

TOOLKIT FOR SCHOOLS

National Poetry Day is the UK's biggest mass-participation celebration of poetry taking place on the **first Thursday of October** each year. In 2020 we reached more than 131 million people through school events, library events, and online activities. By connecting with classrooms, libraries and a whole network of partners, our aim is that everyone who uses words can share in the enjoyment of poetry.

Engaging with poetry can have many positive impacts for learning and wellbeing, and National Poetry Day is the perfect time to get started. Across the coronavirus pandemic when children, young people and their families have been increasingly isolated, poetry offers a valuable medium to help build bridges, support communication and expression, and promote connectivity.

We discovered this year that poetry is really effective at tackling social isolation.

Librarian, York

Bringing poetry into your school can support literacy skills and language learning by integrating reading, writing, speaking and listening in meaningful ways.¹ Exploring poetry offers in-roads to challenging themes and issues such as culture and identity,² and finding that people have similar feelings and experiences can promote students' empathy for others.³ Creating poetry can also be therapeutic, helping to alleviate anxiety, reduce stress,⁴ and improve emotional resilience.⁵ It can be an empowering experience for children and young people to discover their own poetic voice, and the process can improve their self-awareness, self-expression and self-esteem.⁶



References

- ¹ Stange, T.V. & Wyant, S.L. (2008). 'Poetry Proves to be Positive in the Primary Grades'. *Reading Horizons*, 48(3), 201-214.
- ² Holman, W. D. (1996). 'The power of poetry: Validating ethnic identity through a bibliotherapeutic intervention with a Puerto Rican adolescent'. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 13, 371-383.
- ³ Furman, R. (2005). 'Using poetry and written exercises to teach empathy'. *Journal of Poetry Therapy*, 18, 103-110.
- ⁴ Chan, Z. C. Y. (2003). 'Poetry writing: A therapeutic means for a social work doctoral student in the process of study'. *Journal of Poetry Therapy*, 16, 5-17.
- ⁵ Tegner, I., Fox, J., Philipp, R., & Thorne, P. (2009). 'Evaluating the use of poetry to improve well-being and emotional resilience in cancer patients'. *Journal of Poetry Therapy*, 22, 121-131.
- ⁶ Croom, A.M. (2015). 'The practice of poetry and the psychology of well-being'. *Journal of Poetry Therapy: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Practice, Theory, Research and Education*, 28(1), 21-41.

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In 2018, NPD carried out a survey with the **National Literacy Trust** to find out how children, young people and teachers engage with poetry.

Here's what we found out:

- Poetry appeals to boys (**41.7%**) as well as girls (**52%**).
- Poetry can help students feel creative and free in their writing. They see poetry as having fewer rules than other forms of writing, and more freedom over the subject they are writing about.
- Poetry can help young people to connect on an emotional level, and to express themselves and their feelings.
- Poems become bridges over time and space, helping students feel more connected to how others think and feel.
- Poetry is relatable in youth and popular culture ('like a song without music').
- Children and young people who read and write poetry in their free time have improved literacy outcomes.
- Children who receive free school meals are more likely to spend free time on poetry than those who do not (**55.7% vs. 43%**).

Our EAL students clearly enjoyed seeing their cultures represented in the form of poems. They felt "seen".

Teacher, Coventry

Taking part in national events helps build a sense of pride, self worth and a feeling of "normality" and inclusiveness with our students. For students with SEN - poetry is a way of expressing their feelings and creativity in a short accessible way, without the intimidating target of pages of text!

Teacher, specialist SEN school, Hertfordshire

Here's why poetry in schools is so important:

- Teachers are key influencers in whether children and young people consume and/or create poetry. Almost half of those who engage with poetry (**44.8%**) and more than half of those who write poetry (**50.1%**) said their teachers were their main source of encouragement – more than their parents, carers, friends, or even celebrities.
- The lack of engagement with poetry is a greater issue as children get older. Almost three quarters of those aged 11-14 (**70.2%**) told us they don't engage with poetry at all. You can help to address this issue by introducing and reinforcing poetry engagement throughout the school years.
- A lot of children and young people are 'put off' by poetry because they think it's boring (**50%**) or doesn't cover topics that they are interested in (**40%**). You can challenge these assumptions in the classroom by taking a fun and informal approach to poetry, and by looking at examples that have relevant themes (read on for suggestions!).



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1. PLAN YOUR CELEBRATION

Decide together what you want the day to achieve, such as:

- Students, staff and families know about poetry.
- Students, staff and families enjoy poetry.
- Class lessons feature a wider range of poems.
- Celebrate that anyone can be a poet.
- Have fun!

What activities will help you achieve your aims?

- Choose a poem from our trove [here](#) and display around the school.
- Have a whole school poetry party or slam.
- Invite a poet to an assembly or to visit a class. (See section 4, page 4)

How will you celebrate what you have achieved – and how will you tell people about it?

- Record it, write about it – photos, videos, podcasts, blogs and newsletters (share them on social media using #NationalPoetryDay).
- Make displays to showcase activities.
- Keep the momentum going? (See section 5, page 5)

TELL US ABOUT YOUR EVENTS

Please list any events on our map:

nationalpoetryday.co.uk/events.

