

WINDOWS WORKSHOPS

a handbook

The cover shows poems from **Sensational Poetry** displayed on hands, mouths, eyes, noses and ears cut from coloured card and hung as mobiles; the painting of an ear (one of six senses) was created from individual sections based on the poems.

The Windows Project

Readers are advised to visit the Windows Project online at www.windowproject.demon.co.uk for updates to this book and new material

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Windows Workshops © Dave Calder, The Windows Project 1996,1997

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The Windows Workshop Pack originally consisted of a continually updated compilation of workshop sheets. The sheets documented each game as it was first played, though some were originally booklets and others were revised on reprint. They provided basic details, ideas and examples of work. The children's work shown on the sheets was selected to be representative, both of ability and style, rather than exemplary.

This book includes most of the games from the workshop sheets with some recent creations, and additionally suggests variations and discusses working methods and problems. Where a game uses a worksheet, an image of it is shown and a photocopyable sheet will be found in the complimentary worksheets file. A book of the related children's work will be published separately.

Since new games or variations have been and are constantly being developed by many of the writers now involved with the Project, this book will soon cease to include all the Project's games. However, it is hoped that it will provide a guide to many that have been well tried and tested and that its general information will be of continuing use.

The games, arranged in four sections, are discussed with their uses, variations and place in developing skills. A final section looks at specific aspects of their use in school and community, briefly answering those questions which have been most commonly raised over the years.

Although the games described in this book were created either by myself or Dave Ward, we would like to thank the many writers who have worked with the Windows Project who have contributed their individual skills to the playing and development of them.

Dave Calder

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About the Windows Project

The games were invented for the Windows Project. The Project was founded in 1976 to "diffuse knowledge and appreciation of language as a creative medium... to improve skills in language ... for those who have need of it by reason of youth age infirmity or social or economic conditions." Although the Project has worked widely within these categories, the games have usually been designed originally to be sufficiently interesting and accessible for use in playschemes or youth clubs and then adapted to suit different environments and specific users.

In CITY OF POEMS, a report on the Project's work to 1978, Dave Ward explained the reasons for our approach and went on to explain how the Project began to work in the playscheme environment:

In summer 1976 Merseyside Play Action Council invited a group of poets to run poetry workshops in the Bronte Centre and then Rice Lane Playscheme. First we had to decide the best way of introducing the traditionally delicate and thoughtful art of poetry into the traditionally boisterous and fast-moving atmosphere of the Bronte Centre - a purpose built youth and community centre near the Bull Ring tenements in the centre of Liverpool. The Bronte Centre has one main activities room on the first floor - filled with table tennis, swings, nets, and as many opportunities for large numbers of children to let off steam as possible. There is also one smaller room next to the main one. We decided it made most sense to run the workshops in there, with less chance of distractions such as tables and chairs getting knocked over in the general pell-mell. We then had to think of a way to make that room somewhere the children would still want to go. We decided not to make it so totally different from the main room that they would never come in - so we offered them another game. The game became known as the Amazing Push-Poem Machine...

The format at the Bronte had already evolved from work at Great Georges Community Cultural Project (the Blackie):

using a smaller, quieter room with a controlled flow of a smaller number of children;
introducing the unfamiliar (poetry) through the familiar (a game that involves a mixture of skill and chance);
always making sure the children work to the highest possible standards they themselves are capable of;
encouraging them to do so by providing good quality materials to work with;
making the games they play at the beginning as attractive as possible, even though they may be built from scrap material. (The boxes in the Amazing Push-Poem Machine were old beer crates).

This format, together with the idea of taking poems and turning them into something other than books: - badges, posters, food, etc., has become a basis for Windows work in other centres since then - with continuing developments and adaptations.

Among these developments was the extension of the Project's workshops into more formal environments - schools, libraries, day centres, hospitals, etc., where the larger numbers or specialist needs very quickly led to variations in the existing games, and development of others. But wherever the workshop is held, whether open field, gym, storeroom or classroom, something can always be achieved so long as the game is not wholly inappropriate and there is sufficient energy and supervision.

The workshops are the most important part of the work of the Windows Project - it runs about 600 workshops each year. Its other activities include the provision of poetry advice desks, usually in libraries, the co-ordination of writers' tours and events and poetry publications including Smoke magazine.

About the games

Games do not simply provide an amusing introduction; they act as a focus, setting limits to assist concentration; they provide opportunities for discussion about the subject or form; and in some cases are directly instructive.

The games should be seen more as ideas, which can be given a form to suit circumstances. The game is only a vehicle that moves the player towards the poem.

It is important to realise that these games and the writing they lead to contain as many problems for adults (whose expectations are higher or more rigid) as for children, and are best presented as fun and recreation rather than taken over-seriously. After all, however people are encouraged to write, whatever the starting point, the real purpose is to develop pleasure and confidence in writing, the real game is the poem, which although often hard to play, is enjoyable and engrossing.

The workshop games cover a wide range and many can be played in different ways or to different ends; for ease of access I have arranged them in four groups:

- 1 Simple starts - games that encourage language play, agility with words.
- 2 Basic craft - games directed to one particular form or aspect of poetry writing, including rhythm, rhyme and figurative language.
- 3 Dialogue - inner and outer. Games directed to recall of incident and emotion, to the search for significant detail and precise description, to encouragement of the poet's own voice.
- 4 Invention - a wide range of theme-based games, not wholly fantasy or nonsense, to stimulate playful thinking and the ability to connect.

The games were devised over many games and workshops. largely to introduce skills or ways of thinking about writing that we, as writers, noticed were lacking and felt were necessary to assist in the making of poems. For this reason the games are independent of each other, but a step-by-step programme would need one or two Simple Starts, most of the Basic Craft, and then at least How Do You See Yourself, Where We're At and What Do You Think You're Doing from Dialogue and several Inventions.

Simple starts - chance, co-operation, choice

Since words are the basic material of poems the first games we devised were ones that used words much as infants use building blocks. Although simple, they help develop vocabulary recall and selection: the ability to find and choose words, to consider which word suits the sentence and sense better than another, is fundamental to poetry.

The games are fairly similar, in that the players acquire or use one letter at a time to develop a group or individual work built one word after another, though some are more suited to large groups and others to individual play. For example: a session with the Springboard had over 150 contributing players one wet afternoon in Netherley - a Shoveha'penny session could have involved only perhaps 30 of them. Perhaps the most flexible of all has been the card game version of the Amazing Push Poem Machine.

The games adapt themselves to the ability of the players - versions have been enjoyed by infants and elderly; psychiatric patients and regional arts officers, young offenders and teachers alike. They are all suitable for use in "exposed situations" and the larger versions can be treated as high-energy, busked-up fairground games, though the quality of the work usually improves if pressure is reduced.

In all these games the "scribe" is very important in assisting all age/ ability groups to produce coherent work and to explore the possibilities of the game and the poem in play. A theme, or at least a general idea of subject, will usually emerge after the first few words, if it has not been previously agreed. When it does, the scribe should point it out and get the players to agree on what they are writing about and then help them to maintain the subject, though like all poems the work may grow in unforeseen directions. A firm grip needs to be kept on the sense and basic grammar, but the scribe should also point out the results of differing punctuations and help players to avoid dead-ends, unworkable situations.

The scribe should continually read out the work so far, to keep players involved and concentrating, to give a sense of the rhythm of the piece, and to keep the subject and development of the work clear. In an open situation the work should be recorded in a highly visible way - on a blackboard or large sheet of paper - to emphasise the continuing process.

Co-operation should be encouraged between players, especially in the last round of the card game, since the work will benefit from well-thought-out sentences. The scribe should also encourage the use of adjectives and adverbs, as these will often solve or pass on difficulties and make the work richer and more fluid.

These games can be made from anything - cardboard boxes, half-postcards, toilet rolls, or simply chalked on the floor, drawn on paper - but any structure that balls are to be thrown at must be stable and sturdy. I would suggest that you leave out the letters Z and V or Y, that you treat X as EX and Q as ? (free choice).

Amazing Push Poem Machine

The original Amazing PushPoem Machine was a fairground-style game in which each player threw a football up a ramp so that it bounced into one of 24 lettered boxes. As the players chose words beginning with the letters they had won, these were stenciled in colour on large sheets of paper

For the card game the worksheet should be copied twice to provide a double alphabet pack of 48 cards and enlarged if wished to provide a different size of playing card. The pack can of course be varied to provide more "easy" letters. Q is normally treated as "?" (free choice) and X as "ex" or "ecs".

There are many games and variations that can be played, including a form of patience where the cards are laid out and the poem has to be constructed in the predetermined layout, but in the usual version for groups players are dealt a number (3 to 6) cards, or for short simple versions players could choose one or two letters themselves, or use their initials.

In any case, the players use one card/letter at a time to develop a group or individual work by placing one word after another. The cards decide the first letter of each word of the poem - the players are free to choose any word beginning with the letter. A simple variation allows the use of any word which contains the letter. The order of play of the cards decides the order of words in the poem - the players can decide on the structure of the poem, the number of words to a line, etc., even whether it should rhyme.

The conventional order of play is clockwise, and under strict rules players should only be able to call for full-stops or new lines after they have played their card.



Games in boxes

Many of the Project's first games, designed with playschemes in mind, were large fairground style games of chance.

The Amazing Push Poem Machine (so named by Carol Ann Duffy) was made of beer crates and a multicoloured ramp along which the ball was bounced; Pete's Powerful Poetry Pipes (named for Pete Morgan, another of the Project's early guest poets) was a collection of coloured large cardboard tubes from a carpet warehouse held in a wooden box approximately 1.5 metres square; while the Springboard's box contained bed-springs fixed by horseshoe nails to wooden slats.

In each case the ball was bounced in front of the game in such a way as to fall into box, tube or spring, and the player then collected the letter stenciled on the receptacle. The variations in the subsequent work, the sites and use were numerous, ranging from gigantic communal poems with letters each ten inches square on fences in housing estates to individual hand stenciled sheets in windowless community centres; from words written on small shapes of coloured paper pasted onto large hardboard cut-outs to long alliterative lines written out on cloth banners and hung from trees, collected by carrying the game round a neighbourhood.

In the Pipes game players would collect several words picked from bags full of words, cut from magazines, that started with the letters they'd scored and would then use the words to help make the poem, adding in extra words or sentences. The words in the completed poems were then found and cut from magazines (if necessary letter by letter) and pasted on black paper. None were signed, so they were like anonymous love-letters or ransom notes.

The simplest versions were drawn in chalk on pavements, like a hopscotch grid, or used a small Shoveha'penny board into which players flicked a coin or counter. This was marked out with letters or numbers and slotted in a wooden box - the letters version was used in the same way as the large scale games; in the number version players threw for the number of lines, then for the number of words in the first line, then for the number of letters in the first word, and so on until the poem was complete.

Over the years many versions of this game have been made - often by playleaders on rainy afternoons - and the simple plan given here could be adapted in almost any way. Anyone wishing advice on the construction of the large-scale versions should simply contact the Project.

Although on one level these games are directed to simple involvement in language, to the recall of words and at best the 'best' word, versions of them introduce an element of making connections, of building an idea. As writers themselves, the Project's workers have always been aware that they would have usually more time to develop their ideas than any player could be given; but however long the ruminations before or the revisions after, there has to be a period of deep concentration as the first draft is made, and the games lead the players as swiftly as possible to this point where, with a subject and a certain amount of connected information, they can get involved in the actual effort of creation.

Fishing for Words / The Tom Phillips Game

In each of these games part of the text (a word or initial letter of a word) of a poem is provided and players are asked to build on this base. In most cases they will acquire a number of words or objects through the game that are to be linked either in a single or group work, but they can choose the form. The ability to make connections is important to developing writing skills and these are the beginnings of a process developed in City of Poems and later games.

Fishing for Words has perhaps been the most widely taken up by teachers - one school even built its own wishing well - since it allows them to ask for short, usually three-line, poems linked by an idea or image - either to develop flexibility in thinking or as an introduction to haiku and other short forms.

The game consists of "fishing", either with line and magnet or simply fingers, from a suitable container (bowl, tray, hat, bin), a number of words to use as part of the poem. In its original version a selection of random simple words cut from "glossy" colour magazines was used, later the words were written on slips of coloured paper.

The game can be used to start work on specific subjects by labeling the "fish" with useful words. Where line and magnet are used, each slip is paperclipped.

The players could be asked to use the words (usually three) that they "catch" as the first word of a line, or the last; or one at the beginning, one in the middle, one at the end of the poem; or most simply anywhere they can!

If there is no specific theme and no connection is apparent to the player, they can be encouraged to start by taking each word in turn and seeing what ideas each produces, then either linking some of these or shaping the poem around one good idea.

In playschemes the finished poem was usually written out onto white paper and the cut-out words were pasted on in their appropriate places. This paper was then mounted onto fish shapes cut out of wallpaper or advertising posters.

The Tom Phillips Game leads to interesting combinations of written and visual work. Players will need some books - since these will be seriously cut up and since plenty of text on each page helps the game, we recommend the purchase of old novels.

Using a shoveha'penny board or other grid numbered one to nine, you first play for two numbers. If for example you got a four and a one you would turn to page 14 or 41. Then you play for another number. If it's, say, 3, you count 3 lines down the page, pick a word and draw a circle around it.

You repeat this, and for each number you count on down the page, so a 5 would take you down 5 more lines to line 8.

Each time you get a line you circle a word, aiming to build a sequence of words that will 'read' when it is isolated from the rest of the text. When you have run out of lines, or feel you have reached a point where additional words would spoil the poem - you stop.

And then, carefully removing the page, you use inks, paints, felt-tips, to create a design or picture that will block out the rest of the page, leaving only the circled words visible. The finished pages can be mounted on board or card. In one variation Christmas cards were made, using Dickens's 'A Christmas Carol' as the book.

This game takes its name from, and acknowledges, the artist Tom Phillips, from whose 'A Humument' it is derived.

Maze

The maze game is included here in detail not so much for the game as for its follow-on which converts the workspace into an 'installation' piece of sculpture.

It was originally made of wood, about three feet long by four wide with raised walls. Players used a long line to guide a rubber mouse to the centre of the maze, collecting letters as they passed over them. It is impossible to succeed without picking up at least five letters. Whichever path is chosen a player always collects X at the middle. When this is reached the player then makes a poem in which all the words start with the letters collected - the X gives an eXtra letter of the player's own choice.

