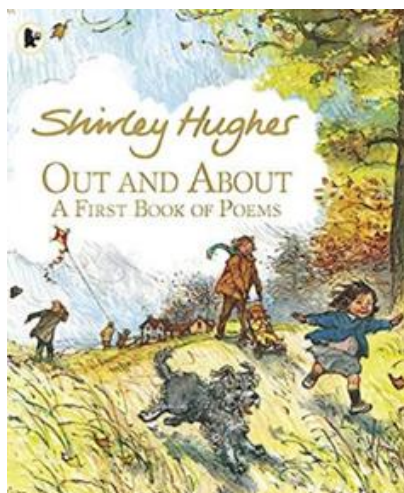


Early years poetry session plans

The Grass House by Shirley Hughes



The Grass House is from
Out and About: A First Book of Poems
Written and illustrated by Shirley Hughes
(published by Walker Books)

Guidance

- Please use the session plans below as a guide; you know your children best. For nursery age children, select the activities that are appropriate for their age and stage of development, or use these ideas as inspiration to develop your own plans.
- It is important to respond to children's responses, thoughts, and ideas about the poem. If you do this, you may find the children's observations and ideas take your activities in a different direction to those suggested.
- The suggested activities would be best delivered in small groups, allowing time for all children to think and contribute to discussions. However, if this is not possible, the activities could be adapted to use with a whole class.
- With a little adaptation, this approach to exploring poetry could be applied to other poems.

Session aims

- To become familiar with and enjoy a new poem.
- To observe the environment and consider how it makes them feel.
- To develop listening skills.
- To engage in conversation and express feelings.
- To learn and use new words.
- To use senses to explore different environments.
- To represent ideas through words/drawing/painting.

Curriculum links

These activities link to the following areas of the EYFS curriculum:

- Personal, social, and emotional development
- Communication and language
- Literacy
- Understanding the world
- Expressive art and design

Session 1: Introduce the poem

Resources

Out and About: A First Book of Poems

Starter

Show the children the book and invite them to tell you what they can find out about it from the front and back cover. Listen to their thoughts and ideas before reading the information, such as the title, author, and blurb.

Main activity

Explain that you've chosen one poem in the book to explore together. Read the poem, *The Grass House* by Shirley Hughes, without showing the children the picture.

After reading the poem, gather feedback from the children, and ask the children questions such as What did you think about the poem? How did it make you feel? What do you think a grass house is? Who do you think is saying the words in the poem? What did you like about the poem? Is there anything you didn't like? Share your own thoughts and feelings about the poem to model the kinds of responses the children could make.

With practice, children will become more able to share their thoughts and feelings about poetry. To begin with, they may find it difficult and need you to model answers for them, or offer choices, such as Did it make you feel relaxed or excited?

Read the poem again and explore any unfamiliar words or phrases, such as private, feathery plumes, seeds, weeds, stalks, pods.

Closing activity

Read the poem again, this time while showing the children the picture. Encourage the children to think about how the little girl is feeling. Explain to the children that you will read the poem again tomorrow and think about it some more together.

Session 2: Talking about feelings and using senses

Resources

Poetry book, pieces of long grass, digital image of the illustration, natural outdoor space *and/or* grass/outdoor sounds, Interactive white board

Starter

Read the poem, *The Grass House* by Shirley Hughes. Remind the children of any new vocabulary they learned and invite children to recall what each of the new words meant. Show the children pieces of long grass to support their understanding of *feathery plumes*. If possible, show them the other items, too: seeds, weeds, stalks, pods (use digital images if you are unable to obtain real items).

Main activity

Display the illustration on a large screen so all children can see it clearly. Remind the children how they previously thought the little girl was feeling. Discuss what they think she likes about the grass house and how it makes her feel. Write down the words the children say.

Invite the children to imagine being in the grass house. Ask them to close their eyes as you slowly and quietly read the poem. Ask the children what they could see, hear, feel, and smell. Allow time for all children to share their thoughts.

