

LEARNING A POEM BY HEART

Think of a poem as a written text waiting to have life breathed into it by reading it, listening to it and speaking it aloud. Here are lots of different ways to help you and your pupils take a poem to heart.

One-lesson-fun whole class starter

We've created a special activity to get your whole class started by learning a poem together in just one lesson. The poem we chose is e.e. cummings's 'maggie and milly and molly and may' – find it on the Poetry By Heart website with the search bar. The activity instructions are in your competition registration pack and on the Poetry By Heart website blog. The fun method can be adapted to any poem you like. Give it a go!

Listen to it

Listen to some different readings of the poem. In the Poetry By Heart poem collections, we've included some links to recordings of poets reading the poems. We've also got some video-poems: listen as the poem words appear before you (for an example, see 'The Tyger' video-poem in the Mix-It-Up collection). Listen to different pupil versions too.

Speak it

Read each line several times and try emphasising different words and phrases. Try different tones of voice in different parts of the poem. Think about pace, volume and timing. When you've worked out how it sounds best, try marking up a copy of the poem to remember how to speak it, or record it.

See it

Pupils could make a poem poster for their own process of learning and for a classroom poetry display. They could write out and decorate their poem with patterns and pictures to help them visualise and remember the words. The process of hand writing is linked to memory in a way that entering text on a keyboard isn't.

Move it

Movement is a powerful memory trigger and a good way of exploring the poem's form. Some pupils might enjoy chanting, clapping, dancing, or drumming the poem as a way of experiencing its sounds and rhythms. If you have space, get pupils walking as they say lines aloud – try different speeds, and stops and starts, to fit the poem's pace and rhythm.

Shape it

Involve pupils in making up movements and gestures to go with phrases or lines of the poem. This can be a fun way to enjoy the poem together and it can make learning the poem by heart a sociable activity. With a bit of practice, this could be a group or class performance in its own right.

Practise it

Pupils will need time and lots of encouragement to practise their poem until they know it by heart. They could say it aloud on their own in front of a mirror or while walking down the street. They can try out loud on friends and family, even the dog. It gets easier the more you practise and the feeling of achievement when you have it by heart is amazing!

