Y8)

“I also enjoy things like poetry because there is no correct answer or meaning, which means it’s personal to everyone, and I think that’s really special.” (Girl, Y12)

## Children and young people as creators of poetry

While nearly 3 in 10 children and young people told us in 2022 that they read poetry in their free time, fewer than 1 in 5 (18.5%) children and young people told us that they write poetry in their free time at least once a month.

Figure 5 shows the percentage of children and young people who said that they wrote poetry in their free time at least once a week over the past 12 years. It shows there was a dip in 2012, when we recorded the lowest levels of children and young people writing poetry in their free time, with roughly 1 in 8 saying this. Since then, levels steadily increased until 2020 when we recorded the highest number of children and young people writing poetry. This was just before the first national lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Levels then decreased in 2021, coinciding with the third national lockdown, before recovering somewhat in 2022.

While we saw an increase in the number of children and young people who told us that they were reading poems in their free time over the past 12 years, the number of children who said that they were writing poems in their free time in 2022 was very close to the number that had said the same in 2010.

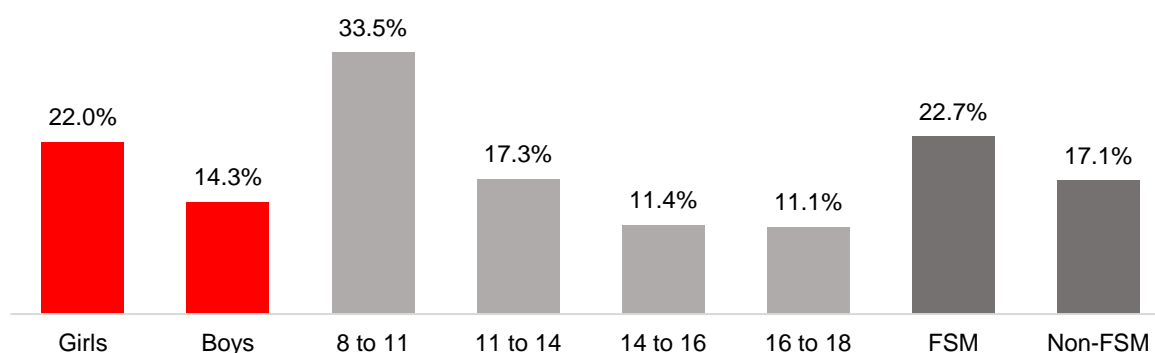
**Figure 5: Percentage of children and young people who wrote poetry in their free time at least once a month between 2010 and 2022**



### Who are the children and young people who write poetry?

More girls than boys told us that they had written poetry in their free time, with over 1 in 5 girls saying this compared with 1 in 7 boys (see Figure 6). Poetry writing decreases as we move up the age groups, with a sharp drop from 1 in 3 of those aged 8 to 11 to 1 in 6 of those aged 11 to 14, followed by a steadier decline among those aged 14 to 16 and 16 to 18. We also found that slightly more children who receive FSMs said they write poetry compared with those who don't receive FSMs.

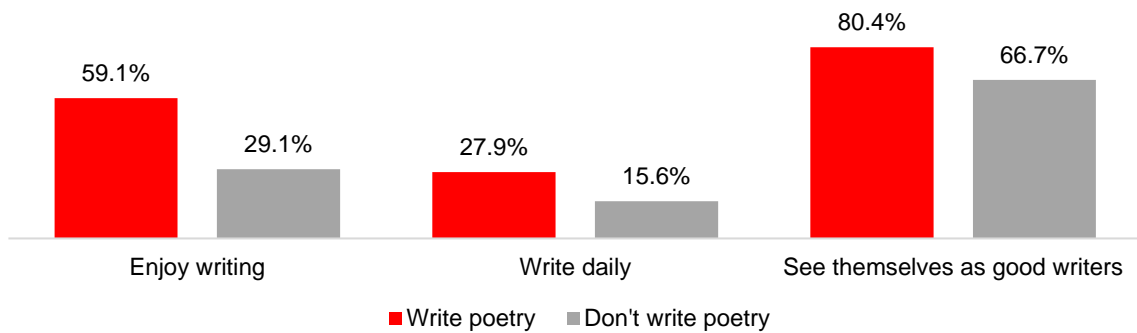
**Figure 6: Percentage of children and young people who write poetry in their free time at least once a month by gender, key stage and FSM status**



