

Messages: A National Poetry Day Book

Edited by Gaby Morgan, with an introduction by Susannah Herbert

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Introduction

We send messages all the time, always have done, always will. The very first one you sent was almost certainly a purple-faced wail, the kind that means: 'I'm alive! I exist!'

How many ways can this be said? I started counting as I began to read this brilliant anthology, but I couldn't stop at the end: once you've allowed a poem to tune your senses to the messages in ordinary sights and sounds, the whole of the world seems bursting to tell you its secrets.

The fourteen poets in this book are all National Poetry Day Ambassadors, honoured for their year-round work bringing poetry into schools and public places. When we first announced that Messages would be the theme for this particular National Poetry Day on 6 October 2016 – to be used over the twelve months that follow – they competed gleefully to come up with the best ideas for encouraging everyone to join in.

Poetry postboxes. Poetry Post-it notes. Poems in bottles. Poetry tied to the webbed feet of carrier pigeons. Poems concealed in code and shared by flashes of torchlight late on a moonless night. You will have other ideas: follow us on social media and let us know what has worked best for you by posting pictures on Instagram or Twitter with the hashtag #nationalpoetryday.

Together we want to encourage everyone to put aside dull prosaic ways of expressing something that really matters, and to say it with a poem.

In this book, under the brilliant editorship of Gaby Morgan and with the support of the Forward Arts Foundation, each Ambassador has created a new poem that speaks to the theme. They have also suggested older poems – by Rumi, Dickinson, Tsvetaeva, Lewis Carroll – to be read alongside. Some treat the world as a vast and intriguing book – Jan Dean and Matt Goodfellow listen to the wind and read the notes trailed by snails – while Liz Brownlee's bees speak volumes and Roger Stevens's cat brings messages from ancient Egypt via outer space. There are poems of apology (Joshua Seigal) and of love (Paul Cookson). Other National Poetry Day Ambassadors investigate the rich variety of ways in which we fail to get through to each other, as with Joseph Coelho's witty description of phones as tools that stop us communicating, or Brian Moses' rumination on the eternally elusive meaning of Stonehenge. But then maybe the misinterpretations are as important as any original intent: they certainly are in Sally Crabtree's 'Chinese Whispers'. And she should know, being an official Poetry Postie, authorized by the Universal Postal Union.

Deborah Alma leads her readers into an exchange of messages between their present and future selves, while Sophie Herxheimer – whose downloadable posters are the National Poetry Day website's gift to you – contributes her grandmother's heavily accented monologue of delightful misinterpretation. Rachel Rooney allows her looking-glass to flip her words until only a mirror can read them. In the hands of Michaela Morgan, who spends much of her time in Scotland, where 'messages' is another word for errands, a shopping list becomes a poem. Her fellow Scotland-based poet, Rachel McCrum, shows how three words, first written on an old lamp post, worm their way into the memories of those who meet them and are repeated throughout an entire city and beyond, carried by their own music. I shan't give the phrase away here, but before it's worked its strange magic on you, know this: all who encountered it smiled.

*And for a moment felt something in their chests had loosened
and wondered about things
that did not touch their lives.*

Me? I am smiling still.

Susannah Herbert

Director of National Poetry Day and the Forward Arts Foundation

National Poetry Day is a Forward Arts Foundation initiative supported by Arts Council England

www.nationalpoetryday.co.uk

www.forwardartsfoundation.org

Matt Goodfellow is a poet and primary school teacher from Manchester. He has had poems published in magazines and anthologies worldwide and recently released his acclaimed debut collection, *Carry Me Away*. He spends half his week as a teacher – and the other half touring the UK, visiting schools, libraries and festivals to deliver high-energy, fun-filled poetry performances and workshops.

Messages

look closely and you'll find them
everywhere

in fields of patterned grasses
drafted by the hare

embroidered by the bluebells
through a wood

in scattered trails of blossom
stamped into the mud

scorched by heather-fire
across the moors

in looping snail-trails
scrawled on forest floors

scored across the sky
by screaming swifts

in rolling, twisting peaks
of drifting mountain mist

scribbled by an ocean
on the sand

look closely: you will see
and understand

Matt Goodfellow

Inspiration

I think that often in our very busy lives we miss messages; the kind of subtle messages that have been sent since the dawn of time, yet get hidden beneath the rumble of tarmac and the ticking of the clock. If we listen carefully, find some time and space and really allow ourselves to tune in, those messages can come through and speak to us. Try it for yourself.

I have chosen another poem to share with you . . .

I've loved this poems for many years: messages in the poem – and the belly of the worm!

Bookworm

I heard of a wonder, of words moth-eaten.
That is a strange thing, I thought, weird
That man's song be swallowed by a worm;
His binded sentences, his bedside stand-by
Rustled in the night – and the robber guest
Not one whit the wiser for the words he had mumbled.

Anon.

Translated by Michael Alexander

Roger Stevens has been writing for children for more than twenty-five years. In that time he has had thirty books published. Roger's most recent poetry books for children include *I Wish I Had a Pirate Hat* (Frances Lincoln), for younger children; *1066 And Before That* (Macmillan) and *What Are We Fighting For?* (Macmillan), both written with Brian Moses; and the anthology *A Million Brilliant Poems (Part One)* (A&C Black), which was shortlisted for the CLPE prize.

