

CULTURAL DIVERSITY, OR P IS FOR PLACES, P IS FOR PEOPLE

Liz Morris

Read and discuss *P is for Poetry* (pp148-150). Brainstorm words beginning with **P** that were not mentioned by the poet. When a list is compiled, ask pupils to suggest reasons why words such as 'people' and 'places' might have been omitted and to consider the relevance of these words to many of the poems in this anthology. Using atlases or a wall-map of the world, children might list places (beginning with P) from where people they know/playmates originate, eg Philippines, Portugal, Peru ... Use these words as a starting point for children's own verses to be added to *P is for Poetry*.

P IS FOR PERSONAL AND FOR PROFICIENCIES

Poems invite a personal response from each reader and each poem can and will be interpreted and understood by different people in different ways, according to each reader's own experiences. *Angel Boy* (p58) might be the story of a super-hero, a boy who has the power to achieve amazing feats though he 'must act like normal', or 'almost normal' – it might also be open to a sadder interpretation. *Miracle Boy* (pp102-103) too celebrates personal abilities and (perhaps more realistically) proficiencies. But each child is unique, and should celebrate his/her own special abilities. Having considered both poems carefully, the class might list on a large sheet of paper some of their own talents, real and imagined, which could be used to prompt individual 'I Am Unique' poems. Fabric and fibre might also be used to construct a child-sized portrait of this super-hero version of themselves around which the poem could be presented.

P IS FOR PRIESTS AND FOR POWERS

Listen to *Lord of the Dance*, a well-known creation poem set to music, and compare and contrast with *Street Dancer* (pp 60-61). Read the poem aloud several times, picturing the various images, feeling the rhythm and beat. Think about the 'holy man' who made clear to the boy that 'everything dances as it should': might he,

like a shaman, be said to have powers and control over natural events? In what ways, if any, is this man similar to the shaman of Máighréad Medbh's poem (pp70-71)? Try reading *Shane the Shaman* as a meditation or relaxation poem, slowing breathing to feel the heartbeat as one voice reads aloud. Consider the humming or steady beat of this poem and contrast with the rapping or drumming beat of *Street Dancer*: perhaps the class could compose a creative dance routine that would illustrate the links between the visible and the spirit worlds of the poems.

NATURE

Enda Wyley

The Great Blue Whale (p22)

This beautiful poem is full of rhyme, imagination and wonder.

IMAGES

The poem is rich in imagery. Notice how the poet Kerry Hardie describes the great whale by comparing its different parts to other things.

- How does the whale sing?

- What is his heart the size of?
- How heavy is his tongue?

DESCRIPTIVE WRITING

- Imagine a living creature you admire. Describe its different parts by comparing them to something else. Kerry Hardie's poem will help you.

*His heart is the size of a car
his tongue ... as heavy as elephants are.*

THE POEM'S STRUCTURE

Every poem has a structure of its own.

- What do you notice about how the poet has shaped this poem?
- See how the first and second lines end in words that sound the same – knows/goes, sings/wings, etc.
- Notice how the last word of the third line rhymes with the last word of the next verse and so on.

RHYMING ACTIVITY

Try and copy the structure of the poem *The Great Blue Whale*.

Pick a subject you love – it can be anything! – and make up a poem about it.

Use three lines in each verse and rhyme the first and second line, making the final word in all verses rhyme with each other.





ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustrations can bring a poem alive!

- Read this poem out loud.
- Imagine the beautiful blue whale.
- Using crayons, pencils, paints, draw a picture of how you imagine the whale. Stick coloured paper to its body to create a collage effect.
- How different is it to the illustration in the book?

The Love Song of Harry Hippo (p24)

TONE

The tone of a poem is how it makes you feel when you read it. This is a playful, energetic poem which makes us smile.

COMPARISON

- Compare this poem with *The Great Blue Whale* p22.
- Make a list of adjectives to describe how each poem makes you feel – happy, sad, dreamy etc.

RHYMES

Larry O'Loughlin's poem is made up of alternate rhymes. This means that every second line rhymes – afternoon/moon, kisses/missus.

RHYMING ACTIVITY

- Rhyming can be fun! Make a list of words that rhyme. They can be as silly as you like! Try and fit them into a poem about an animal in the same way as Larry O'Loughlin did.

ILLUSTRATION

Notice how the poem has been typeset on the page: the word *hippopotamissus* curves like a hippo!

