



# NATIONAL POETRY DAY

## 4TH OCTOBER 2018

### Key stage 3/4

## Effecting change by inspiration

**A National Poetry Day  
resource created by  
Shakespeare Schools  
Foundation**



**SSF** is a cultural education charity that exists to instil curiosity and empathy, aspiration and self-esteem, literacy and teamwork - giving young people the confidence to see that all the world is their stage.

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

Once more unto the breach, dear friends,  
once more;  
Or close the wall up with our English dead.  
In peace there's nothing so becomes a man  
As modest stillness and humility:  
But when the blast of war blows in our ears,  
Then imitate the action of the tiger;  
Stiffen the sinews, summon up the blood,  
Disguise fair nature with hard-favour'd rage;  
Then lend the eye a terrible aspect;  
Let pry through the portage of the head  
Like the brass cannon; let the brow o'erwhelm it  
As fearfully as doth a galled rock  
O'erhang and jutty his confounded base,  
Swill'd with the wild and wasteful ocean.  
Now set the teeth and stretch the nostril wide,  
Hold hard the breath and bend up every spirit  
To his full height. On, on, you noblest English.

Whose blood is fet from fathers of war-proof!  
Fathers that, like so many Alexanders,  
Have in these parts from morn till even fought  
And sheathed their swords for lack of argument:  
Dishonour not your mothers; now attest  
That those whom you call'd fathers did beget you.  
Be copy now to men of grosser blood,  
And teach them how to war. And you, good yeoman,  
Whose limbs were made in England, show us here  
The mettle of your pasture; let us swear  
That you are worth your breeding; which I doubt not;  
For there is none of you so mean and base,  
That hath not noble lustre in your eyes.  
I see you stand like greyhounds in the slips,  
Straining upon the start. The game's afoot:  
Follow your spirit, and upon this charge  
Cry 'God for Harry, England, and Saint George!'

William Shakespeare, *Henry V*

## Starter Activity

Watch the video clip [HERE](#) which includes an active demonstration of iambic pentameter and includes embedded call and response activities involving Shakespearean and non-Shakespearean iambic pentameter lines

## Starter Activity 2

Ask pupils to create their own iambic pentameter conversations about what they did at the weekend or what plans they have for the week (for example).

E.g. *I'm going to see my brother play football  
Oh that sounds nice. Can I come with you too?*

Listen back to some of the exchanges.

### Next steps - investigating an iambic line

Ask ten students to stand in a line, and give them one word each to say aloud:

- *We - stress - the - words - we - want - the - world - to - hear.*

Ask them to deliver the line, one word after the other. Next ask the odd numbered people to say their word loudly and strongly, with a stamp of the foot. Tell the even numbers people to remain neutral.

The result is:

- *WE-stress-THE-words-WE-want-THE-world-TO-hear*  
Pupils will notice that it just doesn't 'sound right' But if we reverse the stresses so the even numbered people stamp and the odds remain neutral, it becomes
- *we-STRESS-the-WORDS-we-WANT-the-WORLD-to-HEAR*

Your pupils now understand iambic pentameter! Ten syllables, with the stress falling on alternate syllables:

- *De DUM de DUM de DUM de DUM de DUM*

Pupils should be wary of using a sing-song rhythm, as it won't sound natural. In fact, there are an infinite number of choices available for verse speaking with iambic pentameter.

### Next steps - adding drama and performance to iambic lines

Using the abridged version of the 'Once More Unto the Breach' monologue, cut up and distribute the lines to small groups of up to six pupils, so that the entire abridged speech is divided up between the whole class.

Ask pupils to follow these instructions. It may be helpful to feed this information to pupils in stages. A whole class discussion would be useful after the first instruction, for example.

- First, investigate the line to see if it is a regular iambic line with ten beats. Does it follow the stressed/unstressed pattern - or is the stress placed on different syllables than a regular iambic line? For example, the line **Stiffen the sinews, Summon up the blood** is ten beats long but it would sound strange if it was spoken as **StiffEN the SINews**. It's clear that the first syllable should be stressed to really get the attention of Henry's audience at this point in the speech. Get feedback from groups as to whether their line is truly iambic. (Note - if the line starts with

a reversed stress as with **Stiffen the Sinews...** this is called a trochee)

- Encourage groups of pupils to play with the way they will speak their line. Suggest they try to avoid using a sing-song rhythm. Tell each group to pick one word from the line to stress and then choose a gesture for the stressed word to add an element of physical performance. Ask pupils to really think about the meaning of the line they are speaking before choosing their most important word for stress/gesture
- Discuss other effects that can vary rhythm in a line besides stressing, such as adding in a pause, speeding up/slowing down, raising/lowering volume etc.
- Give pupils time to rehearse their performance of their line. They may choose to recite in unison, or may divide the line up so that e.g. pairs of pupils speak separately. Some pupils might not speak at all - but may be responsible for the gesture that accompanies a particular word
- Watch back the performances individually and spotlight the different choices after each performance, discussing the effect each one has on the meaning of the line and on our interpretation of the character speaking. If necessary, give pupils time to refine their performances
- Finally - watch back all of the performances in succession, so that you get the entire (abridged) speech. Discuss the effect. Was it rousing? How would pupils feel if they were Henry's followers?



## Further ideas for classroom use

- Pupils could learn the entire monologue in either its abridged or full form, and perform individually
- Search online for different filmed interpretations of this speech. It's easy to find versions performed by Kenneth Branagh, Tom Hiddleston and Laurence Olivier – amongst others. Discuss the different versions and the intended effect on the audience
- Can pupils write their own inspirational rally cry in the form of a poem? It doesn't need to be a call to war: it could anything from a rally cry to inspire a football team or an ensemble of actors before a performance. As an extra challenge, can they write their own composition in iambic pentameter?

## Abridged version of the speech for distribution to small groups

Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more;  
Or close the wall up with our English dead.  
In peace there's nothing so becomes a man  
As modest stillness and humility:  
But when the blast of war blows in our ears,  
Then imitate the action of the tiger;  
Stiffen the sinews, summon up the blood,  
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William Shakespeare, *Henry V*  
(abridged)