He spends his time between the Loire, in France, and Brighton, where he lives with his wife and a very, very, very shy dog called Jasper.

Cat Message

Shemu the cat
whose ancestors
prowled amongst the pyramids
today received a special visitor

Neferhotep
ambassador
from the constellation of Orion

Upon Neferhotep's
departure
Shemu tried her best
to warn her mistress
of Neferhotep's message

The Earth is about to be invaded

Shemu lay on the carpet
and made letter shapes
with her body

I - N - V - A - S - I - O - N

Shemu brought a dead vole
and scraps of bark
into the kitchen
and arranged them in the symbol O-ki-hran

which is Orionese for
You are about to be invaded by hideous aliens
from the constellation Andromeda

But Shemu's only reward
for her efforts
was some tinned cat-food

Humans, thought Shemu,
can be so . . .
dumb.

Roger Stevens

Inspiration

I had been watching a programme on TV about the pyramids in Egypt. The programme claimed that they had been built in a pattern that was linked to the night sky, and in particular the constellation of Orion, the Hunter. The programme said that once a year the pyramids all line up with Betelgeuse, the ninth brightest star in the night sky, and one of the stars in Orion's 'belt'. The Egyptians also worshipped cats. So I thought it would be interesting to put those two things together in a modern setting. And at the same time have fun playing around with Egyptian names.

I have chosen another poem to share with you . . .

Wang Wei was a poet, musician and painter who lived in China in the eighth century. He was one of the most famous men of his time and especially known as a poet and painter of nature. He was a Zen Buddhist and this poem was written to the village of P'ai Ti, which is close to Yamdrok Lake, in present-day Tibet, where there was a famous Buddhist monastery and a site for Buddhist pilgrimages. I like this poem because it uses simple language and images to paint a very evocative scene. We feel that mixture of happiness and sadness that you get when you look back on a journey you made some time ago. We don't know what the Five Willows was, but I like to imagine it was the inn where the poet stayed. Maybe spending time with fellow pilgrims. Although the poem was written over a thousand years ago, it still feels fresh and modern today.

A Message to P'ai Ti

Cold and blue now are the mountains
From autumn rain that beat all day
By my thatch door, leaning on my staff
I listen to cicadas in the evening wind
Sunset lingers at the ferry
Cooking-smoke floats up from the houses
Oh, when shall I pledge Chieh-yu again
and sing a wild poem at Five Willows!

Wang Wei

Rachel McCrum has worked as a poet, performer and promoter in Edinburgh since 2012, arriving via Manchester, Belfast, New Zealand, Oxford and a small seaside town in Northern Ireland. She is Broad of Rally & Broad, winner of the 2013 Callum Macdonald Memorial Award and the 2015–16 Writer in Residence for CoastWord, Dunbar. She has performed and taught workshops in poetry and performance in Greece, South Africa, Haiti and around the UK. Her second pamphlet *Do Not Alight Here Again* was published in March 2015 by Stewed Rhubarb Press, and in August 2015 she wrote and performed her first solo show at the Edinburgh Fringe, as part of new spoken word collective SHIFT/. She was the inaugural BBC Scotland Poet In Residence in 2015.

The Glassblower Dances

The words first appeared on a lamp post
on a dirty road between a chip shop
and some tired Turkish Baths.

They nestled amongst fat careless splurges of paint
and the neon screams of *get us oot o'here*
and *nae future*.

Reading the phrase, passersby smiled
briefly,
and thought no more about it.

But the words tucked themselves
into the minds
of the people
on the bus.

Two days later, the handwriting was seen again
on a wall along a cycle path

and then beside the hospital for sick children
and in a cafe toilet
and down near where the ships no longer came.

And people began to repeat it to themselves
in the early morning
on the streets.

The phrase swirled out.
It appeared on the back of schoolbooks
and on library desks.

It moved beyond the city,

was seen written on a rock
on a beach full of leaving birds,

and on a bench
beside a bus stop
in a small grey town.

It was seen carved down the curve of a mountain.
the glassblower dances

As the words swelled,
people began to talk.
A feature was broadcast on the local news.

And some were curious
and searched for understanding
on YouTube,

removed

but enough to understand
the rhythm that came through the feet
from earth to breath to arm,
the flow of skill,
the exhausted dogged passion
that was required for the alchemy of changing dirt
into something fluid, strong and beautiful.

The words grew.

And the City Council talked
of the cost of cleaning
but they could not calculate it accurately.

And well heeled sorts on a late night sofa spoke
of the shallowness
of modern culture
and lamented the loss
of the canon.

(but the thing about a scratch

is that you feel it
and sometimes it lets things in
and they incubate
and fester.)

And some academics wrote a paper on
the sociocultural intertextual significance
of urban public expression

but it was rather long,
and only read by eight people.

And linguists spoke of sibilants,
how they trace the brain with fingers of smoke.

And historians expounded on the history of glass making,
how China, ignoring it until the Seventeenth Century,
invented fireworks instead of windows.