- Using your new rhyming poem (see rhyming activity), write/draw the words to take on the shape of what you have written about. Display the results on your classroom noticeboard.

REFERENCE

Poets often refer to other poets in their work. TS Eliot was a famous twentieth-century poet who wrote a brilliant poem called *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*.

- Do you think Larry O'Loughlin was inspired by TS Eliot's title?
- Try to find out more about TS Eliot. He wrote wonderful poems about cats that your class might enjoy!

Pangur Bán's Revenge (p90)

BACKGROUND TO THIS POEM

Reading other poems can often give you ideas to write about. *The Scholar and His Cat* is one of the most beautiful poems of the middle ages. It was found scribbled on a manuscript in Austria and tells the story of a monk and his cat Pangur.

COMPARISON

- In your library see if you can find the poem *The Scholar and His Cat*.
- Read it first and then compare it with *Pangur Bán's Revenge*.

TRANSLATION, METRE AND SONG

A translator is someone who translates from one language into another. Many years ago a translator called Robin Flower translated the poem *The Scholar and His Cat* from Irish into English using the very same beat as the nursery rhyme *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star*.

- Do you remember *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star*?
- Can you sing it?

(This could lead to an exploration of other nursery rhymes that the children know by heart.)

- Now try putting the tune of the nursery rhyme to Iggy Mc Govern's poem.
- Has he used the same beat too? (Like Larry O'Loughlin's poem p24, notice how the rhymes also alternate.)
- Have fun singing *Pangur Bán's Revenge*

over and over again. Notice how singing helps you to remember the poem better – and to like it even more.

DESCRIPTIVE WRITING

- *Pangur Bán's Revenge* is written from the point of view of a cat. Try and write a poem in the voice of an animal telling the story of its daily adventures.

OTHER NATURE POEMS

This anthology is full of other nature poems – see *Sruthán sa tSeapáin* p23, *Apple Pip* p27, *The Creatures' Crazy Jambo-ree* pp30-31, *Cold Day, Hot Day* p32, *Doggerel for Emily* p36, *The First Giraffe to be Forced to Live in a Shoe* pp42-43, *An Bhóin Dé* p72, *The Rabbit* p80, *Poisoned* p123 – and many more!



HISTORY

Seamus Cashman

Poems are poems: always first and foremost creative works of art. Poetry can, however, illuminate and provide readers with understandings of a particular subject by virtue of the poet's ability to more fully portray human responses to events past and present. The curriculum suggests that 'history is not the story of the past but rather our attempt to reconstruct and interpret elements of the past which are of interest to us'. Some of the poems in the anthology with a direct historical context are dealt with below.

A Keen for the Coins p94

(20th century; monetary history, social and political history; design in history)

Poet WB Yeats chaired the senate committee responsible for overseeing the design of a new coinage for the Irish Free State in 1928. Sixty-six entries were received following guidelines that one side carry a harp and the other animals or birds. For many years the winning designs by Percy Metcalf, a young sculptor, proudly identified our national coinage. The images on the coins were all linked on the reverse by the 16-string 'Brian Boru' harp: the horse (half crown), the salmon (florin, two shillings), the bull (shilling), the Irish wolfhound (sixpence), the hare (threepence), a hen with chickens (penny), a sow with piglets (halfpenny), and a woodcock in flight (farthing).

Decimalisation in 1971 brought a major change but retained some of the original designs: the new 5p and 10p designs retained the bull and salmon. Then came the euro coins in 2002 – with designs far removed from the traditional rural images of our original coinage! No wonder Heaney lamented! It is the final loss of the animal designs of our first coinage that Heaney's poem laments.

The poem, a light-hearted sextet, is very finely crafted, with rhyming couplets: one nine- and two eight-syllable lines, and a wonderful core – 'O mint of field and flood, farewell!'

ACTIVITIES

- Discuss the choice of words used by the poet (such as 'keen' – song or traditional lament sung at death or burial; 'henry' – adjective of 'hen' rhyming



with penny; 'mint' – note the double meaning; 'ark' – suggestive of the animals of Noah's Ark, and more importantly the sacred Ark of the Covenant said by the British Israelites Association to be buried on the Hill of Tara – they excavated the Mound of the Synods without success for it in 1899; also the 'arc' shape of the rainbow; 'rainbow' – which has a pot of gold coins where it touches the ground.

