

NATIONAL POETRY DAY

25th
anniversary

3RD OCTOBER 2019

Riddles

A National Poetry Day
resource created
poet Ken Cockburn and
the Scottish Poetry Library

Key stage 3

Scottish
Poetry
Library

Bringing people
and poems together

The **Scottish Poetry Library** is committed to bringing the pleasures and benefits of poetry to as wide an audience as possible.

www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk

'Tell all the truth but tell it slant'

Emily Dickinson

A riddle describes a thing truthfully, but playfully disguised. Riddles often present one thing in terms of another, like a metaphor. Solving a riddle requires the reader or listener's thoughtful participation.

Riddle One

Formed long ago, yet made today,
Employed while others sleep;
What few would like to give away,
Nor any wish to keep

Riddle Two

My chain holds no prisoner,
My frame holds no picture,
and my bars offer no drinks.
What am I?

Riddle Three

In a wee pit
But no amang stour*,
Has a strang rit*
But nae
Lat it be stout,
Or lat it be slack,
Aince* lat it out
And it winna gang* back.

* dirt; root; once; go.

Answers (authors): 1 a bed (Traditional); 2 a bicycle (Ken Cockburn); 3 a tooth (William Soutar)

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Activity

After reading riddle-poems, pupils make notes on a chosen object, and from these write a riddle, which others can try to guess. The activity can be adapted for class, group and individual work.

Reading

Share any riddles pupils know, and read some riddles aloud. How easy or hard it is to find the answer? What kind of clues does the riddle give you?

Choosing

You can write a riddle about anything. Here are some examples, or you can make your own list.

- a guitar
- a supermarket trolley
- a jar of jam
- the moon
- a fire-extinguisher
- a shadow
- a potato
- a cloud



Notes

Choose your subject.
Describe it using your senses. Think about it visually – size, colour, shape – and in terms of other senses.
What is it made of?
Name its parts.
List verbs that describe what it does, or what you do with it.
Do any words you’ve written so far sound like other words, or have other meanings?
What else is it like?
What is it not?

Writing

Review your notes, and write a riddle, between, say, 4 and 8 lines long. Think how you can ‘tell it slant’ and disguise your subject – make a unexpected comparison, use words with more than one meaning, play with scale or emphasise what this is not. Your riddle might rhyme, or you could use repetition or alliteration.

Reading

Read your riddle aloud. How easily can others guess its subject? If it’s too easy – or too hard – you can rewrite parts of your riddle.