And the phrase didn't stop any wars
Or bankers –
there were other words to try that job.
And it was beyond this writer's ability
at this time.

But people smiled.

And for a moment felt something in their chests had loosened

and wondered about things
that did not touch their lives.

And all this happened
because once upon a time
someone thought to write upon a wall with joy

the glassblower dances

Rachel McCrum

I have chosen another poem to share with you . . .

I spent a lot of time with Alice in Wonderland when I was younger: I had a big hardback edition – marbled green, I think – with both *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* in tiny writing, accompanied by the original illustrations by John Tenniel.

I much preferred *Through the Looking-Glass*. It's a little darker, and Alice knows the game a little more : that everything is full of hidden messages in Wonderland, letting sharp-eyed Alice know what is really happening, despite it all seeming so fantastical and fun. But it isn't really. In this poem, told to her by the roly-poly twins Tweedledee and Tweedledum, a seemingly innocent scene – but full of odd and disturbing details, like the sun shining at night, and the fat little oysters with their footless shoes clomping along – is revealed to be something more tragic, with the seemingly pleasant Walrus and Carpenter gorging themselves on the baby shellfish. And they promised not to (or did they?). Not everything is as it seems in Wonderland.

The Walrus and the Carpenter – Lewis Carroll

from *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871)

as recited by Tweedledee and Tweedledum

“The sun was shining on the sea,
Shining with all his might:

He did his very best to make

The billows smooth and bright—

And this was odd, because it was

The middle of the night.

The moon was shining sulkily,

Because she thought the sun

Had got no business to be there

After the day was done—

'It's very rude of him,' she said,

'To come and spoil the fun!'

The sea was wet as wet could be,

The sands were dry as dry.

You could not see a cloud, because

No cloud was in the sky:

No birds were flying overhead—

There were no birds to fly.

The Walrus and the Carpenter

Were walking close at hand;

They wept like anything to see

Such quantities of sand:

'If this were only cleared away,'

They said, 'it *would* be grand!'

'If seven maids with seven mops

Swept it for half a year,

Do you suppose,' the Walrus said,

'That they could get it clear?'

'I doubt it,' said the Carpenter,

And shed a bitter tear.

'O Oysters, come and walk with us!'

The Walrus did beseech.

'A pleasant walk, a pleasant talk,

Along the briny beach:

We cannot do with more than four,

To give a hand to each.'

The eldest Oyster looked at him,

But never a word he said:

The eldest Oyster winked his eye,

And shook his heavy head—

Meaning to say he did not choose

To leave the oyster-bed.

But four young Oysters hurried up,

All eager for the treat:

Their coats were brushed, their faces washed,

Their shoes were clean and neat—
And this was odd, because, you know,
 They hadn't any feet.

Four other Oysters followed them,
 And yet another four;
And thick and fast they came at last,
 And more, and more, and more—
All hopping through the frothy waves,
 And scrambling to the shore.

The Walrus and the Carpenter
 Walked on a mile or so,
And then they rested on a rock
 Conveniently low:
And all the little Oysters stood
 And waited in a row.

'The time has come,' the Walrus said,
 'To talk of many things:
Of shoes—and ships—and sealing-wax—
 Of cabbages—and kings—
And why the sea is boiling hot—
 And whether pigs have wings.'

'But, wait a bit,' the Oysters cried,

 'Before we have our chat;

For some of us are out of breath,

 And all of us are fat!'

'No hurry!' said the Carpenter.

 They thanked him much for that.

'A loaf of bread,' the Walrus said,

 'Is what we chiefly need:

Pepper and vinegar besides

 Are very good indeed—

Now if you're ready, Oysters dear,

 We can begin to feed.'

'But not on us!' the Oysters cried,

 Turning a little blue.

'After such kindness, that would be

 A dismal thing to do!'

'The night is fine,' the Walrus said.

 'Do you admire the view?

'It was so kind of you to come!

 And you are very nice!'

The Carpenter said nothing but

 'Cut us another slice:

I wish you were not quite so deaf—

‘I’ve had to ask you twice!’

‘It seems a shame,’ the Walrus said,

‘To play them such a trick,

After we’ve brought them out so far,

And made them trot so quick!’

The Carpenter said nothing but

‘The butter’s spread too thick!’

‘I weep for you,’ the Walrus said:

‘I deeply sympathize.’

With sobs and tears he sorted out

Those of the largest size,

Holding his pocket-handkerchief

Before his streaming eyes.

‘O Oysters,’ said the Carpenter,

‘You’ve had a pleasant run!

Shall we be trotting home again?’

But answer came there none —

And this was scarcely odd, because

They’d eaten every one.’”

Lewis Carroll

Brian Moses has been a children's poet since 1988. To date he has had over 200 books published.

Brian also runs writing workshops and performs his own poetry and percussion shows. He has given over 3,000 performances in schools, libraries, theatres and at festivals throughout the UK and abroad.

Recent books include: a book of history poems, *1066 And Before That* (co-written with Roger Stevens), a picture book, *The Frog Olympics*, and his childhood memoir, *Keeping Clear of Paradise*. Forthcoming in the autumn are a new picture book, *Dreamer: Saving Our Wild World* (OtterBarry Books), and a Macmillan poetry book, *Lost Magic: The Very Best of Brian Moses*.