The poems were usually small, but were then laid out on giant sheets of paper, four feet square. Each of the poems had to fit inside one huge letter that filled the paper. The poems were painted on, or the letters were cut from wallpaper, wrapping paper, colour magazines or advertising posters and pasted.

Each poem was mounted on a simple wooden frame. The frames were lashed together to make another maze that filled the rest of the room. On the last day of a week of workshops the maze was roofed over, extra letters were added to the walls and the floor was divided as a board game. Then everyone crawled through, using a dice to move square by square, reading out the poem and collecting the letter they found every time they had to stop. When they emerged at the other end, players chose one of the letters they'd collected to start a word to add to a communal poem that filled the wall at the end of the room.

	D			K					A
			V						
	J			M		P			T
W		N	I		S				B
	G				X			Y	
		F				Q			H
									L
	C			R			E		U

The Bomb

So called because the ideas explode, this game shows how a description and then a poem can build. It is best played on a good sized surface, though individual players will find A4 adequate.

Players are first asked to provide a noun - boy, cat, car, etc., and then a verb, and a noun of place. The basic phrase can then be developed by the addition of qualifying adjectives and adverbs. This first sentence is followed (or preceded) by another, constructed in the same manner.

Each line can be a self-contained unit that says something new, though more experienced players will be more adventurous. In this way the poem can be developed through questions of how and why, writing up and expanding each chosen suggestion, selecting language with the players.

For example:

1. NOUN - a boy
2. VERB - walking
3. NOUN (of place) - street

^could become first

A BOY WALKING DOWN A STREET

^and then

A THIN BOY WALKING SLOWLY DOWN A LONG STREET

It seems best to start in the centre of the writing surface and make additions around, under and above, using balloons and arrows.

The "mess" of ideas can then be tidied when the poem is well developed, written again below the original, and then the process can be resumed, improving for example the structure, rhythm or ending, with this new draft.

It will help the finished work if the possibilities of rhyme and alliteration are pointed out when appropriate. The drafting process can also discuss the line-breaks and order of lines. If the players can write enough (for this game can be played by non-writers) they are then asked to create their own work using the same procedure, to encourage a more flexible approach to drafting and develop a self-questioning process for thinking about written work.

Presents / What's in the box?

Presents

This is a form of "consequences" and is capable of a wide range of adaptations.

Players are asked to make three lists of three words each - three adjectives, three nouns, three verbs. If suitable, they can then swap lists. They are then asked to fit words from their list into the following:

I'm going to give you an ADJECTIVE NOUN

made out of ADJECTIVE NOUN and ADJECTIVE NOUN

It can VERB and VERB and even VERB and ...

and from here the players continue with description, invention and explanation.

What's in the box?

This is a simple version of Open the Door (SIMPLE STARTS) and, in style, of many DIALOGUE games.

Players are asked first to imagine their box, its shape, colour etc., and then to write down both the description and where they found it.

At this point they could be asked how they found it, what sort of day it was, how they managed to open the box, or any other supplementary question that would enhance the story or description.

The next key question is what is in the box? The answer to this could be limited by restricting possibilities to words beginning with a particular letter. Obviously the more amazing or ridiculous the answer the more fun.

Further questions could discover what happened after the box was opened.

The Great Escape / Expanding Words

The Great Escape

This game starts in the room and tries to get as far away as possible with wild combinations and fantasy. The escape takes three steps:

1. Players list up to six items in the room
2. They describe the items with a single suitable adjective.
3. They select an item outside the room that could also fit the description.

For example:

chair - fourlegged - dog
cupboard - metal - car
light bulb - transparent - rain

The players then create the poem by including and linking as many of the new 'outside' items as possible.

Expanding Words

Start with either a single letter I or A or two letter word. Then add one letter at a time to make a sequence: I in pin spin.

Alternatively, the words can simply keep the core letter or letters but be progressively longer : a at all hang heaps. In either case players can be asked to try to make a sentence or poem that uses the words.

Anagrams and Acrostics

These are well-known games.

Anagrams will be familiar to most adults from crossword puzzles and may seem too difficult for children. However, careful selection from any book of easy puzzles will provide a good stock of phrases which will, when the letters are placed in a different order, reveal a new word or phrase.

Although not directly part of poetry, learning to play with words and working out such word-problems develops a flexibility of thought and playfulness with language that is invaluable in creating poems.

Acrostics are rather too often used as a substitute for thought. Children are asked to, say, write their name down the side of the page and then simply write any word or phrase starting with the given letter.

In order for there to be any real poetic value in the game, some more elements need to be introduced - most basically that the phrases have to be on one subject, and should attempt to explain the player's perceptions and feelings about that subject.

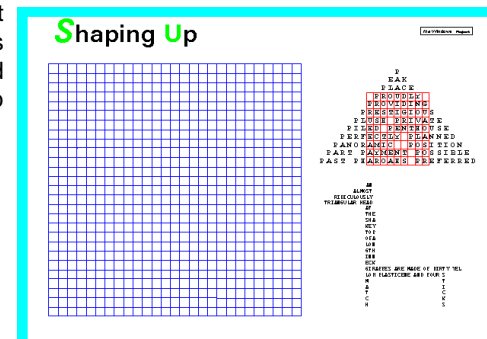
Further possibilities for refining what is often a slack exercise could include asking for the lines, or some of them, to rhyme, or making a small story out of the sequence of phrases.

The given first letter can lead to horrid distortions. Players should be encouraged to make line-breaks follow sense and rhythm as in any other poem.

Making calligrams - pictures with words arranged in a shape - is lots of fun, but planning is needed to get a really good result.

The worksheet provides a grid and two examples. Note that the examples are in a fixed typewriter face which means that a picture made with the grid will hold its shape if printed.

To make a calligram, first choose a subject. The subject needs to be simple and recognisable by its shape. Then think of what you want to say about it, listing useful words and phrases shape on the grid; it will be stepped. Then you can play with the words to rubber and lots of patience are strongly recommended.



Shaping Up 2 :

Traffic Jam Buttie

pavement pavement pavement pavement pavement
 gutter gutter gutter gutter puddle gutter
 car lorry bus car car van truck fire-engine
 bus car van lorry car coach mini-van taxi
 gutter gutter gutter puddle gutter gutter
 pavement pavement pavement pavement pavement"

This poem is more for looking at as a picture, for reading all in one eyeful as much as one word at a time. But the words describe the place and more comment could easily be added:

"gutter litter gutter" or "car fumes lorry".

You could choose any place to "map" in this way. The best results will come from thinking carefully about what should be in the picture - what sounds, what objects - and then, remembering that it is a poem, try to make the picture so that it says more than just being a list.

Basic Craft - introduction

These games are aimed at getting to grips with basic verse skills. Although inspiration and natural rhythms are important, practice with simple model verse forms and figures of speech builds confidence. The acquisition of models is important. The more ways that one is aware that a poem can be made, the more possibilities for expression are available. Our expectations of how a poem looks and sounds governs the range of our own writing. For this reason, it's important to provide a wide range of poems for students, for them to read and hear poems in many different styles and rhythms.

Although the games such as Limericker deal with simple rhymed forms, getting the rhyme right is less important than mastering the rhythm or producing a coherent and cohesive poem. Nevertheless, many children are compulsive rhymers and improving their fluency and range is as necessary to helping them establish control over the structure and content of their work as showing them that poems don't have to rhyme.

The Rhymeboard was devised as an "exercise-bike" for the rhyming muscles; but mere facility in finding rhymes is only valuable insofar as it enables the writer to convey ideas within a rhymed structure without losing sense or strength.

Some of these games can be played aloud, most require only paper; those involving a definite verse form are helped by xeroxed/duplicated worksheets.

In group work, examples should always be worked through and more examples of finished work in the form be given: although these are commonplace verseforms, their workings are often misunderstood and a thorough understanding of how simple rhythms are built up will create confidence. In some ways it can be useful for teachers to think of what they're teaching as being as much music or maths as literature.

Rhyme forms

Basic craft : Forms and figures /1

Many verse forms and metrical patterns can be explained on a "boxed" sheet: even whole sonnets can be given as a TI-TUM "tune". I have included those we have found most fun: the limerick and a quatrain in pentameter. The pantoum and sonnet sheets are for the more experienced. Given in this form, the scansion and structure can be built bit by bit, jigsaw fashion.

Nevertheless, I feel it's not necessary, except in the cases where the form absolutely demands it, to hold precisely to strict rhythm patterns. More can be achieved through reading poems aloud, both during and after the making:

- demonstrating the cadence, the variations created by different phrasing;
- encouraging awareness of their own rhythms and how they can be used in writing;
- to establish that poetry is built on rhythms, that different phrasings and stresses make different and controllable musical effects;
- that poetry is intended to be spoken and heard;
- that to read (quietly) aloud as you write, in order to understand and control the rhythm is an important part of the making.

There are many familiar standards in light verse; nursery rhymes and humorous poems like "You are old, Father William" or "If all the world was paper".

Re-writing the words to these basic stanzas, or, indeed, any parody or imitation, is an excellent way of learning how to work confidently within a form and develop a personal style from a firm base.

Some of the games work by mutation: the original is available or copied out and players are encouraged to start at the beginning, replacing words with others of the same rhythmic and scanning values,

e.g.:

• "You are green, Mother Susan, / the old duck quacked .."
or "If all the stars were pickles / and half the eggs were bad ..".

It's helpful to point out to players how few words need to rhyme but how important they are, so that the choice of rhyme-word will affect the whole sense and story of the verse. Warming-up games of rhyme recognition can be played (see Rhymeboard). It also helps to continually repeat the original, then the part-altered and original together, to keep the overall rhythm and sound of the original before the players.

They should be encouraged to look for lots of different solutions, it being stressed that there is no one right answer but that one phrase or idea will sound and work better than others.

Although the subject matter of these games of parody or replacement can be left to evolve as the mutation develops, we have sometimes provided subjects.

See New Nursery Rhymes (INVENTION).

The Rhymeboard

The Rhymeboard in this worksheet shows the central area of the original rhymeboard which carried extra squares representing the vowel-ended rhymes (see, say, sigh, etc.) and some double consonant- ended (ch, sh, nk, etc.). Each square on the worksheet represents a different constant-ended rhyme.

The board game is played by players moving coloured counters square by square (side to side, or diagonally for a faster game) according to the number of words they can list that rhyme with the sound on the square they are starting from.

Although the original board was designed to allow play between four people (who often became four teams) the sheet can be used for two person or individual play.

Two players can play space-capturing games along the lines of Go; individual players can, for instance, try to see how quickly they can complete it giving one word for each square. Players can list their words directly onto their copy of the worksheet but in the board game a referee wrote down each list of rhymes which were given to the players after the game.

This was because, although the game, the simple rhyming, is a good exercise in itself, the players were then invited to try other more developed rhyming activities - Limericks and Pentameter (and challenging each other by giving three rhymed words which the other player had to use as the last words of three lines of a four line verse (see Pocket Rocket Primary Rhymer). We also provided 'plans', like that given for the Pantoum, of such often used rhyme schemes as Sonnet, terza rima and ballad.

It is advisable to read a rhyming dictionary before leading this workshop.

Rhyme forms

Basic craft : Forms and figures /2

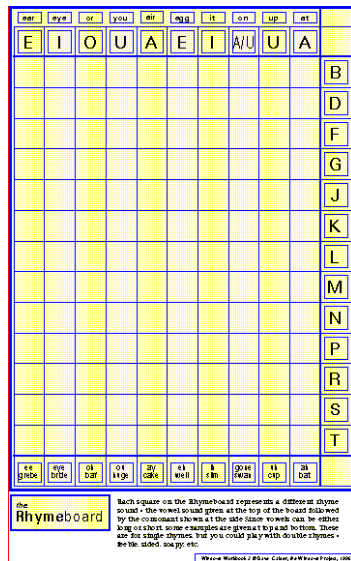
For all these games, whether words are fitted in as in the Limericker or where words are replaced as in Nursery Rhymes, it is essential to follow the 'tune' as much as the rhyme scheme. For this it's important that the verse form be "sung" repeatedly until the rhythm, the number and correct emphasis of the beats is fully absorbed. Unless these are heard and understood and repeated while the verse is being written, confusion will still creep in and rhythm and shape will slip and distort. Ti-tum or Duh-der the tune, making sure that players understand that a word can contain several beats and that "syllable-crunching" (BA-NA-NA, A-ME-RI-CA) can help solve problems, though the real test is aural - how does it sound read aloud?

It is worth pointing out the pitfalls of relying on the way a word looks as a guide to its syllables and that sometimes words are run together or are so short as to be normally unstressed. There are many quirks but the simplest debugging routine is to read the poem aloud, which will reveal any awkwardness in scansion or rhythm, or difficulties due to misplaced stress or juddering combinations of words.

A simple introduction to beat and stress is to get players to count the syllables in their own names and notice where they put the stress as they say them; then move to examples of three, then four beats. I usually end by asking them to count the beats in a long word, such as supercalifragilistic-expialidocious, to encourage patience.

Players should be encouraged to write out lists of rhymes, as appropriate, once they have begun a formal pattern, in order that they can consider the possibilities and plan ahead within the rhyme's restrictions, rather than rushing ahead and messing up the poem by putting down the first word they think of without examining its and the wider possibilities and deciding how these will affect what the verse is about and how it will reach a satisfactory ending.

Given as a form, the scansion, structure and story can be built bit by bit, jigsaw fashion, by players of almost any age and ability. They may not grasp the whole pattern or write a wholly cohesive poem but will have been involved in a method and way of thinking that can be practiced.



Pocket Rocket Primary Rhymer

This is a short course for introducing and developing rhyming skills. It takes the form of a 12 page workbook which children can fill in and a sheet of notes for teachers. It covers all basic aspects of rhyme skills, and also includes work on syllable counting and rhythm. A copy is included in the photocopyable worksheets, but multiple copies are probably best ordered in bulk from the Project.

Nursery Rhymes

As explained before, rewriting nursery rhymes is a good exercise for developing rhyming and rhythm skills.

First, say aloud or read the nursery rhyme several times until the rhythm has stuck in your head. Then read it from the worksheet so that you can see how each bit of the rhyme has its own box.

