

# LITFEST NATIONAL POETRY DAY RESOURCE PACK

## Notes for Teachers

This resource pack is full of ideas, inspirations and suggestions to help pupils write their own poems about 'Choice', which is the theme of this year's National Poetry Day (7<sup>th</sup> October 2021)

We'd love to see your class's poems! Please submit them via email to [info@litfest.org](mailto:info@litfest.org). Your poems will then form part of the Litfest Poetry Mosaic, which will be launched on 4<sup>th</sup> October 2021.

**Please note that the deadline for submissions is midnight on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2021.**



For National Poetry Day, you are going to write a **poem** about ‘**Choice**’. We make hundreds of choices **every day** in our lives — sometimes **small choices**, like what to wear or eat, and some choices which are **much bigger**. Sometimes these choices are **scary**, and sometimes they’re **exciting** — and often it’s **both**!

For your poem, you’ll need to think about **what kind of choice** you want to write about, and **how** you want to write about it. There are as many ways to write a poem as there are grains in a handful of sand, but to start with, you’ll need:

**INSPIRATION AND IDEAS** and then a **BAG OF TRICKS**

## INSPIRATION AND IDEAS

Before you start writing, you need to think of an **idea** — **what** you’re going to write about.

Inspiration can come from **anywhere**. The most important thing is to be **open** to things you might normally miss in your busy everyday life. Poems are a good way of seeing **the world** in a different way.

Try thinking about a **choice** (big or small) that you’ve made in the past.



You don’t have to write about a choice in your life, though — you can always **make something up**!

If you’re stuck for inspiration, there are lots of things you can try...

- Some people are inspired by **music**
- Some people are inspired while **walking** (in the country or in town)
- **Talking to other people** can help you to come up with ideas too.

People are often inspired by **what they see in the world**. On the next few pages, there are some **pictures** of **Lancaster** and **Morecambe** that may help to inspire you...

All these photos were taken by **Johnny Bean**, and you can find many more at:  
Lancaster: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/jonathanbean/albums/72157604635585287>  
Morecambe: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/jonathanbean/albums/72157604631496838>

*Is this just a signpost, or a 'choice' machine?  
What other things do you use to help you make choices?*



*A reflection of an object looks the same as an object, yet it isn't quite the same thing... After you made an important choice, did you feel the same as before, or did you feel different?*



*Sometimes we get to make good choices, like choosing delicious foods from all over the world...*



*... and choosing delicious cakes!*



*Choosing what to wear.  
Do you think this is an easy  
decision, or a hard one?  
Is it important to you, or  
unimportant?*



*Have you ever had to choose one thing  
over another when you didn't want to?  
Imagine those choices were juggling balls,  
and you had to choose which one to drop.  
How did you decide?*

