

A POEM DEVELOPS OVER STAGES

you will need to revise it ~~and it better~~,
POLISH IT, make it better,
~~and make it better~~

make it ~~before~~ ^{INTO} the shiny spirit of your IDEA.
AND MAKING.

**Create a classroom
of poets**

A resource for Key Stage Two teachers from the British Library

Practice makes perfect

This booklet is full of ideas to help turn all your pupils into poets.

Explore the creative drafts and notebooks of some of our favourite poets, and find more activity ideas at bl.uk/childrens-poetry

Share this note by James Berry with your pupils by visiting bl.uk/berry-note

Highlight the image of putting effort in to make something shine by using a visual example like a pair of shoes and a cloth to polish them with.

Poets experiment with words and every syllable is important. So even after poems are written, poets go back again (and again) to revise and make them better. The changes poets make can be tiny – even one word can make a difference.

Look at Roald Dahl's draft poems for *Revoltin' Rhymes*. Note all his crossings out and his 'no good' message. Even famous poets sometimes need to start over again, so we're in great company when things go wrong!

bl.uk/dahl-drafts



We caught up with Michael Rosen to get his top tips for poetry perfection

What advice would you give today's aspiring young poets?

First and foremost you must, must, must read loads. You really must.

If you would like to write poems, read, read, read loads of poems. Get the sound of them in your ear. Listen out for bits of lines that you like. Ask yourself why you like them. What's good about them?

Then my other advice is to keep a notebook. You must scribble down ideas and things you hear that you think are interesting.

Do you make mistakes, experiment or make radical changes to early drafts?

I make hundreds of 'mistakes' – really they are just trying something out. I do make plenty of changes and I listen carefully to what experienced editors tell me. I've had some great editors in the last few years who've got me to cut stuff, change things round, write new scenes, stop repeating myself – and lots more. It's really helpful.

Find out more about what influences Michael's work at bl.uk/rosen-interview



Make a poetry notebook

1. Each child will need at least three pieces of paper, one piece of card, plus a pair of scissors and some ribbon or string.



2. Stack the paper with the card on top.

3. Fold it all in half. It doesn't have to be neat. Remember these are the children's own notebooks for trying things out.



4. Cut enough ribbon to fit around the book plus a bit extra for tying.



5. Pass the ribbon through the centre of the book and tie it on the outside.



6. Children could use colours, collage and cutting out to create a cover that will remind them to see the world like a poet. Perhaps some special glasses or a magical window. How about a shiny cover to remind them of James Berry's idea of polishing their poems?



Take a peek at John Agard's notebook

bl.uk/agard-drafts

Poetry is a way of recording your thoughts in your own unique voice. John carries a small notebook around so he can always jot down and remember ideas.

Noting the images and words that appear in your imagination is the first step in creating a poem. Highlight the imperfections of John's notebook writing compared to the published pages at the end, and note the way he writes phonetically.

Challenge the class to record their own thoughts by writing in their poetry notebooks every day. Give a daily poetry prompt to encourage this, like these ones below:

- fill a whole page with happy, fast or quiet words
- describe your journey to school, using all your senses
- write down as many colloquial words as you can, then see if you can make a poem that incorporates them all.

Happy

Cheerful
Glad
Joyful
Merry
Chipper
Gleeful
Jolly
Tickled pink
Delighted

Fast

Quick
Nimble
Rapid
Flying
Racing
Snappy
Swift
Brisk
Lickety split

Quiet

Muted
Peaceful
Soft
Silent
Hush
Mute
Soundless
Muffled
Noiseless

Doodles and drawing

Edward Lear's nonsense manuscript is bursting with brilliant drawings as well as funny poems, a nonsense alphabet and an animal tale. There are curious creatures from talking guinea pigs to a cow jumping over the moon.

bl.uk/lear-nonsense

Drawing can help us think about, feel and understand poetry, as well as illustrating it for others.

Ask your pupils to try doodling in their notebook while you read out a poem. They could draw pictures, or perhaps just use lines, shapes and colours to reflect the poem's changing mood and ideas.

Ask the children what their images reveal about the power of the poem. Could they write their own lines of verse inspired by their drawings?

Now ask the children to make simple drawings to illustrate one of their own poems, or swap with a partner and illustrate each other's work. Do the pictures give them any new ideas for words to add or change?



Illustration: Edward Lear's 'nonsense' manuscript, 1865 © Estate of Edward Lear. Public domain in most countries other than the UK.

Poetry prompts from Joseph Coelho

Show your pupils the wonderful *History of an Apple Pie*
bl.uk/apple-pie

This is a brilliant example of a form of poetry called an abecedarius (or an alphabet poem). Quite simply it is a 26-line poem with each line starting with a new letter of the alphabet.

The genius of *The History of an Apple Pie* is that it focuses the whole poem on an apple pie and the various characters that interact with it. Notice also how every sentence ends with 'it', providing a sort of repetitive rhyme and expectation as we move through the poem.



Joseph Coelho's alphabet poems

Challenge your pupils to write their own abecedarius based around an item of food of their choosing. Maybe it's a cupcake, or perhaps a cup of tea.

