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# EVERY CHILD

## A POET

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Produced by the **Clare Poetry Collective**, with the much appreciated backing of the **Creative Ireland programme**, in support of teachers in our primary schools in helping children enjoy, understand and create poetry.



Clár Éire Ildánach  
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# EVERY CHILD A POET – HELPING CHILDREN ENJOY, UNDERSTAND AND CREATE POETRY<sup>1</sup>

These ideas have been assembled by the Poetry Collective in order to support teachers in County Clare’s primary schools in inspiring their pupils to explore, love and produce poems.

Helping children recognise the elements of a poem and discover different ways of writing involves enabling them to become more familiar with the meaning of words, sentence structure, rhymes and vocabulary. Moreover, in writing poetry, a child will discover a new, limitless world of expression that’s just as much fun to share with others as it is to create. Poetry can lift us beyond the everyday commonplace into the misty peripheries of the realm of human experience. It makes us pause. It causes us to remember and to reflect. Reading it, reciting it, discussing it and, above all, writing it can be thought-provoking, mind-stretching and exciting: there can never be too much joy in the world and poetry offers possibilities of lifelong pleasure.

The Poetry Collective organises an ongoing EVERY CHILD A POET campaign for all children in County Clare’s primary schools. The main objective is to encourage the appreciation and creation of poems by – as the title says – ‘every child’. The annual contest concludes, in terms of the submission of entries, which must be of no more than 15 lines, on 1<sup>st</sup> March each year. And then, on International Poetry Day, selected poems are read or recited by their authors and the prizes awarded – details are circulated to all schools and announced in the media.

Some of those prizewinning poems are quoted, in full or in part, below, although, of course the impossibility of appraising the relative merit of poems is fully acknowledged. As already emphasised, the main EVERY CHILD A POET objective is that of encouraging young people to produce and enjoy poetry rather than that of engendering fierce competition. This stanza, from an entry to the 2016-17 contest (by Timmy Madigan, then in 5<sup>th</sup> Class at Querrin NS) neatly sums it up:

*Writing a poem is so hard  
Because I am not a bard  
However I will do my best  
To honour your request.*

Like many good things in life, once you try them they often prove easier than anticipated. Some of the suggestions that follow are (fairly) original, other have been drawn from a variety of sources (and often modified out of all recognition). If they help teachers (and perhaps parents) to facilitate primary school children’s enjoyment, understanding and creation of poetry, then our Collective purpose will have been achieved.

## **Start with Examples – lots and lots of them**

Read poems aloud with the children. Frequently. Happily. At set times but also unexpectedly. For younger classes maybe include nursery rhymes or, for instance, Dr Seuss (see below). From the many collections of poems for children (for example, books by Michael Rosen,

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<sup>1</sup> Comments, suggestions and questions on this document may be directed to [mike@poetrycollective.com](mailto:mike@poetrycollective.com)

Roald Dahl, Carol Ann Duffy or Julia Donaldson – or, for a more local poet, seek out Shaun Traynor) or from anthologies of poems for children such as Neil Philip's.

Or from websites such as:

- <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/resources/children>
  - <http://www.primaryschoolpoems.com/#/hello/4524630738>
  - <http://www.primarypoems.com/2014/01/15/day-and-night/>
- and many others – including some that offer poems written by children. After a while, invite members of the class to read. Choose carefully, taking account of the children's prior experience. And always ask them whether they liked a poem and why and "which was your favourite?"

Here is the poem that won the 2016-17 competition. It is by Ruth Golden, then in Class 5 in St. John's NS, Cratloe.

### ***Coming of Age***

*Not many boys like girls,  
They think they're obsessed with pink tutus and twirls.  
Not many girls like the boys,  
They think they are rascals who make lots of noise.  
And as they get older, their opinions change,  
which I find rather strange.*

*The girls think the boys are rather "cute"  
Whenever they see them in a new suit  
Whereas the girls would wear short skirts  
For them to look pretty in order to flirt  
And so this continues as they wait,  
Wait and see who to take on their first date.*

*And when this time comes, the girl gets quite stressed,  
Because they don't know how to get dressed,  
Whereas the boys don't really care  
about either their hair or what to wear.  
And this is how it goes until they decide,  
Who is going to be their future groom or bride.*

This is thoughtful as well as fun; the rhymes come nice and naturally – and it was also read well by its author on International Poetry Day in March 2017.

### **Poems of Different Flavours**

Explain, with examples, that poems come in a wide variety of sizes and shapes ranging from ones that follow conventions of word choice and line length, to the-sky-is-the-limit free verse. Explore different types and even shapes of poems. For younger children, the three-line haiku is one fun way to start while older children may want to experiment with formats like the diamante. [Many example of different kinds of poems are presented below.]

Encourage children to invent poetry, using actual words or nonsense syllables, accompanied by hand clapping, dancing, and singing. It will draw them out. It will attach them to the rhythms of the world and their own bodies. We have an innate love and need for the subtle but strong influences of poetry, in both the general and the literal sense and it connects us one to the other as it blends and harmonises our inner and outer selves.

### **Poetry ‘for Children’**

Is there a special poetry for children? Obviously, subject matter and treatment are always a consideration, perhaps the only important criterion. Is the language appropriate for a child? Is the subject too mature? (Or too babyish!) While children do not need to be insulated from crises or powerful emotion, age and individual sensitivities should be considered. Avoid poems on topics such as suicide or abandonment to young children, for example.

As adults, we have learned to turn to poetry to mark an important occasion: a wedding, a death, a graduation, the birth of a child. Poems are large enough to capture the emotional richness of the event. But poetry is also sufficiently generous to encapsulate everyday experiences. Children’s poetry does that so well: the wonder of the birth of a butterfly, the beauty of a rose, the taste of marmalade. Children’s poems take for their subjects every possible relationship, training the heart and the mind to savour and pay attention in a language that a child can understand. When a child in your class says something thoughtful, say “How about putting that idea in a poem?” Always encourage – seldom stipulate – never command.