These two poems concern messages from the past, one from one of the nation's most famous historical artefacts and the other written about a Welsh poet from the sixth century.

Stonehenge

I remember Stonehenge
in the days when you could still
get close to the stones.
I remember being there, seeing their bulk
and feeling their solid substance.
It was the past brought close,
I could hear the tick of time,
the heartbeat of history.

If only the stones were transmitters,
they could broadcast their story,
answer the 'whys' of Stonehenge,
why Salisbury Plain gained
such a monument, why it was built,
was it temple or tomb?

It only we could summon solutions
from the sky, the clouds, the hills,
from those witnesses to the march
of these monoliths, to their positioning
and their raising.

And if only we knew who built this circle,
who mourned the winter sun
as the solstice darkened the day.
Did they ever imagine the puzzle
they were leaving behind?

And I wonder again at the thread
between present and past,
at all those who have stood
by these stones, hoping to hear
some sort of message

to the living from the dead,
so one of history's mysteries
might be solved at last.

Brian Moses

Inspiration

I wrote my poem 'Stonehenge' after looking through an old photograph album from my teenage years. I'd gone on a road trip with three mates and we'd stopped off at Stonehenge.

The photos showed us walking amongst the stones and posing for pictures. Nowadays the stones can only be glimpsed from afar and I felt pleased that I'd actually had a 'hands-on' experience of Stonehenge. I did indeed feel the pull of the past and feel convinced that there is a message locked into the stones that will one day be revealed.

I have chosen another poem to share with you . . .

'I am Taliesin' can be a model for new versions of the poem. Give yourself a new name – Awesomus, Brilliantina, Magnificento – and then boast like Taliesin about all the things you know, what you've been (animals/objects) and where you've been. Not all the boasts in the Taliesin poem are about great and important things. Many are strange and unimportant. Stretch their ideas so that 'I have been a wolf' becomes 'I have been a white wolf howling in a midnight forest'.

I am Taliesin. I sing perfect metre

I am Taliesin. I sing perfect metre,
Which will last to the end of the world.
My patron is Elphin . . .

I know why there is an echo in a hollow;
Why silver gleams; why breath is black; why liver is bloody;
Why a cow has horns; why a woman is affectionate;
Why milk is white; why holly is green;
Why a kid is bearded; why the cow-parsnip is hollow;
Why brine is salt; why ale is bitter;
Why the linnet is green and berries red;
Why a cuckoo complains; why it sings;
I know where the cuckoos of summer are in winter.
I know what beasts there are at the bottom of the sea;
How many spears in battle; how many drops in a shower;
Why a river drowned Pharaoh's people;
Why fishes have scales.
Why a white swan has black feet . . .

I have been a blue salmon,
I have been a dog, a stag, a roebuck on the mountain,
A stock, a spade, an axe in the hand,
A stallion, a bull, a buck,
I was reaped and placed in an oven;
I fell to the ground when I was being roasted
And a hen swallowed me.
For nine nights was I in her crop.
I have been dead, I have been alive.
I am Taliesin.

Anon.

Sally Crabtree loves getting the message of poetry across and dreaming up exciting ways to do this that will capture people's imagination. Her trademark interactive performances include The Poetree (pick an object off the tree and listen to the song, story or poem it inspires), the I'll Eat My Words range of edible poetry, Word M'art featuring Poems in a Tin, Phone a Poem, Poetry Bingo and the Sweetshop of Words. Her latest project is the Poetry Postie, where she delivers poetic inspiration to the nation and beyond – she has recently been invited to go on her rounds in Japan, the US, China and Cuba and is excited to be sending poetry via pigeon post for National Poetry Day. Sally was once a world-class gymnast and can sometimes be seen doing cartwheeling poems!

Chinese Whispers

Poetry's a whisper
in a disco
But sometimes there is someone there who can read lips
and they
mouth back *'would you like to dance?'*

I love to read the lips of silence
'Live!' it whispers
And I hear it loud and clear

I pass the message on.

You see the way I move
And you read *'Love'*
Suddenly all is silent
No one speaks but smiles
Everybody dances.

Sally Crabtree

Inspiration

As a child I never knew why the game Chinese Whispers was given its name, but I knew how it was played. Evidently it had other names too, like Russian Gossip (when people gossip they sometimes embellish the details so that the final message is far from the truth – although I can't imagine why Russian gossip is any more 'gossipy' than any other kind of gossip!), Geese to Geese, Whisper Down the Lane, Broken Telephone and Don't Drink the Milk. Why it was given that last name is also a complete mystery to me!

This poem was inspired by the idea that poetry itself is like a game of Chinese Whispers. The poet writes one thing and yet whoever reads the words adds something to the mix – their own experience, beliefs, memories, hopes, etc., so that what they take in is slightly different from what

was originally expressed. The message gets through (hopefully) but with a twist! I realized that life is a game of Chinese Whispers – we all interpret things depending on our viewpoint and I wondered if silence was the only message that can't be misinterpreted – or if it was, only for the better!

