

RECITE MOM



Teacher's Notes



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These notes are designed to help teachers incorporate practise for this competition into classes or school assemblies, and offer ideas and tips on teaching poetry recital.

Three
free
throws

Introduction to poetry

What is a poem?

It might be beneficial to begin with a general discussion on poetry - if so, the following may help:

Explain to the class that:

There are many kinds of poems. Some may be only a few lines long, others may tell a story. Some poems rhyme, others, such as free verse, may have little or no rhyme. Poems can be written in verse or appear as shapes on a page.

But all poems have some things in common. They all:

- Create images or pictures in the mind
- Make patterns with sound
- Touch feelings and senses in the reader.

Examples of different kinds of poems can be read and discussed.



Three grey geese in green fields grazing

Poetry is usually written in lines, which is not the same as writing in sentences. Look at the difference between the two below:

Sentence

We stared in amazement as the waters spilled down the mountainside, tumbling and bounding over rocks and boulders like a crazy animal.

Poem

*Spilling down the mountainside,
Tumbling over boulders, rocks,
Slipping, sliding,
Bounding like an animal,
Crazily,
We stared at the waters,
Spellbound*

The class can discuss how the sentence was changed to turn it into a poem.

Understanding the poems

Do some fun exercises with the children to help them understand the narrative of the poem:

Get them to read the poem and then create a storyboard version (like a comic strip) of it. This can be done individually or in groups.

Miming the actions of the poem can also help with understanding the words.

Rhyme

You can start by presenting the class with a list of 12 pairs of rhyming words jumbled up, and see how quickly they can write them down in pairs. Discuss the meaning of “rhyme”, and remind the students that words that rhyme only have to sound the same and are not always spelled the same.

A proper copper coffee pot

Students can be introduced to “patterns of rhyme”, taking as an example *I saw a jolly hunter* by Charles Causley;

I saw a jolly hunter by Charles Causley

I saw a jolly hunter (a)
With a jolly **gun** (b)
Walking in the country (c)
In the jolly **sun**. (b)

In the jolly meadow (d)
Sat a jolly **hare**. (e)
Saw the jolly hunter. (f)
Took jolly **care** (e)

Hunter jolly eager – (g)
Sight of jolly **prey**. (h)
Forgot gun pointing (i)
Wrong jolly **way**. (h)

Jolly hunter jolly head (j)
Over heels **gone**. (k)
Jolly old safety-catch (l)
Not jolly **on**. (k)

Bang went the jolly gun. (m)
Hunter jolly **dead**. (n)
Jolly hare got clean away. (o)
Jolly good, I **said**. (n)

Students can work by themselves or in pairs to work out the pattern of rhyme, which is:

verse 1 – a,b,c,b; verse 2 – d,e,f,e; verse 3 – g,h,i,h; verse 4 – j,k,l,k; verse 5 – m,n,o,n
This exercise can be done with all rhyming poems.



Toy boat
Toy boat
Toy boat

Rhythm

Discuss rhythm with the class using the same poem.

The poem here is dominated by rhythm – the rise and fall of stress and the pattern made by this in the poem. The strong bouncy feel of the poem is also helped by several other factors: rhyme, repetition and, mainly as a result of repetition, alliteration. This comes mainly from the repeated use of the word “jolly”. The rhythm drives the poem along towards the climax.

Rhythm is created through *stress*, as well as the repetition of both words and sounds.

You can explain stress to the class by explaining that words are made up of syllables, and that rhythm comes from the way syllables are stressed or unstressed. E.G., the word *poem* has 2 syllables, the first is stressed, the second is unstressed.

Stress is complicated, the easiest way of working it out is to go through the poem with the class, ensuring they grasp the essentials of rhythm, by tapping out the stress. Also point out that being aware of the rhythm of words and lines helps us to read aloud with expression.

Students should decide how they can best read the poem, and note any rhythm changes between verses. In the poem *I saw a jolly hunter* there is a slight change in rhythm at the beginning of verse 4, here there are 7 syllables instead of 6, and to keep the meaning of the words “head over”, care should be taken to read the 2 first lines of that verse as one, while also paying heed to the rhythm.

The class can try reading the poem together, not as easy a task as it seems! They need to start at the same time, keep to the rhythm and end at the same time.