### **‘Teaching’ Poetry**

Perhaps the primary school is not the time to ‘teach’ poetry to children: there is plenty of time in secondary school for a more formal, analytical approach. But certainly acquaint children with a wide variety of poems, including examples given below. Everyone’s interpretation of a poem is valid, different, and interesting. Talk about where each line of the poem ends and how it creates rhythm, affects the meaning of the poem, and might even make the poem look a particular way. As always, the approach is that of sharing interesting ideas rather than ‘teaching’.

Perhaps we come to formal poems naturally, the way a child comes to language. “Bath, book, bottle, bed” are soothing to children because they know what comes next. So is “Mary had a little lamb / whose fleece was white as snow / and everywhere that Mary went / the lamb was sure to go.” The rhythm comes measure by measure, as does the rhyme. It is a wonderful pleasure for children – for all of us – to be able to predict what comes next.

When writing poetry allow the children to work as a whole class, in groups and pairs as well as individually. Model writing the different types of poems. Give children plenty of opportunity to see and discuss the style of poem you have selected before writing it themselves. Print or copy, laminate and display their poems. Give children the opportunity to present their work

### **Poems and Pictures**

Illustrations enhance poetry for children. The sounds of words paired with pictures are especially appealing to the child – and also to the one who reads to the child. The abovementioned Dr Seuss asks:

*Do you like green eggs and ham?  
Try them, try them, if you can.*

Cats and hats, bread and butter, caps and creatures are known quantities in a child's life, and as such, their placement in this unconventional form makes the familiar strand delightful – like peering into a kaleidoscope for the first time. Nursery rhymes offer other opportunities to link words and images: it can be fun to illustrate Oranges and Lemons, or poor Humpty Dumpty, or Mary's Quite Contrary Garden. [Older children may enjoy finding out the hidden meanings in those innocent-sounding rhymes, as discussed below.]

Make a slideshow poem. Have the children in your class photograph a series of five to ten pictures (based on a common theme or during a trip). Import the photos into a multimedia software programme such as PowerPoint, iPhoto, or Photo Story and ask the child to write a poem by posting a word or two with each image. Add special effects, transitions, or music to enhance the slideshow.

Sometimes a poem conjures up vivid images in the mind. Here is one that won a prize in the 2016-17 contest. It is by Emily Connolly, then in 3<sup>rd</sup> class at Barefield National School:

### ***Trick or Treat***

*Haunted halls and spooky walls  
Ghosts and witches and gore,  
Halloween night is here at last  
Time to trick – a – treat each door.  
Sleepy, creepy, freaky doors  
I bravely ring the bell  
And fierce some, tear some faces appear  
Have I landed in Hell?  
Hinges squeak, doors creak  
My nerves start to shake,  
My legs quiver, my arms shiver  
Grab a treat – a sweet-a cake!  
Home I run, I'm done with fun  
I've had my fill of goo,  
I'm sick of bats and rats and cats  
And witches that say 'Boo!'  
At last I'm past my garden gate  
It's time to rest my head,  
Switch off the light  
Goodnight to fright  
AAAAAAHHHHHH  
– I 'm DEAD!*

[Apart from being an imaginative poem, creating great word pictures, it was delivered extremely well by its author.]

### **Old Tune, New Words**

Sing a favourite song together and write down the lyrics. Then ask the children to write a poem that they can sing to the melody of the song. Use the structure of the original lyrics as a guide.

### **Walk and Talk**

Go on a poetry walk. Stop at various points - the park, the street corner, the local shop, the church – and ask the children to write a sentence or two that describes what they see. Back in class, the child can revise and shorten those sentences and turn them into a poem.

[The Poetry Collective has developed a Poet's Trail through Ennis with buildings, memorials and other locations related to no fewer than 18 poets with local connections. But that's not what we're talking about here.]

### **Lost and Found**

'Found poems' take existing text (e.g., from a passage in a book, a magazine article, a sign, a letter) and condense and reorder the words to form a new poem. Children may select few sentences from a favourite book and turn it into a found poem. Here is an example from a feature by Bev Truss in a recent *Clare Champion*:

*Cats are solitary animals  
And seldom like to share.  
So bringing home a new cat  
Can be a bit tricky especially  
If there is an established  
Adult cat there already.*

*Cats have an amazing vocal range  
Of which the most famous feline sound  
Is the meow, which has many versions,  
Of different lengths, pitches and pace.  
Other familiar cat sounds are  
The aggressive hisses and growls,  
The howls and yowling of female cats,  
The chirp and chatter of hunting cats,  
And the famous purr.*

Discuss with the class where best the line breaks should come. For further information and ideas, have a look at: <http://www.foundpoetryreview.com/about-found-poetry/>

### **A Time to Rhyme**

Children love poetry and rhymes and quickly learn to identify rhyming words in stories. There are a range of rhyming books available which are suitable for very young children such as 'Mole in the Hole', 'Mouse in the House' and 'Duck in the Truck'. Contest entries in early 2017 included such couplets as:

*Donald Trump  
belongs in the dump*

(which might conceivably have been influenced by an adult) and

*I love my teacher,  
She is such a fabulous creature.*

(which we are sure could not possibly have been directly guided by the teacher in question. Or could it!)

Rhyming stories are ideal for shared reading experiences and your class may surprise you with how quickly they remember and join in with the rhyming phrases. These stories can be read again and again as children learn to identify and pick out the rhyme. Rhyming stories are ideal for children who may struggle with listening as the rhyming phrases make the story fast moving and exciting. Children can hear the rhyming patterns and this helps maintain the child's attention.

