

Joseph Coelho: *Werewolf Club Rules*, illustrated by John O’Leary (Frances Lincoln 2014 9781847804525)

Joseph Coelho’s first collection ranges around school and family life and demonstrates a delight in language and an ambitious use of words. ‘Miss Flotsam’ is a heroic reception teacher with global sensibilities. A list of the contents of school dinner leaves pupils begging for a packed lunch. ‘Conquer’ plays with a pun which highlights children’s enjoyment of the fruit of nature while ‘Halloween’s Crumble’ superbly captures the frustration of trying to pick those blackberries that are just out of reach. An intergenerational relationship is encapsulated by the use of a deck of cards to deal out information about places travelled while ‘Bug Poem’ demonstrates that there are creepy crawlies to suit every member of the family.

This collection won the 2015 CLPE Poetry Award.

Overall aims of this teaching sequence.

- To explore and understand the importance of poetry as a genre.
- To know how to listen and respond to a wide range of poems from a single poet collection.
- To understand that poems are written for different reasons.
- To interpret poems for performance.
- To gain and maintain the interest of the listener through effective performance of poems.
- To be able to use art as a means of responding to a poem, visualising and inferring and extending and enriching language.
- To recognise figurative language in poetry and interpret its effect on the reader.
- To draft, compose and write poems based on real and personal experiences using language with intent for effect on the reader.

This teaching sequence is designed for a Year 4 or Year 5 class.

Overview of this teaching sequence.

This teaching sequence is designed to be delivered over 15 sessions but teachers will want to use their own judgement about the length of time their class will need to spend on each of the sessions. The teaching sequence is split into three sections. The first section looks at poems that Joseph has written about different aspects of his childhood and his personal journey. These sessions are designed to explore personal response and expression and to help children understand the different ways in which they can respond to poetry as well as understanding how it can be a vehicle for personal storytelling. The second section investigates poems in this collection which explore a range of emotions and the sessions are designed to help children begin to develop their understanding of the different ways in which poetry can express emotional response. The final section investigates Joseph’s poems about the natural world and helps children to understand and experience the ways in which he uses language to describe settings and the feelings they inspire. The sequence is designed so that the children’s experience of this collection, and their understanding of one poet’s voice and use of language, will support them to use similar techniques, poetic devices and wordplay in their own writing.

Teaching Approaches:

Reading Aloud
Listening to the poet and responding
Visualising and drawing

Outcomes

Poetry performance
Text marking
Drafting, redrafting and writing poetry

Exploring Poetic Devices:

Rhythm and Rhyme
Imagery
Metaphor
Personification
Word play

Opportunities to develop and reinforce phonic knowledge and reading fluency

Rhythm and Rhyme
Different representations and pronunciations of vowel sounds
Rehearsal and performance of poetry

Cross Curricular Links:

PSHE:

- Lots of the poems in the collection are based on the poet's real experiences or experiences the children can easily relate to. Some of the issues and themes contained in the poems will provide an excellent stimulus for group discussions in PSHE sessions that will allow for the children to explore and extend discussions around issues brought out in the poems.

Art and Design:

- In Parts 2 and 3 of the sequence, art is used as a means of visualising and representing real and imagined experiences. Using a range of materials throughout these sessions will be important as well as a focus on specific techniques for observing real objects and representing imagined experiences. Responding to the children's drawings afterward will allow them to explore the effectiveness of techniques and materials used.

Science:

- The focus on Nature in Part 3 of the sequence links to scientific knowledge in Key Stage 2 around the life cycles of plants and animals, work done in science could provide the stimulus for the poetry writing at the end of Part 3.

Geography:

- The focus on the well-travelled 'Dada' allows exploration and location of the world's countries, which is a key element of the Geography programmes of study in Key Stage 2. Work locating these in atlases is embedded in Part 2 of the sequence.

Links to other texts and resources:

Joseph's Poems are also feature in:

Green Glass Beads edited by Jacqueline Wilson

The Works 6 edited by Pie Corbett

John Agard's *What the teacher said when asked: What er we avin for geography, Miss?* is another school focussed poem you may wish to explore on poetryline, along with Rachel Rooney's *Home Time*, *The 20a Bus*, *Don't Move the Goalposts* and *Making Friends* (from *My Life as a Goldfish*) alongside the poems on school in Part 1 of the sequence.