I have chosen another poem to share with you . . .

This is one of my favourite poems and it has inspired much of my current work as the Poetry Postie. We are the message of ourselves!

Do you know what you are?

'Do you know what you are?
You are a manuscript of a divine letter.
You are a mirror reflecting a noble face.
This universe is not outside of you.
Look inside yourself;
everything that you want,
you are already that.'

Rumi

Michaela Morgan is the author of over 140 books, including fiction, non-fiction, picture books and poetry. Her book *Walter Tull's Scrapbook* was shortlisted for the BBC Blue Peter Award and chosen for the Guardian cultural diversity awards. She runs poetry workshops, visits schools and talks at conferences for teachers. Michaela's hobby is daydreaming. If there were medals for daydreaming she is convinced she could be a winner.

Note to Self

Pop to the butcher's for some meat.

Get my feet back on the street.

A magazine and six farm eggs,
plus the chance to stretch my legs.

Maybe choose a chunk of cheese,
feel fresh life brought on the breeze.

Milk and yogurt, tub of cream.
Drift and dawdle and daydream.

Washing liquid, food for the cats.
A time for smiles and little chats.

Some biscuits and a loaf of bread,
feel the sun and clear my head.

In the chemist buy some tissues
and discuss the local issues.

Shall I buy some more shampoo?

Oh hi, good morning, how d'you do?

Treat myself to perfumed soap?

Nod to sad lady, helps her cope.

Message to self:

take the time to wander,

to smile and laugh and talk and ponder.

Take time to wonder, and to see.

Take time to breathe the air.

Take time to be.

Michaela Morgan

Inspiration

In Scotland, 'Messages' is another word for 'shopping' or 'errands'. So someone setting out with a shopping list would have a list of messages . . .

There was a time when people would go out and walk to the shops (not a supermarket) and they'd have a list, and on the way they would meet people and chat. So this poem is a message from history.

I have chosen another poem to share with you . . .

I found these lines by accident when I was very young. I didn't understand it but I loved the image of an invisible hand writing a message. It was so mysterious and so immense. The use of capital letters for important words has Stayed With Me:

from The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam

The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,
Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor Wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,
Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it.

Omar Khayyam

Translated by Edward FitzGerald

Jan Dean lives in the South West of England and likes to eat ice cream and swim in the sea. When she's not doing that she travels all over the place performing her poems in schools and running workshops for pupils and teachers.

Written in the World

I left you a message in the apple tree

'blossom' it said

I meant you to be strong and happy

I meant you to grow and shine

I know you will be beautiful

you are so loved, how could you not?

I left you a message

in the rivers in the tides,

about comings and goings

the way things keep on being new

the sky is full of scribbled notes

birdsong and blue

stormcloud hailstone blizzard

stuff changes

but bad things are not forever

the same is true

of all the weather in your heart

and don't forget the message

in the snail

the unexpected handsomeness of shells

trails of silver underneath your feet
that let you know
the things which eat
your precious garden shoots
are more than pests
and have a secret loveliness
that's all their own

Jan Dean

Inspiration

There's a famous saying 'the medium is the message' – it means that if you paint a picture, one of the things the picture will be about is the paint itself, its dribbliness, its thickness and its colour. A poem will have a subject, but it will also always be about words themselves and what they'll do. I started to think about the messages in things around me and this poem grew from that idea.

I have chosen another poem to share with you . . .

This is a medieval poem about all the signs that tell us summer has arrived. It's so old we don't know who wrote it. The most important sign of summer in the poem is the call of the cuckoo. The cuckoo's song is a message that summer is here. I chose this poem for lots of reasons – it's a poem bursting with energy and happiness. I love the sound of it and I enjoy the strangeness of the language (it's called 'Middle English' and it's an ancestor of the English we speak now). Because it's all about 'reading' the messages in nature that tell us the season has changed, it makes a good partner poem for 'Written in the World.'

Sumer is icumen in

Sumer is icumen in,

Lhude sing cuccu!

Groweth sed, and bloweth med,

And springeth the wude nu –

Sing cuccu!

Awe bleteth after lomb,
Lhouth after calve cu;
Bulluc steteth, bucke verteth,
Murie sing cuccu!

Cuccu, cuccu, well singes thu, cuccu;
Ne swike thu naver nu;
Sing cuccu, nu, sing cuccu,
Sing cuccu, sing cuccu, nu!

A modern version

Summer has at last come in
Loudly sing, cuckoo!
Seeds are grown, field-flowers full-blown
Leaf buds are open to make green woods.
Sing cuckoo!

Ewes bleat at their lambs
Cows low at their calves
Young bulls dart and young bucks fart,
Merrily sing, cuckoo!

Cuckoo, cuckoo, sing well, cuckoo.
Never, never stop,
Just sing, cuckoo, sing, cuckoo.
Sing now, cuckoo. Sing, new cuckoo,
Sing cuckoo!

Anon.