Here is a nice one from Spike Milligan:

***Soldier Freddy and Soldier Neddy***

*Soldier Freddy  
was never ready,  
But Soldier Neddy,  
unlike Freddy  
Was always ready  
and steady,*

*That's why,  
When Soldier Neddy  
Is-outside-Buckingham-Palace-on-guard-in -the-pouring-wind-and-rain-being-steady-and-  
ready, while  
Soldier Freddy  
is home in beddy.*

Introduce the rhyming dictionary at [Poetry4Children.com](http://www.poetry4children.com) and as a helpful tool for writing poetry.

<http://www.poetry4kids.com/rhymes>. Another source is the Oxford Children's Rhyming Dictionary.

**By Heart**

Be careful about requiring children to memorise poems: let that come naturally. When a volunteer is ready to recite her or his chosen one in front of the entire class, be lavish with praise. Such poems remain imprinted on mind for ever. Here is a good example by Joyce Kilmer (it is also sung beautifully by Paul Robeson)

***Trees***

*I think that I shall never see  
A poem lovely as a tree.  
A tree whose hungry mouth is pressed  
Against the earth's sweet flowing breast;  
A tree that looks at God all day,  
And lifts her leafy arms to pray;  
A tree that may in summer wear  
A nest of robins in her hair;  
Upon whose bosom snow has lain;  
Who intimately lives with rain.  
Poems are made by fools like me,  
But only God can make a tree.  
For poems are made by fools like me  
But only God can make a tree.*

Repetition doesn't make good poems tiresome. Instead, the repetition became part of the person. As we live with poems that we know by heart (wonderful phrase) they bring us increased understanding and resonate with truth. But less so if we're forced to learn them too early in our lives.

## Thesaurus

This could easily be a type of dinosaur. Until a few years ago it was a book by Roget. But now it is a website such as <http://www.thesaurus.com/browse/thesaurus> at which synonyms are suggested. For example, look up 'sunset' and you may find:

- dusk
- nightfall
- sundown
- twilight
- eve
- evening
- eventide
- gloaming
- close of day
- crepuscular light

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- Using a thesaurus to find alternative words is a fantastic way to think more deeply about things. In looking for an alternative verb for 'jump' I discovered that there were a variety of ways to describe the penguin's movements and I could include them all as they were all specific characteristics of the penguin. Likewise, it is a great way to widen your vocabulary as we so easily slip into using the same vague 'all-inclusive' verbs in every day conversation.
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## • Nonsense Verse

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A nonsense poem can call us to laughter, to play, to another dimension of the imagination. In such poems, sense is subordinate to sound and absurdity is sought for its own sake. Among the most famous practitioners are Lewis Carroll, Edward Lear and Ogden Nash who wrote:

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- *I eat my peas with honey*
- *I've done it all my life,*
- *It makes the peas taste funny*
- *But it keeps them on my knife:*

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- But how about this example?

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- *I Keep Thinking it's Thursday*
- 
- *A weary weasel with a flower-pot on her head*
- *Is better than a florist in a potting shed*
- *But, all in all, I'll take my pot of tea in bed.*
- 
- *A Bengal tiger on a trail bike through the trees*
- *Is better than a boatswain in a nor'west breeze*
- *So let me have another slice of Gouda cheese.*
- 
- *A llama wearing lace-up army surplus shoes*



- *Is better than a Sergeant-Major of the Blues;*
- *With pickled anchovies on toast one cannot lose.*
- 
- *A robin breasting breadcrumbs in the Christmas snow*
- *Is better than a bearded chauffeur going slow:*
- *Quince jelly always leaves a jolly afterglow.*
- 
- *A bandicoot at ease atop an open car*
- *Is better than a barrister behind a bar;*
- *Pray send me up at my copy of the Morning Star.*
- 
- *A waltzing walrus sporting scarlet pantaloons*
- *Is better than a waiter with no silver spoons:*
- *I think today I'll have some custard with my prunes.*
- 
- *A chic orang-utan upon a rubbish heap*
- *Is better than a shepherd without unshorn sheep –*
- *Upon that sad note, I shall now return to sleep.*

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- Is there a hidden meaning in even the most apparently nonsensical of poems?

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- **Nursery Rhymes**

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- For instance, there is a treasure trove of hidden meanings in so many well-known children's verses:

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- *Ring-a-ring o' roses*
- *A pocketful of posies;*
- *A-tishoo! A-tishoo!*
- *We all fall down*

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- is a dancing game but believed by some to be associated with the 17<sup>th</sup> century Great Plague (though this is contested). This one is said by some to refer to Mary Queen of Scots:

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- *Little Miss Muffet*
- *Sat on a tuffet*
- *Eating her curds and whey.*
- *Along came a spider*
- *And sat down beside her*
- *And frightened Miss Muffet away.*

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- while this example has been linked with the Wars of the Roses:

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- *Hey diddle diddle*
- *The cat and the fiddle*
- *The cow jumped over the moon;*
- *The little dog laughed to see such fun,*
- *And the dish ran away with the spoon.*

•

- with various roles allocated to Richard III, Warwick the Kingmaker and Henry Percy. Many opportunities for fun research: one good reference book is Albert Jack's *Pop Goes the Weasel – the Secret Meanings of Nursery Rhymes* (and the one in that title is an excellent example to explore, with lots of rhyming slang, London landmarks and pawnbroker's practices to unravel.)