Many of Grace Nichols' poems recall family members and events. On poetryline, you might like to link to *My gran visits England* and *Wha' mi mudder do* when looking at Part 2 of the sequence

George Szirtes *Apple Tree* and *The Sea's Hands* give other examples of using personification in the theme of nature; these can be viewed on poetryline. Reading descriptions of the Victorian Garden in *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett will enrich the work around *The Satyr's Head* in Part 3 of the sequence

Teaching Sessions:

Before beginning this sequence, talk to the children about poetry. What do they already know about poetry? What favourite poems do they have? What poets do they know? Allocate a display table or board in the classroom as a poetry corner. Display examples of children's favourite poems or collections to share and discuss, planning in regular browsing and independent reading time when the children can access the books. Display a copy of the focus text *Werewolf Club Rules* and photographs of poet Joseph Coelho, so that children can see what the poet looks like. You may also want to make some handmade books for the children to have as their own poetry anthologies, to draft poems that they feel inspired to write throughout the sequence and make a large shared journal to collect examples of children's responses to the poetry studied in the unit.

Part 1: I am a writer

Session 1:

The experience of being read to is likely to be the real foundation of children's knowledge of poetry, and is also going to be a major influence on how they write themselves. So it is important that it should be as rich, interesting and 'ear-catching'

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as it can be.

Read the poem *I am a writer* (P54-55). Allow time for the children to discuss the poem and talk about what they like, any questions they have, words and phrases that they like or that are interesting to them. What do you find out about the poet from reading this poem? How does he view writing? What does he like about it? How does it make him feel?

Watch the video on poetryline of Joseph Coelho talking about his writing www.poetryline.org.uk What else does this tell us about him? You could also link to Joe's website: <http://joseph-coelho.com/> to learn more about him.

Divide the children into groups and give each group an enlarged copy of this poem. Have the children read it through, talk about the words and phrases that they find interesting and think about how they could perform this poem for others to listen to. Will they split the poem into parts? Will there be parts that they will perform together? How will they use timbre, tempo and dynamics to create effects?

Allow time for the children to think about and discuss why we write poetry and what poetry is for. Note responses down on post-it notes to add to a working display. Discuss ideas and responses. Allow time to compare these with some of the reflections some other poets make on writing poetry on the poetryline website.

Session 2:

It is important that voices other than the teacher's should be heard interpreting a poem. In this way, a range of accents, dialects and voices can be introduced into the reading. It can be particularly valuable for children to hear the poets themselves reading their own poems. This allows authentic voices to be heard.

Watch the video of Joseph performing the poem *Little bit of food* (P36-37) on poetryline (www.poetryline.org.uk). Allow time for the children to savour the language, discuss likes, dislikes, questions they have found connections with other poems. How did it feel to hear the poet read the poem? Discuss language that may be new to the children such as fufu. What else can we learn about the poet from hearing him read this poem?

The natural rhythm in this poem makes it a fantastic poem to perform; allow children the time to practice performing this either individually or in groups.

You could go on to discuss children's own favourite foods and use these in additional sessions to write a shared, group or individual poems about food, following the rhyming structure of this poem and allowing children's own distinctive voices to be heard in their individual contributions.

Session 3:

Discussion about books forms the foundations for working with books. The same is true of working with poems. Children need frequent, regular and sustained opportunities to talk together about the books and poems that they are reading as a whole class. The more experience they have of talking together like this the better they get at making explicit the meaning that a text holds for them.

Dramatic poetry performance can be a fruitful way of working with poetry, both in terms of encouraging and eliciting responses from children to the poems they read, and also in providing opportunities for poems to be lifted 'off the page' and brought to life.

NB: This session contains a poem about being teased. It is important that, prior to this session teachers are aware of any children in the class who may have had issues with being teased or picked on, as this may be a sensitive topic. Use PSHE sessions to fully explore the issues around this subject, alongside the focus poem, which is a good springboard for beginning discussions. Suggestions for this are contained in the session notes.

