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# King of the Sky

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**Gwynneth Bailey** on using poetry for The Literacy Hour.

**Gwynneth Bailey with ideas on using a poem for literacy hour (or any other hour...) with Years 1 and 2 (5 to 7-year-olds)**

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For young children, poetry should be vigorous and rhythmical. Through its use, they develop growing control and feel for words, and strengthen their grasp of how language works.

Poetry should be perceived as a pleasurable experience, often as an end in itself, without written work as an outcome. It can be a perfect teaching vehicle for listening and speaking, reading and writing; and for THINKING.

## Raising the Profile of Poetry

Teachers can raise the profile of poetry by inviting a poet to their school, by staff and pupils reading a favourite poem in assembly, by compiling a class or school book of favourite poems. Ask Y6 pupils (10 and 11-year-olds) to word process the poems, and the selectors to illustrate them. Have a week in your class, or school, when you all learn a poem a day. Get parents to learn a poem with children at home or children to teach parents a poem learnt in school. There are many ways to involve others in the joy of sharing poetry.

## Writing as a Group

One of the most successful events I have attended was a poetry workshop run by Wes Magee. Wes is hot on rhythm, and his workshop soon had the children joining in enthusiastically. He shared with us some of his poetry and then we wrote a poem as a group.

Inspiration came from the hall in which we sat. One wall was covered with a long green curtain and Wes chose the title, 'Behind the emerald curtain...' and suggested that each verse begin 'There might be...'. Ideas from the floor came thick and fast and each verse turned out to be different in character. Our creation was drafted as we went along on a flip chart. Vocabulary choices were discussed and refined, and line lengths adjusted.

## Using 'Summer Sun'?

**Summer Sun** by Wes Magee

Yes,  
the sun shines  
bright  
in the summer,

and the breeze  
is soft  
as a sigh.

Yes,  
the days are  
long  
in the summer,  
and the sun  
is king  
of the sky.

I have chosen Wes Magee's 'Summer Sun' as the focus of this article as the format of this poem can easily be identified by children. It is also full of feeling, observation and things to think about that will develop their understanding of poetry and support their own poetry writing.

### **WHOLE CLASS READING**

- Read the poem and ask the children to imagine a scene in their heads as they listen.
- Share initial responses.
- Discuss with a neighbour who they think might be speaking.
- Get some feed-back.
- What do they notice about the beginning of both verses?
- Re-read poem.
- Talk about similes ('soft as a sigh?'). Do they know any others? (eg. as hard as rock).
- Listen whilst your neighbour sighs.
- Talk about the sun being 'king of the sky?'. What did the poet mean? Do they know any other kings? (eg. King of the jungle)
- Read poem a third time with everyone joining in.
- How does this poem make us feel? If we read it on a cold, wet November day, would our feelings be the same?
- Look at the pattern of lines and words in the poem. How is each verse similar? Is it just the first line?

### **GUIDED READING GROUP**

Ideas for reflecting, and developing critical analysis:

- Does the poet give us any clues about how to read this poem?
- Look at the punctuation (commas, full stop). Discuss how this clearly marks the poem into phrases.
- Are there any rhyming words?
- Should any words be emphasised when reading? (bright, breeze; long, sun, king?)
- Try reading one line each around the group. Does this work? If not, why not?
- Can the children suggest why the poet arranged the lines in this special way?

### **WRITING TASK**

With classroom assistant or other adult.

Write additional verses, using Wes Magee's format of lines and rhyme. This work can be done in a group, scribed by the adult, or individually, depending on ability and experience.

### **WORD LEVEL WORK**

Try in partners.

- Think of words to rhyme with SIGH/SKY; SUN; KING; BREEZE; BRIGHT (a green hairy toes word)
- Letter pattern -igh. Use an alphabet, run through from a to z to find initial letters of two other words ending -igh. List words ending -ight, remembering blends eg. sl, fr.

## POETRY SEACHING/BROWSING

Provide a box of poetry books.

- Search for other poems about summer. Read with a friend.
- Create a display of favourites.

## WHOLE CLASS PLENARY

Begin by reading together Wes Magee's two verses, then ask the writing group to read their additional verse/s. Have they caught the celebratory feeling of summer? How did they organise their choice of words, their lines? Did they follow Wes Magee's format?

The poetry search group could read a chosen poem to the class.

Make an enormous shining sun, crowned in splendour. Write Y E S in gigantic letters, followed by the rest of the poem. Display the children's additional verses in the sky.

## Conclusion

OFSTED reports imply poetry may be falling into decline. Stop the rot! Let us use the opportunities presented by the Literacy Hour to fill classrooms with the rich and diverse joys of poetry.

Wes Magee's 'Summer Sun' is included in **Language in Colour**, a Belair Publication.

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