

'Starting points for writing' involving poems

More for Additional Poems

Character development: 'At Grandpa's'

Read *At Grandpa's* and discuss it, drawing out responses and understanding of the poem. Note how the character is described through the things in the room. Read *Aunty Jane's* (see in Additional poems)too or your own poem from Arvon.

Think about someone you know well – think hard about the space you normally see them in, and the things that are in that room. Be very specific, instead of 'flowers on the windowsill ' you could say 'The wilted white lilies in the vase'.

Character development: 'The child within me'

Read *The Nazi within me* Stephen Dobyns and *A Meeting* by Michael Laskey

Invite the class to list different kinds of roles, jobs or dispositions e.g. Scientist, doctor, clown, optimist, pessimist, child, teenager.

Listen to these and select one each, writing a few lines about what the optimist within me reveals

Attention to the senses: Exploring objects

Choose an object then look at it and feel it, explore it. Be completely immersed in your object. Start by looking really closely at your object – and think about it from the perspective of all five senses. Then let ideas flow – does it remind you of anything or make you think about anything? Give time to Just Write

Sharing the reading of poems which describe objects , animals or plants in various ways *Anchor Riddle*; Chrissie Gittins *Adder, Bluebell, Lobster* (Otter-Barry Books, 2016) or *The Lychee* from Additional Poems.

Character Development: 'What every woman should carry'

Shared reading of Maura Dooley 'What Every Woman Should Carry' (cutting parts as appropriate) and discussion of it, noting how she combines concrete objects and abstract ideas.

Show not tell: An abstract idea and the five senses

Think of an abstract noun: eg sadness; hope; frustration

If you were filming your abstract noun what would be the opening shot, the opening images?

What does your abstract noun smell of? Taste of? Feel like? Sound like? What is its voice and what does it say?

Shared reading of Carol Ann Duffy *A Worry* and *Grief* by Stephen Dobyns or *Anxiety* (see Additional poems)

Show not tell: Telling the Opposite

Shared reading of 'Not an Ending' by Andrew Waterhouse.

Write your own poem/story extract where what you write is the opposite of what you mean.

Character development: 'At Grandpa's'

Grandpa's Soup

No one makes soup like my Grandpa's,
with its diced carrots the perfect size
and its diced potatoes the perfect size
and its wee soft bits –
what are their names?
and its big bit of hough,
which rhymes with loch, floating
like a rich island in the middle of the soup sea.

I say, Grandpa, Grandpa, your soup is the best soup in the
whole world.

And Grandpa says, Och,
which rhymes with hough and loch.

Och, don't be daft,
because he's shy about his soup, my Grandpa.

He knows I will grow up and pine for it.

I will get ill and desperately need it.

I will long for it my whole life after he is gone.

Every soup will become sad and wrong after he is gone.

He knows when I'm older I will avoid soup altogether.

Oh Grandpa, Grandpa, why is your soup so glorious? I say
tucking into my fourth bowl in a day.

Barley! That's the name of the wee soft bits. Barley.

Jackie Kay

Collected in: *The Works 4* eds.
Pie Corbett & Gaby Morgan
(Macmillan, 2015)

Grandfather's Seal

The red garden candle found stuck in the back yard.
A yellow melted bear, head dripped away, stuck to
the mantelpiece.

Two pink glossy puddles found on the dressing-table
of my mother's old room.

The green residue of tea-lights from the rim of
the bath, their smell long faded.

An orange '50' still stuck in the uneaten cake
in the freezer.

Five cracked purple tapers, heaped like rosary beads
in the fuse box.

A blue pristine cube on his bedside table, my name
printed on the side.

The colours swirl in the saucepan,
releasing charred wicks like long-held secrets.
He picks them out with huge sun-spotted hands.

His fingers come out glossy with wax,
turning opaque and hard as the air hits.
He places the peeled casts into my tiny hands.

He would have set fire to the sky for me.
So I ask...

"Why is Mum always angry with you?"

