

The Choices We Make

A guide to reading and responding to a poem that provokes ideas for writing.

More Pointless Questions

Goldfish
goldfish
which glass do you
prefer?
A bowl of glass
or a pond that ripples
when the winds pass?

Little bird
little bird
which do you prefer?
A house of wires
or a branch
that's a stage
for feathered choirs?

Red rose
red rose
which do you prefer?
A vase once used
to contain dry flowers
or a patch of ground
blooming with briars?

Putting such questions
to a goldfish
or a bird
or a rose
is pointless I suppose.

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from *The Rainmaker Danced* (Hodder)



Read the poem out loud to the children.
Allow them to consider the poem they heard.
What did it make them think about? How did it make them feel?

Give a copy of the poem to mixed pairs or groups of children, let them re-read it and discuss, encouraging them to annotate the text with their thoughts and ideas.

What does the poem say to you? What responses does it provoke in you as a reader? What is it about the poem that makes you think or feel this way? Why do you think the poet might have chosen to write the poem?

Reflect on some of their thoughts and ideas together. Comment on the repetition of the natural object at the start of each stanza, holding your attention on it; the opposition in the two choices presented in each verse; the carefully chosen verbs and adjectives that create such evocative imagery; the use of rhetorical questions to provoke the reader to think or question.

What questions does the poem raise for you about the actions and choices we make as humans?

Re-read and consider the final stanza. Why do you think the poet points out that: **Putting such questions / to a goldfish / or a bird / or a rose / is pointless I suppose.**

What does this mean to you? What thoughts does this final stanza leave you with?

Consider this in relation to the title: **More Pointless Questions.**

Do you believe these questions are pointless? Who do you think really needs to consider these choices and why?

Ask them to re-read the poem for themselves and think about other connections they make with it. *What other elements of the natural world might humans be making choices about? What consequences might these choices have, both on humans and on nature itself? Do the benefits of these things outweigh the negative impact on the environment? You may wish to look at a specific example together first, such as keeping animals in zoos, or using animals for food, or cutting down forests to build homes or for farming purposes.*

Allow the children to consider a human choice about the natural world that they might like to share in writing. Think about the elements they found effective in encouraging them to take note and consider the choices we make in John Agard's work and look at how they can use these in their own writing. Let them draft out their ideas together. Ask the children to practise their draft verse out loud and see if it works off the page. Get them to make any edits they may need, working up their own ideas until they feel they are ready for publication. When they publish, you may wish to encourage them to consider using illustration to emphasise their message, with the stanzas contained within an illustration of the object we would contain the nature in.

You can see this spread here: clpe.org.uk/poetry/poems/more-pointless-questions

Let the children polish up their work, proof-read, check the layout and adding illustration before typing up or writing out in presentation handwriting. You can display their published poems in a shared space for an audience and/or to perform these as an audio or video performance.

If your class would like to study the full *The Rainmaker Danced* collection, there is a free teaching sequence available on CLPE's Poetryline:

clpe.org.uk/books/book/rainmaker-danced

Here, you can also see John performing other poems from this collection.

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