Read the poem *Gingerbread man* (P51). Discuss the children's responses to the poem. On first reading, who did they think was the tormentor? When did they see that it was actually the other child, not Billy? How has the poet used the written language to trick the reader?

Why has the poet written this poem? Why has he written it in this way? Explore poetry as a means of expression, and also as a release of feelings, good or bad. How do you think the poet feels, reflecting back on this childhood experience now? Look at the words and phrases that show how the two children in the poem are feeling. Explore and discuss language that may be new or unfamiliar, such as 'jibed'. Act out the poem in pairs, to show how both children in the poem are behaving and feeling. The children may also add action to the beginning or end of the poem to infer extra meaning. How will you perform the poem alongside, as you act it out?

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You could also use a PSHE session to talk about experiences of being picked on in a safe and secure environment. Have they ever been picked on? Picked on anybody? Or even been a bystander? How does it feel from all these perspectives? You may also feel that a session writing some words in a poem may help to explore these issues. Children may want to decide if theirs is a poem they want to share or write just for themselves if dealing with sensitive issues.

Sessions 4 and 5:

Poetic form is often a big obstacle to children who are beginning to write poetry. This is because most ideas of what a poem ought to look like are based on traditional poetry, on its regular verse form and strict rhyme schemes. It is important therefore that children experience a wide repertoire of poetic forms that they can explore and experiment with in their own writing.

Leading on from the previous session; read a selection of the school based poems from the collection, such as: **An A* from Miss Coo** (P46), **Golden time** (P47), **School tomorrow – excuses for Mum** (P48), **Make it bigger, Eileen!** (P52), and **Last day of school** (P90-91). Allow plenty of time for the children to read and discuss the poems. Which ones they like best and why, words or phrases they like or add meaning or feeling, questions they have around the poems and connections with shared or real life experiences. Look at how the poems are shaped and structured; some have rhyme and pattern, others are free verse, some are in couplets, others in verses. Pick favourites to rehearse and perform individually or in small or larger groups.

Talk about our own memories of school. Look back at shared memorable experiences, favourite moments, lessons, topics, experiences or experiences that are memorable for other reasons. It is important that, like in **Gingerbread man**, children understand that poetry allows us to reflect a range of feelings and expressions, not always good or humorous ones. Model writing a poem based on a memorable experience for you as a teacher during a shared writing session, talking through the choices that you are making as a writer to bring the experience alive for the reader. Allow time for children to draft their own poems around the theme of school then allow them to read aloud to a response partner to lift the words off the page, hearing how they sound when performed, before redrafting and presenting for publication on a display or in a class anthology.

Part 2: Exploring emotions

Session 6:

One of the best ways of involving children in poetry is to make a habit of reading aloud to them as often as possible. The experience of being read to is likely to be the real foundation of their knowledge of poetry, and is also going to be a major influence on how they write themselves. Poetry is rooted in word games, word play, song and rhythm, and it's therefore particularly important that it should be heard as well as read.

Read aloud the poem **Miss Flotsam** (P13-15). Allow time for the children to respond with likes, dislikes, puzzles and connections. Give each child a copy of the poem to read through again, annotate with their own notes and encourage them to highlight and clarify any new or unfamiliar language such as 'Peruvian alpaca', 'Indonesian Gamelans' – it may be useful to have a dictionary, thesaurus and atlas on each table. What do we know about Miss Flotsam from the way she is described by the poet? Is her name really Miss Flotsam? What does Flotsam mean?

When the children have read and annotated their copy, ask them which scene in the poem was the most memorable for them? Why was this scene memorable? Did all the children pick the same scenes or did different scenes resonate with different children? Have the children read their most memorable scene again, visualise it and draw what it looked like to them. Annotate with words, phrases and questions from the poems that stick in your memory.

Session 7:

Personal experiences and memories can provide a powerful stimulus for children's poetry writing. Episodes from family life and childhood are often particularly rich and vivid sources of experiences which can be recalled and explored.