Joseph Coelho 'Grandfather's
Seal' in *Overheard in a Tower
Block: Poems* (Otter-Barry
Books), 2017

Sensing Mother

Dad keeps Mum's favourite dress
deep in the bottom of the ottoman.
Sometimes, when he is at work
I stand listening to the tick of the clock
then go upstairs.

And propping up
the squeaky wooden lid, I dig through
layers of rough, winter blankets
feeling for that touch of silk.
The blue whisper of it cool
against my cheek.

Other times – the school-test times,
and Dad-gets-home-too-late-
to-say-goodnight times –
I wrap the arms of the dress around me,
breathing in a smell, faint as dried flowers.

I remember how she twirled around
– like a swirl of sky.

Collected in: *The Works 4* eds.
Pie Corbett & Gaby Morgan
(Macmillan, 2015)

When I am old enough I will wear it.
Pulling up the white zip,
I'll laugh and spin,
calling out to my daughter:
How do I look?

Mandy Coe

Character development: 'The child within me'

Blackberry

luscious globules
purple dribbles
apple's friend
crumble filling

thorny picking
bluey fingers
pimple curer
winter jam

brambleberries
brumblekites
bramble ramble
pie delights

Chrissie Gittins 'Blackberry' in *Adder, Bluebell, Lobster* (Otter-Barry Books, 2016)

THE APPLE'S SONG

Tap me with your finger,
rub me with your sleeve,
hold me, sniff me, peel me
curling round and round
till I burst out white and cold
from my tight red coat
and tingle in your palm
as if I'd melt and breathe
a living pomander
waiting for the minute
of joy when you lift me
to your mouth and crush me
and in taste and fragrance
I race through your head
in my dizzy dissolve.

I sit in the bowl
in my cool corner
and watch you as you pass
smoothing your apron.
Are you thirsty yet?
My eyes are shining.

EDWIN MORGAN

Collected in: *The Works* ed. Paul Cookson
(Macmillan, 2010)

FISHBONES DREAMING

Fishbones lay in the smelly bin.
He was a head, a backbone and a tail.
Soon the cats would be in for him.

He didn't like to be this way.
He shut his eyes and dreamed back.

Back to when he was fat, and hot on a plate.
Beside green beans, with lemon juice
squeezed on him. And a man with a knife
and fork raised, about to eat him.

He didn't like to be this way.
He shut his eyes and dreamed back.

Back to when he was frozen in the freezer.
With lamb cutlets and minced beef and prawns.
Three month he was in there.

He didn't like to be this way.
He shut his eyes and dreamed back.

Back to when he was squirming in a net,
with thousands of other fish, on the deck
of a boat. And the rain falling
wasn't wet enough to breathe in.

He didn't like to be this way.
He shut his eyes and dreamed back.

Back to when he was darting through the sea,
past crabs and jellyfish, and others
like himself. Or surfacing to jump for flies
and feel the sun on his face.

He liked to be this way.
He dreamed hard to try and stay there.

MATTHEW SWEENEY

Collected in: *101 Poems for Children: A laureate's Choice* ed. Carol Ann Duffy (Macmillan, 2012)

Mooses

The goofy Moose, the walking house-frame,
Is lost
In the forest. He bumps, he blunders, he stands.

With massy bony thoughts sticking out near his ears –
Reaching out palm upwards, to catch whatever might be
falling from heaven –
He tries to think,
Leaning their huge weight
On the lectern of his front legs.

He can't find the world!
Where did it go? What does a world look like?
The Moose
Crashes on, and crashes into a lake, and stares at the
mountain and cries:
'Where do I belong? This is no place!'

He turns dragging half the lake out after him
And charges the cackling underbrush –

He meets another Moose
He stares, he thinks: 'It's only a mirror!'
'Where is the world?' he groans. 'O my lost world!
And why am I so ugly?
And why am I so far away from my feet?'

He weeps.
Hopeless drops drip from his droopy lips.

The other Moose just stands there doing the same.

Two dopes of the deep woods.

