

## Key Stage 3-5

# POETRY IN FRAMES

There are so many messages to find in old,  
treasured photographs.

### Sunny Side Up

Dad, you looked like a fried egg on your wedding day,  
in your crisp shirt and yellow tie.  
A yellow tie to your own wedding?  
A yellow tie full stop.  
I stole the photo from Mum's shell box -  
the only thing grabbed from Nigeria. The only thing  
she found herself still clutching at Dover.  
Now, it holds our passports, home insurance docs,  
spare car keys. The jewellery  
either lost or sold. I'm not sure  
if Mum has kept this photo because she glances, still.  
Or because, to her, you're just another  
yellowing deed.

by *Rachel Long*



An activity by Apples & Snakes, which produces exciting, engaging and transformative work in performance and participation.

[www.applesandsnakes.org](http://www.applesandsnakes.org)



**Have you ever stumbled across a photograph of a person you love?**

Perhaps someone you might not have seen/  
spoken to in a long time. (If not, imagine you  
have).

**Where did you find the photograph?**

Was it in a secret place?  
Is the photo black and white, sepia, or in colour?  
What do you associate these colours with?

**How did it feel to hold the photograph?**

What did it feel like to hold the photographed  
person in your hand?  
Who is taking the photograph, and why?

**What sound would the photograph make if  
it could make a sound?**

What music might be playing in its background?  
What would the photograph taste and smell like?

**Is the person/people in it saying something  
to you?**

What are their eyes like?  
Are they smiling?  
What are they wearing and doing?  
Are they standing up or sitting down?  
Are they dancing?  
What's happening in the background?  
Imagine what might be happening behind the  
person.

**Are there any questions that you want to  
ask the photograph directly?**

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**Read the poem *Sunny Side Up* and  
discuss it as a class.**

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**Write your own letter-poem to your  
photograph.**

A letter-poem is simply a poem that is  
addressed to a person or thing in the same  
way a letter is.  
Include at least one question for the  
photograph within the poem.

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**Allow time to share your poems at the  
end.**

## Key Stage 3-5

LOVE LETTERS BETWEEN  
INANIMATE OBJECTS

Create poems about everyday objects. Here is a chance to interrogate the miscellaneous, normal things that surround us. It is an exercise in voice, surprising language and characterisation in poetry.

**The Toothbrush to the Bicycle Tire**

They told me that I was meant for the cleaner life;  
that you would drag me through the mud.

They said that you would tread all over me,  
that they could see right through you,

that you were full of hot air;  
that I would always be chasing,

always watching you disappear after sleeker models—  
that it would be a vicious cycle.

But I know better. I know about your rough edges  
and I have seen your perfect curves.

I will fit into whatever spaces you let me.  
If loving you means getting dirty, bring on the grime.

I will leave this porcelain home behind. I'm used to  
twice-a-day relationships, but with you I'll take all the time.

And I know we live in different worlds, and we're always really busy,  
but in my dreams you spin around me so fast, I always wake up dizzy.

So maybe one day you'll grow tired of the road  
and roll on back to me.

And when I blink my eyes into morning,  
your smile will be the only one I see.

by Sarah Kay

**Choose two activities you do every day, such as:**

Cycling to school  
Brushing your teeth  
Queuing for lunch  
Going to the shop

**List all the objects you need to do these activities and then choose one object from each activity, for example:**

Bicycle light  
Toothbrush

**Interrogate the objects**

What colours are the object? What do they feel like? What might they taste like, how do they sound when in use?  
What do the objects hate about getting up in the morning?  
What do the objects have in common?  
What would they say to one another?

The answers should form around 10 lines of a poem which is a love message from one object to another.

Think carefully about the form the poem takes. Could it be developed into a sonnet? Or haikus that answer one another?

**Read aloud. Share online.**



Reference: Watch Sarah Kay read her poem *The Toothbrush to the Bicycle Tire*  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BIAQENSqcuM>

## Key Stage 3-5

# MESSAGES THROUGH TIME

**Message:** the inspired utterance of a prophet or sage.

**This resource will appeal to anybody who loves science fiction/fantasy or magic such as The Lord of the Rings or Harry Potter.**

 Llenyddiaeth  
Cymru  
Literature  
Wales

An activity by Sophie McKeand,  
Young People's Laureate for  
Wales, for Literature Wales,  
the National Company for the  
development of literature in  
Wales.