- **Primary Colours**

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- Here's a way of teaching children to write poetry. Explain that poetry is different than story writing. It looks different on a page. It usually has fewer words. Poetry uses words that put special pictures in our minds. And while it sometimes rhymes, it often doesn't. Writing poems can be intimidating for children. Colour poems show just how simple and enjoyable poetry writing can be. Write a colour – for example 'purple' on the board and then let the class brainstorm about things of that colour. For example:

- - **Purple**
  - *grapes*
  - plums*
  - violets*
  - new sweater*

- 
- Next, show the class how to add words to the poem to make it more interesting. With the children's input, here was our next version of the colour poem:

- - *Purple*
  - *Crisp wet grapes*
  - Soft, juicy plums*
  - Beautiful violets*
  - Shiny, rubbery balloons*
  - Cosy new sweater*

- After discussing this, perhaps working in small groups, let each choose a colour (not the same one). See if longer lists of objects can be developed, such as:

- - **Pink**
  - *lipstick*
  - sunset*
  - baby's shirt*
  - paint*
  - marker*
  - pencil*
  - jewel*
  - princess*
  - gum*
  - tongue*
  - tutu*
  - flamingos*
  - ballerinas*
  - ice cream*

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- And then, let the groups add extra words to make their poems interesting. For example:

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- **Pink**
- *Soft lipstick*
- Colourful sunset*
- Inky marker*
- Hard pencil*
- Shiny jewel*
- Beautiful princess*
- Chewy gum*
- Wet tongue*
- Scratchy tutu*
- Cold ice cream*

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- Perhaps the lesson could evolve into an art project.
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- **Poetry within the Syllabus**

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- *...And I have trawled the internet and come*
- *Upon the Primary English Curriculum.*
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- *Curaclam na Bunscoile* offers general encouragement in relation to poetry rather than specific stipulations, which is entirely reasonable: “...explore and express reactions to poetry... and refine aesthetic response through oral language activity and writing... develop a sense of appropriate presentation... share writing and responses to reading experience with other children and adults... gain pleasure and fulfilment from language activity”.
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- Infant classes are encouraged to “play with language... nursery rhymes, action songs and poems, a wide variety of rhythms... write and draw frequently... learn and retell a rich variety of rhymes and songs”.
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- First and second classes are called upon to “clarify thought (and) develop emotional and imaginative life through writing... learn about the sounds (relating to) rhyming... have regular opportunities to write for himself/herself... continue to listen to and enjoy stories and poems being read aloud...express feelings in writing (including) likes and dislikes about events and characters in poems”.
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- Third and fourth classes should cover “creating and fostering the impulse to write... developing emotional and imaginative life through writing... engage with a wide variety of poetry and verse on a regular basis... write regularly... explore new interests and perspectives through reading poetry... write in a variety of genres... enjoy playful aspects of rhymes and verses... express reactions to poems in writing.”
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- And then, at the fifth and sixth stage level, the oral, reading and writing strands should, together, enable “the development of emotional and imaginative life... write for an increasingly varied audience... read (poetry) widely as an independent reader... take part in co-operative (poetry) writing activities... listen to, read, learn, recite and respond to a challenging range of poetry... write poems”.
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- This structure offers a commendable and exciting opportunity for teachers, progressively, as each individual child develops, to foster a love and understanding of

poetry. That it does not always happen is a function of our imperfection as humans. But let us keep trying: Every Child a Poet may occur, across the triple halves of Clare, if we are determined to make it so.

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- **Poems Across the Curriculum**

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- And the previous section addressed ‘English’ whereas poetry straddles the syllabus (and, indeed, these divisions between subject areas were created by people rather than being inherent in nature). Teaching children to write poetry is a natural tool for [writing across the curriculum](#) and an easy way to introduce them to a love of words. They are a versatile tool for introducing and understanding a world of plant life cycles, animal habitats, current events in social studies, biographies of influential persons, and the like. Multiple Intelligence Connections include:

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- **Verbal-Linguistic:** developing skills in the [poetic craft](#) of metaphor and simile; writing poems in the styles of famous poets; writing poems about [literary characters](#);
- **Spatial:** using images of colour and shape within poems; writing poems about [art or well-known artists](#);
- **Logical-Mathematical:** writing poems in [traditional forms](#); writing poems about [mathematical concepts](#) or influential mathematicians;
- **Bodily-Kinaesthetic:** writing poems about different sports or [health education studies](#);
- **Musical:** writing in [syllabic patterns](#) and rhymes; writing poems to accompany instrumental selections or about influential musicians;
- **Interpersonal:** writing poems about [human history and cultures](#);
- **Intrapersonal:** writing poems that centre upon [personal character and values](#);
- **Naturalist:** writing poems about [environmental](#) or [scientific](#) topics; and
- **Existential:** writing poems that explore [spiritual values](#); in an appropriate context, such poems become prayer poems.

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- As evidenced above, poems and poetic activities enrich all aspects of the curriculum. Through teaching children to write poetry in any academic context, you are encouraging them to make [meaningful connections](#) to the material. [Valuable books on generating and encouraging writing include *Write for Life* by Nicki Jakowska, published in 2009 by Enitharmon.]

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- **Metaphor and Simile**

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- The building blocks of poetry are metaphors and similes. By working with these concepts, children develop skills in crafting imagery and careful word choice. This versatile activity is called the **Like What?** list and offers an understanding of simile and metaphor. Try this exercise within any topic of study. Here's the format:

- colour like-
- hot like-
- cold like-
- sounds like-
- tastes like-
- smells like-
- looks like-

- feels like-
- makes me feel-
- 
- For example's sake, let's apply the **Like What?** form to a science unit on insects, specifically the bumblebee. Each of the lines below spin from each of the senses above.
- Black-and-gold robe
- Hot morning sun
- Cold evening breeze
- Humming throughout the day
- Sweet honeysuckle
- Wild rose's perfume
- A tangled fairy forest
- Boundless energy and life
- Oh, to have the bee's happiness!
- 
- See how easily this simple activity brings poetry into any subject! Let's try another one! Suppose we're beginning a botany unit. Using the **Like What?** list above, we create this about an oak tree:
- Royal green
- In summer heat,
- Through cold stinging rain,
- Silently growing.
- Taste of earth and bark
- Scent of ageless wood
- A sentinel searching the skies
- A calm guardian of the fields.
- Give me your strength and wisdom
- 
- When writing poetry within content areas, here's a basic procedure that fits into any lesson plan:
- Select the unit topic
- Brainstorm ideas, words, and images that spin from the **Like What?** format
- Share models of poems you've written
- Share your students' subsequent poems
- Have fun using simile and metaphor to explore the world, as you experience teaching children to write poetry!
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- **Haiku**
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- A Haiku is a traditional form of Japanese poetry usually conveying the essence of an experience of nature or the season intuitively linked to the human condition, in which the first two lines make a statement and in the final line these two statements are combined. In English they are in three lines of 17 syllables, traditionally in "5-7-5" form. Many make use of punctuation, space, a line-break, or a grammatical break to compare two images implicitly.
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- For several years the Clare Poetry Collective ran annual Haiku contests for primary school students. One year I gave these examples to parents, teachers and children. [Two of them are by Haiku masters, one by Wendy Cope and the others are by me (Mike)] and invited them to detect which is by whom.