Change a few words (write the new word in the box under the old one). Read the changed line to check that the rhythm is still right - now change another word. You'll find it easiest to change words like dish or little or hill.

If you change a rhyming word (these are marked by shaded boxes) find the word it rhymes with (it's marked by a box of the same colour) and either change it to the new rhyme at once or write the new rhyme sound nearby to remind you how it needs to change.

Do not worry if your first attempts are total nonsense and the 'story' is a mess - once you can keep the rhythm or get better at swapping words and rhymes you will find it easier to make more organised and satisfying stories.

See also Pocket Rocket Primary Rhymers and New Nursery Rhymes.

Nursery Rhymes

Hey diddle diddle
The cat and the fiddle
The cow jumped over the moon
The little dog laughed
To see such fun
And the dish ran away with the spoon
Jack and Jill
went up the hill
To fetch a pail of water
Jack fell off
And broke his crown
And Jill came tumbling after

WORD LIST:
SUNGLASS, SALT, BEA, LIGHT, CEASE, BOOM, SWELL, WIND, ROLL, GULLER, POSSE, SLURGE, SHORE, DEEP, HEAVE, SYSTEM, CRACK, SPEECH, SHRAY, CLOUD, BAY, WIGGLE, WAGGLE, ROLLER, SQUEAK, CREAK, RISE, RUSH, ROCK, CRASH, TIDE

Aboard the Pentameter / Wet, wet, wet

Aboard the Pentameter

The Pentameter has been a common form in English verse for over a thousand years. The worksheet shows the simple pattern and a list of words to help build a poem about the sea.

To make the poem you fill in the boxes - one beat to a box. The boxes are in groups (called "feet") of two beats, giving a TUM-tum or tum-TUM rhythm. This is the rhythm of oars, of waves.

You can choose up to twelve words from the list (all the words have one beat or syllable) to help you start, and then add words of your own to build sentences or short phrases to make a description or story. You should try some out in spare space first, hearing how they sound when you say them to the rhythm and counting up the beats to check that they fit into the pattern.

REMEMBER - you should only choose twelve words from the list to put into the poem, all the others should be your own, BUT you can use the listed words in any form - ROCK, for example, could be ROCKY, ROCKING, ROCKED - though these may need more than one beat/box.

Aboard the Pentameter

one	two	one	two
-----	-----	-----	-----

WORD LIST:
SUNGLASS, SALT, BEA, LIGHT, CEASE, BOOM, SWELL, WIND, ROLL, GULLER, POSSE, SLURGE, SHORE, DEEP, HEAVE, SYSTEM, CRACK, SPEECH, SHRAY, CLOUD, BAY, WIGGLE, WAGGLE, ROLLER, SQUEAK, CREAK, RISE, RUSH, ROCK, CRASH, TIDE

Wet, wet, wet

This game uses the same method as the Aboard the Pentameter game to help create a quatrain verse.

The boxes drawn allow for eight beats to a line. This will allow a number of simple forms, the most common in English verse would be a ballad stanza as found in so many anonymous poems of the Middle Ages.

A ballad stanza has four feet of two syllables in the first and third lines and three feet of two syllables in the second and fourth lines. This means that the two end boxes in lines two and four should be ignored. Ballads usually rhyme the second and fourth lines.

Wet, Wet, Wet!

Choose to fit eight of the words and write them into the boxes. You can use any words from the list more than once. You can use your own words too. Write a quatrain (four lines) and give it a title.

one	two	one	two
-----	-----	-----	-----

WORD LIST:
SUNGLASS, SALT, BEA, LIGHT, CEASE, BOOM, SWELL, WIND, ROLL, GULLER, POSSE, SLURGE, SHORE, DEEP, HEAVE, SYSTEM, CRACK, SPEECH, SHRAY, CLOUD, BAY, WIGGLE, WAGGLE, ROLLER, SQUEAK, CREAK, RISE, RUSH, ROCK, CRASH, TIDE

Limericker

Everyone knows of the limerick, and can probably recite several. The jingly sound is instantly recognisable - the worksheet helps to keep the rhythm and rhyme correct so that the finished verse sounds right.

A simple way of starting is to decide on who the limerick is to be about (this will take 3 or 4 beats or syllables - a fat cat, a thin monkey, an old man) and write this into the beat-boxes after the "There was".

In the next free box write the word "from" or "of". You should now have either one or two boxes empty at the end of the first line. Now choose a place - remembering that it will need to fill either one or two beats (for example - York, Ayr, Cardiff, Dundee) and will also set the rhyme for all three long lines.

When you have decided on and written down the place name, make a list of words that will rhyme with it. This will help you think about possible ways to begin the story in line 2 or how the limerick could finish in line 5.

It is usually easiest to give the character something to do in line 2 and then work out a suitable result of the action for line 5. The two short middle lines will link these two ideas together. The stories in most limericks are strange and silly so you can be as crazy as you like, but keeping to the rhythm is essential.

You may know some examples of limericks that use 9 and 6 beats in the long and short lines, but whichever length you use it is better to start from the tightest form (as on the worksheet) and add the extra beats as necessary. Be careful not to make the first line longer than the second or the third longer than the fourth. Remember that most of the beats are in groups (called "feet") of three beats, so that some combinations of words will sound odd even if they have the right number of beats.

Beware of getting into a TUM-tum rhythm - the sound is tum-TUM-tum. Some words, 'a' in particular, are so short that they often don't need a beat of their own if they are not stressed. You will find out whether they need one by reading the limerick aloud, keeping to the correct rhythm.

Limericker

There	was	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
Who	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]

RHYTHM PATTERNS

one	TWO	THREE	one	TWO	THREE	one	TWO
one	TWO	THREE	one	TWO			

RHYME SCHEM

You may find that certain rhymes use 4 and 5 beats in the long and short lines. If you decide to try this length it will still be better to start in the tightest form, and add the extra beats as necessary. Remember that most of the beats are in groups (called "feet") of three beats, so that some combinations of words will sound odd even if they have the right number of beats. Beware of getting into a TUM-tum rhythm - the sound is tum-TUM-tum. Some words, 'a' in particular, are so short that they often don't need a beat of their own if they are not stressed. You will find out whether they need one by reading the limerick aloud, keeping to the correct rhythm.

Supersonicsonnet / Pantoum

Supersonicsonnet

The sonnet was originally an Italian verse form with quite particular rules. It became popular in England in the sixteenth century and poets began experimenting with its form. The fourteen lines were kept, but from Shakespeare onward the strict rules were ignored and many variations on the rhyme scheme have been tried, most famously by Wordsworth and Milton.

The rhyme structure used in the worksheet is that favoured by Shakespeare.

To encourage first attempts some words and phrases are printed onto the form.

This restricts the subject matter, but also shows that sonnets do not have to be about nature or love! A sonnet is normally in iambic pentameter as explained on the Aboard the Pentameter worksheet.

There	is	deep	water	near	my	place	where	light	waves
The	words	I	love	have					been
[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	been
[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	been
[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	been
[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	been
[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	been
[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	been
[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	been
[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	been
[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	been
[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	been
[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	been
[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	been
[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	been

Cooking Up A Pantoum

The Pantoum is a verse form from South East Asia, first used in Europe in 1820. In its original Malay version the first two lines of each verse describe the scene and the last two lines the action.

Cooking up a pantoum is easy, but to get a result you're really proud of will take preparation.

As you can see in the poem pattern, you will only need six good lines for a twelve line poem - a pantoum puffs up like pastry. And because whole lines are repeated there are only 3 rhymes to make. but careful handling makes all the difference.

You will need to choose lines that make sense in two different places! So it's best to practice with a description rather than a story. Try writing 6 phrases - 3 pairs of rhyming lines - about somewhere. then number the lines - one pair 1 and 2, another 3 and 4, the last pair 5 and 6.

Then fit them into the pattern and read out the result. Do you like it? Or will moving or swapping lines or writing slightly different ones make it better?

COOKING UP A PANTOUM

[]	1	A
[]	2	B
[]	3	A
[]	4	B
[]	5	B
[]	6	C
[]	7	A
[]	8	B
[]	9	A
[]	10	B
[]	11	C
[]	12	A

The Pantoum is a form that has been used in South East Asia since the 18th century. It is a form of poetry that is based on the repetition of lines. The first two lines of each verse describe the scene and the last two lines the action.

When you've worked out a short description of a place, try making a pantoum about someone doing something - a simple job perhaps, then try a story. There can be as many four line stanzas as you need.

Near rhyme :

There are several sorts of combinations of sound that can take the place of rhyme.

These include:

imperfect rhyme (spot - parrot),
unaccented rhyme (butter - mother),
half-rhyme (down - drowning),
dissonant rhyme (bike - fight),
assonance or vowel rhyme,
alliteration or consonant rhyme and consonance.

The easiest to play with is one of the oldest devices, alliteration.

Alliteration: Time to twist the tongue

Players pick a letter ..., a personal letter, perhaps the initial of their name .. and try to write the longest sentence in which every word starts with that letter. The sentence should make sense even if it is not sensible.

A good way of building such a sentence is to first construct a core phrase:

NOUN DOGS VERB DESTROY NOUN DINOSAURS

and then surround each of the words in the phrase with adjectives and adverbs, then lengthen it by conjunction and preposition and build up supplementary phrases:

Dirty dreaming DOGS dizzily drunkenly DESTROY dangerous damp dreary
DINOSAURS down disgustingly damp dungeons during dismal December days.

It will help if a first, example, sentence is constructed by the players on a blackboard or large sheet of paper. The finished sentence, and subsequent individual ones, can be written on long strips of paper and hung as banners, or rolled out as carpets.

A combination of alliteration with a version of consequences.

Players contribute two alliterating adjectives and a noun, and a further adverb alliterating with a final word, as in:

"A ragged raving robin merrily MET
eight elegant elephants incredibly IN
the wrecked red room and sweetly SAID
'What wobbly wonders with scaly SKIN'."

It can be helpful to ask players to start by deciding on the four words that end lines. This is only to give them a push and a structure, they should not feel bound by the first choice if it prevents a better work.

Figures of speech : Simile

AS-AS : the Simile

The players should be divided into three * groups : two (groups 1 and 3) to think of a number (say 6) of nouns each and one (group 2) to choose the same number of adjectives. The groups should keep their choices secret.

The words chosen can be written out either on cards (to hold up) or as a numbered list to read out.

To play, group 1 holds up or reads out their first word, everyone shouts `AS', group 2 supplies their first adjective, everyone shouts `AS', and group 3 completes the simile with their first noun.

The completed simile can be joined together if on card or written up large as it takes shape. An example:

a BATAS BIG AS a BALLOON

* The number of groups can be enlarged to suit the number of players - for instance a class of 30 could divide to 6 groups of 5 to produce:

a FAT ... BATAS ... BIG ... and ... BLUE ... AS ... a BURST ... BALLOON

In this case the groups' order will be 1 adjective, 2 noun, 3 adjective, 4 adjective, 5 adjective, 6 noun.

There are many other possible combinations but it is essential to work out the structure of the long ones in advance to avoid chaos.

Warning: The similes produced are likely to be more curious than the examples shown. After each round, rather than after each sentence, the similes can be discussed. The players consider and comment on which are funny, strange or most apt. The phrases could be swapped around or amended.

Figures of speech : Metaphor

Onomatopoeia

Figuring out figures of speech

The development (or encouragement, or recognition) of figurative language - ways of measuring the world and expressing shades of meaning through imagery - both adds breadth and depth to the work and extends the ability to explain thoughts and ideas. Although everyone makes use of comparative language and sound effects in everyday speech, many, especially children, hardly use them in their writing.

The games are intended to recall the uses to mind; there is no necessity for a poem to employ them but they are useful and being aware of them is important, if only to stop them being lost or censored in the journey between spoken and written.

The games cover the most common and useful figures.

Metaphor: What is it, like?

Since this game is about the metaphor, any two lists of nouns (one short, one long) collected as in AS..AS (below) will serve as a beginning, but an alternative visual start is from blown-up pictures, black and white only and as unrecognisable as possible. Once these have been displayed or as they are passed around, players should write down what they think the picture represents. Then the subject of the picture is revealed and written down. This also provides, for each picture, a noun and a list of nouns.

However the lists are made, an example of use is:

A COW is a COOKER, a BALLOON

Now, how could a COW be said to resemble a COOKER or BALLOON?

Where is the similarity, and what other words will help to show the similarity? Are there any verbs or adjectives that will help? How could the sentence continue?

The HOT COW is a STEAMING OLD BROWN COOKER.

The COW is a WOBBLY BALLOON, HELD DOWN BY THE ROPE ROUND ITS NECK.

The choice of nouns is not important, discovering limits is useful. If a comparison is ridiculous, overstretched or impossible this is all to the good. Words can be discarded or substituted freely until connections are found.

The metaphors can be treated as riddles which everyone can help to solve.

Discussion should always involve the recognition of metaphor in everyday speech, including the validity of such statements as 'He's a pig' or 'You're all cheeky monkeys'.

Sound effects Onomatopoeia: Comic Strip

Although onomatopoeia is the use of a word or combination of words that imitate or suggest the sound being described, this game, Hear Here! (page 15, SIMPLE STARTS) and the Phantastic Phonetic Phactory/BOOM (page 48, INVENTION) take a loose view, in the interest of conveying the concept.

In Comic Strip players work out a short narrative: e.g.. - cross the street, trip on the kerb, skid on banana, hit a wall.

Then they try to imagine the strip of pictures that would represent the narrative and decide which sound words might be in the frames. The words are written down, drawing is not permitted. A few additional words will probably be necessary.

The example given could become:

vroom roar screech
whew! pitter patter clunk
tripped out! ow! thump
squelch slither squeal
WALL wham crunch bang bonk...

Finally, read out or passed around, the other players have to decide what the poem is describing.

Dialogue - introduction

These games provide opportunities to write about people and personal experience. However, a sense of place informs description of incident and often remembering a place will unlock details of an event.

The section is titled DIALOGUE both because in such writing the writer speaks most directly to the reader and because the workshops involve, and indeed developed from, conversation.

The games set limits to the conversation, they give it something to start from, but there are no limits to depth and it is generally unimportant if it wanders from the original subject.