- How does the poet feel about the coins?
- What is the illustrator suggesting by the layers of coloured stripes – an archaeological dig?
- What might have given the illustrator the idea for this illustration?

Líadan p33 (Early Irish history)

Líadan (also spelt 'Líadain') was a seventh-century *ollamh* (bard), or Irish master-poet – one of the few women to achieve this honour. She was betrothed to

the *ollamh* Cuirithir, but spent much time away from him as her duties meant doing *ollamh* 'gigs' throughout the west of Ireland. They were apart for nearly a year. She took a vow of chastity, and he did likewise although they lived together for some years before finally retreating to separate hermitages (no doubt the pressure got too much!). Líadan wrote many poems for Cuirithir, lamenting her ill-fated love. Read John Montague's translation, *Líadain's Lament for Cuirithir*:

... A roaring flame
has consumed my heart:
I will not live without him she wrote.

And alas, she did die of a broken heart, aged about twenty-six, in the hermitage at Clonfert.

My Day p110 (Famine, 1845)

A portrait of a girl and her family, her home and her expectations during a time of horrific national and human tragedy.



The story line is simple and will find echoes today. In its telling we are given an intimate view of a home during the famine – straw beds, lack of clothes and shoes, animals and chickens in the house, and family conversations and relationships are suggested. And, of course, the young girl's thoughts, ambitions, hopes and dreams –

*thinking things that turn me into something wrong ...
a poet or professor or a travelling prince.*

Note, throughout the poem,

- the wonderful musical and conversational rhythms: 'not just summer, winter too'; 'splash my face with my reflection, comb my hair'; 'who'll whisk me like a story, far away'
- the rhyming and half-rhyming words: *shuddered ... wondered ... kindred / Connors ... summer ... winter*
- the use of assonance: *wish, dish, spring, pit, pink*
- the use of repetition: 'straw over, straw under' / 'in the same byre ... the same miry floor' / 'eat together, sleep together'.

School Yearbook p136 (1916)

A look at war and rebellion from the intimate viewpoint of a family – the young soldier home from the trenches, his rebel

classmates crouched in doorways, and the daily clatter of horse hooves as a man does his daily work in a topsy-turvy world. Note the poet's economy with words. In ten words an urban battle scene is created:

*Insurgents, young as himself
among the ruins, crouched in doors.*

And instead of horse hooves, it is war that clatters on the cobbled quays.

The Game p136

(Northern Ireland troubles)

The poet captures in childhood relationships an aspect of the 'troubles' seldom highlighted. This could be compared with what we hear of the Israeli Palestinian conflict today. Note the Belfast slang: 'linty' = linnet, which suggests being out early and sharp in the morning; 'boney' is bonfire.

Poems which invite historical comparison or deal with historical themes include:

- *Dán do Theifigh* p137 (present-day immigration/emigration)
- *Pangur Bán's Revenge* p90 (monastic Ireland)
- *Solar Eclipse* p69 (history of science, astronomy)
- *The Day the Dalai Lama Met the Pope* p135 (Northern Ireland troubles; religion in history)
- *The Violet Maker* p112 (work and technology, child labour)
- *Turns* p67 (history of childhood – street games)
- *Yarn* p113 (agricultural history).

RHYTHM

Rhythms are sound patterns. Trochaic tetrameter is a line of poetry with four trochee feet or measures per line. A trochee is a beat of one stressed syllable followed by one unstressed syllable: 'In the / green and / silent / valley'. Iambic pentameter is another common rhythm – five feet each an iamb, an unstressed followed by a stressed syllable: 'The low / ing herd / wind slow / ly o'er / the lea'. Other metres are spondee - -: beats of two stressed syllables; dactyl - ~~: beats of a stressed with two unstressed syllables; anapaest ~~-: beats of two unstressed with a stressed syllable;

FAMILY

Enda Wyley

Skinhead p59

Remember – a poem can be very short and say a lot in a few lines.

DISCUSSION

- What kind of person do you think the brother is at the start of this poem?
- How does he change? Does he have to change? Why?

WORD PORTRAIT

The illustrations on pp58-59 are very dramatic.

Painters use paint to create a portrait.

Poets and writers use words.

- Ask someone in your family to sit quietly in front of you. Write down what you see – the expression on their face, the colour of their eyes, the shape of their nose etc. Now you have made your own word portrait.

Anto's Inferno p119

Poems that tell stories are called narrative poems.