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- *Can one write haiku*
- *If one is not Japanese*
- *But enjoys raw fish?*
- 
- *Winter moonlight.*
- *A brie waits silently*
- *Upon the sideboard.*
- 
- *An afternoon breeze*
- *expels cold air, along with*
- *the fallen brown leaves.*
- 
- *Snow on Mt Fuji.*
- *Will it still be Mt Fuji*
- *When the snow has gone?*
- 
- *A broken oak branch*
- *In the dark and soggy wood*
- *Supports my trip home*
- *Sunday's roast beef lunch*
- *if eaten using chopsticks,*
- *is still not sushi.*
- 
- *Spring has just arrived,*
- *My cats are licking their milk*
- *but it is frozen.*
- 
- *Love is like winter*  
*Warm breaths thaw cold hearts until*  
*one day the spring comes.*
- 
- *I sing of summer.*
- *Warm, warm, hot, hot, sweltering...*
- *Yet I get colder.*
- 
- *The same DNA:*
- *Hojo Soun is a warlord,*
- *His twin writes Haiku.*
- 
- *I fold the paper*
- *So that the mighty eagle*
- *becomes a sparrow.*
- 
- *Fine calligraphy*
- *Enhances my humble verse*
- *As silks the Empress.*
- 
- *The harsh winter wind*
- *Disturbs desiccated reeds.*
- *Six geese fly high.*
- 
- *A haiku is an*
- *unfinished kind of poem*
- *dealing with themes like*

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- **Writing Poems**
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- Introducing children to poems at a young age will develop their interest and enthusiasm early on. There are many poems which are specifically written to engage children such as those by Michael Rosen. [The Usborne Book of Poetry for Children](#) is another great way of introducing a child or a class to a wide variety of poems.
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- As already emphasised, the easiest way to help children write poems is to share lots of poetry with them so they can quickly become familiar with poetical language. Read a range of funny, sad and silly poems as well as poems and rhymes with nonsense words. Make sure each child is aware of the variety of poems available. For example, some deal honestly and thoughtfully with serious subjects, such as Niamh Lernihan's *Seeing the World Again*, written when in , 6<sup>th</sup> Class at Lahinch NS:
- - *Since the age of five,  
My grandma has been blind,  
I wonder how she sees the world,  
In her mind.*
- 
- or one entitled: 'The Burren', written by Aisling Blake, 4th Class, Barefield NS, which begins:
  - *From the rocky mountain side  
To the flowers in the breeze  
Such beauty there I cried...*
- 
- Encourage each child to write about things that are relevant and important to them. Poetry is a good way for children to express their emotions and feelings so utilise this opportunity. Encourage your child to use similes in their poems to compare two things by using 'like' or 'as'. Each child will need some help to write a poem using similes to start with, but this is a powerful tool in poetry writing.
- 
- The children can include as many similes as they choose in the poem template shown below, which is an ideal way for them to start writing poetry, as the structure is simple to follow. Children as young as six have written poems using this format. The children may enjoy writing about their best friend, family member or pet as this makes poetry writing more meaningful. Once children have written their poems encourage them to read them back to you; this will allow them to appreciate the impact of similes and the choice of language. You may also like to introduce alliteration for greater effect.
- 
- Simple Poetry Template
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ is my best friend,
- Without \_\_\_\_\_ I feel like,
- A star with no shine,
- A book without a cover,
- A playground with no children,
- A flower without petals,

- 
- ‘Button Town’, by Dylan Williams, then in 2<sup>nd</sup> Class at Ennis National School, demonstrates several of these qualities, which is why it was a prize winner:
- 

- *There is a handful of buttons in my hand  
And I can see a little town in my head*
- 

- *A yellow button in the sky  
The sun is shining very bright*
- 

- *White buttons big and small  
These are clouds very tall*
- 

- *Red buttons very nice  
These are apples, get a slice*
- 

- *Blue buttons like bubbles  
These are big puddles*
- 

- *How many buttons in this town?  
Come on let’s count.*
- 

- 
- **Onomatopoeic Poems**
- 

- These are sound poems and are an ideal way for young children to think about objects, people, animals, birds et cetera and the sounds they make. Children would need plenty of preliminary work before creating the poem and it may link with oral language, a story that has just been read, an excursion or suchlike. Here is an example:
- 

- *The Supermarket*
- 
- *Trolleys banging,*
- *Mammies talking,*
- *Music playing,*
- *Babies crying,*
- *Registers ringing,*
- *I want to go home.*
- 
- 

- 
- **Pyramid Poems**
- 

- In the Pyramid poems get the children to describe the chosen topic using one adjective in the first line, then two adjectives in the second line and so on. The children can add as many lines as they wish, with a short sentence at the end to round off the poem. The following example is based on the story “Can’t You Sleep Little Bear” by Martin Waddell.
- 

- 
- 
- **Bear**



- A little bear
- A cute, little bear
- A tired, cute, little bear
- A scared, tired, cute, little bear
- Go to sleep little bear

## • **Acrostics**

- Show the child how to write an acrostic poem, in which the first letter of each line spells out his or her name, when read top to bottom. Once the child writes a poem based on his or her own name, the child can write about family members, friends, or pets.
- Write the title vertically on the left hand side of the page, each letter represents a word and can then be added to form a sentence. For younger children you can begin by using their name, mammy, daddy, pets, animals, birds, seasons et cetera. Develop the theme for older children by using feeling/emotions or other abstract ideas. Here are two examples:

- **Granny**

- *Gardening all of the time*
- *Rubs my knee when I fall,*
- *And makes yummy scones.*
- *Never gives out,*
- *Never complains,*
- *Yes I love my granny.*

- **Summer**

- *Sun is shining*  
*Unique flowers have arrived,*  
*My mom says go out and play,*  
*Mark and I say yay,*  
*Enjoying the sun,*  
*Running around having fun!*

- And here is one by Patricia Greenwood, submitted for the 2016-17 contest when she was in 4<sup>th</sup> Class at Kilnamona NS, which was a prize winner in March 2017:

- *Patricia is*  
*Always*  
*Thoughtful*  
*Respectful, full of*  
*Integrity*  
*Courage and an*  
*Ideal and*  
*Artful Friend.*

- 
- 
- 

- **Rhyming Couplets**

- 

- Teachers can begin using rhyming couplets with infant classes but children need a lot of practice with rhyming words. Nursery rhymes are a great place to start; rhyming couplets can also be linked to phonological awareness or with rhyming poems and stories. Teachers can begin using rhyming couplets. Begin by reciting common nursery rhymes to the children, but change the last word on the first line, get the children to fill in a word that rhymes with this e.g.

- 

- *Humpty Dumpty went to the shop*
- *To buy himself a ...lollipop/spinning top*
- *Humpty Dumpty bought a hat*
- *In it was a big black ...cat/rat*

- 

- *Jack and Jan (Dan, Gran, Stan, Ann)*
- *Went to ...Japan,*
- *To see a ...man in a caravan*

- 

- Introducing and playing rhyming and rhythmic games with children also helps them to write poetry. Listening to poetry or a rhyming story on CD is helpful as it encourages your child to recognise rhythm. Resources such as [\*A Celebration of Poetry with a Beat\*](#) are an ideal way of introducing this.

- 

- Or just make up your own rhymes. It is important to brainstorm rhyming words with the children before you begin e.g. bear, there, where, lair, mare, hair, chair, glare, pear, pair, stair, tear, wear...

- 

- *Deep in the wood was a grumpy bear*
- *Who sat all day in a gloomy lair...*
- 
- *I saw a lovely young red fox*
- *With a black tipped tail and white, white socks.*

- 

- One entry in the 2016-17 contest was by Johnny O'Loughlin, then in 3<sup>rd</sup> Class at Clarecastle NS, and entitled Cauliflower of Power – what a lovely idea – and it leaves a lot to the listener's imagination. The final rhyme takes you by surprise as, with his girlfriend called Rose:

- 

- *They took a pose*
- *in a selfie*
- *and went on a honeymoon to Chelsea!*

- 

- presumably to the Flower Show.

- 

- **Alphabet Poems**

- 
- Good precursors to alphabet poems are oral language games such as the Mrs O'Grady's Cat. These allow children to think of adjectives, going from a-z to describe the cat.

- 
- *Mrs O'Grady's cat is an awful cat*
- *Mrs O'Grady's cat is a beautiful cat*
- *Mrs O'Grady's cat is a creepy cat*
- *Mrs O'Grady's cat is a delightful cat.*

- 
- This game can also be played using the names of the pupils

- 
- *My name is Deirdre and I like doughnuts*
- *My name is Tom and I hate tomatoes etc.*
- 
- *My name is Ita and I am in Italy (countries)*
- *My name is Mary and I eat marmalade (food)*

- 
- This depends on the level and ability of the class. There are numerous different forms of alphabet poems, in the example below we focus on verbs but you can create a poem using adjectives, nouns et cetera. The poems don't have to rhyme

- 
- ***The Playground***
- 
- *A asked to borrow a bat*
- *B bounced a ball*
- *C crawled under the fence*
- *D danced round Paul*

- 
- **ABC Books** allow children to choose a word for each letter of the alphabet and describe it in some way. As a class you may wish to focus on a theme such as animals, insects, countries, flowers, feelings et cetera

- 
- *A is for anger and gritting my teeth*
- *B is for blushing and making silly mistakes*
- *C is for cranky when I don't get my way...*

- **Group Poems**

- 
- In the following poem the title of the poem is taken and repeated throughout the poem, to begin link the theme to a topic that the children are familiar with e.g.

- 
- *In the Playground*
- *We run around*
- *In the Playground*
- *We swap lunches*
- *In the Playground*
- *We play chasing*
- *In the Playground*

- **Free Poems**

- It is important that children remember that poems don't always have to rhyme in order to be a poem, similarly we don't always have to tell children to write a poem for them to express themselves poetically. A young six year old wrote the following piece in her nature notebook; she was not asked to write a poem but when the teacher saw the piece she praised the child for the beautiful poem, the child was delighted.

- *I Like Nature*
- *Flowers come with nature.*
- *Trees come with nature.*
- *We come with nature.*

## • **Colour Poems**

- Colour poems can be written and developed right through the school. When writing colour poems with junior classes just repeat the colour at the beginning of each sentence. Get the children to brainstorm things that are this colour e.g.

- *Black*
- *Black is my cat*
- *Black is granny's stove*
- *Black is my shiny shoe*

- You can also focus on themes when writing this sort of poetry e.g. Friends are..., Autumn is ... etc. Adapting the theme for Senior Classes: War is..., Hunger is ... etc. When working with the older classes you don't have to repeat the colour/theme at the beginning of each sentence, also rather than constantly thinking of solid objects ask the children to think of things that the colour/object/theme represents, for example:

- *Black*
- *The old mine degenerating in the dead of night,*
- *The exposed body lying helplessly on waste ground,*
- *An engulfing darkness in a maze of winding passages,*
- *A dagger of evil stained with blood,*
- *A cold and lingering silence*

## • **Adjective Poems**

- In this instance we repeat the title three times on the first and last lines of the poem and at the end of each line in the poem. The poem can be as long or as short as you want. For younger children the words may be of just one syllable but in order to develop this type of poem for the middle classes and senior classes you can ask for two and three syllable words also. You can also ask that all of the adjectives in each line begin with the same letter, for instance:

- *Pirates*
- *Pirates, Pirates, Pirates,*
- *Big, beefy, burly pirates,*
- *Dark, dour, dangerous pirates,*
- *Mean, mucky, massive pirates*
- *Pirates, Pirates, Pirates.*

- 
- A variation of this poem is to use verbs and adverbs e.g.