The games have been played with, and the structure found helpful by, players of all ages. Although there are variations of style and structure they all lead to a subject followed by a discussion and collect usable information on the way. The aim is to enable and teach the player to eventually ask their own questions and find their poems in their answers.

Although some of the games rely more on the discussion to provide the information, all of them ask the player to build up the information separately from the making of the poem - often by asking questions - and recording it for later use as and when needed. This assists players to first focus on a subject and then recall and record the information for the poem without breaking up the poem-making. This is then available to help in the development of ideas and the poem - which at its simplest can often be developed by moving from one item (or picture) to the next. However, as players make the poem there will be more questions, but now they will be directed to help shape the writing.

Moving Mirror Show / How Do You See Yourself?

These games both invite recall of personal experience. The Moving Mirror Show was a collaboration between the Project and Radio Doom, who specialised in audio/visual events. The poems arose entirely through one to one interviews with older teenagers about their feelings about themselves and their lives, which developed from an introductory exhibition of reflected images and led to a final product of a video.

How Do You See Yourself? was the Project's simpler version. In it the game helps to narrow down the possible subject matter by determining topics to focus upon (slowly when played on the board, swiftly with the quiz) by means of the cards collected in play. As with the pictures in City of Poems (page *), the words (e.g.. blood, dream, tear) on the cards are open to the players' interpretation and do not themselves provide the subject, which is discovered by the players choosing from their cards that one which means most to them, that they can relate to, "see something in".

The original board game version of How Do You See Yourself? is too long and complicated for group use. This shorter version retains the spirit of the original but can be played with large groups.

The original game was a grid pattern and as players landed on an intersection (there were 33 intersections) a question was asked and the answer selected decided the colour (there were 6 colours) of the card they would receive and also the next path. For this paper quiz only red, yellow and blue cards are used and the questions are the same for everyone.

Players are asked to circle one of the three choices available in each question, and are told that the choices are preferences and they must choose one. With younger groups it is advisable to read the questions and choices out loud, to prevent players falling behind and to explain any difficulties.

When the players have finished they are asked to count up the number of circles in each of the three vertical columns - left, centre and right - and to write the totals at the bottom of each column. The totals should add to twelve. The players are then given cards corresponding to the three totals - yellow for column one, red for two, blue for three. Since twelve cards slow the game, each total is normally divided by two with no remainder, which gives most players five cards.

How Do You See Yourself?

In the board game players were encouraged to take a broad view of the cards, which included words of a symbolic nature, but for speed and simplicity the words on the cards for this version are all obviously related to everyday events and actions. This allows the player to be asked simply to choose one card because it reminds them of something that happened to them or of an event that made them feel a particular way. This incident becomes the subject for the poem, which can be developed both by description of place and action and by consideration of thoughts and feelings. The discussion about the word they have chosen, asking how, when and in what circumstances they came to have that experience or feeling will allow the subject, and often much of the poem's actual content, to emerge.

As in most of the games, this discussion of possibilities is important, the point of an incident, the cause of a feeling, may not be evident at first, and the oral explanation a player makes in discussion will help them think aloud.

Sympathetic questions will encourage openness and it is important to remain neutral when dealing with less creditable topics. It also helps players if you ask them to recall small precise details and speech, including what they said to themselves or overheard.

The quiz questions and the listed words for cards can easily be revised to suit a specific theme. This has not proved difficult in the past, nor has oral presentation of the questions, and the lists of questions and available words can be quite short. However it seems important to retain the spirit of 'magazine test-yourself' quizzes or fortune-telling so the players believe their 'true selves' are being divined or defined which encourages openness and revelation.

After the poem at most playscheme workshops the player's silhouette was drawn on a large sheet of paper, held on a sheet of plastic 'glass', using strong light and shadow. The silhouettes were either mounted on a black frieze with the poems displayed underneath or used as the basis for collage artwork on individual sheets or mobiles which also carried the poem. Multiples of the same head cut from different types of paper, including hoarding posters, gave striking results. At Carr Mill Youth Centre the silhouettes were also used as the basis for a large mural along the corridors, featuring the players and the ideas contained in their poems.



What do you Think you're Doing?

What Do You Think You're Doing? was devised initially for work in youth clubs, where the two players would interrogate each other, taking down the evidence. A short list of useful questions was provided, but they could ask many others - so long as it was strictly turn and turn about. For work in schools the questions have been limited to those that will provide basic notes towards a poem.

It has proved sensible to read the questions to classes, both to explain where necessary (e.g.. 'mentally' means inside your head, 'touching' includes leaning or lying on something) and in order to keep everyone together so that neither speed nor slowness lead to difficulty.

First of all the players have to decide on something they were doing. They can be helped in this by being dealt two cards - one from a pack of places (shop, street, etc) and one from a pack of actions (stand, walk, etc). Then they are invited to think of an incident from their own life that fits the action and place specified on the cards. For example, SCHOOL and RUN could be "running in the corridor, late for lessons". Or they can simply be asked to think of an action and then one place and time in which they performed it.

Then they are asked to remember the incident and, as far as possible, a moment within it, a "snapshot". Then on a small piece of paper they write down what the incident was, what they were doing; sign the paper and fold it up. The cards, if used, are best collected at this point.

Next, in pairs or a group, they answer the questions. They are told that they must tell the truth but can avoid revealing what they were doing; that a material can stand for an object (i.e.. glass for window) and that answers are best expressed in sentence form. If played in pairs, the players alternate, asking the questions in any order they please and recording the exact words of the other player. In a group, they are asked the questions as listed and sign their own sheet when completed. The players then exchange sheets.

It is helpful to ask for the time of day to be expressed by reference to event rather than clocktime, for example: "when the milkman comes" rather than 7 a.m.; and ask for actual thoughts to be recorded among the mental feelings and direct speech among the noises.

In both versions, the players now attempt to deduce what the other player was doing from the available evidence: they can guess, probe and banter before the answer paper is unfolded.

Then they all get their own evidence returned to them. They are asked to look at their answers, to enlarge the descriptions, to say what, for instance, the sounds and smells were like, what their fuller feelings were, what other small details they can remember. It is worth pointing out to the players that, even though they may have worked out what each other was doing, they still have very little idea of what it was really like to be the other person, and that as they expand their notes they should be looking for ways, through precise words, small detail, comparative and descriptive language, to explain their own experience to the reader.

What Do You Think You're Doing?

These notes then, with whatever arises from discussion, will help the player recall enough of the event to start shaping the poem. Some may choose to use little more than cryptic bare details, and should carefully select the significant details; others will want to expand to full narrative and may need to beware of rambling too far beyond the focus of the incident.

Small groups of older players can work in pairs, interrogating each other, asking questions in any order, and recording the exact words of the other player as if taking evidence. This is best done on a separate sheet of paper to allow for supplementary questions.

This game and Where We're At can be adapted to focus on specific activities - sports for example. Sport can be the subject of odes and epics, especially for the youth - but try to encourage wit and interesting rhyme, especially in rappers. It is usually best to insist on an element of personal experience. An alternative would be to read poems about sport and afterwards ask children to write about a game or sporting activity they'd played in or watched. But ask them not to write generally or about the whole game but to select a specific incident or moment and concentrate on it in detail, to describe feeling, action, and "landscape" precisely.

What Do You Think You're Doing?

Your answers should all be about the action and place that you have chosen and written on the small piece of paper

1. What time of day was it?
2. What could you see in front of you?
3. How did you feel mentally about what you were doing?
4. How did you feel physically about what you were doing?
5. What were you standing on? What was by your feet?
6. What noises could you hear?
7. What were you touching?
8. What was behind you? How did you feel about it?
9. What did you do just before what you were doing?
10. What could you smell?
11. Name something that you know was nearby, but that you couldn't see.
12. What was the weather like?

Remember: your answers must be truthful, but do not have to be the whole truth.

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Objects	Action	Sounds, Speech	Smell	Thought	Feeling	People	Describe
OBJECTS	ACTION or MOVEMENT		SOUND or SPEECH				
SMELL	FEELING		PEOPLE				
THOUGHT							
Where we're at ...							Windows Project

Where We're At

Where We're At was devised as a direct descriptive counterpart to the 'more people than place' games and in particular What Do You Think You're Doing? which have a selected incident as their starting point. However, the difference is only in emphasis. The game and worksheet can equally be used to note the details for a poem describing an incident or individual.

The worksheet originally went with a table game of squares lettered to correspond with the boxes (e.g.. A for Action) or marked D for Describe so that players filled in their sheet according to chance, and a version of the board is provided for work in pairs.

However, this approach may be felt to be too slow for general classroom work and it would then be more sensible to get all the players to fill in each box in common order to allow for supervision and to help solve shared difficulties.

Players can still keep the described place secret as in What Do You Think You're Doing? to allow a guessing game.

Players are asked to select any location that comes readily to mind and to think of one, and only one, time that they were there. Unless it is intended that the work should be imaginary (set in space, perhaps, or derived from, say, film, fiction or cartoon) it is wise to specify a real place.

The players are then asked to focus their attention, to think of themselves as a camera: selecting a moment to hold, to freeze the frame, fixing the standpoint in their memory before they start the description.

Usually players will start from the top left corner, with Objects, and work around in any order, making lists until each box contains some information. They will then go over the whole sheet adding descriptive words. Players should be encouraged to record thoughts and direct speech, to note small but significant detail, to describe through comparison as well as adjectives. Feeling should be understood in its tactile sense - but it allows, for instance, the effect of externals such as wind or sun as well as personal physical and emotional sensations. Some difficulty will often be experienced in describing Smells, but it's worth pointing out that there is always some smell present, even if faint rather than pungent.

When they move from the notes to writing the poem they should be encouraged to begin the poem at any point that feels right to them, starting from any of the contents of any box, adding any other, expanding and revising until the poem begins to acquire a shape and purpose. They need to be helped to feel that they can jump in anywhere, that a poem does not have to start at "the beginning".

This game can be adapted to suit particular themes or specific activities such as sports or holidays.

Who Do You Think You Are?

Who Do You Think You Are? was devised for use by young people and adults, to ask them to imagine life through another's eyes. Since much intolerance is formed by an inability to see the world through eyes other than our own, the players are asked to identify with, to seek to understand or imagine the feelings of the person defined by the game. For young children it might be better to provide pictures of people or to ask them to imagine that they are somebody they know, or, using examples in poems, that they are, say, a busy mum or old. Older children can play **Voices** (below).

The pack contains five types of card : Where, Gender, Relationship, Work, Emotion. Each player receives five cards from the shuffled pack and the object is to collect one of each type of card by, in turn, discarding and picking-up as in rummy. As players succeed, they declare their hand and leave the game, the others continuing until all are out. On declaring, players roll a dice to determine age, this being in the decade starting with ten times the dice value - so 2 gives 20-29. Occasionally this produces an unusual combination with other cards, but there are no insoluble combinations and eccentricities help define the character.

The players look at the cards, which together give a light sketch of a character. First they will have to reconcile the cards with each other until they have an idea of what sort of person it is, then taking the Emotion and Where cards move on to imagine what is happening to the character at the moment of the poem. This can be written from inside or outside the character.

It helps to start by imagining the place in some detail and also whatever the character is physically doing (or not). This encourages the players to feel they are there. The reason for the emotion needs to be worked out in the context of what else is known or decided about the character. There are obvious opportunities for card makers to arrange the balance of possibilities to suit the group they wish to work with. A set is provided, but they could be handmade by writing on half-postcards, with a dab of colour to identify the different types. The card game could provide less or different key information, and for larger groups it would be simpler to draw slips bearing the information from separate "hats" - some trading might be permissible, but not of gender.

Although the poems are to be about people, it is usually helpful if the "landscape" is considered early on - whether an open park or the inside of an office, trying to imagine what the subject can see not only leads to imagining thoughts, but provides details, clues to the life being described.

WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?	M	M	F	F
	for age roll dice	for age roll dice	for age roll dice	for age roll dice
Where	Where	Where	Where	Where
by a door	in a park	by a window	in a place of work	you phone
Relationship	Relationship	Where	Where	Where
single	partnered with child	in a vehicle	in a queue	in a kitchen
Relationship	Relationship	Work	Work	Work
single with child	partnered	unemployed	part time	retiree
Work	Work	Work	Work	Work
office	unemployed	retiree	in house	retiree
happy	unhappy	happy	unhappy	

Voices

This is a worksheet version of **Who Do You Think You Are?**, in which players make more of the choices.

Younger players can leave out parts. All players should choose a Where.

Younger players should then choose between M and F for gender, go on to deciding on the character and fill in from Seeing onwards. Older players should choose Work and Relationship, but could leave out Education.

They then ring one of the vertical columns of two numbers and a letter in the grid at the top of the sheet. The numbers represent the age and can be read either way (eg. 45 or 54). The letter gives gender - y for female, a for male. They then move to decide on character and fill in from Seeing onwards.

However much of the sheet is used, when the players have filled in the basic boxes they should have created enough information to begin to make the poem using the discussion method set out in **Who do you think you are?**

voices

1 2 3 4 5 6 1 2 3 4 5 6 1 2 3 4 5 6 1 2 3 4 5 6 a y y y a a y a y y a a y y a y y y y y a y 2 3 4 5 6 7 2 3 4 5 6 7 2 3 4 5 6 7 2 3 4 5 6 7	M a y F
---	------------------

Where: in a kitchen in a car **Where?**

Where: in a kitchen in a car **Where?**

Where: in a kitchen in a car **Where?**

Where: in a kitchen in a car **Where?**

Where: in a kitchen in a car **Where?**

Work

Technician Unemployed Transport Unskilled In Home Other Manual Industry

Relationship

Education

Seeing

Doing

Thinking

Saying

© Windows Workbook

City of Poems

This game provides a starting point for writing about everyday urban experience. The original version used a four-foot high tower-block whose windows contained pictures on hinged flaps. Players swung a demolition-ball from a crane to hit a window and collect its picture.

As in subsequent versions, the players collect three pictures of street or interior scenes and are invited to relate these to each other and to their own life. Although the range of pictures was limited, the range of poems is not, partly because everyone has their own experiences and will interpret images differently but mostly because we have always used the pictures as starting points for a discussion that will discover the true subject for the poem, the poem the player is interested in writing. Players are not obliged to link the pictures and are often encouraged to choose one, either because they recognise the situation or simply prefer that picture. The pictures were collected largely by browsing through magazines and then photo-copied, which simplifies the power of the image itself. They show scenes common to all urban areas, and people appear in most of them, shown on the street, sitting in a room, as part of a crowd, rather than in stereotypic activities, so that players can decide how to interpret them in the light of their own experiences.