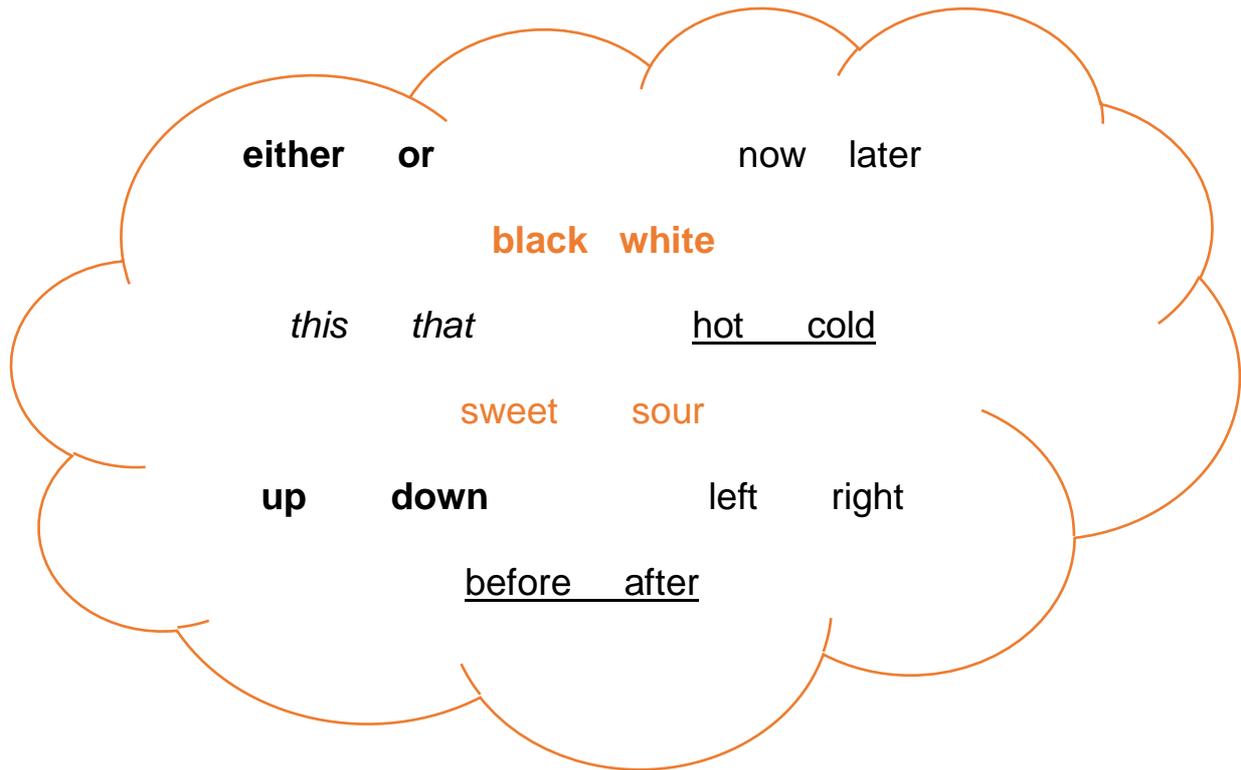


*There are lots of kites to  
choose from here. Have  
you ever had so many things  
to choose from that you felt  
overwhelmed or worried?  
What did you do?*

## Word clouds and lists

Here's **another** way to come up with some ideas for your poem. Try making a word cloud or list of all the things you associate with **choice**.

You could think of **opposites** as two things you sometimes have to **choose** between. Here's a word cloud with lots of **opposite** words in it:



But you don't have to work with **pairs** of words — sometimes there's a midway stage, like with traffic lights: **red** — **amber** — **green**. Or you could write down randomly all your favourite things, all your least favourite things, things you like to eat, games you like to play, or TV programmes, books, songs and films you enjoy. This will help to give you some **building blocks** for a poem on the **theme of choice**.

## BAG OF TRICKS

So you've come up with an **idea** for your poem — **great!** Now you need to decide **how** you're going to write it. Try to choose a **type** of poem that matches what you're writing about — e.g. for a **funny** poem, you might want to pick a type of poem that's short and has lots of rhymes.

If your poem is going to be about something **serious**, it might be longer.

**Couplet** (2 lines that rhyme)

A robin redbreast in a **cage**  
Puts all heaven in a **rage**.

William Blake, from *Auguries of Innocence*

**Quatrain** (4 lines, at least some of which rhyme)

*Awake! for Morning in the Bowl of **Night**  
Has flung the Stone that puts the Stars to **Flight**:  
And Lo! the Hunter of the East has caught  
The Sultan's Turret in a Noose of **Light**.*

from *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, trans. Edward Fitzgerald

**Limerick** (funny poem in which lines 1, 2 and 5 all rhyme with each other, and lines 3 and 4 form a separate rhyme)

*There was an Old man with a **beard**  
Who said it is just as I **feared!** –  
Two Owls and a **Hen**,  
four Larks and a **Wren**,  
Have all built their nests in my **beard!***  
by Edward Lear

**Sonnet**

(A 14-line poem that can rhyme or not rhyme. In most sonnets, the last two lines either solve a problem or emphasise the main point.)

*Let me not to the marriage of true minds  
Admit impediments. Love is not love  
Which alters when it alteration finds,  
Or bends with the remover to remove.  
O no! it is an ever-fixed mark  
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;  
It is the star to every wand'ring bark,  
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.  
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks  
Within his bending sickle's compass come;  
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,  
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.  
If this be error and upon me prov'd,  
I never writ, nor no man ever lov'd.*

by William Shakespeare

## Haiku

A *haiku* is a Japanese poetic form. It has three lines, each with a set number of syllables. The first and last lines usually have **five** syllables, and the middle line has **seven**.

Here's one from the great seventeenth-century Japanese poet, Matsuo Bashō:

*An old silent pond...  
A frog jumps into the pond,  
Splash! Silence again.*

Bashō's *haikus* have inspired poets ever since. Here are two more recent ones, the first by the English poet BC Leale (reproduced by permission of the author's estate):

*LIZARD  
A twig of copper  
on this hot stone or  
green, riveted light*

That one is **irregular** — if you include the title, there are 17 syllables overall, but the lines don't follow the 5-7-5 pattern. Can you think of a reason why the poet might have chosen to vary the form here?