### Writing engagement of those who write poetry

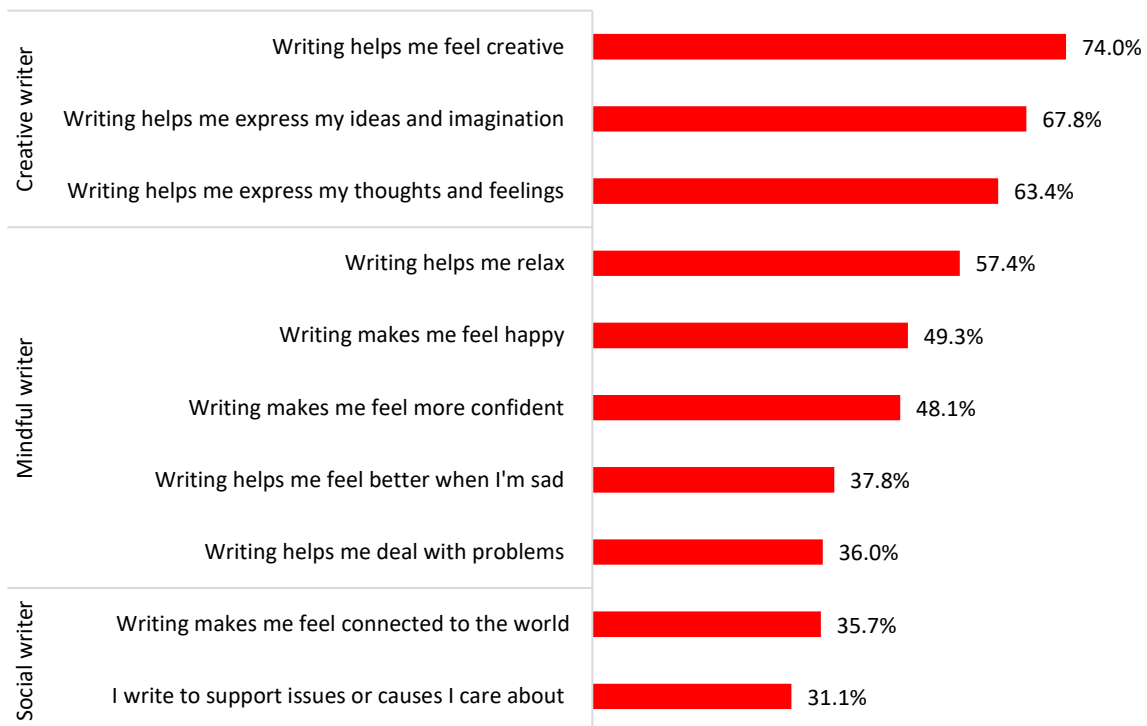
We were also interested in the general writing engagement of poetry writers compared with non-poetry writers. As shown in Figure 7, poetry writers showed higher writing engagement than their non-poetry-writing peers, with over 3 in 5 poetry writers enjoying writing compared with fewer than 3 in 10 non-poetry writers. More poetry writers also said that they write daily in their free time and more see themselves as good writers.

**Figure 7: Writing enjoyment, frequency and self-perceived writing skill of children and young people who read poetry compared with those who don't**



Furthermore, we looked at poetry writers' general motivations for writing. As shown in Figure 8, most writers of poetry said that they were motivated by creativity, with most saying that writing helps them feel creative, helps them express their imagination or helps them express their feelings. Motivations associated with a mindful writer also figured highly, with nearly 3 in 5 saying that writing helps them relax, and 1 in 2 saying that writing makes them feel happy or confident. Far fewer writers of poetry were motivated to write by social aspects, such as writing to support causes they care about or to feel connected with the world.

**Figure 8: Poetry writers and their writing motivations**



We were also interested in the motivations behind why children and young people write poetry, as expressed in their own words. Looking at open-ended comments, we found that many children and young people say they write poetry to support their wellbeing. For



example, poetry is commonly used as a way for children and young people to express themselves:

“I write poems because it helps me express how I feel.” (Girl, Y11)

“I write because it brings me pleasure, it can make me feel good or if I am upset I will write normally a poem to express how I feel or when I am happy I will either write a song or a poem. It makes me feel good and is a fun thing to do.” (Girl, Y7)

“Writing is a release for me, I write poems when I’m angry and sad as a way to channel the emotions. I also enjoy writing as I feel it is something private.”  
(Boy, Y10)

“I write poems when I have gone through difficult times at home and family. I do this because I like to get my hard feelings into a rhythm that flows so I can make sense of it.” (Girl, Y10)

“Writing lets all my emotions out. If I’m having a hard day I write a poem and it helps me greatly.” (Girl, Y9)

“I write because it’s natural to me. In terms of songs/poems it’s a wonderful tool for self-expression.” (Boy, Y13)

“I write poems because it’s easier than to tell people what’s going on inside my head.” (Girl, Y9)

“I like writing poetry because I can express my feelings in a poem. I can take things that worry me or make me sad or anything and turn them into a poem, it’s a good way of helping me get all of my feelings out of my system.”  
(Girl, Y8)

Or to relax:

“Writing is relaxing, especially writing poems.” (Girl, Y10)

“I sometimes like writing a diary or poems about my life because it makes me feel relaxed and happy when nobody is interrupting me as I go through.”  
(Boy, Y8)

“I occasionally write poems because I love to rhyme and it normally calms me.” (Not specified, Y7)

“I prefer to write poems or books. I don’t mind how long they take but I adore rhyming words and I love letting my ideas flow from a pen or onto a computer. It makes me feel relaxed after I write about something that I have kept to myself for however long.” (Girl, Y8)

Children and young people also told us that they write poems for other people. Some write poems that other people can relate to while others use poetry as a way to entertain others:

“The thing I write the most is poems about mental health because I want my readers or future readers to feel like they can connect with the poems I wrote and feel happy someone has written about something they relate to.”