If possible, go outside to a natural/grassy area and ask the children to find a space to sit down. Explain that you are all going to sit quietly for a few minutes to imagine what it's like being in the grass house. Encourage them to use their senses to explore and observe the environment. Encourage them to look closely at the ground to see if they can spot any insects, feathery plumes, seeds, weeds, stalks, or pods. Alternatively, use YouTube videos and sound effects to enhance their imaginations as they have another go at imagining being in the grass house.

Gather in a group and ask the children to share what they saw, heard, smelled, and felt.

Closing activity

Either gather outside or return to the classroom to read the poem again. Ask the children how they feel about the poem now.

Session 3: Explore and talk about feeling safe/secure

Resources

Poetry book, list of feelings from Session 2, digital image of illustration

Starter

Remind the children of the last session. Display the illustration. Invite the children to recall some of the things they saw, felt, smelled, and heard when they were outside.

Main activity

Ask the children if they think they would like to be in the grass house. List some of the things they would like/not like about being in *The Grass House*. Acknowledge that it's okay for them to have different ideas and feelings about what they do and don't like.

Review the list of feelings from Session 2, recalling how the children think the girl feels when she's in her grass house. Introduce and explore the ideas of feeling safe and content (if they have not naturally arisen). Talk about how your body feels when you feel safe, in contrast to how it might feel if you are worried or frightened (children might find it easier to show you how their bodies would look when feeling these emotions, then you can support them with words to describe, e.g. tense/tight or relaxed/loose/floppy). Invite the children to show you how they might sit and the expressions they would make when they are feeling those contrasting emotions.

Closing activity

Re-read the poem.

Session 4: Special places

Resources

Poetry book, digital image of illustration. Paper and pencils/whiteboard and pens

Starter

Read the poem, *The Grass House* by Shirley Hughes. Recall the discussion about feeling safe and content.

Main activity

Ask the children to have a think about a place where they feel safe and content, point out that not everyone has an outdoor space with a grass house! It could be somewhere at home, upstairs or downstairs, in a bedroom, at Grandma's house, or an area where you like to play or read stories. Include places in the classroom or outdoor area in your suggestions, highlighting quiet/cosy spaces that children may particularly like to spend time in.

Have a quiet moment for children to think, play some calm music. You might choose to give the children paper or a whiteboard to draw their safe place while they're thinking.

Then encourage children to chat to a partner about their special place. If children find it difficult to think of somewhere, consider creating some small spaces/dens in the classroom and outdoor area to support their understanding.

Invite children to tell the group about their special place if they would like to.

Work together to make a list of words to describe how the children feel when they're in their special place; why do they like it?

Closing activity

Explain that you're going to think some more about their special place tomorrow. Suggest that if they are in their special place at home tonight, they could have a think about how it makes them feel, and what they can see, hear, smell, and feel there. (optional) Re-read the poem, *The Grass House* by Shirley Hughes.

Session 5: Prepare for poetry writing

Resources

Poetry book, digital image of illustration, list of feelings from Session 4, x4 large sheets of paper prepared with symbols of senses at the top (eye, ear, nose, hand)

Starter

Recall the last session and explain to the children that you're going to start getting ready to write a poem together.

Main activity

Recall some of the children's special places shared in the last session and some of the things they said about them.

Ask if they remembered to think about their special place at home last night.

Show the children your prepared paper sheets and ask them to tell you what they can see when they're in their special place, for suggestions to add to the list. Go through each of the senses, creating lists of the children's words as they think about their special places.

Create opportunities for all children to contribute, asking direct questions to support individuals where appropriate.

Closing activity

Read all the lists you've made so far, including the feelings list from Session 4. Explain to the children that you're going to write a poem together next time, and that their word lists will help.

Session 6: Write a poem

Resources

Poetry book, digital image of illustration, lists of words from previous sessions.

Starter

Recall the last session (show or read the lists of words) and explain to the children you're going to write a poem together.

Main activity

Explain that you are going to write a poem like *The Grass House* together; except it will use the children's ideas about their special, or safe place. Explain that you will use everyone's ideas, so it will be about all their special places and how they make them feel.