Re-read Miss Flotsam, compare her with the teachers in **Make it bigger, Eileen!** (P52) and **An A* from Miss Coo** (P46) How does the poet leave you feeling about each teacher? Why? Think of an adult in school who has had a memorable

impact on you. Why did they mean so much? Was it one big thing, or lots of little things as with Miss Flotsam? How would you describe the teacher, without actually naming them, like the poet has done with *Miss Flotsam*.

Create a draft of a Mrs... Miss... or Mr...poem, using free verse, as the poet has here, about your most memorable adult in school.

If the children wish to share these, give time to read aloud, make any changes to improve the flow or figurative language, publish and present in a display or class anthology.

Session 8:

Giving voice and sound to poetry is an important key to unlocking the meanings and music contained in each poem. It is through reading poetry aloud that the quality of rhyme and verse form and the power of language can be explored and realised.

Read the poem *Dada's stories* (P24-25). Allow time for the children to respond with their likes, dislikes, puzzles, connections. Clarify the location of the places mentioned in the poem; Calcutta, Tibet, Goa, London. What do we think we know about Dada? Explore the relationship with his grandfather. What does the fact he calls him Dada tell us about how he feels? What else can we infer about how the poet feels about him? How do we know?

Give each child a copy of the poem to annotate with their thoughts, responding using evidence from the text. What important words or phrases help us picture Dada or how the poet feels about him? What words or phrases would you use to describe him? Why? How would you perform this poem to bring across the character of Dada and how the poet feels about him? Allow time for the children to practise and perform.

Sessions 9 & 10:

A 'special person' theme offers a clear focus for the personal memories of each writer and can provide a variety of ways in which it is possible to represent early childhood experiences and give them new life.

Read aloud the poem *Cards dealt* (P78-79). Compare this with the poem read in the previous session. What else do we learn about Dada? Does this enrich our knowledge about him? About how the poet feels about him? What do we know about the life Dada has led? What tells us this? Annotate individual copies with notes, thoughts and ideas and highlight words, phrases and sections that help us to visualise Dada and the poet's feelings about him.

Why do you think the poet has chosen to write two poems about Dada? Link back to the first sessions and the reasons we write poetry.

Lead to writing about a special person in their wider life. If they were to write about a special person in their life, who would it be and why? Allow time for children to think about who they want to write about and why, to draft and write focussing on descriptive language and language that evokes emotion, drawing on understandings gained from the poems they have studied.

Extra sessions to read aloud, refine, redraft and to publish, illustrate and perform these will allow the children to see the complete writing process.

Display the children's work prominently, either bound in an anthology or as a whole school display to give audience to the work created.

Part 3: The nature of poetry

Session 11:

Many poems demand to be read aloud or performed; poetry is a literary form which has a great deal in common with drama. It is a natural progression to move a poem into performance and perhaps to divide the poem between different voices. This kind of work can produce some very creative thinking. When multiple groups work separately on the same

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poem it can be fascinating to see how differently they interpret it.

Read aloud the poem **Conquer** (P38). Why do you think the poet has chosen to spell the title in this way? Look at images of horse chestnut trees that show their grandeur, their bark, the 'mace-like' fruits growing on the tree. (Clarify what a mace is with a visual comparison if children are not aware of this medieval weapon.) If you have a horse chestnut tree in the local environment, it would be good to go outside to investigate it; to look at and feel the 'folds of the bark' and see if there are any signs of fruit – this may still be blossom, small fruits may have begun to emerge or, if this is the right time of year, children may actually be able to see or collect the conkers. Discuss the meaning of the poem and any questions the children have after reading it. What made this experience so tantalising for the children – look at the repetition in '**Every** classroom faced the playground, **every** child could see the tree'. Have they ever longed for something and had to wait? How did it feel? Share examples.

Give children a copy of the poem to read themselves and annotate. Discuss the way that the poet effectively illustrates the children's longing and anticipation by his language choices and sentence structure in the poem. Collect effective examples to annotate a large copy of the poem on the working wall to share thinking. How could this poem be performed, in groups of five – like the five children in the poem – to show the eagerness, excitement and anticipation effectively? Give time for the children to mark up a copy of the text in their groups, rehearse and perform to the class.

