

Poems about CHOICE: a resource for teachers and librarians

The theme for National Poetry Day 2021 is CHOICE. If you work with young people and you're looking for ways to learn and play with poetry on the theme of CHOICE, then read on!

TROIKA is a small, independent children's publisher that's keen, eager and enthusiastic about poetry! So, we invited ten of our poets to work together on a small collection of poems exploring CHOICE in a variety of ways.

READ, WATCH & LISTEN

You'll find our ten CHOICE poems on pages 2 to 11.

You can also watch and listen to our poets perform each of the poems in a short video at www.troikabooks.com/blog/choice

THE POEMS

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On pages 12 to 15 you'll find a raft, a bunch, a ckuster of ideas for using our ten CHOICE poems in all kinds of different ways (a choice of ways, if you like). These ideas are aimed at teachers, librarians, parents and anyone looking to engage with young people and poetry.

And, if you'd like to find out more about our poets and their books, page 16 is the place to go.

We hope you enjoy these poems and ideas!

WHAT TO WEAR?

Neal Zetter

I won't wear a wizard outfit, wand and black moustache
I won't wear a blonde wig as I'd look completely daft
I won't wear a monster suit with googly eyes
I won't wear a cape (unless it helps me to fly)
I won't wear the whiskers, tail and claws of a cat
I won't wear a ten-gallon cowboy hat
I won't wear a leotard or a long white nightie
I won't wear a pirate's beard that's prickly and spiky
I won't wear armour as it's sure to rust and creak
I won't wear a clown nose and big floppy feet
I won't wear the costume of a giant bumble bee
'Cause at your fancy dress party I'll be going as...
Me!



WHO IS YOUR FAVOURITE COLOUR?

Ed Boxall



Is it that wizard White,
Made of glistening icy light?
Is it that hero Red,
From the neon city night?
Is your favourite the fairy Green,
Running lightly over leaves?
Or dreamy dragon Pink,
Made of soft evening breeze?
Is it the traveller Grey?
Treading wearily through the rain?
Or maybe mother Yellow,
Saying 'Hello, Home Again!'
Could it be clown Orange,
Who refuses to rhyme?
Or the silent spirit-bird Blue,
From beyond space and time?



TEN MINUTE POEM

Zaro Weil

there are only ten minutes left to go
should I get up and get ready to leave now
or should I keep doing this for nine minutes more
or climb a tree in eight minutes
or bake a cake in seven minutes
or write a book in six minutes
or make an important scientific discovery
during the next five minutes
or compose a symphony in four minutes
or save my country in three minutes
or circumnavigate the globe in two minutes
or explore the milky way in one minute
or or or or or



BELL RINGS
Trevor Millum

bell rings
voice calls
radio gives time
diesel powered vehicle arrives
vehicle halts
bell rings
bell rings
your name is called
bell rings
bell rings
bell rings
bell rings
bell rings
bell rings
rings rings

vehicle halts
it stops
voice speaks
voice shouts
radio sings
tv says time
set clock
it ticks

you rise
you eat
you leave
you board
you walk
you enter
you sit
you speak
you move
you move
you eat
you sit
you stand
you jump

you queue
you board
you walk
you nod
you answer you eat
you listen
you move

you sleep
and dream you really not
machine

INSTEAD
Brian Moses



Instead of an X-box
please show me a pathway that stretches to the stars.

Instead of a mobile phone
please teach me the language I need to help me speak with angels.

Instead of a computer
please reveal to me the mathematics of meteors and motion.

Instead of the latest computer game
please come with me on a search for dragons in the wood behind our house.

Instead of an e-reader
please read to me from a book of ancient knowledge.

Instead of a digital camera
please help me remember faces and places, mystery and moonbeams.

Instead of a 3D TV
please take me to an empty world that I can people with my imagination.

Instead of electronic wizardry
please show me how to navigate the wisdom inside of me.



BEST FRIENDS
Bernard Young

Would a best friend
Eat your last sweet
Talk about you behind your back
Have a party and not ask you?

Mine did.

Would a best friend
Borrow your bike without telling you
Deliberately forget your birthday
Avoid you whenever possible?

Mine did.

Would a best friend
Turn up on your bike
Give you a whole packet of your favourite sweets
Look you in the eye?

Mine did.

Would a best friend say
Sorry I talked about you behind your back
Sorry I had a party and didn't invite you
Sorry I deliberately forgot your birthday
- I thought you'd fallen out with me?

Mine did.

And would a best friend say, simply,
Never mind
That's OK?

I did.