The second poem, by Janet Jenkins, is about hairdressers re-opening in England, after being closed for a long time during the pandemic:

*Hairdressers will need  
to order large sacks ready  
for April shearing.*

Janet's poem comes from a video collection of *haiku* about the pandemic. It's called *Haiflu: More to life than COVID* by Liv Torc, and is on the National Poetry Day website at:

<https://nationalpoetryday.co.uk/poem/haiflu-more-to-life-than-covid/>

As you can tell from these examples, haiku can be **funny** or **serious**. They're a good way to focus on an **important idea** or **feeling**. And because they only have a few words in them, you'll need to **choose** and **arrange** your words **carefully**: use adjectives, verbs and adverbs that will have an **impact** on the audience.

## Repetition

While repetition is not a form, as such, many poets have used it to emphasise important points, and to help structure their thoughts.

You can also use it to set up an expectation for the audience that the poem then fulfils. Or, you might use it to lead the audience to think the poem is going to end in a certain way – then you can surprise them by ending it differently.

Here are two examples. The first one is from the eighteenth-century poet Christopher Smart (who clearly loved his cat Jeoffry very much and observed it closely).

*For I will consider my Cat Jeoffry ...  
For having done duty and received blessing he begins to consider himself.  
For this he performs in ten degrees.  
For first he looks upon his forepaws to see if they are clean.  
For secondly he kicks up behind to clear away there.  
For thirdly he works it upon stretch with the forepaws extended.  
For fourthly he sharpens his paws by wood.  
For fifthly he washes himself.  
For sixthly he rolls upon wash.  
For seventhly he fleas himself, that he may not be interrupted upon the beat.  
For eighthly he rubs himself against a post.  
For ninthly he looks up for his instructions.  
For tenthly he goes in quest of food.*  
Christopher Smart, from *Jubilate Agno*

See the next page for the second poem, which is called 'Instead'. It is written by the contemporary poet Brian Moses, and is on the theme of 'choice'.

## **Instead**

by Brian Moses

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

You can find this poem among those freely available on the National Poetry Day website: <https://nationalpoetryday.co.uk/poems/> (*Reprinted by kind permission of the poet*)

Once you've got your **idea** and thought about the **sort** of poem you want to write, you need to think about the **words** you're going to use and how your poem is going to **sound** when read out loud.

A poem will be a discovery – for you and the reader – and might:

- Contain a **surprise** or something you've just **found out**
- Express a **feeling** – like joy, sadness or anger, or all three
- Use your **favourite** words, or **unusual** and **new** ones
- Say very clearly what it **means** (like Brian Moses' poem 'Instead')...
- ... or be **ambiguous** and mean two things at once (like Robert Frost's 'The Road Not Taken', which can be found on the next page)

The only rule is there are **NO RULES**: just lots of different things to try as you find a way to express what you want to say.

The brilliant Michael Rosen has very kindly set out 9 tips for writing poems: <https://www.theschoolrun.com/poetry-writing-tips-for-kids>

Here are some extra things you could try:

### **Unexpected language**

Choose descriptive words that the reader might not expect, e.g.

*His rusty smile* or *Her volcano eyes*

### **Simile**

You can use these to make imaginative comparisons, e.g.

*As cool as a cucumber*

or, as the BFG might have said:

*As disgusting as a snozcumber*

or as the Scottish poet Robert Burns did say in a famous poem:

*O my Luve is like the melody*

*That's sweetly sung in tune*

### **Metaphor**

These are often stronger than similes, so you can use them when you want to create a really powerful image in the reader's mind, e.g.

*My teacher is a dragon* or *The classroom is a zoo*

or, as Romeo says in Shakespeare's play, *Romeo and Juliet*:

*But soft! What light through yonder window breaks?*

*It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.*

## Extended metaphor

You can think of a situation that's similar to your idea, and then weave it into the poem or weave a poem from it.

'The Road Not Taken' by the American poet Robert Frost is a great example of an extended metaphor. In the poem, life and its choices are described as a road winding its way through a wood. You can find it at: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44272/the-road-not-taken>

## The power of a last line

A strong last line can really bring home the emotional power of a poem. In 'Harbour' the Guyanese poet Grace Nichols brilliantly evokes the virtual and bubble lives we have all been living during these hard, strange times. Then, in the final line she reveals what it is we have all been missing. You can find this one at: <https://www.mmu.ac.uk/write/harbour.php>

**Whatever you decide to write about, and however you decide to write it, Litfest is looking forward to reading your poems!**