[www.literaturewales.org](http://www.literaturewales.org)  
[www.youngpeopleslaureate.org](http://www.youngpeopleslaureate.org)



### **Kat Godeu/The Battle of the Trees (Excerpt)**

I was in a multitude of forms  
Before I was unfettered  
I was a slender mottled sword  
Made from the hand.  
I was a droplet in the air,  
I was the stellar radiance of the stars.  
I was a word in writing,  
I was a book in my prime.  
I was the light of a lantern  
for a year and a half.  
I was a bridge standing  
over sixty estuaries.  
I was a path, I was an eagle,  
I was a coracle on the seas.  
I was effervescence in drink,  
I was a raindrop in a shower.  
I was a sword in the hand,  
I was a shield in battle.  
I was a string in a harp  
under enchantment for nine years,  
[and] foam in water.  
I was a tinder-spark in a fire,  
I was a tree in a conflagration.  
I am not one who does not sing,  
I have sung from infancy.

by *Taliesin*  
translated by *Marged Haycock*

The Welsh bard Taliesin was both a prophet and sage. Numerous myths and legends surround his birth and life as his inspired poetry existed in spoken form for hundreds of years before being committed to the page.

One of Taliesin's most famous poems is *Kat Godeu* or *The Battle of the Trees*. The excerpt on the previous page is taken from Marged Haycock's *Legendary Poems from the Book of Taliesin*, and has been translated into English by Haycock from medieval Welsh.

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**What message is the poet sending out to us across time about who he is?**

The opening line reminds us of Walt Whitman's *Song of Myself* - 'I am large, I contain multitudes...'

In this poem Taliesin transforms from a single word to the whole book.

**What does it mean?**

**If you were to think of yourself in this transformative, mythical form what would you be?**

**What message would you want to send to others about your mythical self?**

**Remember - in the space of this poem you can be any shape or form or element.**

**Here's an excerpt from a poem of mine inspired by *Kat Godeu*:**

I  
I am in  
I am out  
I am up  
I am down  
I am left  
I am right  
I talk with trees  
I have seen the hearts of mountains  
(the starry night sky)  
and the universe told me her name.

**Now it's your turn to write.**

**Try starting each line with either I was, I am or I will be.**

Explore the possibilities of shape-shifting as you time-travel through the poem from past, to present to future.

**Finally, practice speaking your poem out-loud as Taliesin would have done. Whisper it. Shriek it.**

**This is your inspired message to the world, your declaration of who you really are.**



## Key Stage 3-5

# A NOTE CAN BE A POEM

Imagine coming down one morning  
and finding this:

### This Is Just To Say

I have eaten  
the plums  
that were in  
the icebox

and which  
you were probably  
saving  
for breakfast

Forgive me  
they were delicious  
so sweet  
and so cold

by *William Carlos Williams*



An activity by the Poetry School. The Poetry School is a national organisation running classes and projects to teach poetry.

[www.poetryschool.com](http://www.poetryschool.com)





**Would you forgive the writer of the note?**

Why do you say that?

**How could the person who ate the plums  
earn your forgiveness?**

Might writing you a poem be enough?

**Have you ever taken or eaten anything you  
shouldn't have?**

Did you apologise? If so, how?

**Could you make *This Is Just To Say* into a  
comic strip?**

How many panels would you use?

Would you include people?

What colours would you use?

Would you use all the words or none?

**Draw that comic strip.**

**William Carlos Williams (1883 – 1963) worked  
as a doctor and drafted some of his poems  
on prescription pads. Maybe that's why *This  
Is Just To Say* is so small and short – just 28  
words long. Perhaps it had to fit on a tiny  
piece of paper.**

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**What poem would a supermarket checkout  
worker write on a long thin till roll?**

What about someone who worked in a fish and  
chip shop, with access to those massive sheets of  
paper used to wrap up fish and chips?

What about someone selling cinema tickets?

**Write those poems.**