- *Sailing*
- *Sailing, sailing, sailing*
- *Silently sailing,*
- *Swiftly sailing,*
- *Surely sailing*
- *Sailing, sailing, sailing*

- 
- **UP and DOWN POEM**

- 
- This is a variation of acrostics poems, and can be used with the older classes - a theme or title is taken and is written in capitals and in a bright colour. They create their poem around this. Before beginning Choose one “key” word as the focus - e.g. slavery, Peace, freedom, etc. brainstorm related key words - adjectives, adverbs, feeling words, power words, etc. Write the word DOWN the middle of the page, (one letter per line). Students can write individually, in pairs or in small groups. Fit words and phrases around the letters by choosing your kindred words, or by using the brainstorm list to help. The idea is that each letter from the key word becomes incorporated into the word or phrase going across. The one rule is that the first line and the last should be connected in some way - same word or same sentiment. A more difficult exercise is to write the title down the right side of the page, so that all the lines of the poem end with those letters.

- 
- *HOMework*
- 
- *Horrible stuff,*
- *cOmpletely disgusting, in fact!*
- *Makes*
- *mE*
- *Want to*
- *gO and find a*
- *"Real job"...*
- *Nah, I don't thinK so!!*

- 
- **Sausage Poems**

- 
- These are lots of fun. In a sausage poem the last letter in the first word is the same as the first letter in the second word and the last letter in the second word is the same as the first letter in the third word and so on. Here are two examples:

- 
- *HoW Would DangerouS SnakeS SnaP Petrified DonkeyS?*
- 
- *HippoS Swop PyjamaS SO OfteN No-onE EveR RememberS*

- 
- Taking it further, let the class try write the poems so that the last letter of the last word is the same as the first letter of the first word, this is known as a circle sausage poem.

- 
- **Character poems**

- These follow a standard line-by-line format:

- 
- (Character first name) \_\_\_\_\_
- Lives \_\_\_\_\_ where \_\_\_\_\_
- Hears \_\_\_\_\_,
- Sees \_\_\_\_\_,
- Touches \_\_\_\_\_,
- Needs \_\_\_\_\_,
- Fears \_\_\_\_\_,
- Gives \_\_\_\_\_,
- Wonders \_\_\_\_\_,
- Dreams \_\_\_\_\_,
- Believes \_\_\_\_\_,
- Loves \_\_\_\_\_ and
- Is \_\_\_\_\_.
- (last name of character)

- 
- 
- 
- And here is an example of a character poem:

- 
- *Frodo*
- *Lives in Bag End where he*
- *Hears horses hooves,*
- *Sees black riders gallop,*
- *Touches the one ring to rule them all,*
- *Needs to save the Middle Earth,*
- *Fears the Orcs,*
- *Wonders if he can fulfil his quest,*
- *Dreams of home,*
- *Believes in Gandalf's magic*
- *Loves Bilbo, and*
- *Is strong enough to defeat all enemies.*
- *Baggins*

- 
- [We could find no example of Frodo 'giving' although much was given to him.]
- 

- **Limericks**

- 
- The word derives from our nearby town of Limerick and variants of this form of poetry can be traced back to the fourteenth century. In limericks, lines one, two and five rhyme, as do lines three and four, which are shorter and there are plenty of examples all over the place, including these by Edward Lear:

- 
- *There was an Old Man with a beard,*  
*Who said, 'It is just as I feared!*  
*Two Owls and a Hen,*  
*Four Larks and a Wren,*  
*Have all built their nests in my beard!'*
-

- *There was an Old Man of Kilkenny,  
Who never had more than a penny;  
He spent all that money,  
In onions and honey,  
That wayward Old Man of Kilkenny.*

- *There was an Old Man who supposed,  
That the street door was partially closed;  
But some very large rats,  
Ate his coats and his hats,  
While that futile old gentleman dozed.*

- *In a castle that had a deep moat  
Lived a chicken a duck and a goat.  
They wanted to go out  
And wander about  
But what they didn't have was a boat.*

- Some may be no more than inspired nonsense) and none the worse for that, such as this entry by Aoibhinn Kierans-O'Neill, then in 2<sup>nd</sup> Class at Clarecastle NS

- *There was an old penguin on ice  
Who said it was oh very nice.  
When he saw a big boat  
In which was a goat,  
Eating a bowl of fried rice.*

- or even limericks that might have been about the contest's Chief Judge:

- *There once was a granddad called Mike  
Who loved to cycle a bike.  
He fell off one day,  
A fine day in May  
and hurt his leg on a spike.*

- [Mike maintained strict objectivity during the judging process, but avoided both bikes and spikes.]

- **Kennings**

- A Kenning is a poem which uses two-word phrases (a noun and a verb) on each line to describe the subject. This makes writing kennings a particularly good exercise for looking really closely at something and describing it in detail. The idea is to observe details closely and then relate them in a kenning in an order of least obvious first. As the poem grows with more information, gradually, by the end of the kenning, the subject should have become obvious. Kennings do not have to rhyme, although they may. A title or topic is chosen and children describe it in other ways without using the name.