If you can, use a drum, or improvise a drumbeat

*Silly
sheep
weep
and
sleep*

Memorisation and recitation

Learning the words off by heart

The best way to learn a poem off by heart is through repetition, but this can result in boredom setting in quickly.

To try to avoid this, mix up the learning process a little:

Memory aids can help the child's confidence during the initial phase, so you could provide the students with cue cards with reminders on for the beginning of each verse, or particular lines or words they find difficult.

Give the student a copy of the poem to take home and read every night before going to sleep.

Vary the practice times, slip in a practice when the class isn't expecting it, and don't spend too long at it. For example you could run through a poem for 5 minutes in the middle of a maths class, or on a bus during a school trip.

Teach the children about the "voice" or "tone" of the poem by reciting the same poem with different emotions. For example get them to read the poems with different emotions, e.g. sad, happy, excited, fearful, mysterious, etc.

Discuss with the class the most appropriate feeling or tone to use when reciting the poem.

The children can then pick out lines or words to deliver with a particular inflection.

Students should decide the following:

- Which part would you speak slowly?
- Which part would you speak quickly?
- Where would you pause?



Double Bubble gum Bubbles double

How could you change your voice at the climax or end of a poem?
What actions could you use? *Note: Dramatic gestures should be kept to a minimum, as poetry speaking is different to performing a dramatic piece.*

To start with the students can go over the top with their recitations, giving as much emotion, emphasis and inflection as possible, and should then refine their performances as they become familiar with the poem. Eventually they should be able to balance the meaning, emotional impact and meaning of the poem.

Tips:

- When performing, fix your eyes on a spot above the heads of the audience.
- Speak clearly and loudly.
- Try to make your actions seem natural.

Warming up:

Breathing

Deep breathing before reading/ reciting is good for the voice, and can also help calm nerves. Try practising the following exercises with the class:

Have the children stand comfortably and ask them to close their eyes. Ask them to pay attention to their own breathing, getting the air right down deep into their lungs, a little deeper with each breath.

Encourage them to breathe from the diaphragm (belly), not to take shallow breaths from the top of the lungs.

Tell them to put their hands on their diaphragms (bellies) so that they can feel it move as they breathe. Ask them to "Breathe in 2,3,4,5,6,7,8 and hold 2,3,4,5,6,7,8 and out 2,3,4,5,6,7,8. Repeat this a few times.

She
sees
cheese

Relaxing

Relaxation exercises are also good for banishing nerves and aiding concentration. Get the children to tense and relax different sets of muscles, for example toes, feet, calves, etc. You can do this exercise with any sets of muscles in the body, including the muscles of the face.

Tongue twisters

Try some tongue twisters to loosen up the vocal chords. Good ones are; “Red lorry, yellow lorry, red leather, yellow leather” and “Unique New York”.

Some longer ones;

“Six slippery snails slid slowly seaward” and “Betty bought butter but the butter was bitter, so Betty bought better butter to make the bitter butter better”.

For lots more hilarious and entertaining tongue twisters, try Dr. Seuss’s “Oh say can you say” and “Rhymes, riddles and nonsense”.



Red Lorry Yellow Lorry

Dealing with nerves:

Children may suffer from nerves before a performance and may benefit from the following tips:

Prepare well, rehearse as much as possible so that you can tell yourself you are as ready as you can possibly be.

Practise your breathing and relaxation exercises before a performance.

All finalists and semi-finalists will have performed their poem before, in class, at assembly or at a school poetry evening. You were successful then - tell yourself if you could do it then, there's no reason why you can't do as well, or better, now.

Give yourself time to check out the performance space beforehand. Familiarise yourself with where you will stand, where you will be looking during the performance, and if possible, decide what to focus on while you recite. Knowing what to expect is half the battle when fighting nerves.

Finally, try not to worry. Your performance doesn't have to be perfect, and there will be a prompter on the night to help out with stage fright. The most important thing all our contestants can do is to have fun and enjoy the experience.

Sources

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- Poetry: Reading, writing and performing poetry by Mary Green, Folens 2007
- Primary School Curriculum: English language, Government Publications 1999
- www.bbc.co.uk/schools/teachers/offbyheart