The players are invited to think of connections between one or more of the pictures and their own life and neighbourhood, fixing on a particular place and incident. Then, remembering and noting that experience in its landscape, with the smells, conversations, feelings; the sense of being there; will provide the material to shape and reveal the concern and nature of the poem.

On the earliest workshops the players wrote their poem on models of buildings and other structures, roads, vehicles and people - to create a city of poems. A huge range of 'waste' materials was used, and the poems were displayed in many inventive ways. Simpler displays have used large wall-friezes utilising collage and mural techniques. City of Poems has been widely used over the last fifteen years and some simpler versions have been invented for group work. In the one most commonly used in schools, players are given a map with numbered roundabouts and are invited to plot a route that passes through three of these points. The numbers on the roundabouts relate to pictures which are passed out as before. A photocopy of any street-map will do, but it will probably be necessary to close or open certain streets (with a black pen or white correction fluid) to improve the maze. Suitable pictures should be relatively easy to collect as indicated above. It will be useful to have more pictures than roundabouts, or vary the number/picture relationships, if one route becomes too well-used. Another version involves inviting players to simply describe what is in the pictures, looking for something - an object, an atmosphere - to link them together. Alternatively they can be given just one picture at random and be asked to decide what they think is happening, how it feels, smells etc., perhaps what will happen next. Both these later versions can produce imaginative story-lines and sympathetic descriptions - what is "made-up" is influenced by our own experiences and feelings - but some players will be tempted to be banal without the spur of personal identification.

Windows on the Mersey / Postcards / Pavement

Windows on the Mersey, Postcards, Pavements and Where We're At all start from the view, shaping description by the choice of detail.

Windows on the Mersey

The players for this game (originally in a community centre overlooking the river) are in a room with a view - which could be of anything!

The panes of one or several windows are covered over and numbered. Cards are drawn to determine which player is to use which pane. Then in turn each player uncovers their pane for five minutes, during which 'exposure time' they can make notes for a poem - and take one or more photographs.

The Project was assisted by Aware for the photographic workshop.

The view is then closed and the player can begin to develop the poem - and the photographs.

In the original workshop the poem and the photograph were printed together as a combined image.

The details are made significant by the impression the player forms of a scene in a short period of time, a snapshot memory.

Postcards

Devised for a Lancashire school, Postcards is like the Art Game or City of Poems without pictures.

The players were asked which parts or produce of their home town should be on postcards. The produce needs a location.

After this, since they knew the place, they were asked to describe what they saw there, what it is like to be there - a postcard in words. The important details are those that will give the reader a good idea of what the place is like, and it's important to keep reminding players that general descriptions don't really do that - smaller details give a clearer sense of place.

Pavement

This game is an strictly urban version of Yellow Prose - the players use cards, each of which represents one quarter of a paving stone and carries a word related to street life or environment, playing them onto a board marked out as a pavement, trying to set down a set of four, both to fit the shape and to relate the words written on the cards into a coherent idea. As they move along the eight stones of the pavement they seek to maintain and develop the theme, description and narrative. The best work usually comes from tight connections and description - brevity, precision and evocation of atmosphere rather than narrative.

For story writing it is better to let players lay out all their cards first and then construct the plot.

Birds

In many ways it's better to think of Birds as having more to do with landscape than birds. This is because the players, once they know which bird they're dealing with, should be encouraged to think as much about where the bird is as what it's doing. The bird may make only a fleeting appearance. Poems from the bird's or its prey's point of view are also possibilities. In all cases care must be taken to prevent bland stereotypic or encyclopedia writing.

Often, as with the 'real' World Game, the player will have a limited knowledge but they have all seen or heard birds; more, they have seen them somewhere. Again, discussion will reveal which approach is most suitable and pictures of birds in action or landscape will help their remembering.

The players were told that there were over 250 different birds common to Britain and that 110 of them were hidden in numbered envelopes in our 'bird box'. To discover their bird they played for its number. The envelopes contained an information card with picture, and details of habitat, call and diet; and a cardboard template of the bird cut in four - wings, head, body and tail.

The first version of the game was played in a wooden box (a baker's tray) part of which was hollowed to make a nest. The players rolled 32 marbles, and the number that stayed in the nest was counted. In a simpler version of the game players draw numbered eggs which relate to envelopes containing the shape and information card. The original workshop was dominated by two hinged display boards bearing eagles with eight-foot wingspans. The feathers of the eagles were a collage of poems and pictures about birds for the players to look at, read and refer to throughout the workshop.

Whatever game is played, it is only a mechanism for selection from a wide ranging subject, and at its simplest the players could be asked which birds they've seen recently and where. Then, either by putting the names or descriptions on slips of paper for random distribution, or by asking players to choose which of those they've seen they'd like to concentrate on and write about, they can focus on the subject, making quick notes and then recalling detail from memory.

After the poem was finished the players usually copied it onto blue card with the outline of the bird from the template, and coloured in. During the summer workshops murals were created on large sheets of cardboard, the first players drawing a picture in chalk, the others over the course of a week filling it in with small pieces of various paper and fabrics stuck with suitable glues.

Since I had to create the bird jigsaws from scratch, checking scale and drawing them individually, I would not recommend it unless very long-term use was anticipated. But because it does offer each player the opportunity of producing a properly shaped and proportioned drawing, some, more standardised, templates are available to assist empathy and artwork. The information cards are not that necessary but some background should be available, if only to find out small details like nest materials which can often help the poem along.

The World Game

The World Game can be played to two different ends. One is the invention of an imaginary land (see under INVENTION). The other is relating imagination to the world as it exists - although we find that for many children the world beyond a small region is an imaginary fantastical land. In this version, as in Africa (below), the shift in emphasis needs back-up material - photographs, maps of food, wealth, wars - so that, however shakily, they can grasp the diversity of life, experience and landscape across the planet and relate it to what they have already seen, heard or read.

When players put their pieces together they have a world in microcosm: rich and poor, fertile and barren are brought together. I now feel that this "serious" version should be played alongside related social and physical geography lessons.

The original version was the world mapped on a quarter-sphere geodesic hoopla board - 5 feet wide by 3 feet high. The second version was an A3 size tiddleywinks board in a box 2" deep. In both cases the players acquired a shape (each shape is quarter of a continent) and information, and sometimes a letter of the alphabet. The simplest way to play would be for the cut-out pieces to be drawn at random.

The original board-maps were drawn on the Bonne projection, which is less distorted than the familiar Mercator as used on the sheets shown here. The map provided can be used as a basis for games boards and templates. Thin card is usually sufficient depth for a template.

In each version the player then joins the shapes together and maps the outline of the new land. They are then asked to think about this new world or island, about its differing regions, climate, landscape and inhabitants.

The best poems have tended to draw on known conflicts either of interests and lifestyle or armed; or have merged or superimposed different places and cultures. They have also been the ones where the writer has collected a 'stockpile' of small details and decided on a definite subject and approach, whether descriptive or narrative. As with the imaginary country, it's worth asking where they are in the country, what they "see", to try to describe situations more subtly.

Africa

Another geographically based workshop, on Africa, used a main board on which phrases of African poetry were written to fill the continent's outline to provide useful words and starting points. This board was complemented by a display of wide-ranging images and other materials. It ran into the same reality problem as the 'real' World Game.

I still like the phrases of poetry as display, but partly because they were so evocative and the children so ill-informed, the images they led to could easily degenerate from a building of rapport with the atmosphere and culture to a Tarzan movie, and it was difficult, even with the presented visual images, to get them to consider Arab and Civic Africa. I feel that to deal with "real" continents, peoples, cultures, it's necessary for far more extensive information to have been taught or acquired than can be conveyed during a short poetry-directed session.

Invention - introduction

Invention: Unmatched things

Many of the games in other sections of this book, and almost all within this section, use the connection of objects to ideas to spark the poem. The source objects are not usually quite as random as the surrealist's chance meeting on an ironing board, since most players need some elements of obvious common ground. However, the process of association and connective inspiration is of general application within poetry, perhaps most clearly summed up in this poem by Yannis Ritsos:

APPROXIMATELY

Unmatched things he takes in his hands - a stone,
a broken roof-tile, two burnt matches,
a rusty nail in the opposite wall,
the leaf blown in through the window, the drops
that fall from the soaked flowerpots, that straw there
that the wind carried yesterday into your hair - he takes them
and there in his courtyard he builds approximately a tree.
In this "approximately" sits poetry. Do you see it?

peripou by Yannis Ritsos
©Estate of Yannis Ritsos
from TESTIMONIES Volume Two (Ekdoseis Kedros, Athens 1966) trans.: D. Calder

Elementary Poetry

Elementary Poetry was one of the earliest games devised and shows it, both in physical scale and the number of subsidiary activities our budget could cover. The workshops ran for a week on each site and used a massive converted coconut shy to introduce the themes of Earth, Air, Fire and Water.

For Earth, the coconut shy was converted into a bowling green, where a ball was rolled to collect four bags filled with things from the Earth - seeds, soil, plants, metal etc. Players wrote poems based on the objects onto green or orange paper. The poems and objects were arranged on green boards cut into the shape of fields, which were laid out as a landscape of poems. Then the player could illustrate the poem or part of it on cotton cloth using batik dyes and make cushions; create seed collages, or plant a word in flowers in seedboxes.

For Air, the coconut shy was set up for a game of darts, thrown at a giant weather map of the British Isles, to collect four objects from a range of clouds, suns, feathers, even wind instruments. These objects were included in the poem, which was later attached to a gas-filled balloon. Sent off with a label requesting replies, some were answered from over 100 miles away. Other workshops included the making of kites and inflatables.

On the Fire day, players snuffed out candles to collect coal and images of smoke, flames, etc. for the poem. The poems and objects were arranged in a communal fire sculpture. Workshops included writing poems out in Plasticine and pressing matches upright into it, about 1/4 inch apart. This was dramatic when set alight and left behind black sticks twisted in remarkable shapes with the lettering beneath intact. Or players could try "grilled poetry" - writing selected words on bread with tin-foil stencils or cheese, then toasting it.

On the final, Water, day, players threw pennies into a pool to collect boats, fish, shells etc. to start the poem. The poems were squeezed into bottles like messages from shipwrecks. Workshops included using the poems for badges and mobiles of umbrellas and fish; or decorating them with 'marbling' - oil paints on water.

Despite the size of the game and the quantity of related workshops, the players are simply collecting several related ideas (if we agree to call a word, a flower, a rubber whale, ideas) to help them focus their thinking. These ideas could have been displayed simply for view and touch, or provided at the writing desk or passed round for discussion or collected on a field trip. However "winning" the ideas avoids dithering and complaint on playschemes and appears to increase interest in the object-ideas themselves.

We were interested not in nature poetry but in poetry involving the natural, the elemental. So much of the discussion was sensory - the smell, the feel, even the taste of the object was important. Usually discussion will provide a relationship that can spark the poem, and sometimes it's useful to get players to jot down thoughts about one object, then another, to help things along.

An alternative version of the game is to collect objects from a small defined area for examination and comment, which could perhaps be combined with some science or micro-geography.

Phantastic Phonetic Phactory

As with Elementary Poetry, the Phantastic Phonetic Phactory was an early fairground size game, and the machine solved the problem of how to ensure that words of a certain type (here, describing sounds) could be built up letter by letter in choices that were guided, not predetermined, allowing "made-up" words like SIZZAM or SPLINK to appear.

The Phactory worked for a week on each site. When players first came in they signed on at a clock that converted the time outside the Phactory into 'Word Time' - giving four different coloured letters. These were written on a date-stamped time card and the player was ready to start manufacturing words on the silver Anagramma machine with its seven conveyor belts of colour-coded letters. Players rolled the belts forward, starting with one of the letters on the time card, until they had lined up a 'noise word' such as FIZZ, GURGLE, WHISPER or even SWONK - any noise so long as the player could say what made it and every letter in the word was the same colour.

Players made four words, one for each letter on the card, and stenciled the words onto a tile with four gummed shapes - the same colours as the words. The poem used the four words as a framework for ideas. Players decided what had made the sounds - HISS could be a snake or steam, SPLAT could be a slap in the face or a fallen fried egg. They then worked from the ways the sounds were made to make the poem, but the 'noise words' themselves were not allowed to appear in it.

When the poem had been written, and written out on computer print-out paper, players moved to a studio (a large cupboard) where the tile was added to a growing pattern of tiles on the wall which charted the shape of the recordings so far and determined the order in which the player would add the next sounds. Then the player recorded the poem, and added machine noises and sound effects, sometimes made with the body, sometimes with objects or simple instruments. Players were also invited, before or after the recording, to build one of the four 'noise words' out of a variety of materials - often card, but polystyrene, latex, foam rubber or fabrics were also used. These words, ranging from one to five feet in height, were then hung, piled or stood around the Phactory.

At the end of a week the tape of poems was tidied up and the sculptured words re-arranged into a maze on which spotlights of the four colours shone and in which tiny lights twinkled. Those who had worked in the Phactory, and many others, came to listen to the poems and sounds and look at the sculptures. At the end of each show a different game was played using the maze to create a new communal poem.

The game was designed for the long summer playschemes, but it was slow and labour intensive, especially in getting the machine through doors and upstairs. A later smaller-scale version using coded cardboard templates in place of the lettered tapes worked well enough but is too fiddly. In fact, the game presents problems of choice entirely suited to computer play, and basic data is available, but we felt that it would be difficult to get child-players off the computer and into the poem.

Phantastic Phonetic Phactory

Of course the sound words could be drawn at random, or from various bags with different starting letters, or chosen from a list on a big display board, or written down and passed about. Vice-versa, a sound can be played and the players choose a word to describe it.

The words set the context for discussion - what is causing the noise? where is it? why is it happening? what relationship is there between it and the other sounds? The solution might be an ingenious fiction or a memory, but in any case if one word turns out to be unnecessary or would be too awkward to connect, discard it quietly: after all a poem can come from one sound or silence.

Also see Hear Here! and BOOM (SIMPLE STARTS).

