

Poem of the Day by Jon Biddle

Context

I am currently English Coordinator/Reading Champion at Moorlands Primary Academy in Norfolk. The school has been through a turbulent few years (high turnover of staff, negative relationships with many parents) and is now rebuilding. Creating a genuine reading culture is at the centre of this. After surveying the children across KS2 earlier in the year, we realised that their knowledge of poets and poetry was limited. Many of them could only name Michael Rosen and Paul Cookson, who had visited the school two years previously.



Research inspiration and rationale



UKLA research shows that a significant percentage of teachers can only name a narrow range of authors and poets (20% of the 1200 teachers didn't name a single poet! Cremin et al., 2009), and tend to rely on a very limited canon. If this is the case, then the range of poets that the children are exposed to will also be narrow. Conversations with students, as well as results from class reading surveys, confirmed this to be true at Moorlands.

The importance of creating positive reading identities for all children, giving each child ownership of their own Reading for Pleasure and building reciprocal reading communities were three of the findings from the *Teachers as Readers* project. Poetry, due to its often accessible nature, can be used as a way for children to take control of their reading identities, as well as to support the development of a genuine reading community.

Aims

- To increase the diversity of poems and poets that students and staff are exposed to and raise the profile of poetry across the school.
- To provide students with opportunities to discuss, share and perform poetry with their peers.
- To broaden the range of material read aloud in classrooms.



Outline

- Before introducing the initiative, we ensured that there were a selection of poetry collections in each classroom. In many cases, this meant purchasing new books. These were shared with the children and left in prominent positions around the room for a couple of weeks.
- A laminated A4 sheet was displayed near the poetry books which allowed the children to sign-up to read a poem, either alone or as part of a small group.
- For the first week, the sign-up sheet was filled with the names of staff from the school who then modelled the reading of the poems to each class. We talked about why we had chosen each particular poem and how we had practised it in order to help us improve our performance.



<u>POEM OF THE DAY</u>		
Day	Name	Poem & poet
Mon	Mr.B.	Eddie & the Car - MR
Tue	Emily, Winter, Suzripie ☺	School report - page 14 BM
Wed	Aleisha + Jasmine	Opposites page 2
Thu	Haray + Aleisha	Our granny page 18
Fri	Frediet & Jodie	Word of a lie Jackie Kay

- For the second week, the sheet was left blank. We told the children that they were welcome to add their names, but should be willing to practise their selected poem a few times. Initially nobody signed-up in my class and I was starting to think the idea had flopped. However, during lunchtime two girls came in and asked if they could perform a poem together. Hooray! They added their names to the list and went into the playground to practise. During afternoon registration, one of the less confident readers signed-up, wanting to read a poem that he had written himself about his cat.

By the end of the day, the sheet had been completely filled, and we were up and running.

- A short period of time (five minutes) is put aside every day for the children to perform their poems. It is often just before lunch or story time.
- After listening to the poem, the children are given a couple of minutes to talk about it with their friends. No time is spent analysing words, rhythm, structure or meaning after hearing the poem as it is important for them to talk about their emotional response to the poem, whether they enjoyed it, what it reminded them of, etc.
- The poem is then photocopied for our school 'Poetree'. This is an interactive poetry display in one of the corridors to which the poems are added. Children are encouraged to randomly select a poem to read at break and lunch times (they are rolled up so that they can't be seen). This will help expose them to the work of a wider range of poets. As several classes are involved in Poem of the Day, the poems on display and available to be read are changed fairly frequently.





Impact

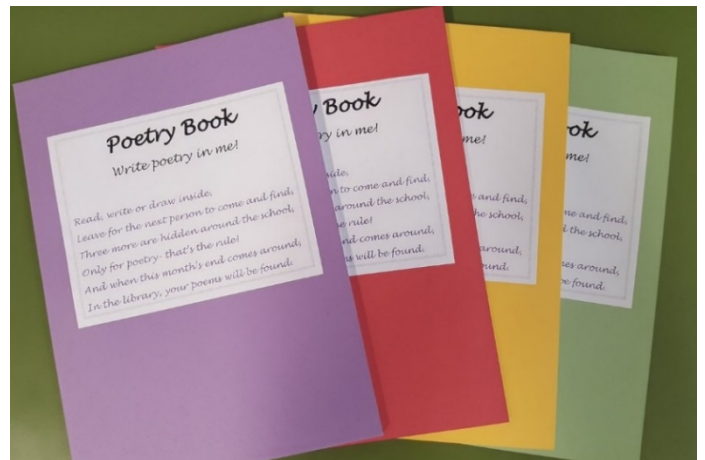
- Some teachers had immediate success with Poem of the Day which was, in part, due to their initial levels of enthusiasm and poetry knowledge. In other classes, it took several weeks for it to become firmly established as part of the daily routine but most persevered.
- Children and staff actively look forward to Poem of the Day. Several classes have a waiting list each week and some have even begun running it twice a day.
- The profile of poetry has been raised significantly across the school over the past few months. Children are now reading poetry books in the playground when practising for their performance, and more children are borrowing poetry books to read at home. We have also created a poetry display in the library, consisting of books selected by our Year 6 Library Assistants.

months ago. They enjoy talking about the poems the class are sharing together, with their selections showing increasingly more variety.

- As a result of the increased interest in poetry, we are now working with poet Joseph Coelho as our Patron of Reading.
- Staff knowledge of poems and poetry has improved across the school.

Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice

Raising the profile of poetry by introducing Poem of the Day and the Poetree has helped the children become more confident when sharing and discussing poems. We are now looking at ways to develop the reading relationship between staff, children and parents by using poetry. This will include making poetry the focus of our next round of learning cafés and inviting parents to share their favourite poems for our upcoming school reading newsletter. Several teaching staff have realised that poetry is an accessible and enjoyable way for a child to develop their love of reading and are continuing to work to help maintain its higher profile (eg blank exercise books around the school for the children to write poetry in, poetry and videos in assembly, etc.)



Poet and Patron of Reading, Joseph Coelho, enjoying the Moorlands Poetree