Ted Hughes

Collected in: *The Works* ed.
Paul Cookson (Macmillan,
2010)

Riddle

I am at your beginning and your end.
I dog your footsteps
And cannot be shaken off.
Though I fade from view
You are never alone.
So silent that you often forget me.
I am still there,
Your constant dark spy and companion.

John Cotton

Collected in: *The Works* ed.
Paul Cookson (Macmillan,
2010)

Riddle

My first is in fish but not in chip.
My second in teeth but not in lip.
My third's in potato but not in plum.
My fourth's in mouth and also in thumb.
My fifth is in pear but not in cherry.
My sixth is in bacon but not in berry.
My last is in chocolate but not in crumble.
Sometimes when I'm empty you'll hear me rumble.

John Foster

Collected in: *The Works* ed. Paul
Cookson (Macmillan,
2010)

THE SEA

The sea is a hungry dog,
Giant and grey.
He rolls on the beach all day.
With his clashing teeth and shaggy jaws
Hour upon hour he gnaws
The rumbling, tumbling stones,
And 'Bones, bones, bones!'
The giant sea-dog moans,
Licking his greasy paws.

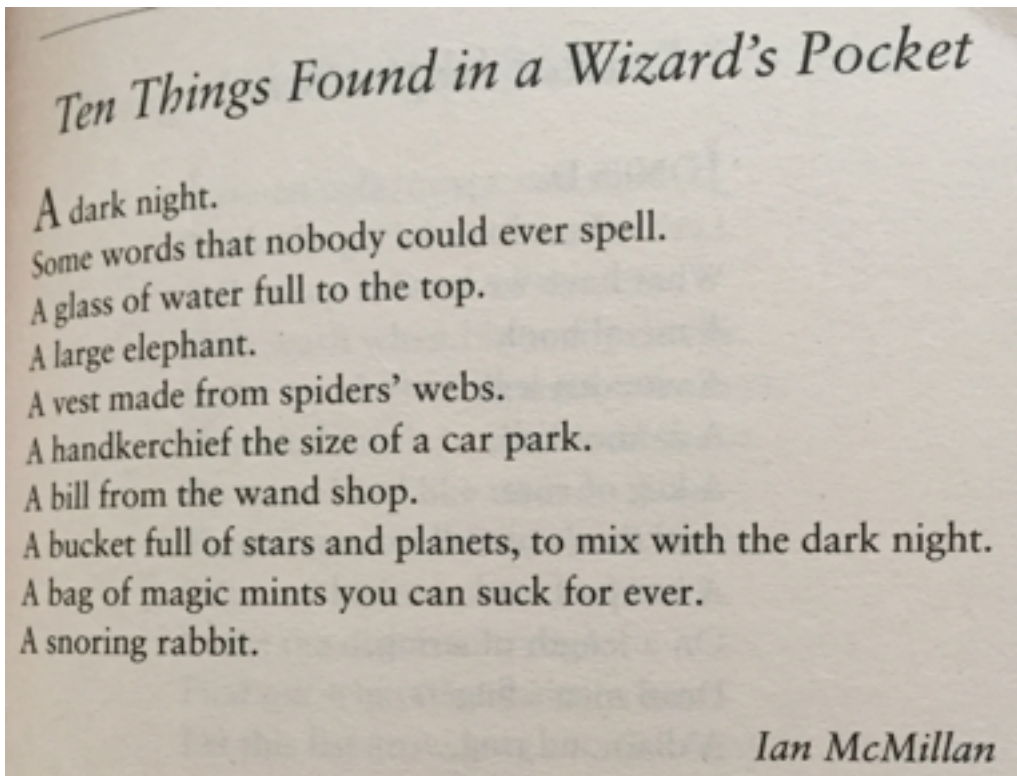
And when the night wind roars
And the moon rocks in the stormy cloud,
He bounds to his feet and snuffs and sniffs,
Shaking his wet sides over the cliffs,
And howls and hollos long and loud.

But on quiet days in May or June,
When even the grasses on the dune
Play no more their reedy tune,
With his head between his paws
He lies on the sandy shores,
So quiet, so quiet, he scarcely snores.