Evaluate performances together looking at specific performance techniques that brought the poem alive and added effect and meaning to the poem. You could also go on to re-evaluate, and video or voice record children's 'edited' performances to share together.

Session 12:

Art is a natural aspect of the curriculum to combine with poetry. After all, poetry deals with image and imagery and many poems are based on the sort of close observation of real life subjects which can also be the basis of work in art.

Read aloud the poem **Halloween's crumble** (P40). Explore how the poet uses metaphor and figurative language for effect in this poem., ensuring children have an understanding of these terms and can relate them to specific language in the text, e.g. *A shark gaping wide; Savage whips, swearing they won't mark; Frogspawn, black beads, spider eyes, wet and bleeding.*

Give time for children to re-read and annotate the poem with their own observations, questions, comments and to highlight examples of effective language use that draws in the reader and makes them feel what it is like to see, feel and taste the blackberries. Ask the class to respond to the poem, expressing likes and dislikes, asking questions, including clarifying unknown vocabulary and connecting with real life experiences. Have any of them been blackberry picking? Seen fresh blackberries? Eaten hot blackberry crumble? Describe the experiences using all the senses. If this is the right time of year and there are blackberry brambles in the locality, a trip to actually take part in blackberry picking would enhance this experience further. Photographs of blackberries growing on brambles in the wild would also enhance the experience. .It would also be useful to have some fresh blackberries in the class for children to observe, draw or paint, touch and taste so that they can use their own examples of metaphor, simile and figurative language to describe them. This may be as annotations on post-its or sentence strips around their artwork.

Session 13:

Asking children to picture or visualise a character or a place from a story is a powerful way of encouraging them to move into a fictional world. Children can be asked to picture the scene in their mind's eye or walk round it in their imaginations. Finally they can bring it to life by describing it in words or recreating it in drawing or painting.

Listen to Joseph Coelho read the poem **The Satyr's head** (P82) on poetryline (www.poetryline.org.uk) Give the children a copy of the poem to look at **but remove the illustration**. There is rich and complex vocabulary in this poem, e.g. Satyr, crenellations; listen to him read it again and have the children highlight language that is interesting or new to them to discuss after listening.

Have pastels, charcoal, drawing pencils, watercolours and other art materials that children would like to use available and have them draw what they can see whilst listening to the poem. Compare and contrast drawings and discuss what led to their own visualisations.

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Read the poem again, focussing on the emotions of the children in the poem. How do we know they were determined to get to the garden? What is it like in there? Do the children mind? How did they feel to be in the garden? What made them feel like this? How does it compare to the other places where they live and play?

Finally reveal the illustration in the text. How does it compare with their interpretations? Display their work in a prominent place, alongside the poem to give audience to their work.

Sessions 14&15:

Many of the cross-curricular themes and topics that act as a focus for learning and teaching in the primary classroom are capable of being illustrated through poetry. A focus on 'nature' for example is a good example of children writing a collection of poems around a particular theme. Poems offer a special way of thinking. They can allow children to express some of the more intuitive, affective aspects of their perceptions.

Allow time for the children to explore themes of nature that are of particular interest to them. These may be natural objects, such as in **Conquer** and **Halloween's crumble** or natural places such as in **The Satyr's head**. Allow time for children to find images or objects that inspire them, to draft and write focussing on figurative language to evoke emotion as they identified in the poems they have studied. Extra sessions to read aloud, refine, redraft and to publish, illustrate and perform these will allow the children to see the complete writing process.

Display the children's work prominently, either bound in an anthology or as a whole school display to give audience to the work created.

Drawing the learning together:

To draw together all the work done in this unit, hold a discussion about the collection as a whole. What are your most memorable poems? Why? What have you learnt about poetry that you didn't know before? Would you be encouraged to read more poetry after studying this collection? Why? Why not?

If you were to write a letter to the poet, what would you say about the collection? What lingering questions would you ask him? You could get children to actually write these up and send some to the poet or tweet questions to the poet.