DISCUSSION

- What story does this poem tell? Where is The Joy? Why was Anto sent there?

COMPARISON

- Compare Anto with the brother in *Skinhead*. Are they alike?
- What kind of person do you think Anto is? Why is there so much pizza left in the fridge? Do you think the narrator really misses him?

REACTING TO THE POEM

- Do you find *Anto's Inferno* shocking in parts? If so, where?
- This poem is also very funny. What does Anto's friend Liver Lips say about him?
- Can you find humour anywhere else in the poem?

INTERVIEW

- Imagine you are a journalist. Interview Anto.
- Does Anto's own version of his story give a different point of view than the one reflected in the poem?



Lion King p63

ENJOYING THE POEM

- Read this poem out loud and enjoy the images in it – the newspaper flopping like a seagull, the grandad looking like a spaceman.
- Read the last line. Do you think your grandparents or older relations were always old?

FAMILY TREE

- Research your family history and make a family tree.

DISCUSSION

- Invite one of your grandparents or an older relative into school to talk about their lives.
- Or bring photos into class of your grandparents or other older relatives.
- How different were their lives as children from yours? Have a class discussion.

WRITING ACTIVITY

The child in this poem watches the grandad's face very closely.

- Next time someone in your house falls asleep watch what they look like. Do they sigh, snore, twitch, yawn? Write what you see.

VISIT AN ART GALLERY

- Find paintings of families. Choose one and write about it.

OTHER FAMILY POEMS

There are other family poems in the anthology: *What are we doing yesterday, Grandad?* p17, *Poem for a Baby* p99, *His i's Were Empty* p126, *I'm Not Stupid* p131, *My Family, When I'm Angry* p133, *Leaving for a Nursing Home* p139 and many more!

NONSENSE/ WORD PLAY

Irene Barber

'What are we doing yesterday, Grandad?' p17

Read this nonsense rhyme in Irish. Don't worry about the meaning but if you need it there is an English translation on p151. Let the children enjoy the sound of the words. Experiment with different groups/individuals saying different parts: eg one group reading the grandfather's lines and the other group the boy's; or one group repeating the line 'Ó fada ream' (O for the ram! see translation) and the other group the rest. Record pairs saying the poem. Play it back to them. Time individuals reading the middle section, the scéal – see how fast they can read it. Illustrate Grandad's nonsense story in as exotic a manner as you can imagine.

Word Game pp20-21

Read the poem. Have an individual read the poem with the group reading the repeated sound in each line, eg in line one: l, sky, l; in line two: you, shoe, you. As a group make a grid as below and fill with rhyming words. Consult a rhyming dictionary.

I	you	he/she/ we	they

Now rewrite the poem substituting your own rhyming words. Think about interesting ways of presenting the final draft. When you decide, write and illustrate your poem on poster-size paper, sign it and perhaps some could be laminated and put on display in a public place.

Hoppy New Year p21

Read and chat about this poem. What is a one-legged nursery rhyme? Write your own poem about the year where each word rhymes and if this doesn't happen naturally, tweak the word and make it rhyme like Thomas Kinsella does. You might like to begin like this:

January comes cold and desolate,
February usually has twenty eight,
March ...

If you make a list of one- and two-syllable words ending with 'ate' (make up a few just for fun!) you will have a bank of words to choose from. Having four strong beats in each line will mean that your poem will have a similar rhythm to Kinsella's when read aloud. Read Christina Rossetti's *The Months* or Pie Corbett's *Calender Year* for ideas.

Three p32

Adam coins new words which tell us more about the thing he is describing than the correct word does: *flutterbyes* for butterflies and *flapwings* for lapwings.

Compose multiple-choice questions suggesting three possible meanings for a word but with only one correct one. All three should sound plausible. Use your dictionary. For example:

An eft is (a) a carpenter's tool (b) a medieval cure or (c) a small-tailed amphibian.

Arrange a quiz show using these multiple choice questions. Decide on the title, the host, the format, the theme music etc. Run the show.

QUICK IDEAS

The First Giraffe to be Forced to Live in a Shoe p42

- Read the poem a few times and then design the ideal house for a giraffe.

P is for Poetry pp148-150

Enjoy this poem and then compose your own acrostic poem:

P is for ...
O is for ...
E is for ...
T is for ...
R is for ...
Y is for ...

It might be fun to make each line relevant to this particular anthology, eg P is for Pangur Bán who ... etc.