Rachel Rooney is a teacher and poet who has had two collections of children’s poetry published by Frances Lincoln. The first, *The Language of Cat*, won the 2012 Centre for Literacy in Primary Education Award (CLIPPA) and the second, *My Life as a Goldfish* was shortlisted for the 2015 CLIPPA. She has also written a rhyming picture book, *A Patch of Black* – a tale about night-time fears published by Macmillan Children’s Books. She goes into schools as a visiting poet, and has performed at the Hay Literary Festival, the Southbank Centre and for the Children’s Bookshow.

Mirror

Hold me to the mirror light
and make my meaning clear
The world reverses left to right
when I am there, not here.

Rachel Rooney

Inspiration

I wrote this poem after I had read *Through the Looking-Glass*. I was researching mirrored writing and started playing around with reversed font images. I liked the idea of writing a poem which you actually have to physically hold up to a mirror in order to decipher. The content of the poem is a reflection of this – in more ways than one!

I have chosen another poem to share with you . . .

This traditional playground singing rhyme is one I remember chanting in my childhood. Church bells were rung to let people nearby know when there was a wedding or a funeral being held, or to call people to Mass. In past times, church bells were rung at the time a prisoner was executed – which is where this poem may have originally come from.

Oranges and Lemons

Oranges and lemons,
Say the bells of St Clement’s.

You owe me five farthings,
Say the bells of St Martin’s.

When will you pay me?
Say the bells of Old Bailey.

When I grow rich,
Say the bells of Shoreditch.

When will that be?
Say the bells of Stepney.

I do not know,
Says the great bell of Bow.

Here comes a candle to light you to bed,
And here comes a chopper to chop off your head!

Anon.

Paul Cookson has spent twenty-five years visiting schools, libraries and literature festivals, performing poems, leading workshops, publishing books and making people laugh – and he still isn't tired. *The Works* is his bestselling anthology (over 200,000 and counting) and his latest collection of his own favourite poems is *Paul Cookson's Joke Shop*.

The Greatest Message

Embrace this feeling we call faith

Believe and live in hope and truth

Learn to love as we'd be loved

The idealism of our youth

It's time to banish all those means

That would invade and sour our dreams

It's time to stand and turn our backs

On all the forces that attack

It's time to act, it's time to face

The powers that erode our faith

The faith passed down that we inherit

The strength within the human spirit

It's time to see through grown-up eyes

Once and for all to realize

That love is love is love is love

And nothing to be frightened of

Yes, love is love is love is love

Like black and white, like hand in glove

Patient, kind and from above

Yes, love is love is love is love

So keep the faith, hold tight the hope

Hope for the future we dream of

Faith, hope and love, these three remain

The greatest of them all is love

Paul Cookson

Inspiration

I like the idea of taking a very famous passage of the *Bible* – one that most people are familiar with, and one that very few could disagree with in terms of spirit – and trying to encompass it within a poem. The first few drafts were blank verse and non-rhyming and, as such, were clunky and wordy, over-expanding. What I love about poetry is the fact that as poets we try to write concisely within a framework, so I decided on a rhyming framework. Also, when I write, rhyming poems lend themselves to humour in a natural way in terms of the rhythms and rhyme and I wanted to use the rhythm and rhyme to convey something more serious . . . I hope you like it.

from St Paul's Letter to the Corinthians – Chapter 13

If I speak in tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

Love is patient, love is kind, love does not envy, love does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

When I was a child I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now we only see a reflection as in a mirror: then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part: then shall I know fully . . .

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Liz Brownlee loves writing about endangered wildlife. She has poems in more than sixty anthologies, on plaques at the animal enclosures at Bristol Zoo and in her book *Animal Magic* (Iron Press). Two further books, one for Macmillan Children's Books, written with Jan Dean and Michaela Morgan, and one for Bloomsbury, written with Roger Stevens and Sue Hardy-Dawson, will be published in 2017.

Liz shows images and reads poems about incredible animals while doing workshops in schools and libraries and at literary and nature festivals. She also speaks at teaching conferences and organizes poetry retreats, exhibitions and events.

Dear Bee

Thank you for your friendly buzz
that lets us know you're near to us;
for all those busy daytime hours
you spend pollinating flowers,
helping grow the food we eat;
for gathering the nectar sweet
and making honey, bright as trumpets,
to drip from our toasted crumpets,
and though a weapon on the wing
thanks for preferring not to sting.

Yours, Me

Liz Brownlee

Inspiration

I chose to do my National Poetry Day project this year in messages to the world and its creatures. Bees are one of my favourites – not only do I love them for ensuring crops grow, but I also love their presence in the garden, pollinating and bobbing in the flower heads, propagating a continuing beauty. So my poem is a message of thanks to the bee.

I have chosen another poem to share with you . . .

Emily Dickinson's lovely poem, although written as to a good friend, also celebrates and welcomes the bee as the harbinger of spring.

Bee! I'm Expecting You!

Bee! I'm expecting you!

Was saying Yesterday

To Somebody you know

That you were due –

The Frogs got Home last Week –

Are settled, and at work –

Birds, mostly back –

To Clover warm and thick –

You'll get my Letter by

The seventeenth; Reply

Or better, be with me –

Yours, Fly.

