

How to ... play OULIPO

Looking for a fun way to free your thinking and create a poem? National Poetry Day ambassador [Sophie Herxheimer](#) suggests a game of OULIPO.

OULIPO is a way of playing with words and letters and comes from France. Every year poets and mathematicians meet and dream up funny new rules to hatch ideas about how to think and write. The idea being, if you make some rules it gives you new freedoms. I like this, it makes me find words I'd never use otherwise.

Warning: it won't make any sense but it might put pictures in your head.

Put every letter of your whole name into a big flowerpot as if each one was a little seed, add every letter of the name of your favourite animal and/or football team.e.g. for me it would be

SOPHIEMARYHERXHEIMER / POODLE/ CRYSTAL PALACE

but I'd write them all mixed up, like:

RXSHCERYSPOERIARPALYHEHEIMCTALAOOPDLEME

It helps if you have a lot of vowels! What can you find? There's happy, moody, see, loop, poem, rhyme, peace, cries, simpers, me, topiary(!), heat, heath, health, hermit, polite, mercy... and of course, crystal, poodle and palace. Maybe my poem goes

O CRYSTAL ROSE

THIS APPLE CARROT DAY
IS PALE: I SIT SO STILL,

MY PALACE IS ALL AT
PEACE LATELY
I'M CHILLY AS A TOPIARY ARCH THO'

CAN I SEE MY OLD MAMA
OR MY PROPER SHIP SHAPE POODLE ?
I CRY TO A SPARE TREE

THIS IS MY RHYMELESS POEM.
THIS IS MY TIMELESS PLEA.

I wonder what poem you can write or find if your name is ADRIANLYNDONPOTTS and you like MANCHESTERUNITED and CATS? At least you'd have 5 Ns then, I didn't have any so I couldn't write AND. Or if you are called NADIA MOHAMMED and you're fond of the RHINOCEROS... still you'd have to do without an L or a W... if your name is very short and you don't care about football, you could make up a fancy middle name, or use the name of your favourite film...GOOD LUCK!