JAMES REEVES

Collected in: *100 Best Poems for Children* ed. Rodger McGough
(Puffin Poetry, 2002)

Character Development: 'What every woman should carry'



Collected in: *The Works* ed. Paul Cookson (Macmillan, 2010)

The Things You Find in a Poet's Beard (section)

There are fleas and flies and knots and nits,
breadcrumbs, marmite stains and bits

of pencils lost in the distant past,
coffee dribbles from a thermos flask.

Spiders' webs and sparrows' nests,
string that they use for old men's vests,

bits of dinner from yesterday,
orange pips and strips of hay.

Chips glued in with tomato ketchup.

Bits of driftwood sometimes fetch up

and tangle about in the twisty hair

the poet grows on his chin and there

are knitting needles, lengths of twine...

Oh no! Hang on! That's a porcupine.

Koala bears peer out and chew,

there's a cockatiel and a cockatoo.

A sloth blinks slowly under the fur

And if you listen close there's a happy purr.

A. F. Harrold *Things You Find in a Poet's Beard*
(Burning Eye Books, 2015)

TEN THINGS FOUND IN A SHIPWRECKED SAILOR'S POCKET

A litre of sea.
An unhappy jellyfish.
A small piece of a lifeboat.
A pencil wrapped around with seaweed.
A soaking feather.
The first page of a book called *Swimming Is Easy*.
A folded chart showing dangerous rocks.
A photograph of a little girl in a red dress.
A gold coin.
A letter from a mermaid.

IAN McMILLAN

Collected in: *101 Poems for Children: A laureate's Choice*
ed. Carol Ann Duffy
(Macmillan, 2012)

Locker Inspection

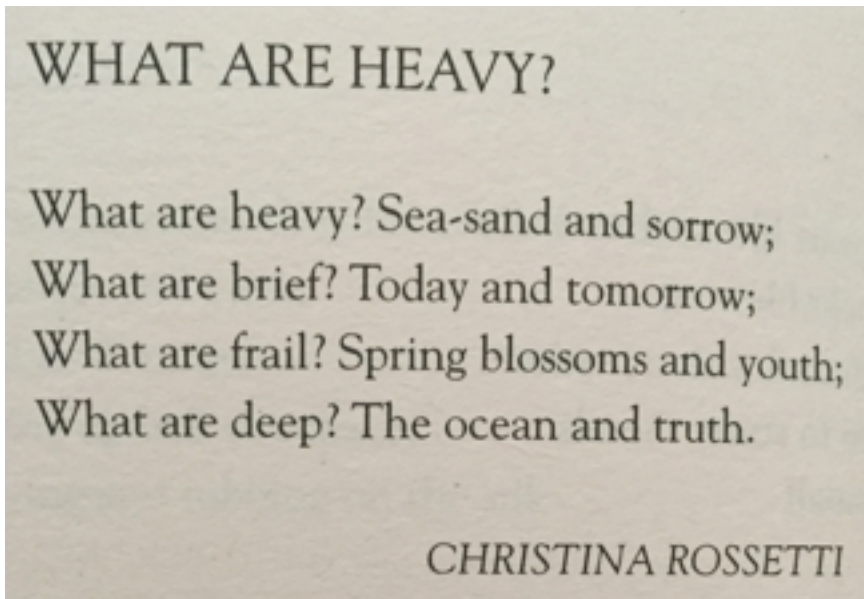
JONES D.

Let's take a look –
What have we here?
A metal hook!
A wooden leg,
A cannonball.
A keg of rum
And that's not all –
A lump of lead
On a length of string,
Dead men's fingers,
A diamond ring,
A dagger, a skull,
An old sea chest –
Of the lockers I've seen, Davy,
Yours is best!