Yellow and Purple Prose

A simple game of linkage lies behind the pervasive colours in Yellow and Purple Prose. It could be played by writing a list of any objects, or any objects associated with one colour, as in Dr. Squint (below) or indeed of anything at all.

The games are played by rolling (e.g. a yellow penny down a yellow chute) into a tray or box in which there is a collage of pictures of objects of the same colour. When a picture is landed upon, the player has to incorporate that object into a sentence or clause that will carry the story forward.

The sentence is then written with coloured markers onto a roll of card, which is moved on and up so that everyone can read the story so far. The longest yellow story was over nine feet long.

The list could be on cards, shuffled and dealt, or numbered and revealed in a sort of bingo. In any case, players are building a poem or story sentence by sentence or line by line, and as with the PushPoem Machine it helps if some players can be persuaded to use their turn to firm up the idea or plot, add to the description or otherwise slow down the relentless action.

It's important to keep players in touch with the whole work so far, reading it out regularly, so that motifs, reappearances, even mere coherence, are encouraged.

Dr. Squint's Colour Co-ordinator

Dr. Squint's Colour Co-ordinator was specially built to help create a mural at Tower Hill Community Centre. The room was prepared by painting everything white, except the window frames and lines on one end wall, marked in imitation of the windows, which were painted aluminum. This defined six large panels sub-divided into four sections. Four perspective lines were drawn which passed through each of the 'windows' on the wall and linked the sections together.

Dr. Squint's Colour Co-ordinator consisted of a box containing two large discs each carrying six different coloured lighting gels. The discs were spun in opposite directions and players, viewing down a tube, tried to stop their motion when two matching colours were lined up between them and the light. The colour they matched correctly became the one they concentrated on, firstly by making a list of things that would normally be that colour.

The colour can be chosen through a spinner with coloured sectors, or as an exercise for a group where the words for the colours are discussed and written up for all to use in their own writing.

One basic problem emerged - that there is a limited number of things that are always the same colour, that imply the adjective. Of course there are ways round the difficulty; the use of other adjectives especially. Sky, for instance, could be many colours, but clear sky implies blue; cloudy sky white or grey; thundery sky, black.

Players should be encouraged to make long lists of useful words and word combinations (ie blazing sunlight for yellow, burning sunset for red).

The players go on to write a poem by looking at their word list and playing with the possibilities it suggested until a scene or event came to mind. The poem would be full of things of the same colour but the actual word of the colour (red, green, blue, yellow, purple or orange) was never mentioned in the poem, only alluded to by object or simile.

The subject matter of each poem formed the basis for part of the mural. At Tower Hill A 'window' on the wall was selected and a draft picture laid up on card, making use of the perspective line. Then the draft was copied to the wall, painted entirely in shades of the one colour. When complete, the poem was painted into the picture using a very fine brush.

Sensational Poetry is another game of connections, evolving a description of a place or event from five clues expanded by considering how they go together. As in other games, the poem is the most important thing and players should not be pushed to use words from the game that do not fit their developing idea. - although this game thrives on strange combinations that can be used to surreal or humorous effect. The process of deciding what to write about allows discussion which can help the poem in content, structure and voice.

In the full game a mysterious cabinet was used - on its shelves were brown jars containing tastes, green bottles holding smells, a white box looked into through a magnifying glass, a small cube which contained an earphone linked to a tape-recorder and black fabric bags that held objects to touch. Players rolled a dice to determine which of each they would assess.

Then they smelled, tasted, touched, looked and listened, recording what they thought each sense had experienced. There were no correct answers, they were not even told if they were right, since it was what their senses told them that was important.

The five things the player sensed then formed the basis of a poem, but they could be used in any way - combined into surreal incidents, included as simile or metaphor, or blended into a simple description.

The game can be reduced to sample bottles or blown-up photos or sounds played to a whole group. At its simplest it can be presented orally, players being asked to write down a favourite, or most unpleasant, or first to mind, sight, sound, smell, touch, taste; then to think about how they could be together at the same place and time. There is also a riddle version, as described on the worksheet A Sense of Place.

When the poem was finished it was written out on a large coloured cardboard shape, cut around a template of an eye, ear, nose, mouth or hand, depending on which sense seemed most relevant to the poem. These shapes were hung by thread and sticks to form a mobile. When the workshops were held at the same site for a week during summer playschemes, 'murals' were created on large boards. These were marked out in the shape of a mouth, hand, eye etc., and divided into square units. Players were invited to fill in a unit using paper, cloth and paint in any combination, preferably with a picture related to their poem. The only rules were that if a line of the basic shape crossed the unit chosen then the line had to form part of the design and that on the outside of the line only black and white could be used, in order to make the basic shape stand out clearly. A later variation was to create collages from cut-up advertising posters on the reverse of the cardboard shape that carried the poem.

A Sense of Place

Each player is given a number and also numbers as many lines as there are players, on a sheet of paper - let's call this the answer-sheet.

Each player then selects a location which they then write down alongside their number on their own answer-sheet.

On a separate sheet of paper - or on a copy of the worksheet below - they write their number at the top and then five phrases - one describing a taste, one a sound, a sight, a smell and a touch - that they associate with the location they have chosen.

For example:

"Salt on the lips

Creaking timbers

A heap of shining scales

Wet wool and gumboots

Cold, slippy flesh"

would do for a fishingboat. There is no need for every player to write down the senses in the same order, but there is a checklist to help you make sure all the senses have been included.

The sheets with the clues are then passed to other players who try to decide what is being described.

They record their solutions on the line with the same number on their answers-sheet.

The answers are read out at the end and discussion on which clues succeeded best and why can follow. Since the game is a sort of riddle, the more precise and subtly evocative the clues are, the more fun they are to set and unravel.

A Sense of Place

Each player is given a number and also numbers as many lines as there are players, on a sheet of paper - let's call this the answer-sheet. Now YOU CHOOSE A PLACE and write down what or where it is alongside your number on your own answer-sheet.
TURN THE ANSWER-SHEET OVER - KEEP IT SECRET!

ON THIS WORKSHEET - write your number at the top and then five phrases - one describing a taste, one a sound, a sight, a smell and a touch - that you associate with the location you have chosen. For example:

Salt on the lips
Creaking timbers
A heap of shining scales
Wet wool and gumboots
Cold, slippy flesh

would do for a fishingboat. There is no need for you to write down the senses in the same order, but there is a checklist to help you make sure all the senses have been included.

DO NOT WRITE WHAT THE PLACE IS ON THIS SHEET because when you have all finished, the worksheets with the clues will be passed to other players who will try to decide what is being described. You and they will record the solutions on the line with the same number on the answer-sheet. The answers are read out at the end - and then you can fill in the name of the place.

Since the game is a sort of riddle, try to make the clues a truthful description without giving away the answer.

NUMBER **NAME**

Check: Sight Taste Sound Touch Smell

DO NOT FILL THIS IN UNTIL AFTER THE GAME:
THE PLACE IS

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A Poem is a Fertile Egg

A Poem is a Fertile Egg was the precursor of Amazing Animals. In it the mixing of recognisable creatures is more obvious, but both games seem irresistibly to lead to "nonsense".

Egg does, somewhat eccentrically introduce the idea of genetics and a more scientifically valid game (the DNA, or Frankenstein, game) where letters represent the genes and the name- word is created from correctly bred combinations, could be devised. Players were told that a fertile egg was created from male and female chromosomes and that in reality there would be the same number of chromosomes from both male and female.

However they were being invited to make unnatural hybrids by mixing different species. They then played two number games, rolling balls of two different sizes through a row of holes of two different sizes. They then chose two animals to mix from a table of make-believe chromosome counts. The names of the listed animals were swapped every day with no respect for the true facts of nature. So, for example, a score of 6 male and 15 female could be half frog, half mouse.

The players were then told that the chromosomes determined the nature of the creature by passing on genetic information and that for the game the female chromosomes were to be represented by nouns and adjectives, the male by verbs and adverbs. So the score of 6 male and 15 female could start a poem about a `Frouse', using 6 verbs or adverbs and 15 nouns or adjectives, together with as many linking words as were needed.

The poem was `engineered' on a small blackboard until it hatched, and was then `cloned', by typing the poem and drawing a picture on a stencil which was duplicated, so that at the end of each day a booklet was ready containing all the poems written that day.

Since the game can be played simply, using three dice with 6 not scoring, (i.e.. 6 = 0) a sample table is provided below. Players could select both from any column, or one from A and B, or one from A or B and the other from the own choice column.

The choice of verbs, adverbs, nouns and adjectives is best done on rough paper.

	CHOICE A	CHOICE B	ADDITIONAL CHOICES
1	BUG	VIRUS	
2	FLY	BEE	
3	SNAKE	CAT	
4	KANGAROO	DOG	
5	HAMSTER	RABBIT	
6	FROG	FISH	
7	GIRAFFE	BAT	
8	SEAL	WARTHOG	
9	HIPPO	FOX	
10	TIGER	PIG	
11	WHALE	ALLIGATOR	
12	ZEBRA	HUMAN	
13	MONKEY	HEDGEHOG	
14	COW	PARROT	
15	MOUSE	SPARROW	

Amazing Animals

When we came to reduce Egg to basics, the result was Amazing Animals (Crazy Creatures).

Despite a certain amount of flummery with numbers to restrict the players choice, this game proposes only a simple mix of known animals. and asking players to choose three creatures to mix can be a simple oral proposition. Such simple speculations are always fun, which probably accounts for the popularity of the game.

Players acquire three numbers, which in turn select three from nine dice, which when cast reveal a name for an imaginary creature.

Ways of acquiring the three numbers include taking the initials of the first and last names of the player and converting them to numbers using the given code, then adding the numbers together to give the third (n.b. if the total is 10 or over, add the individual numbers again : $8+3=11=2$); or by simply choosing any three numbers under ten.

The dice can be replaced by part-names written on card, or players could invent their own. Nor do they need to throw the dice, these could be turned until an acceptable combination is reached. The game, after all, is only a way of approaching the subject, and the actual conditions of play and the length of time you wish to allow for play before writing will affect the choice of method. But agreeing on a name first, speedily and at the same time as other players when in groups, does help progress and concentration.

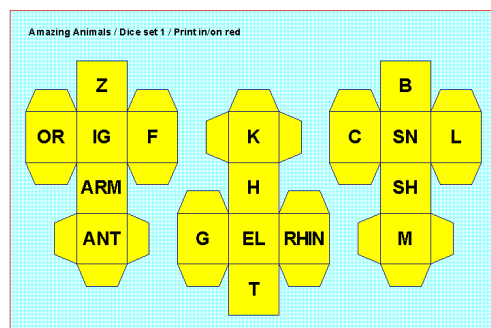
Once the name is chosen, there are two key questions:

First, how does the animal behave - is it greedy, sleepy, grumpy, etc.? Second, where does it live - in a teacup, a pillow, a sink, etc.?

It's best if these are everyday places, washing machines, kitchen cupboards, drains; not zoos, jungles or even conventional habitats like fields or caves.

Players can then be encouraged to think about what the animal would be doing, given its character, in the chosen environment. The poem can then develop without undue emphasis on shape, colour, number of eyes or legs, letting these physical curiosities emerge through actions or to suit the demands of a developing plot - if it's got ten feet what does it do with them?

Players should be encouraged to think about what it does, what it gets up to, what it eats, what it smells like, rather than how it looks - after all, they can draw a picture of it later!



Word Spotter was devised for Schools Poetry Review as a worksheet version of Amazing Animals.

The text of the worksheet is self explanatory:

A creature is hidden in this tangle of letters. By finding words - reading the letters up, down or diagonally - you will get clues to help you track it.

Write them down as you find them. Only you must find ten words with four or more letters.

Two warnings before you set out on your search: be prepared for some of the words you find to be of no use, and for the creature to be in a surprising place.

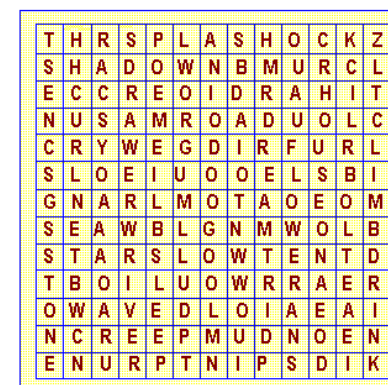
What do you think you've found?

What do you think the creature is, where is it, what is it doing?

It could be a creature that no-one has ever heard of before.

Can you use the ten longer words (and any others) as part of a poem that describes what you think you have found? You can use the words to build sentences, lines, and ideas.

If you enjoy your first expedition, try again - there are certainly other interesting creatures to discover in the wild words. For real adventure try finding words formed by letters in zig-zag patterns and paths that wander around. You will have to decide any rules for this yourself.



Windows Workbook

Encounters

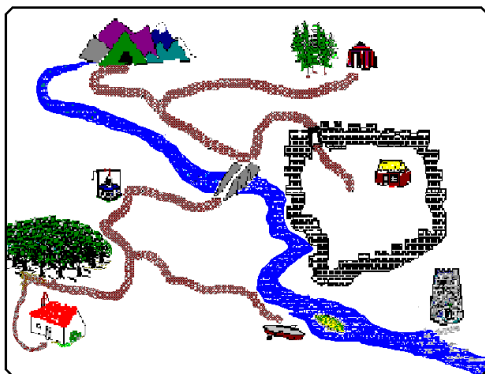
This story-telling game has been played in many different ways, from individual accounts to interconnected narratives, from straightforward stories to performance with songs and dances, and once you have played it you will undoubtedly think up variations of your own.

In the original version, with the map painted onto a large board, players chose a character and a starting location and then threw a dice to move the character a number of grid squares.

They could travel by any route suggested by the content of the grid squares they chose to count in. As they moved they described the journey. As they met other players they could hold conversations or be part of incidents, building up overlapping stories - and of course the stories would be affected by each meeting.

Players were encouraged to tell stories, exchange gifts or sing songs at these meetings, rather than indulge in gratuitous violence. In some workshops the players would act out the meeting, agreeing a common version of the event.

It is sensible to determine the method of recording - individual notes, independent scribe, tape-recorder, - in advance, in order to record the stories as they flow and develop, especially if the story is a group effort. A map is provided, with the original locations and characters, but often new characters were created and empty parts of the map were found to contain interesting locations. For extended sessions it would be better to enlarge the map, or use it to encourage the players to design and create their own map and characters from which to build stories.