- *Storm*

- *An angry sky-god*

- *A lightning-thrower*
- *An electricity-charge*
- *A tree-destroyer*

- An interesting guessing game with a Kenning is to read poems aloud without a title and see how soon someone can work out what the subject is. If, for example, the subject was “spider” you would begin with something obscure like “egg layer”, and work towards “web creator”. You could use this idea as a quiz, and everyone has to write down an answer as soon as they think they have one, earning more points the earlier they can guess correctly. A well written kenning would therefore be vague at first and progress to be recognised by everyone by the last line. Use an encyclopaedia and gather snippets of information about one particular animal for example, including the lesser known facts. Use the information to write a descriptive kenning, and organise it such that the things that are not common knowledge are the ones that you mention first.

- For instance, using the topic of a penguin...

- *Bristle tongued creature*
- Slippery food eater*
- Hook billed grabber*
- Fish nabber*
- Nest builder (maker)*
- Stone stealer (taker)*
- Torpedo shaped diver / ocean diver*
- Water leaper*
- Land bouncer (ledge leaper)*
- Waddling walker*
- Winged waddler*
- Arctic dweller*
- Tuxedo wearer?!*

- Look for ways to include alliteration by editing specific words: would you prefer ‘ledge leaper’ to ‘land bouncer’ or does that lose something of what you wanted to say? Finally, order the facts from least obvious to most obvious. In this case bristled tongues is new information to me; hook-billed grabber is vague enough to be any number of birds; but winged waddler and arctic dweller work together to make the answer obvious for me.

- **Alliteration Poems**

- Alliteration poems are sentences, phrases or statements where the words in each sentence begin with the same letter e.g.

- *One waggly walrus won a wet wager*
- *Two trustful twins tumble in a typhoon,*
- *Three thin thoroughbreds thumped a thick thief ...*

- **Cinquains**



- 
- These poems have five lines:
- Line 1: 1 noun
- Line 2: 2 related adjectives
- Line 3: 3 descriptive gerunds (verb + -ing)
- Line 4: 1 complete, related sentence
- Line 5: 1 noun (a synonym of first noun)

- 
- *Combat*
- *Sad, destructive*
- *Killing, injuring, destroying*
- *A thing that kills life.*
- *War*

- 
- 

### **Diamante Poems**

- 

- These are of the following form, as illustrated:
- Line 1: 1 noun (a)
- Line 2: 2 adjectives to describe the noun (a)
- Line 3: 3 gerunds (verb + ing) (what you do in/with noun)
- Line 4: 2 nouns linked with a + 2 nouns linked with its antonym (opposite) (b)
- Line 5: 3 gerunds (verb + ing) to describe noun (b)
- Line 6: 2 adjectives to describe noun (b)
- Line 7: noun (b)

- 

Here are two examples:

- 

- ***Seasons***
- 
- *Winter*
- *Rainy, cold*
- *Skiing, skating, sledding*
- *Mountains, wind, breeze, ocean*
- *Swimming, surfing, scuba diving*
- *Sunny, hot*
- *Summer*

- 

- ***Weather***

- 

- *Wind*
- *Fierce, strong*
- *Blowing, gusting, pushing*
- *The clouds are moving quickly, leaving blue in their path*
- *Warming, calming, soothing*
- *Peaceful, bright*
- *Sun*

-

- **Plagiarism**

- 
- A few years ago I attended a children's poetry contest won by a pupil who claimed to have composed verses that had in fact been written by Lord Byron centuries ago. Embarrassment all round. In order to define 'plagiarism' and consider how it should be outlawed, I have used that example several times and invited children to discuss how this incident should have been handled – prevention rather than punishment. Sometimes the copying is innocent and unintentional and, indeed, nothing is completely original (but submitting a Byronic 20-liner is hardly accidental).

- 
- Of course it is very difficult (not just with poetry) to police when the involvement of parents (and teachers!) crosses the borderline from permissible encouragement to unfair input, although a child reading or reciting a poem with words that are clearly unknown to her or him is a dead giveaway. Nowadays there is readily available computer software that may check whether or not a poem is original or pirated [but please do not apply such checks to this present document]. Often one comes across a poem – or any piece of work – and one thinks “surely that cannot have been written by an 8-year-old!” Maybe they said that about Keats.

- 
- **Tailpiece for Teachers**

- 
- For your own lifelong learning and delectation, a magnificent starting point is Stephen Fry's *The Ode Less Travelled: Unlocking the Poet Within*. “Brim-full of enjoyable exercises, witty insights and simple step-by-step advice, this extraordinary book guides the reader towards mastery and confidence in the Mother of the Arts”.

- 
- And of course all who receive and/or read these notes are most welcome to **join the Clare Poetry Collective** and participate in our programme of readings, open mic sessions, workshops, visits, public events and other activities, including contributing a poem for publication in Poet's Corner in the Clare Champion. Please make contact at: <http://www.poetrycollective.com/>

- 
- And of course, believing that creativity begins early and should be encouraged always, we run that **annual EVERY CHILD A POET competition for primary school pupils** in conjunction with Clare Education Centre – whose support is greatly appreciated.

- 
- All primary pupils are invited to write a poem (or two) of no more than 15 lines on any subject. No particular form (haiku, sonnet, clerihew...) is stipulated. There will be just the one 'open' category but there will be special awards for high-quality poems by younger pupils. Poems of, say, three or four lines from children in the early primary years will be welcomed.

- 
- Some of these young poets will be invited to read or recite their entries on World (or International) Poetry Day – and subsequently on Clare FM maybe. While most of the assessment will relate to the poems themselves, how well they are read will also be taken into consideration. Teachers and parents will of course be welcome.

-

- The Collective will also organise prizes and arrange media coverage and publicity and, as previously, the perpetual Trophy (a singing bowl) will be awarded to the school with the widest range of ‘good’ poems contributed.

- 

- Entries should be submitted to: [mike@poetrycollective.com](mailto:mike@poetrycollective.com) on or before 1<sup>st</sup> March each year. Details will be provided to schools – just as this Guidebook has been.

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