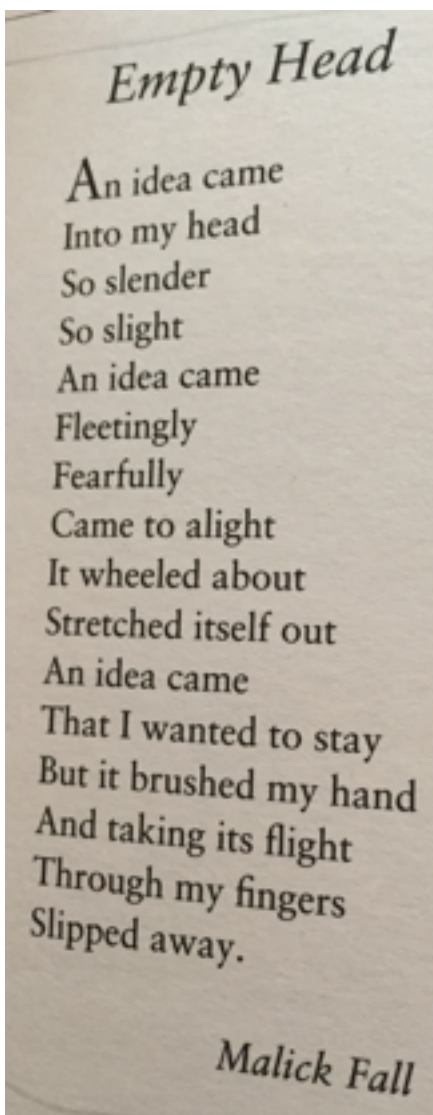
Sue Cowling

Collected in: *The Works* ed. Paul Cookson (Macmillan,
2010)

Show not tell: An abstract idea and the five senses



Collected in: *101 Poems for Children: A laureate's Choice* ed. Carol Ann Duffy (Macmillan, 2012)



Collected in: *The Works* ed. Paul Cookson (Macmillan, 2010)

THE FEAR

How often I turn round
To face the beast that bound by bound
Leaps on me from behind,
Only to see a bough that heaves
With sudden gust of wind
Or blackbird raking withered leaves.

A dog may find me out
Or badger toss a white-lined snout;
And one day as I softly trod
Looking for nothing stranger than
A fox or stoat I met a man
And even that seemed not too odd.

And yet in any place I go
I watch and listen as all creatures do
For what I cannot see or hear,
For something warns me everywhere
That even in my land of birth
I trespass the earth.

ANDREW YOUNG

Collected in: *100 Best Poems for Children* ed. Rodger McGough (Puffin Poetry, 2002)

The Fear

I am the footsteps that crackle on gravel
and the sudden chill that's hard to explain.
I am the figure seen flitting through doorways
and the noisy rattle of a loose windowpane.

I am the scream that wakes you at night
with the thought, was it real or a dream?
I am the quickening thud of your heart
and the feeling things aren't what they seem.

I am the slam of a door blown shut
when there isn't even a breeze
and the total and absolute clarity
that you just heard someone sneeze

I am the midnight visitor,
the knock when there's no one there.
I am the ceiling creaking
and the soft footfall on your stair.

I am the shadows that dance on your wall
and the phantoms that float through your head
and I am the fear that you fear each night
as you wriggle down deep in your bed.

Brian Moses

Collected in: *The Works 4* eds.
Pie Corbett & Gaby Morgan
(Macmillan, 2015)

Show not tell: Telling the opposite

My Eyes are Watering

I've got a cold
And that is why
My eyes are watering.

It's nothing to do
With getting caught
When I had planned
To SMASH
The rounders ball
SO FAR
That it would go
Into PERMANENT ORBIT
Round the school.
It would've done, too –
If Lucy Smith
Hadn't RUSHED
To catch it.

'Look at Trevor –
He's having a cry!'
Not true.
I've got a cold
And THAT is why
My eyes are watering.

OK?

Trevor Harvey

Collected in: *The Works* ed. Paul Cookson (Macmillan, 2010)

Caught

Our guilty knees shake.
Footsteps down the corridor.
"But it wasn't me."

Joseph Coelho 'Caught' in
Overheard in a Tower Block: Poems (Otter-Barry Books),
2017