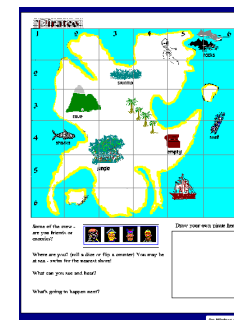


Pirates / Dinosaurs!

Pirates

Like **Encounters** or the **World Game** this game is played by the writer putting themselves into position on a map and developing a description and incident from their imagined surroundings.

Players can use dice to find their location on the chart - what they see or do next on this dangerous island is up to them!



Dinosaurs!

Dinosaurs was the theme of a four-month residency at Liverpool Museum. The game and information sheets formed only a small part of the materials used to introduce and assist young visitors to participate in writing their poems.

There are simple templates of twenty dinosaur species, which the Project can supply, but as in the Birds game (page) are too many to reproduce here and it is assumed that anyone wishing to use dinosaurs as a theme would collect the information and materials most suited to their workshop.

On the making of poems, it is worth noting that there is an unfortunate tendency for them to be dominated by carnivorous violence and efforts need to be made to try to imagine both the landscape and non-aggressive activity.

The World Game - again

Horror

The World Game is discussed in another version under DIALOGUE, and further details will be found there.

In this simplest version players invent an imaginary land, and in the same way as Amazing Animals it's important to move quickly to imagining.

In the hoop-la version where letters are won the players could write alliterative phrases on each of the letters or could treat the letter as the first of the name of a thing or things that are in the land. Their ideas expand from these words or phrases.

These can be played as continuous games where players add as many phrases as they like.

Where the map alone is the stimulus (tiddlywinks) the land can be discussed and some interesting feature of weather, inhabitants or topography could form the basis of the poem. Or players can be invited to imagine themselves at a particular point on their map, to describe what they see there and so develop the image.

It helps players if they can imagine and concentrate on one aspect or feature of the land - everything made of sweets, or upside-down. The more focused the central idea, the more connected thoughts will form.

The finished poem can be written inside the map shape, expanding and distorting letter and word shapes to fill the outline, or the map can be filled with picture or detail and the poem put outside.

Horror is a "peg to hang the poem on" game - players collect three words to plot incident: scene, sound, object or action. Various unpleasant versions have been unearthed - in one lumps of bone were rolled along an open coffin divided into squares each marked with a different ghastly word; in another 'ghost-shaped' skittles were bowled over. The poems were usually written out with red ink and nib-pens onto white shapes of spooks or skeletons, which were then hung to brush against future players. A version of this board game is provided but for work with groups the worksheet Horrible, Horrible will provide a better framework for ideas to build towards a revolting poem. For group work it is helpful to keep players to a common order as they fill in the boxes, to assist and stimulate.

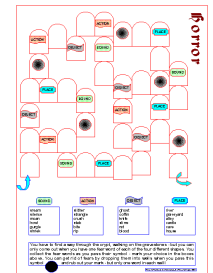
Once players have built a stock of words and a rough plot they can move onto a clean sheet to draft the poem. The aim is to produce gothic gruesome giggles, rather than terror, and the emphasis should be on choice of language. The poems will work best through atmosphere and suggestion rather than crude gore.

Ramsey Campbell, a fine writer of horror stories, once suggested, as we played the board game at a youth club, that a limitation on the game is that it leads to melodramatic, possibly stereotypic, ideas of horror. This is true, but high gothic horror and ghost stories provide creepy amusement to most children, and for these the game works well.

Ramsey suggested that horror is individually felt and lies within the known and everyday - this is also true, but requires a different game. A version of What do you think you're doing? can be used. I have found simple discussion enough, but this takes time. The main question is not only "What are you afraid of, what do you fear most?" but also, taking Ramsey's point, "Which of your small fears or misgivings could, if magnified, become really frightening?"

It is often helpful to suggest that the writer places the poem at the moment before the worst happens. Writing impersonally (she, he) often helps the writer to be honest ...

The World Game



Circus of Calamities

Circus of Calamities originally formed part of clowning workshops, with juggling, make-up, etc., and was aimed at poems describing circus acts and atmosphere.

It was played on a wide chipboard ring, 8 feet in diameter, marked with concentric circles subdivided into sections each of which bore a letter. On this ring each player performed various acts to gain three letters, such as tightrope-walking, juggling or somersaults. The position in the ring at which the act 'failed' determined the letter.

Then the player decided on things from a circus that began with the collected letters and used them to write a rhyming song about life in the circus. However, the players themselves decided that the game was of a circus where everything went wrong and this led them to a more humorous approach.

Despite the wide range of writing on circus themes in children's literature, surprisingly few of the children we met had ever seen a circus - it was like a fairy story, they knew the characters and how they behaved, but without personal experience. In such cases, where blandness often results from struggling for fictional actuality or against the dead weight of limited fixed ideas, an extra proposition helps to free up the writing: here the circus could have been suggested to be mysterious or crazy, in outer space or in your own house. But it was the disasters they wanted.

The poems were written out on card which was then curved and stapled or stuck into the shape of a clown's hat. At one week-long workshop the children performed a circus which included the singing of their songs accompanied by a clown band, many amazing tricks, and a final gigantic twenty-a-side custard pie fight!

Gardens

I had written a series of poems in which characters were seen through their gardens; Dave Ward and Matt Simpson started using them for workshops in schools, rather to my surprise.

But they were right. I should have remembered that any writing game you use for yourself can be used for others.

My basic game had been to decide on mainly fictional characters and invent the detail of their gardens to reflect character.

Put this simply, children could play by choosing a character that appealed to them, listing the associated personality traits and objects, and either converting these into appropriate flowers, trees etc., or describing the condition of the garden. In many areas it will be useful to begin by discussing what can be found in gardens.

Although many children will start by making "lists" these will not usually make interesting poems unless detail is encouraged, particular ideas explored and an effort made to draw the listed thoughts together.

Different methods of subject selection have been used. The original game used a circular maze with its exits marked - horror, history, someone in a story, space, animal, etc., and the player chose within the category corresponding to their way out. The categories were sometimes changed to suit occasions. However, for work with groups it may be easier to simply suggest one category - a cartoon character for instance.

The poems were usually displayed on paper flowers attached to a trellis; when more time was available this became a three-dimensional garden.

For the trellis, a net was used as the base and the flowers and leaves were stapled to it. The centres of the flowers, which carried the poems were cut circles of sugar-paper and the leaves and petals, often strangely worked to represent attributes of the character, were cut from advertising posters. The garden involved origami, tissue paper sculpture and mixed-media work with anything from pipe-cleaners and clay to various wires, newspaper and found objects.

Windows in Space

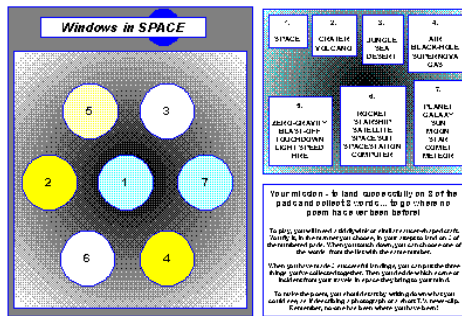
In our first version of Windows in Space, which was originally built for outside use, players acquired pictures selected from sci-fi comics and the resulting poems were simple but effective. When we brought the game indoors we were able to add interesting links with other art forms, but the writing tended to concentrate on action, stereotypic space-war stories.

This was partly due to the exciting style of the graphics, irrespective of content, but most 'scientific /educational' pictures are drab when photocopied. So we turned to language, which stimulates pictures in the individual imagination, supported by reference photographs.

When players land their flying saucer they are given only a choice of words: landing pad 1 has the word space, the other pads carry words relating to phenomena such as black-holes, parts of landscape like craters, other worlds such as star or moon, and words connected to space travel itself, like zero-gravity. The higher the pad's number the wider the choice. This has led to far more evocative, imaginative and humorous writing. Freed from pictures, the players can be asked to concentrate on what somewhere is like, can write of small instants of time - a take-off, a comet passing; rather than being drawn into sagas of zapping aliens, they can look for detail in their imaginations to try feeling the amazement and awe of space rather than blandly reworking television plots.

Although many parts of the game have been revised and the follow-on activities have been too numerous and varied to detail, having ranged from poems stuck on simple large rocket shapes and booklets of strip-cartoon poems to animation and electronic music, the invariable parts have remained the flying saucer and the landing pads, though even these painted circles on a board (about 3 feet by 3 feet square) have been reduced from 12 to 7. But the saucer has always been made by stapling together two paper plates, rim to rim, and spraying them/it silver. A cardboard disk placed internally, or for those with large staplers, between the plates, will add weight many flyers will find helpful. They fly well but are very sensitive. This means that if the landing board is placed near a wall the saucer definitely tends to land on certain pads (not always the ones closest to the wall). If this happens it's worth rotating the board to try to get more landings to occur on the higher numbers, to give greater choice.

Obviously the sheet provided here is too small for these saucers - but tiddlywinks or other small disks can be used. It can be played without the board - players choose three numbers, then the lists are revealed and they choose three words from the correspondingly numbered lists. A maze game, visiting three numbered planets on the journey, can make this more amusing.



Windows Workbook

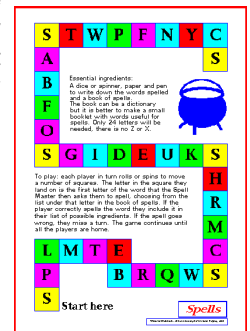
Spells

The original version of Spells uses a pathway game during which players spell words as part of their move, which children enjoy even when they're "weak" spellers. A version of this is provided, though for playscheme or heavy use I would recommend that a wooden, painted board be made. The board game can be used by groups of 4 players: for class work they can take turns at being the spell-tester. Players move by dice or spinner, when they land on a lettered square they are asked to spell a word that begins with the letter. The words, chosen from the natural world for their usefulness as objects or description for spells, have usually been listed in dictionary form in an A4 folded booklet. Players could compile their own before the game. Players should also decide the rules on missed turns or retries for incorrect spellings. Each player should complete the course, even if another has "won".

The game helps to provide a list of possible ingredients for any spell. However, the point of the game is to create a list not simply of ingredients but of useful ideas and this could as easily come from discussion, or writing a list of random/useful objects beginning with, say, the player's initials. But because many children will rush into an all-purpose list of ingredients and soon get stuck, it's best to get them to first decide on the exact purpose of the spell. The words available to the player may well help in this, and we have found three categories useful to those trying to pin down a subject: to make things worse, to make things better, and to change one thing into another. However, most children know what they want from a spell and the more common problem is dissuading them from being avaricious, violent or excessively nasty. The players could write chants, (where the invoking words are the spell) or recipes (where the ingredients are mixed and the method described). Another approach would be to use the spell as a brief beginning to a poem about its effects.

Occasionally players produce poems that are entirely narrative but these tend to flounder if not kept compact. It will help the poems to gain coherence if players are led away from "tooth of bat" ingredients to ones actually connected with the purpose of the spell - sympathetic magic - and are encouraged to consider the details and circumstance of any ritual. We have found riddles, which have the right air of mystery, to be very accessible for youngest age groups and as a "warm-up" game. Two of the classic forms of riddle are easy to explain and invent; these can be created by groups or individuals. They are the metaphorical (I am a ... I am a fire that bakes the earth) and the alphabetic (My first is in ... my first is in sing but not in ring). There are many examples, but it is better to create a new one, a worked example, especially with small children, to provide a working method.

Played orally, we might read examples of spells and invocations, start by writing alphabetic riddles, then ask players to write a list of items, perhaps words beginning with their own initial, that they feel would be appropriate to a spell. Then they'd be asked which of the three categories the spell will be in, and what it will do. As usual, the emphasis is on extending ideas, so that even the list becomes more precise and interesting - not just a tooth, but a jagged tooth from a slobbering dog ..



Windows Workbook

The Art Game / New Nursery Rhymes

The Art Game

For this, first visit a postcard shop or art gallery to acquire a varied selection of post cards of paintings - naturalistic, surrealist, even abstract. Deal them out to the players, suggesting that they write about what they see, what they think is happening.

Ask them to pay close attention to how the people, animals, objects, in the paintings feel, why they are acting as they did, and to describe the landscape in terms of what the images show and suggest, rather than just what they represent.

It is worth noting that this game has been used successfully with adults visiting exhibitions both of visual and tactile art - using the artworks themselves instead of postcards.

New Nursery Rhymes

The use of nursery rhymes to help develop rhyming, metrical and structuring skills is considered in the section BASIC CRAFT.

In developing these games however we were interested in the idea of nursery rhymes as short story or comment on events and people.

The game has been played both to comment on current events (as many nursery rhymes are believed to have done in their time) or purely for fun. In each case, newspaper or comic pages respectively were laid out on a suitably sized flat surface.

Since newspapers are large, the players threw cardboard shapes of nursery rhyme characters onto them, drew round the outline of the shape where it fell and cut it out. They then looked at the content of articles or advertisements on the cut-out until they found something of interest and then wrote the poem in the style, though not necessarily the old rhythms or form, of a nursery rhyme.

The poem might simply retell a story or comment on it or the people or issues involved. These poems were published as wall posters and broadsheets in the 18th century style.

The comic version is similar, but being smaller counters were rolled onto the field of opened-out comics. The cartoon frame that the counter landed within was cut out and the poem was written about the events or character shown in it. Players went on to draw their own cartoon and finally mounted the poem, their own cartoon and the original comic frame together on a display sheet.

Moon over Water / Good Guys

Moon Over Water

Although Moon Over Water was originally created round the symbols of moon and water simply to fit in with a wider mixed-media and performance event, we found that the particular combination led to dream-like poems. It has subsequently been used at several workshops, usually held outdoors or in tents, to assist some countryside or ecological theme.

It is essentially a version of Fishing for Words (SIMPLE STARTS) except that the words were specifically selected to spark resonances. The original version used a spinning moon to determine which cards a player used to build the poem. It could be played by any random method of picking cards with the words on them or through discussion leading to a word-list.

As in Aboard the Pentameter, (BASIC CRAFT) the provision of some evocative words allows an image to develop and stimulate ideas, whether or not such words form part of the finished work.