BEST WEEK EVER
Sue Hardy-Dawson

On Monday
in the clouds I saw
a polar bear king
ride a glittering horse
across a cornflower sky
on a flock of crimson leaves.

On Tuesday
among flowers I saw
a fat bumble bee
dusty with pollen gold
and heard the dry sigh
of wind in the old oak tree.

On Wednesday
by the path I saw
a pearl-pale worm
in a puddle's pool
left it safe and dry
~~after a slight detour~~ - on the way back from PE

On Thursday
on the glass I saw
two giant raindrops
and watched them race
they took a long time
in fact, almost, all of DT

On Friday
Mrs Greenwood saw
'Not much maths...no story!'
She said something about
MAKING BETTER CHOICES?
well FYI - this week - I've peaked.



THIS TREE AND ME

Dom Conlon

This tree and me are here to see
the rivers and the sky,
but as the distant diggers work
I hear the wildlife cry

as they are driven from their home
so track and road might grow –
with city spread and climate change
they've nowhere else to go.

With fewer places now in town
where I can run and play,
this tree and me are here to see...
but I can walk away.



FATHER'S DAY

Shauna Darling Robertson

He said he would definitely come
so I sit - or I stand - and I wait.
I trust in him (smart move or dumb?)

Last Tuesday I overheard Mum
on the phone to him, saying the date.
He said he would definitely come.

I'm sure when does we'll have fun
and I'm certain he's just running late.
I trust in him (smart move or dumb?)

On some days I feel almost numb
and then sometimes I get in a state -
He SAID so! He PROMISED he'd come!

Outside, feeling lost, I chew gum
and fix both my eyes on the gate,
still trusting him (smart move or dumb?)

Come on, love, let's head out, says Mum.

I say, No thanks I'd far rather stay.
He loves me. I'm sure that he'll come.
I trust in him. (Smart move? Or dumb?)



MARINER
Coral Rumble

The gulls circle, screaming,
And I am lost in the echo and
the hollow of the sound.
The beach is deserted,
The weather is turning
Like Grandad predicted,
As he sniffed at the air
And tethered his boat firmly.

One more week and I'll be home,
Walking down sheltered alleyways
Between tall buildings,
Past the iron gates that shield
The school where my screaming
Rang too loud for teachers,
Where the storms in my head
Shipwrecked me to suspension.

Grandad wrinkles his face into a smile,
As he suggests a mug of tea
In the shelter of the Pavilion,
Away from the air, thick with raindrops.
I know he will sail his questions
Gently towards me, always a wise mariner,
Until I am sure, in my own mind,
Whether I should live with Mum or Dad.

IDEAS FOR TEACHING, SHARING & CREATIVE PLAY

On the next few pages you'll find a bunch of ideas for using our **CHOICE** poems in different ways... reading aloud, performing, thinking and reflecting, sharing and discussing, writing and getting arty. Poetry offers lots of possibilities for learning and play, and our ten poems cover a variety of subjects and styles.

You might like to work with the collection as a whole or you may prefer to pick and choose one or two poems to focus on.

How you introduce a poem to children for the first time can make a real difference to how they engage with it. Will you start by reading the poem aloud to them (maybe more than once)? Or will you play the video of the poet performing the poem? Or give them the poem to read in print first? How about mixing it up and seeing how the children react and respond to different approaches?

The ideas offered here are based on our specific collection of poems, but many of them can be adapted to use with other poems too.

Do encourage children to find their own poems that involve choices and, of course, to write and perform their own.

P.S. Our poets would love their poems to be enjoyed and explored - but not analysed!

OUT LOUD

Many of our poems will work well performed or simply read aloud. Where a poem is to be read by children taking a line each, it's relatively easy for the poem to be learned off by heart and this makes for a better performance.

What to Wear? could be read by twelve children taking a line at a time or by two children reading alternate lines.

Who Is Your Favourite Colour? Again, this could be performed by eight children or by two children alternating. For a simple performance, find pieces of coloured A4 card to match those of the poem. Each pupil will hold theirs and raise it above their head when they've said their line. For extra interest, ask children to bring in objects of those colours.

Bell Rings could be a poem for two voices and should be spoken in mechanical emotionless tones, for example like a Dalek and a zombie!

Instead also lends itself to two voices.

All of the other poems can be read aloud or performed, of course, but would probably be best undertaken by individuals with some practice and guidance, especially on tone, speed and the use of pauses. A word on memorising poems - it's a useful skill, but in this case, if children forget a word or a line, why not encourage them to choose to improvise!

IN ACTION

If you have access to puppets, why not use these in small groups for children to act out what's happening in *Father's Day*. Because of the emotions involved here and the situations which will resonate with strongly with some children, puppets are a good way for them to explore challenging feelings and choices with a bit of distance.