(Y8, I describe myself another way)

“I like to write poems, it makes me feel happy and like other people could maybe relate to it.” (Girl, Y7)

“I personally enjoy the community aspect of making poems together, especially with other cultures – it’s inexplicable how multiculturalism pushes towards better teamwork.” (Boy, Y11)

“I write poems because it can help other people.” (Girl, Y7)

“I write lyrics/poems because I enjoy it and when I write them it can relate to other people’s lives, which is nice.” (Boy, Y9)

“I write poems to make my family laugh.” (Girl, Y6)

“I write poems to put my thoughts and feelings into words that resonate with me and others.” (I describe myself another way, Y9)

They also told us that they write poetry as a way to express creativity:

“I write things such as poems or stories to spark my creativity more.”

(Boy, Y7)

“I write because I love the creativity of poems and stories.” (Girl, Y7)

“Honestly, I can’t explain it, I just get ideas that pop into my head that I just feel like I need to write about or incorporate a certain line/verse into a book or poem.” (Boy, Y7)

“I write because I find it interesting, especially coming up with lyrics and poems, it means I have a way to release my imagination.” (Girl, Y10)

“I write because I enjoy it. I love writing in the Victorian and Shakespearean tongue. I find the words, poetry, plays and stories of these masterful periods in time really rather romantic and something special.” (Boy, Y7)

“I like to write poems because you can experiment with unusual similes and metaphors and you get to come up with an interesting plot line.” (Girl, Y8)

“I write about poems to change them a bit to make my own version.”

(Boy, Y8)

A couple of children said that writing poems helps them feel connected to the world and feel more confident:

“I used to write poems because it helped me really connect with the world. Even though sometimes they asked us to do it in school, it made me feel more confident and happy.” (Girl, Y8)

“Poetry and writing in general have boosted my confidence, made me feel proud of myself and had a great impact on my life.” (Boy, Y7)

“I write because it gives me a way to express my feelings to others, especially in poems. It helps me express how I’m feeling that I’m unable to tell anyone. It also acts as a time capsule of my past self and how I can improve.” (Boy, Y8)

“Personally I do a poetry session with a community of people every few weeks.” (Boy, Y11)

### **When readers of poetry are also writers of poetry**

1 in 2 (50.9%) children and young people who read poetry in their free time also told us that they write poetry in their free time compared with only 7.1% of those who don’t read poetry in their free time. Indeed, many children and young people told us that they read poetry as it inspires them to write their own:

“I enjoy reading because it can inspire me to write and helps me learn new vocabulary which I can later use in my own poems. I enjoy reading poetry because it helps split a big book up into chunks and is easy and fun to read.” (Boy, Y7)

“I like reading books and poems because it encourages me to write them.” (Boy, Y7)

“What makes me want to read is when I’m trying to write poems.” (Girl, Y8)

“I love catchy and relatable storylines in a story whether it be short or not. This is the same for poems when they are written from the perspective of someone’s personal feelings. It inspires me to write my own poem, which is something I love to do regularly regardless anyways. So relatable and emotional content is what makes me want to read and what I love to read most.” (Girl, Y9)

“Poems are good because I like learning new rhyming words. If I want to write a poem I will get ideas from that.” (Girl, Y4)

## Conclusion

This report has shown that poetry continues to provide an outlet for creativity for many children and young people. In fact, we have seen a steady increase in the number of children and young people who read poetry in their free time at least monthly.

Our findings also strongly indicate that poetry plays an important role in the life of young poetry lovers and has great potential to engage reluctant writers and readers because of its formal dynamism and playfulness. Poetry is a readily available and energetic tool to support mental wellbeing, express feelings and struggles, escape reality or make sense of the complex events going on in our world.

As we look ahead to a period of processing and recovery in a post-pandemic society that is as financially challenging as it is geopolitically turbulent, positive behaviours around poetry reading and writing are more crucial than ever. At the National Literacy Trust, we will continue to support schools to develop poetry writing for enjoyment practices with the radical view that every young person is a poet.

## About the National Literacy Trust

Our charity is dedicated to improving the reading, writing, speaking and listening skills of those who need it most, giving them the best possible chance of success in school, work and life. We run Literacy Hubs and campaigns in communities where low levels of literacy and social mobility are seriously impacting people's lives. We support schools and early years settings to deliver outstanding literacy provision, and we campaign to make literacy a priority for politicians, businesses and parents. Our research and analysis make us the leading authority on literacy and drive our interventions.

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