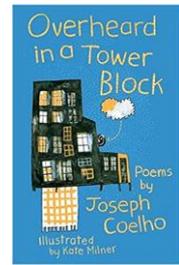


Pick a Poet

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Context

I am leading the Leeds Teacher reading group and working as a freelance primary reading consultant.

OU Research inspiration and rationale

- My area of interest from the Teachers as Readers (TaRs) research findings was teacher's knowledge of children's literature. Specifically – poetry.
- When we completed our 'review your practice' surveys at the start of the year a clear theme across our group was a lack of knowledge around and engagement with poetry.
- A common experience seemed to be that poetry was often overlooked or even actively avoided.
- The TaRs/ Building Communities of Readers project showed that teachers struggled to name six poets, we did too!
- It suggested that teachers select poetry rather than poets to read and study.

I was also personally inspired to explore more poetry after reading the case study of Brenda (Building Communities of Engaged Readers p.83) who decided to get to 'really know' the work of two poets a term and to read poems aloud more frequently. As a result, 'poetry was heard being spontaneously voiced and sung' and 'By the end of the year, the class's repertoire of poets was extensive and remarkable'.

Aims

As a teacher reading group to:

- develop our knowledge of children's poets
- build a shared rationale for the value poetry has for children
- gain positive experiences of reading poetry with our classes

Outline

I planned a poetry focus in each session in different forms:

- I developed some prompts and questions to survey teachers experience of poetry for pleasure in their classrooms and own reading lives. Teachers mentioned some whole school poet visits or poetry events but no one read poems for pleasure to their class and poetry books were scarce in book corners.
- I created a poetry pin board inspired by the poem gallery wall from a workshop at the Liverpool UKLA conference. One of the benefits of this format was the freedom to 'pick and choose' and a more accessible way of interacting with poetry than anthologies.
- We each found a poem that resonated with us and had a discussion around this.
- I provided a simple overview of why poetry could be beneficial and enjoyable to read/share/hear in class. We looked again at the idea of starting with a poet rather than poems.
- We explored the CLPE CLIPPA shortlist and watched Brian Moses performing some poems online.

Why poetry?

Medium for higher order thinking and response
Develop vocabulary
Explore identity- own and others
Enjoyment!
Shorter- more accessible for time pressed teachers
stretches children in all different ways
Introduces children to new rhythms and patterns in written language
Multicultural- poetry highly valued in Arab/Syrian cultures among others.
'poetry is the magic of every day words' - Paul Cookson

Poetry boxes
Poetry journal
Poetry pinboard or gallery
Read a poem a day
Listen to poets perform...
(youtube/poetryline)
Poetry slam
Poet study
Learn a poem off by heart
Perform with instruments
Sketch whilst you listen



Performing Poetry

To bring poetry alive.
Hear the rhythm and word play more effectively
John Cooper-Clarke: 'if a poem doesn't sound very good read out loud, then it's probably not a very good poem.'

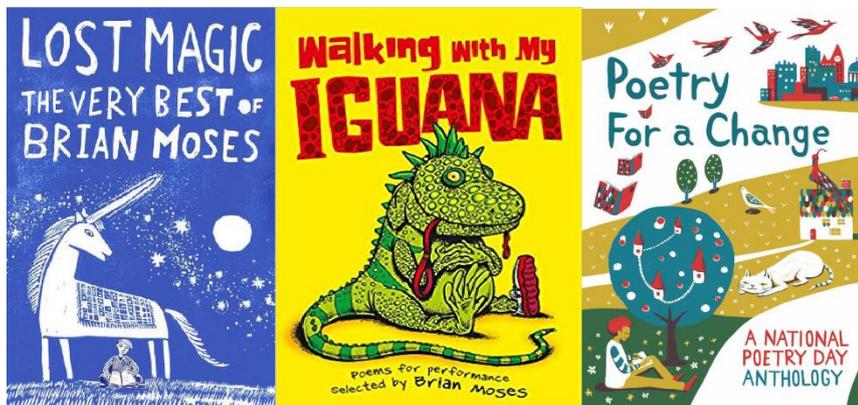
Start with a poet...

Roger McGough
Michael Rosen
Valerie Bloom
AF Harrold
Brian Moses
Rachel Rooney
John Hegley
Tony Mitton
Joseph Coelho
John Agard
Allan Ahlberg
Ruth Awolola
Karl Nova
Grace Nichols

- Teachers were given a simple challenge to share a poem every day if possible, with their class as part of their reading for pleasure time.
- I introduced two new poets (Rachel Rooney and Ruth Awolola) with an overview of their background and work and some poems we read together and could then be shared back in the classroom. I was also keen to feature non-white-male poets

Impact

- As a result of our focus on poetry teachers began to share poems with their class. The response was very positive. One teacher described how reading 'CloudBusting' by Malorie Blackman (a novel written in verse featuring a different type of poetry in each chapter) created high levels of engagement in her Year Five class. Children enjoyed hearing the repeated rhythm and patterns of language and experiencing poetry in a different form.
- One teacher shared Brian Moses poetry with her book club by showing him performing online. She described the value of the children hearing the poem being performed out loud and by the poet themselves.
- One teacher went to the school library to hunt down more poetry books for her class book shelves. They were well hidden in the school library suggesting they weren't being regularly accessed there either but by selecting some for the class stock she increased opportunities for children to enjoy poems independently.



Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice

Reflecting on the importance of teacher's knowledge of children's poetry led us as a group to explore a genre we might otherwise have continued to ignore. For some of us, we recognised that poetry might never be something we naturally selected and enjoyed reading ourselves, however we all found poems we connected with and began to discover some of the specific benefits of sharing this genre with children.

Through engaging with poetry for pleasure, teachers have broadened the range of genres children were engaging with and gained a new appreciation for the accessibility, rhythm and word play offered by poetry.