Good Guys

For bonfire night, poems about good guys - not for burning! Draw an outline of a guy on a sheet of paper and fold as in the old game of Consequences. Each folded section should show a different part of the body and a related question.

Example questions:

What is he wearing on his head?

What is he holding in his hand?

When all the questions are answered, unfolding the sheet section by section, there is a word picture of the good guy which can be reshaped into a poem.

Events

Some of the Project's game based events were too large in scope to be usefully included in detail for general workshop use.

Over the years these have included installations and street performances, and collaborations with dance and theatre companies. However it is worth mentioning MENU, an event in which poets took over cafes or restaurants for a day, refurbishing the decor with prints of calligrams and tablecloths covered in scribbled poems. providing a wide selection of readings to customers, and presenting a menu with an assortment of games that could lead customers to write poems.

The Project has run this event successfully in many locations and will provide full details on request by any organisation that wishes to recreate it.

Notes for Playworkers

1. If the children are unused to writing activities start with a game from CHANCE COOPERATION CHOICE or FILLING IN THE GAPS.

2. Make sure that AT LEAST ONE ADULT is going to be able to give ALL their attention to the workshop.

3. For all games involving writing it's important to be separate from other play activities. At the simplest this can be achieved by sitting at a table in a corner, or building psychological barriers with tables to define the workshop's area; by forming queues for floor games; by creating verbal barriers by explaining to sightseers the distraction they are causing - how this hinders those writing and makes their own wait to play longer; and by making lists so that interested children can go away until it's their turn. All these strategies have one aim: to reduce the pressure of external distraction on the child and assist their concentration.

4. Though with proper staffing and arrangement of the environment all the games can be played in open spaces, if you intend to play any games other than the simplest it's worth trying to actually isolate the workshop.

This is because the general noise and movement are disruptive and make writing harder than necessary and so less enjoyable. Isolation could mean a separate room or a corridor blocked off by a table.

We've worked in large cupboards, changing rooms, kitchens and toilets. A standing joke is that the Project got its name from always working in windowless rooms.

Most children appreciate the "special" nature of the separation and enjoy curious environments. The main problem is tourism. Working children will usually support you in sending away disruptive visitors, but the harm may be already done. If you judge that tourism will be a potential problem, try to get a room that either has no direct access from the main play area or that is supervised for other reasons, like a kitchen. The relative calm inside will make the room different from anywhere else in the club and appreciated, especially by the girls, for that very reason.

In any case, it's usually helpful to start a list and let it be known that only those on the list will be invited in. While you are stimulating interest or while behaviour presents no problems you can always leave the door open. If sightseers start preventing others working then you can put them out and close the door, explaining that they wouldn't like interruption if it was their turn, that it's delaying their turn, that there are lots of other places to shout and run, etc.

Notes for Playworkers

5. If you find that circumstances cannot be controlled, which will be rarely if you've sorted staffing and space out properly - play a simpler game.

6. Proper staffing for a workshop which is mostly brain work and in which many may have additional difficulties with the manual skill of writing, depends both on the game and environment. But to encourage well thought out work, to give the level of assistance that will overcome language and spelling difficulties, to actually pass on skills involved in crafting a piece of writing, the ratio of adult to children should not be above 1 to 3.

This is because each child must feel that what they are saying is important, that they are not struggling unnecessarily with the mechanics of grammar or even letter-formation, that they are being encouraged and assisted to make their own decisions. This means listening, trying to let their own words become the poem, offering possibilities, choices of style, shape and direction. To achieve this you need to restrict the numbers to as many as can be treated properly, but they will write with greater ease and concentration because of the respect and attention, and will finish their poems sooner and with more pleasure than they would struggling on their own; and this also means that a steady stream of children can pass through the workshop at the speed of their individual requirements rather than being left, unavoidably, to their own devices as would happen in a larger group.

Replies to questions from teachers

1. The reading and writing of poetry is valuable because:

a) it stimulates imagination, abstract reasoning, and the appreciation and development of language; it is a means for the improvement of precision, balance and style in writing.
b) since it begins with the simplicity of nursery rhymes and the fun of nonsense and goes on to explain experience and examine the world, because it accepts the validity of dream and imagination, and because it is music and sound as well as thought and writing, it is accessible to and accepted by children of all ages. Even before reading, children can acquire a rich vocabulary and stimulating concepts through poems and songs.

2. Don't worry about age. Since language is spoken and writing is its memory, infants can certainly be involved in the creation of poems. Such games as rewriting nursery rhymes, building word pictures or making a class poem through question and answer, work well.

3. Oral work is important - both discussion and reading. The discussion because talking, especially if focused by judicious questions, helps to develop ideas and builds confidence in the validity of writing what is said or thought aloud, and of writing it in the speaker/thinker's own voice.

Reading aloud will provide models of rhythm and style - the more varied the better - giving them more flexibility in the ways they choose to write. Also, reading aloud or being read to is the only way of properly appreciating the musical qualities of writing, of making it alive.

For this reason, if children are encouraged to read aloud with proper attention to rhythm, pace and clarity, it will help them to hear the effects they are creating with their own words.

4. When you're presenting poems, I suggest that you first make sure you can read them well; clearly and with proper pace, timing and inflexion.

Children commonly rush their reading: you should err on the side of slowness. I try to choose poems which require little explanation outside themselves and that are generally going to suit the listeners' age and comprehension, but if reading several I like one poem to stretch them. Before reading I'll usually say a few words of general introduction: state the subject, theme or underlying idea, explain any obvious difficulties, preferably through question and answer, and then simply read the poem. Obviously every poem can be the basis for a discussion, but the poem itself has to be effective and capture its audience while being read, since if it is not enjoyed or wondered at no amount of talk or discussion will make it more vibrant.

5. It may seem a bit obvious, but the writing will be children's, not adults', and to assess their efforts in relation to published adult work is invidious. They are acquiring a huge job lot of basic skills and the emphasis is better placed on what is achieved, rather

Replies to questions from teachers

than by how far it falls short. Equally, there is no point in praising any old rubbish. As in any other subject you want them to understand which bits are better and why, to help them to develop a personally useful way of making as good a poem as they can. Although there are some aspects of the craft of poetry which can be formally assessed - for example the ability to maintain a rhythm or rhyme pattern - most aspects can only be assessed in terms of the individual child's development and marking is inappropriate. On the other hand, comment and discussion are highly important.

6. I always encourage drafting and revision: most of the Project's games deliberately involve making a rough draft that is then rewritten before display. It is good practice at working, as well as the working practice of writers, to ignore neatness and spelling and simply concentrate entirely on the ideas and words when making a first draft, and to then use patience, craft, dictionary, to mould the raw poem.

I do encourage children to revise their work, at all stages, since the process of creating a poem involves continual rethinking - talking with them so that they understand possibilities and can make choices, so they are aware of what is awkward, badly turned or weak and can try to improve it themselves.

I try to avoid correcting spelling until the poem is fully/substantially drafted and will correct grammar only if it affects the sense or sound of the poem. This is not to say that these aspects of writing skills are unimportant, but simply that I feel it is inappropriate to ask children to concentrate fully on thinking about the creative aspect of writing and then lumber their brains with technicalities that can be sorted out after the poem has evolved.

7. If their work seems too much like prose, first examine what they've written - it may in fact be a prose-poem, where a little editing and marshalling to match the pattern and flow of idea/image development will suffice; it may be a poem that simply needs to be set out with line breaks to enhance its rhythm and flow, and discussion of the breaks often leads to re-arrangement or improvement of weaknesses revealed; or it may actually be prose. Which is only to say - for some reason or another the child has not yet grasped or has not used the poetic form. But something has been written, and turning it, or part of it, into a poem, is just an extreme form of the process of draft and revision. You can start by taking out all the unnecessary words and tightening sentences. Then try to find some key phrase(s) in the text, perhaps a single idea or interesting image, and help the child to reorganise or rebuild the work around that. For many children, these proses result from too much story/essay writing praised for length rather than content and they are drawing their canvases too widely. If you show them that it can be better for a poem to be about one thing examined closely they will be pleasantly surprised.

Try, in any case, to get them to write in "poem-length" lines to encourage them to become aware of the natural rhythms of their writing and of the reasons for the line's length.

Notes on being helpful

Dialogue is very important - after all, writers rely on inner discussion to generate and improve their writing: this very sentence has been thought, developed, constructed, queried and revised as it was written. This process is basic to writing, so basic that adults can forget that they do it, but children need help to concentrate on each stage: you are the memory they cannot hold long enough in focus and the questions they do not ask themselves.

The Project's poem-writing games, even the simplest, provide basic information or starting-points for discussion. These can be used first to establish a clear subject, talking through possibilities until the child knows what the poem is to be about, not in vague terms like "rain" but focused, as on "the rain on the window while I was in maths last Tuesday thinking about not being able to go out at playtime". This discussion can now continue allowing useful detail and perception to emerge.

Try to remember all that the child says, and if a good phrase pops up, or a fact or image surfaces, get it written down. To help, you have to be what they are developing - a critical memory.

Help them to pursue lines of thought, to build up ideas and inventions by asking "what if?", to draw out factual or fictional information from themselves. You are trying to help them explore and control not only language but also their imagination.

At first you can expect general statements, like "in a room". You have to encourage them to look for significant details by drawing the thought out: what room? where in the room? what else is in the room? - those bits of information that will inform the reader, give a sense of being there, even in fantasy. These details may well include speech, their own or others, and thoughts.

Try to find adjectives and adverbs, many children tend not to use them more from indolence than style. They may be unnecessary and edited out later, but thinking about them helps form a clearer mental picture. This is also true of choosing accurate verbs, for actions are often expressed in a weak form.

Some consideration can be given to figurative language - the question "what is it like?" or, for example, "what else is round and yellow?", will lead to suggestions which if followed by a consideration of the effect of the comparison can enhance the poem, but pressing such matters is often pointlessly time-consuming since the child is most likely not to be using comparison because (s)he has not practiced inventing metaphor or simile either in everyday life or class. The use of comparison and of precise vocabulary is the result of taking pleasure in language and of acquiring, as for arithmetic, a trick of the mind. Time needs to be spent playing independently with these aspects.

Notes on being helpful

It is important to read widely yourself, to be aware of the wide range of possible forms a poem can take. This will help you to suggest options as the poem develops. In the beginning you will be trying to get the ideas out, to get a rough shape; but often the child will need help in choosing a course and you can show the different effects so that the possibilities are understood.

Read the draft aloud (but not too out loud) trying to show the rhythms in what has already been written, helping them to improve phrasing as they get deeper into the poem so that they can feel the work as a whole, can apprehend the sense, sound and feeling and be encouraged by where they have reached and to "see" and develop the rest of the work.

Please help them to write in their own words and word order as much as possible, making them aware of their natural rhythm. They need to feel they can use their own inner and spoken voice rather than mimicing some poetic voice. If awkward, it can be sorted out later, as with spelling and punctuation .. getting the first draft down swiftly is important, concentration is limited. If you are keeping them focused on the poem they will be less likely to waffle up blind alleys - once they have chosen the point, the direction of the poem, help them hold to it.

Spend as little time as possible in assistance with spellings. Many children use spelling enquiries as a time-wasting ploy, others don't write the word they are actually thinking of, either because they can't spell it or because it "feels" difficult to spell properly. Certainly their final draft should be corrected with dictionary and rewriting, but first improve their confidence in simply getting their thoughts out onto paper by encouraging them to write first and tidy up later. Obviously some children have great difficulty in shaping letters, and for these it may be better to take dictation - they can revise or copy from that.

You should make it clear from the start that there will be several drafts and explain why. If the children become used to the practice they will become more willing to make an effort to consider improvements, rather than sticking with their first thoughts simply because reworking seems to need too much effort.

Although the development of a poem is extremely individualistic and often interesting work will emerge unexpected, there are some aspects of style that enhance or weaken a poem. As is often the case, the positive points are harder to define than the weaknesses to avoid, but include imagination and honest recall of experience, the expression of the writer's own voice and feelings, use of clear interesting or playful language, the ability to create or hold to a structure and fresh or inventive ideas. The weaknesses are more precise and causes and cures can be suggested:

Forced rhymes: these usually arise either because the writer has set up too tight a structure or has been too rigid in following one way of expressing an idea. Suggesting a looser rhyme pattern and discarding the weakest phrases is often more help than reworking one line since the problem tends to recur.

Notes on being helpful

Plagiarism or hackneyed obvious phrases: Stating the obvious (wet rain) is usually cured by finding a more lively adjective. Plagiarism or the use of well worn 'poetic' phrases is sometimes subconscious, sincere imitation or a song or phrase "stuck in the mind". Bear in mind that a child may be unaware of how overused some phrases have become, but deal with it as a false voice. Parts of songs can sometimes be made effective by making the lines into a quotation around which the child can develop a poem of their own. Occasionally some children will offer a complete copy of something they've memorised. I feel it depends on the particular child whether this is a success, however misplaced, or a total lazy scam. If the latter the problem is psychological not poetic. Part borrowings can be cured by pointing out the relevant bits or ideas and suggesting that they are used as a model to be built on or rewritten to make it their own. There's nothing wrong in this, a lot of famous poets have done it.

Purposeless waffle: Since one of the best things about a poem its brevity, filling space needlessly is to be avoided. Waffle is often caused by an attempt to approach a poem in the same way as an essay. The cure is polite pruning until a healthy shape appears. If caught early enough the child will usually be more grateful than protective, especially when they see the best bits standing out freed from the dead wood.

Pointless repetition of words, use of overworked or weak words: this is largely a matter of insufficient vocabulary or inability to hunt out the best word. Discuss, suggest, poke the memory. The search for the best, the vivid, word is so fundamental to poetry that there is no other cure than to say: this doesn't tell me what it was really like, now what word would give me a better picture or idea of what you're thinking about.

Lastly, a special effort is needed to bring the poem to a decent end. There is no need to hunt for a perfect epithet or to settle into a comfortable convention (the then-I-woke-up syndrome) but a poem that peters out or drifts on in confusion is not satisfying. Often possible endings will surface early and will only need recording or re-arranging, but in poems that tell a story it is worth at least enquiring about the ending quite early on, if not actually demanding a plot; and in most poems the ending is best considered before weariness sets in.