Just like *The History of an Apple Pie*, ask them to think about who has interacted with this item of food. Will you start with its creation? If so, who made it? If it's a vegetable, where was it grown? Maybe you follow the food all the way through the process of being eaten and digested.

The important thing is for your pupils to have fun and to be as imaginative or as zany as they like. Maybe they will follow the example of *The History of an Apple Pie* and simply show us the characters that come into contact with the food. Maybe they'll end every sentence with the same word, or maybe they'll make it rhyme with different words.

Take note of the lists of rhyming words further into *The History of an Apple Pie*. Could the children use some of these words to make their abecedarius rhyme?

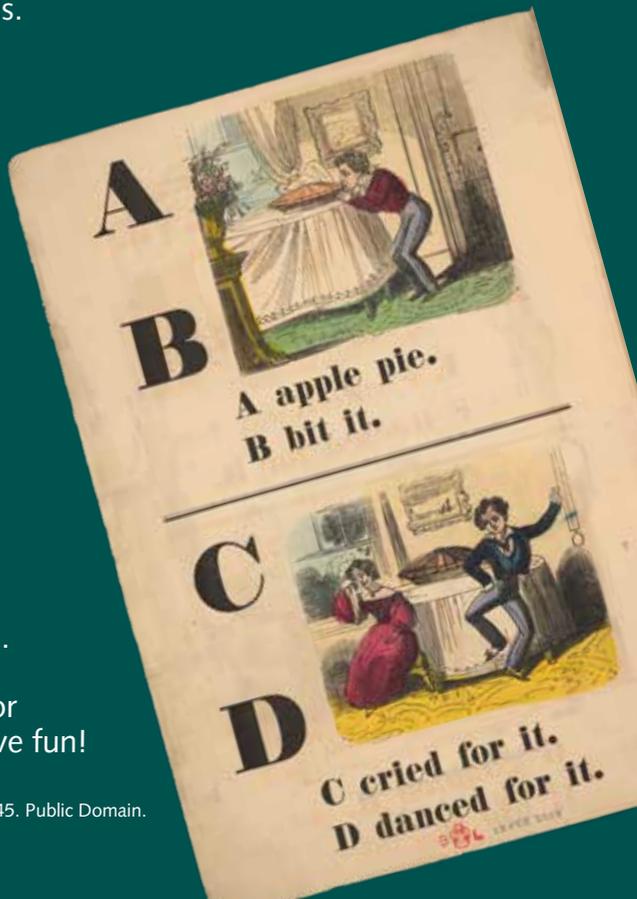
Maybe they'll make every other line rhyme like this...

The History of a Cheese Sandwich

- A** ate a bit of it
- B** bawled for a crumb
- C** cried for a tiny bit
- D** dented it with his thumb...

Remember there is no right or wrong way to do it – just have fun!

The History of an Apple Pie; written by Z., c. 1845. Public Domain.



Work that poem

Writing is a process and a poem will get better and better the more you work it. Ask your pupils to take a poem they have already written, get hold of a different coloured pen and start to:

- delete any words they don't like
- try to swap three words for alternatives they have found in a thesaurus
- have a go at adding some more describing words
- see if they can change the order of any words.

Discover more of Joseph's ideas to inspire poetry at bl.uk/poetry-prompts

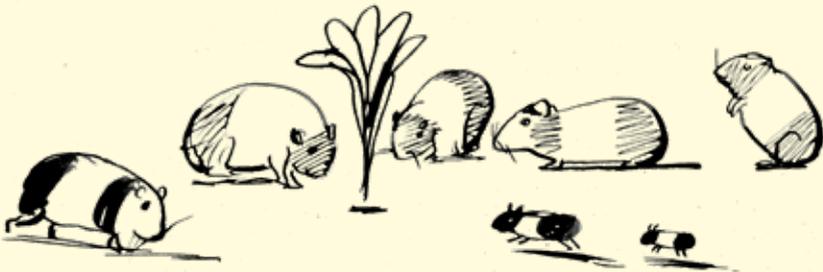
Poems are to be heard as well as seen

Your pupils can watch Joseph performing some of his own poems, and find out more about how he writes them, at bl.uk/coelho-interview

Look at *Break/Dance* by Grace Nichols at bl.uk/nichols-drafts

Rather than read it out, ask the class how they think it should be said aloud. What pitch, tempo, volume, rhythm and so on?

Model pupils' suggestions and encourage volunteers to perform their line readings. Add a request for movements that could help convey the meaning of words. Get the whole class on their feet and continue with one pupil giving a suggestion, then the whole class copying. You could now divide the poem so every child has one line and have a celebratory group performance. Pupils could also work on a performed version of a poem in their notebooks.



Additional activities by Laura Bridges and the British Library

Find more ideas and resources to inspire a love of reading and writing by visiting our free *Discovering Children's Books* website bl.uk/childrens-books

 [@BL_Learning](https://twitter.com/BL_Learning)

Cover image: Manuscript note by James Berry c.1995 © Estate of James Berry. You may not use the material for commercial purposes. Please credit the copyright holder when reusing this work.



The
GOLDSMITHS'
Company

The Steel Charitable Trust