Agree on a title for your poem, such as *The Special Place* or *The Safe Place*. Use the word lists to help you create a poem together. Use the frame of *The Grass House* poem or create your own. For example:

The Special Place

The special place is my ...
In the special place there are ...
And ...
In the special place I feel ...
Only ...
And ...
Know where my special place is.

or

Safe Places

My safe place is ...
When I'm there I feel ...
I can see ... and ...
It smells like ... And ... in my safe place.
Sometimes I hear ... and ...
My safe place is ...

Don't worry about the finished poem being perfect. You could write just one verse or several. Your poem doesn't have to rhyme or make sense; let the children share their ideas and be creative.

Closing activity

Read your poem so far. Decide together whether the poem is finished or whether you want to do some more work on it another day.

Session 7: Introduce the poet, and illustrations

Resources

Poetry book, digital image of illustration, IWB/YouTube videos, sharpened pencils, and watercolour paper

Starter

Read the poem you wrote together.

Main activity

Refer back to the first session when you gathered information from the front cover of the book and see whether the children can remember the information they learnt. Point out the author's name, and explain that Shirley Hughes is a poet, an author, and an illustrator. Watch Shirley Hughes reading the beginning of her story *Dogger*: [Shirley Hughes Reading Dogger - YouTube](#).

Then either draw attention to the drawing and painting materials in the *Dogger* video OR watch Shirley Hughes demonstrating and talking about her illustrations: [1/2 Shirley Hughes - What Do Artists Do All Day? - YouTube](#) Watch 0.00-2.35, 3.55-5.45 & 14.30-15.00.

Explain that the children will be doing their own illustrations of their special place for their poem, in the same style as Shirley Hughes.

Invite children to draw their 'rough' illustrations using pencils on watercolour paper. Before children get started, ask them to remind you where their special place was. Sit alongside children as they draw, supporting them to think carefully about what they are drawing. For example, if they are drawing their bed, encourage them to think if they need to include a teddy or a blanket in their picture.

Closing activity

As children finish their drawings, add annotations to describe where their special place is. For example, *My special place is Mummy's lap*. *My special place is my playhouse*.

Session 8: Watercolour illustrations

Resources

Poetry book, digital image of illustration, watercolour paints, brushes, and paper (or alternative materials for adding colour to drawings)

Starter

Share the children's illustrations so far with the group.

Main activity

Remind the children that Shirley Hughes added colour to her finished drawings. Explain that you are going to use watercolour paints to finish the illustrations you have started.

If the children have not used watercolour paints before (or recently), demonstrate how to use them. Repeat the process of washing and wiping your brush and adding paint to it before painting on the paper. If you are using an alternative medium, introduce or re-introduce it to the children in a similar way.

Talk to the children about trying to make their illustrations look realistic like Shirley Hughes ones do (share some of her other illustrations in the poetry book as a reminder). and encourage them to think carefully about the colours they use.

Provide children with a practice paper to experiment with the watercolour paints while you support them, before they add colour to their illustrations.

Closing activity

When the children have finished their paintings, invite them to come and look at each other's work as you read their poem. Explain that you will display their poems and illustrations on the wall or make them into a book.

What next?

It's up to you...

- If the children have worked in groups, you could plan an opportunity to share their poems and illustrations with one another.
- Find a way of supporting the children to share their work with parents.
- The children may decide to write another verse, or a poem about something else.
- You may choose to take some of the children's other ideas and questions to further explore the poem and its contents, for example learning more about their senses, or the creatures they spotted outside.
- You could explore musical instruments and sound-makers, to find some that could represent *The Grass House* or the children's own poems.
- You might decide you'd like to explore some of Shirley Hughes' other poems and stories, or those of another poet.
- Maybe you'll select one poem a month to explore in more depth.
- **Whatever you decide, do give some thought as to how you can introduce the children to more poetry, and incorporate it into your daily routines and planning.**

***The Reading Framework* (DfE, July 2023) highlights the importance of poetry in the reception and year 1 classroom:**

'Through enjoying rhymes, poems and songs, and reciting poems or parts of longer poems together as a class, teachers can build children's strong emotional connection to language.'

'Poetry in language-rich classrooms builds shared memories for all children.'