Emily Dickinson

Sophie Herxheimer is a visual artist and a poet. She has held residencies for the London International Festival of Theatre, the Southbank Centre and Transport for London. Her exhibitions include the Whitworth, the Poetry Library and the National Portrait Gallery. Her poems have appeared in *Long Poem Magazine*, *Poems In Which* and *Tears in the Fence*, among others. She won first prize in the 2015 inaugural Poetry Book Fair competition. Recent publications include *The Listening Forest* and *The New Concrete*. Sophie teaches and collaborates extensively.

London

Not zo mainy Dais zinz ve arrivink.

Zis grey iss like Bearlin, zis same grey Day

ve hef. Zis norzern Veizzer, oont ze demp Street.

A biet off Rain voant hurt, vill help ze Treez

on zis Hempstet Heese vee see in Fekt.

Vy shootd I mind zat?

I try viz ze Busses, Herr Kondooktor eskink

Me . . . for vot? I don't eckzactly remempber;

Fess plees? To him, my Penny I hent ofa –

He notdz viz a keint Smile – *Fanks Luv!*

He sez. Oh! I em his Luff – turns Hentell

on Machine, out kurls a Tikett.

Zis is ven I know zat here to settle iss OK. Zis

City will be Home, verr eefen on ze Buss is Luff.

Sophie Herxheimer

Inspiration

This is the first of twenty-eight poems I've written phonetically in my late grandmother's German accent. She was Jewish and had the luck to find refuge in England in 1938, with other members of the family. Here she is on an old-fashioned Routemaster bus, being called 'love' by a stranger, which made her day. Her good humour in the face of all sorts of troubles has been an enduring message from her to me, and she continues to transmit this even though she died in 1980. Writing in someone else's voice can be very freeing, and playing around with what does and doesn't make sense is one of the aspects of poetry I most enjoy. If this looks incomprehensible try reading it aloud, that's the best way in. Remember to roll your 'r's! I guess I also want to include it as a message to always welcome new people into your community.

I have chosen another poem to share with you . . .

This powerful poem was written by a contemporary of my grandmother, who was also facing the horror of war and enormous upheaval. The message – that as long as we have 'spittle', or a voice and the courage to use it, we can fight back against injustice and tyranny – seems encouraging at the end of such a bleak account.

from Poems to Czechoslovakia

They took quickly,
they took hugely,

took the mountains and their
entrails.

They took our coal, and took our
steel,

from us, lead they took also
and crystal.

They took the sugar, and they took
the clover

they took the North, and they
took the West.

They took the hive, and took the
haystack,

they took the South from us,
and took the East.

Vary they took, and
Tatras they took,

they took the near at hand
and faraway.

But worse than taking
paradise on earth from us
they won the battle for our
native land.

Bullets they took from us, they took
our rifles

minerals they took and
comrades too.

But while our mouths have spittle in
them

the whole country
is still armed.

Marina Tsvetaeva

Translated by Elaine Feinstein

Deborah Alma is the Emergency Poet in her vintage ambulance, driving around the country (and sometimes to other countries) prescribing poetry to people.

What You Might Write

Picture the place that you call home
and draw its shape as an outline
on paper, fill it with words.

Now tell me
of the view from the window,
and do you see the man over there,

or a woman, someone maybe
who looks over your shoulder
at the words there,
or takes both your hands,
looks into your eyes, just,
just briefly, so that you know them?

Now tell me who the empty chair is for
and what you might write on a postcard
home, as you sit at a small desk

with a blue lamp, with moths
gathering.

Deborah Alma

Inspiration

I was wondering about writing a postcard home in this poem, but not an ordinary postcard, rather one to yourself and the person you might be when you're older. I hope that it's a little mysterious and will ask the reader to think about themselves.

I have chosen another poem to share with you . . .

There is a similar melancholy feel to the poem by Robert Louis Stevenson, 'Where Go the Boats?', which is a message of a poem I suppose, and is about growing older and about death too, with a quiet note of optimism in the thought of other children sailing their boats in the future.

Where Go the Boats?

Dark brown is the river,
 Golden is the sand.
It flows along for ever,
 With trees on either hand.

Green leaves a-floating,
 Castles of the foam,
Boats of mine a-boating –
 Where will all come home?

On goes the river
 And out past the mill,
Away down the valley,
 Away down the hill.

Away down the river,
 A hundred miles or more,
Other little children
 Shall bring my boats ashore.

Robert Louis Stevenson

Joseph Coelho is a performance poet and playwright. He has written plays for companies, including Soho Theatre, Polka Theatre, York Theatre Royal, Oily Cart, The Spark Festival, Islington Community Theatre and The Pied Piper Theatre Company. His plays have received special note from Soho's Verity Bargate Award and The Bruntwood Playwriting Competition.

Joseph's poems have been published in several Macmillan anthologies, including *Green Glass Beads*, edited by Jacqueline Wilson. Joseph has been a guest poet on CBeebies' *The Rhyme Rocket*, where he was beamed up from the Rhyme Rock to perform his Bug Poem. His debut children's collection, *Werewolf Club Rules*, is published by Frances Lincoln and was the winner of the 2015 CLIPPA Award.

Just the Messenger

Ask your Mother

if she has seen my phone.

Tell your Father

I have not seen it.

Ask your Mother

to ring my phone.