If you used our logos or posters, take pictures and share them on social media with #NationalPoetryDay

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2. THINGS YOU CAN DO - SIMPLE + FUN

Here are ideas to choose from and enjoy on National Poetry Day, and every day!

Make sure you have lots of poetry books on display. If you're looking for some great recommendations of books published this year, check out our recommended reading lists on our website:

nationalpoetryday.co.uk/poems/poetry-recommendations.

Here are a few quick starters to get you going:

Write a poem

National Literacy Trust [KS2](#)

Learn poetry by heart

Poetry By Heart [KS 1-2](#) and [KS 3-5](#)

Read a poem

Poetry Book Society [KS 3-5](#)

Two of my SEN students have started writing voluntarily for the first time!

Teacher, Somerset

You will launch a series of films on the theme of **Choice** that can be viewed in your classroom. You can find them here:

nationalpoetryday.co.uk/education.

We have **24 National Poetry Day Ambassadors** who regularly visit schools across the UK championing poetry. They include Michael Rosen, Dean Atta, Sarah Crossan, Joseph Coelho, Victoria Adukwei Bulley and Karl Nova. You can watch our ambassadors and other poets reading and talking about their work on our YouTube channel:

youtube.com/NationalPoetryDay.

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3. PLANNING A CLASS LESSON

National Poetry Day and our fantastic partners have put together a trove of resources you can use to structure a class lesson.

You can find them on our website:

nationalpoetryday.co.uk/education/free-education-resource-downloads.

You can also access a fantastic guide for secondary school teachers by poet and teacher Kate Clanchy to help engage with contemporary poetry and enjoy creative writing using activities built around the books shortlisted for the Forward Prizes for Poetry 2019 and 2020:

forwardartsfoundation.org/from-poem-to-poem.

4. HOST A POET VISIT

There's no experience like meeting a poet and hearing them read and share their work. It can trigger a fresh enthusiasm for poetry and encourage pupils to keep reading and writing for pleasure. If you can't arrange a real-life visit, many authors are now offering virtual visits.

Some tips for arranging a visit:

- If funding is tight, join up with other schools. Your poet could visit two schools in the same day – or schools could come together.
- It's great to get involved with local poets – and they might like to become a Patron of Reading at your school: patronofreading.co.uk.
- Book your poet well in advance! Poets' diaries get booked up, especially on National Poetry Day and World Book Day.
- Ensure your class explores their poetry.
- Make sure to address practical concerns first (fee, invoicing, number of students, ages, format).

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Look after your poet:

- Plan the day together. Discuss any equipment needed and let them know how you will document the visit. Make them welcome, have someone to take them round, and offer tea/coffee/lunch.
- Be clear with them about your goals for the visit, such as:
 - Children's increased enthusiasm for poetry
 - Children more confident about reciting poetry
 - Children more confident about writing poetry
 - A really enjoyable day – with pictures and maybe a film of the day!
 - You can arrange book sales via your poet or their publisher, or with your local bookshop.

Partner with your local library. They can suggest poets you might like to invite or lend copies of the poet's books, and, if needed, a venue for sessions.

WHERE TO BOOK:

- Direct with poets via their websites
- Through your school library service, or public library service
- Through your local bookshop
- The Poetry Society poetrysociety.org.uk
- Authors Aloud authorsaloud.co.uk
- Contact an Author contactanauthor.co.uk
- Speaking of Books speakingofbooks.studysupport.info

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5. KEEPING POETRY ON THE PROGRAMME

After all the excitement of the day, make sure that you keep up the momentum so poetry is alive throughout your school. Build these ideas into school life.

- Promote your activities through displays, newsletters and school media.
- Encourage classes and individual pupils to share poems via display boards, in class, in assemblies and on digital spaces.
- Feature a "Poem of the Week" on your display boards. Teachers and students could take it in turn to choose – have lots of sticky notes available so pupils can put their thoughts and responses up around the poem.
- Set up a poetry blog. Invite students to write and talk about their favourite – and not-so-favourite – poems, and share their writing.

Make individual or class poetry anthologies that include the students' own poems as well as out-of-copyright poems. Learn about copyright via the **Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society**. They have a wealth of resources available: alcs.co.uk/copyright-education.

Just the fact of the day being given over to poetry has been a huge benefit in school, raising the profile of poetry generally, and highlighting the many styles and voices that poetry can have.

Teacher, Isle of Man

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KEEP IN TOUCH

Sign up to our mailing list:

nationalpoetryday.co.uk/join-our-mailing-list-full

Or contact: info@forwardartsfoundation.org

National Poetry Day would like to thank the **Authors' Collecting and Licensing Society** for supporting our #NationalPoetryDay schools activities.



SUPPORT US

Forward Arts Foundation is a registered charity (number 1037939) and relies on your support. From the excellence of the Forward Prizes for Poetry to the mass participation of National Poetry Day, you can help us shape a society where everybody can find their voice through poetry.

Give £10 to help us send a National Poetry Day pack to a local library or school

Give £20 towards our vibrant season of events in the run up to the Forward Prizes

Give £50 to build our commissioning fund for new poetry every year

Or **give £5 a month** to support our core work promoting the knowledge and enjoyment of poetry

Visit forwardartsfoundation.org/support to make your donation or [contact us](#) to take your support further as a Patron or programme sponsor.

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