Some children may wish to create their own dramatic representations of this and other poems. You may find that mime is more effective than dialogue. *Mariner* would be a poem that would benefit from such an approach.

Younger children can have fun acting out *Ten Minute Poem*, getting faster as time runs out.

IN WRITING: POEMS

Best Friends can be used as a template for writing new versions, perhaps with shorter / fewer verses, like this:

Would a best friend

.....

.....?

Mine did.

Similarly, *Best Week Ever* could simply be *My Week*: with good things followed by a bad thing, or (perhaps better) vice versa, e.g. boring / ordinary happenings followed by something exciting. Or, as in *Best Week Ever*, simply the things that we, as individuals, happen (or choose) to notice. It doesn't even have to be real – anything can happen...

On Monday, - - - - -
- - - - -
- - - - -

ending with:

BUT on Friday, - - - - -
- - - - -
- - - - -

Ten Minute Poem can also provide a pattern for writing. It would be a good basis for a group poem or a whole class collaboration. Notice how, in the poem, the things the poet might choose to do in a short amount of time get more and more unlikely. Your poem could do the same or take the opposite approach, gradually coming down to reality.

Instead: rather than taking the poem as a template, ask children to think of other mechanical or everyday items which could be replaced by something imaginary. They will need a few examples to get them going, such as:

Instead of a hair dryer, send me a warm breeze from the tropics.

Instead of bicycle, show me a magic carpet made of all the colours of the rainbow.

Children write their ideas down on small pieces of paper, each idea on a separate piece. There's no need to know who wrote each one. Gather them in and read out a few. Later, when you have time, combine them (or as many as is feasible) into one long poem – a kind of manifesto of an imaginary world the children would choose to live in.

IN PICTURES

Ask children to make a pictorial representation of what is going on in **This Tree and Me**. According to availability, they could use pencil, crayons, paint or appropriate software to create a single picture, a strip cartoon, a collage...

They could also draw a cartoon version of **Bell Rings** or **Ten Minute Poem**.

Ask children to draw an appropriate emoji for each verse of **Father's Day**.

In **Who Is Your Favourite Colour?** the colours come to life as characters. Ask children to choose a colour and paint how they see that colour's character: what is the colour doing? How does it feel? Later, look at all of the pictures and invite the children to notice how we each see a colour in different ways. Is this a choice we make?

IN WRITING: PROSE

Having read **Father's Day** a couple of times, ask children to write a few lines from the point of view of the father. Did he come? Why was he late? If he didn't come, how does he feel; how does he explain himself? Alternatively, what might Mum say to a friend afterwards?

What is the story behind **Mariner**? This could be written in the third person, taking a dispassionate view, or from the point of view of the child, or the parents, or the Grandad.

In **Best Friends**, one friend chooses to apologise after a misunderstanding and the other to forgive. Ask children to imagine they are a reporter interviewing the two friends and to write down the answers. They might ask the friends what led to the misunderstanding, how did it feel when they fell out, and why did they chose to make up?

Thinking about **Bell Rings**, what if, for one day, everyone chose to ignore all of the sounds and signals that we usually respond to (school bells, alarm clocks, traffic lights, fire alarms – and more). Ask that children to write a few lines about that day.

IN CONVERSATION

Choice can be a sensitive topic but it can also be a fertile starting point for a wide variety of discussions. Children can be invited to describe a choice they have made that they are willing to share. It could be trivial or serious. This is a good opportunity for the teacher to share first – anything from 'I chose to become a teacher' to 'why I chose what I'm wearing today'.

In **This Tree and Me**, what choices made by humans have led to 'wildlife crying'? What choices could we make individually and collectively to stop other creatures being 'driven from their home'?

In **Best Week Ever**, the poet notices details of the natural world while ignoring her teacher and her lessons. Ask the children to discuss why this might be a bad choice, and why it might be a good one.

Thinking of the poem **Instead**, ask children: if you could change any one thing right now and swap it for something else instead, what would you choose?

Looking at all the poems, ask children to come up with any 'differences' they can spot. Start them off with 'Some rhyme, some don't'. (Some are in verses/free form; short/long lines; serious/light; realistic/fantastic...)

FINALLY - FOR FUN

Can children solve this clue?

If you 'see' inside choice,

What do you get that's rather nice?

(Answer: CHO-C-ICE = choc-ice!)

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This resource was created for Troika by Trevor Millum, Shauna Darling Robertson and Dom Conlon.

For more resources like this, visit www.troikabooks.com/resources

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