

Context



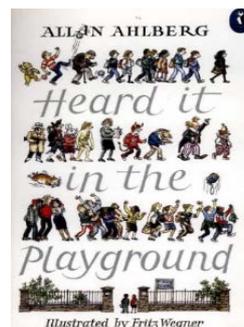
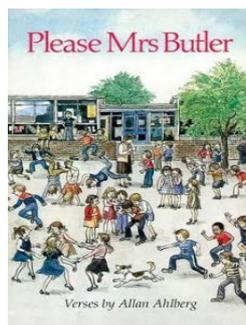
I work in a 3 form entry primary school (Nursery to Y6) in Manchester. We have 29% FSM, 67% EAL learners and over 30 different languages are spoken in school and in children's homes. As a school, we have had a push on Reading for Pleasure (RfP) and our focus has been fiction and picture books. I realised that we were massively missing out on using poems and so I wanted to find a way to get poetry into the classroom in a positive and purposeful way.

OU Research inspiration and rationale

When I started running an OU/UKLA RfP group in Stockport I completed the [‘Review your Practice’](#) document alongside the other attendees and I realised that, whilst I'd spent the last 18 months reading loads of children's books, (I was great at naming authors and illustrators), I struggled when it came to poets. I could name the 'classics' of Keats, Wordsworth and Frost but I couldn't name anyone more modern, so I knew this was my next area of focus. I looked into the research on teachers' knowledge of children's literature and realised that other teachers also had limited knowledge of poets - 22% couldn't name a single poet!! (Cremin et al, 2014). So I needed to increase my knowledge of poets and to read more poetry for pleasure.

As a *Teachers as Readers* group leader, I was asked to run a workshop at the RfP Conference in Macclesfield with Laura Ovenden, @OvendenLaura, (a lover of poetry) and this seemed the perfect opportunity to explore poetry further. After discussions with Laura, she recommended a Poetry Gallery – an informal but focused look at a range of poems.

Speaking to Laura about poems also helped me realise that I loved reading poems as a child; in particular I loved 'Please Mrs Butler' and 'Heard it on the Playground'.



I think that analysing an anthology of poems for my English GCSE made me switch off from poetry. I thought that you had to fully understand all the hidden meanings of a poem when you read it and this stopped me reading poems for pleasure as it always seemed too difficult a task. However, I've been reminded that reading poetry can be fun and that you don't need to understand every element to enjoy them. I know that I must pass this on to the children I teach.

Aims

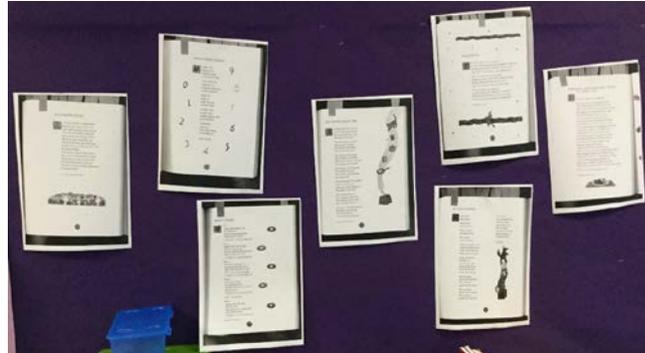
- To increase my knowledge of poets
- To show children that reading poems is just as enjoyable as reading a book
- To show children that they have a choice in what they read and what they do and don't like
- To use more poetry in my teaching practice.

Outline

To set up a Poetry Gallery, the first thing you need to do is to photocopy a collection of poems and cover your classroom walls with them. I used this fabulous book with Year 6.



I then papered my walls with the poems – I put up 2 copies of each poem as I thought this would help to generate more discussions.



As the children entered the classroom, I simply said 'Welcome to the Poetry Gallery, enjoy reading them'. I then watched as the children moved from poem to poem reading them to themselves in their head, to themselves out loud and to their friends. There were exclamations of, 'This one is about donuts and it's great!' to, 'This one is a tongue twister – can you read it faster than me?' The children seemed to automatically understand that they didn't need to read them all and that if they weren't enjoying one then they could move on. You might want to make this explicit if your class aren't sure about this.

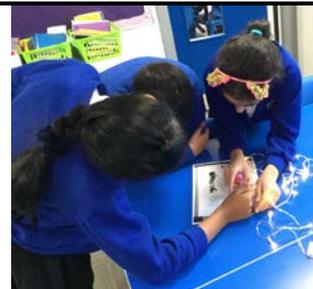


After about 15 minutes, I set the next task– choose one you like, take it off the wall and practice it for a performance. You can perform on your own, with a partner or in a small group – the choice is yours.

The children seemed to like being able to pull the poems off the walls. They quickly decided what they wanted to perform and who they wanted to work with. I was surprised by some of the groupings with children working with new partners.



They had about 15 minutes to practice their performances and in this time they were constantly re-reading their chosen poem, improving their fluency and intonation. They also added actions and founds items around the room as props. Everything was open and entirely their choice, this is really important to remember.



We then had a **Poetry Theatre** and groups performed their poems to the class. It was great to see their interpretations and to hear the choices they had made.

The whole activity lasted about 45 minutes and there was a buzz in the classroom for the whole time. I repeated this with the other two Year 6 classes and each session was just as successful. I thoroughly recommend this.

Impact

Whilst this was just one activity, it has helped develop the children's interest in poetry and has widened my knowledge too. Here are some quotes from the children.

I liked it because some poems were different and some had good rhyming and some were long and good.

I liked it because it was creative and all the poems were about different stuff. We read it all together and enjoyed it and at the end when we got to perform it, it was good because it was our creation.

I thought it was a creative way to start the day and it gets you into the mood to have a good day and I wish it was like this every day.

I really liked it because some poems made me happy, some made me laugh, some made me hype. It was fun, going around and reading all the different poems.

There were so many different poems, funny ones, serious ones and there were so many to choose from.

I really like the poems and I always used to be shy when performing but after this I feel more confident to perform.

I enjoy saying the poems out loud and hearing what other people chose.

Here are some quotes from members of staff who were present.

It was a fabulous event. The children all engaged with the poetry and loved planning and rehearsing their performances whether they performed or not. They were really on task for the whole session and joined in with real enthusiasm. I would love to continue with this type of activity to develop the children's love and understanding of poetry. (Assistant Head teacher)

I thought that the set up was fantastic - a great way to just present a task and leave the children to their devices to pick a poem and then decide how this is presented. Also allowed children that do not really like presenting to be involved and build confidence. (Teacher)

The poetry gallery was a nice change, and it was good to see the children reading independently and also performing the poems. (TA)

I thought that the poetry lesson was a great success. All of the children were able to access the lesson and responded really well to the input. (1:1 TA)

Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice

I loved the Poetry Gallery and would thoroughly recommend it to everyone to try out. I am covering in Year 2 soon and I cannot wait to try this out with them, although I will have to choose some different poems for them to access.

Since remembering my love of reading poems as a child, I have started buying some new poetry books to read and I am really enjoying them. I will be sharing many more poems with the children I teach and in my weekly reading assemblies with Year 5 and Year 6.

I already feel more confident to name some poets and I have children asking to borrow my poetry books and talking to me about their favourite ones. This is thus developing our pleasure in reading poetry.