Tell your Father

I'm on my phone.

Tell your Mother

I need my phone.

Tell your Father

he needs to look.

Tell your Mother

I have looked.

Tell your Father

look again.

Tell your Mother

to please get off the phone.

Tell your Father

I will in a minute.

Tell your Mother

my train is leaving.

Tell your Father

my battery is dead.

Joseph Coelho

Inspiration

I think we have all experienced that horrible situation of being the messenger between two people who are not talking properly to each other. Maybe you have been the messenger between two friends who have had an argument or two parents who are in different rooms. I wanted to preserve this moment in a poem and thought that the ideal subject matter for such a situation would be a mobile phone. Mobile phones are everywhere now and whenever you head outside you can see people staring at their screens and not talking to one another. Mobile phones have in many ways made the world smaller and made it possible for us to communicate with those far away, but sometimes that means we do not communicate with those who are right next to us.

I have chosen another poem to share with you . . .

I chose this poem because it is a wonderful example of the Epistle, a form of poetry based on letters, and uses that brilliant poetic device personification. The 'voice' of this poem is writing a letter to the

month of March and it is clear from the poem that they have previously received a letter from March! I wonder what that letter said!

Dear March, come in!

Dear March, come in!
How glad I am!
I looked for you before.
Put down your hat –
You must have walked –
How out of breath you are!
Dear March, how are you?
And the rest?
Did you leave Nature well?
Oh, March, come right upstairs with me,
I have so much to tell!

I got your letter, and the bird's;
The maples never knew
That you were coming, – I declare,
How red their faces grew!
But, March, forgive me –
And all those hills
You left for me to hue;
There was no purple suitable,
You took it all with you.

Who knocks? That April!
Lock the door!
I will not be pursued!
He stayed away a year, to call
When I am occupied.
But trifles look so trivial
As soon as you have come,
That blame is just as dear as praise
And praise as mere as blame.

Emily Dickinson

Joshua Seigal is a poet, performer and workshop leader from London. He has an MA in Writing and Education from Goldsmiths College, and spends his time visiting schools, libraries and festivals around the country, where he inspires children with his energetic brand of performance poetry. He has taken poetry shows to both the Edinburgh Fringe and the Edinburgh Book Festival, and is widely published in anthologies. His poetry collection *I Don't Like Poetry* is published by Bloomsbury.

I'm Sorry

I'm sorry that I hit you.
I'm sorry that I laughed.
I'm sorry that I said you had
a neck like a giraffe.

I'm sorry that I spat at you.
I'm sorry that I kicked you.
I'm sorry that I told on you.
I'm sorry that I tricked you.

I'm sorry that I took your lunch
and made fun of your cat.
I'm sorry that I said I'd rather
make friends with a rat.

I'm sorry that I tickled you
and sent you nasty texts.
I'm sorry that I stole your coat
and that I hid your specs.

I'm sorry that I didn't stop
when you said 'that's enough'
I'm sorry that I picked a fight
and tried to look all tough.

I'm sorry that I did all this.
I didn't mean to spite you,
I only did these things
because

in fact

I really like you.

I'm sorry for the things I did,
I know it's strange to mention
that I only did these things
so you'd give me attention.

So I hope that you'll forgive me
and this poem's made you see
that I'm *really* sorry . . .
 . . . will you go out with me
 Miss?

Joshua Seigal

Inspiration

I wrote this poem because I like jokes, and am inspired as much by stand-up comedy as I am by literature. I love the rhyme and rhythm of poetry, and enjoy exploring its comedic potential. With this poem, the comic timing of the ending is very important, and I am still trying to get it right in performance! With rhyming poetry it is important to have a powerful ending, so my advice, when writing a rhyming poem, would be to think of a witty, appropriate ending first, and then to work backwards, building up to it.

I have chosen another poem to share with you . . .

I chose this poem in part because I think its use of old-fashioned slang and its colloquial voice might be interesting to a contemporary audience used to more formal war poetry. The poem is also interesting in its interspersing of two separate voices, a technique which pupils likewise can experiment with.

The Letter

With B.E.F. Jun 10. Dear Wife,
(Oh blast this pencil. 'Ere, Bill, lend's a knife.)
I'm in the pink at present, dear.
I think the war will end this year.
We don't see much of them square-'eaded 'Uns.
We're out of harm's way, not bad fed.
I'm longing for a taste of your old buns.
(Say, Jimmie, spare's a bite of bread.)
There don't seem much to say just now.
(Yer what? Then don't, yer ruddy cow!
And give us back me cigarette!)
I'll soon be 'ome. You mustn't fret.
My feet's improvin', as I told you of.
We're out in the rest now. Never fear.
(VRACH! By crumbs, but that was near.)
Mother might spare you half a sov.
Kiss Nell and Bert. When me and you –
(Eh? What the 'ell! Stand to? Stand to!
Jim, give's a hand with pack on, lad.
Guh! Christ! I'm hit. Take 'old. Aye, bad.
No, damn your iodine. Jim? 'Ere!
Write my old girl, Jim, there's a dear.)

Wilfred Owen

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for their poems, which were written specially for this book and are published here with their permission.

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