Abstracts

1. Website

Alliteration and assonance, rhyme and rhythm. **Find out how you can impress on your students from a younger age a love for poetry and language.** Blair will also provide a suggested list of English poetry in Asia that teachers can use in the classroom.

2. Proposal

My talk will focus on the music of poetry and why we should encourage students to read aloud, or to think of poetry as a *performance* art. I believe most, if not all poetry, is written for the voice because of the focus on *sound* in poetry. The talk will discuss aspects and techniques of poetry that relate to sound, such as onomatopoeia, alliteration, assonance, rhyme and rhythm among others, and how these devices enable students to better understand feeling and emotion in poetry. I will connect this with *performance* and *movement*. Reading poetry aloud is a physical skill that both demands and enhances understanding of poetry, and as a veteran performance poet of 20 years I will talk about techniques for the memorisation and performance of poetry so that we might provide students with better ways to enjoy and derive meaning from an art form that is traditionally considered difficult. Poetry by its nature rests in ambiguity, and thus fuels debates and discussions about meaning. Sound is a major contribution to meaning. I will also provide a suggested list of English poetry sourced in Asia that teachers might use in the classroom.

1. Intro & Speech. 14 minutes

2. Explain the speech and how it leads into today’s topic – memorisation & reading aloud. 2 minutes

3. Nursery Rhymes. A few points about memorisation. More about rhythm & rhyme.

3 minutes

4. Aids to memorisation. 7 points. 3 minutes

5. Exercises with An Irish Airman Foresees His Death.

a. Rhyme words. 2 min

b. Verse order. 2 min

c. Sound analysis. 5 min

d. Memorisation game. 5 min

36 minutes to here

6. Books & poems. 10 minutes.

Part I. Introduction speech. 10 minutes

Hi, I’m here to talk about inspiring your students in the ways of poetry. This is because I seem to be someone who’s interest in poetry was sparked from a young age, but really only in brief moments. With hindsight I might have started writing poetry from a much younger age had I been subject to a lot more poetry in primary school. I can only remember 3 particular incidents from my childhood. One was a poetry writing exercise I did in Standard 3 which was about age 10. That was writing simple form poems such as haiku, tanka and cinquain. I also remember memorising a poem, Ladles & Jellyspoons for a recital at a school performan ce, and then my last abiding memory was from analysing poetic sound devices in high school. Despite what I think was a quite limited exposure to poetry, it snagged at my interests and stayed with me into adulthood. My enjoyment of poetry primarily stems from an enjoyment of recital.

The structure of my talk today is as follows:

1. Speech about my history with poetry and the pleasures of reading aloud.

2. Analysing a poem with respect to its sound content.

3. Some exercises with poetry that can be taken back to the classroom.

4. Some recommended books?

Why read aloud, from the book. Why memorise?

A quote from Elena Aguilar who wrote a blog entry on using poetry in schools. I agree with everything in this statement, except one point.

Aguilar says, “A suggestion about bringing poetry into your lives: don't analyze it, don't ask others to analyze it. Don't deconstruct it or try to make meaning of it. Find the poems that wake you up, that make you feel as if you've submerged yourself in a mineral hot spring or an ice bath; find the poems that make you feel irrational joy or sadness or delight. Find the poems that make you want to roll around in them or paint their colors all over your bedroom ceiling. Those are the poems you want to play with -- forget the ones that don't make sense. Find those poems that communicate with the deepest parts of your being and welcome them in.”

Most kids by the time they start primary school have already memorised a fair number of poems, known as nursery rhymes. That’s fine, and instils a sense of rhythm and rhyme, even those most of these are culturally specific to England, and comprise a lot of very dated ideas and language. They still serve a linguistic purpose of introducing literacy and fluency.

Benefits of memorisation.

1. Reading a poem from memory and reading aloud from the page are two different things. **Only through memorisation can you truly enter a poem and focus your thoughts *into* it.** Reading aloud means you’re concentrating on the words before your eyes but reading from memory means you’re putting your whole body into it . How much better to “see” the poem happen before your eyes so that you *tell it* rather than simply read it to people. WB Yeats said, “Poetry is blood, imagination, intellect running together...It bids us to touch and taste and hear and see the world, and shrink from all that is of the brain only.”

2. **It empowers us when we have the knowledge to solve a problem rather than be reliant on something else**. If our circumstances change and things fall apart, we can recall a poem that reassures us. It can remind us that others have journeyed far and found their way home. Learning by heart means we always have the wisdom of those poems to draw on.

3. **Poems are written to be remembered and recited aloud.** Memorisation is like sports practice – the more you do it, the more skilled and confident you become. When you memorise a poem by heart, it is yours forever, and you can share it with others.

Memorise what?

**Rhythm & Rhyme**

Kinesthestic. Uses the whole body. I don’t like drawing distinctions between boys and girls and what they are or are not capable of, but some people think rhythm/rhyme is good for getting boys involved in poetry. I know that was certainly the case for me. I loved reading Dr. Seuss books when I was young, and reciting tricky tongue twisters, and I always loved poetry with lots of language play. Gerard Manly Hopkins was an 19th century poet who loved playing with language with respect to sound and rhythm. This is the kind of poetry that sparks children’s interest in poetry because they can see the fun element in it. The weird and wonderful. Edward Lear is famous of course for his nonsense verse and I see him as a precursor to Seuss. Julia Donaldson is hugely successful and I'm convinced its because her books are fun to read aloud. I myself write with rhyme and rhythm. And I think there’s benefit and interest to learning about prosody in poetry: how do the rhythms work, what sound effects are working the poems to make them interesting and fun to say out loud. **Techniques for reading poetry aloud & memorisation.**

I’m coming from a very personal angle. Poetry & music/song are obviously related. Poetry is vocal music.

“Poetry promotes literacy, builds community, and fosters emotional resilience. When read aloud, poetry is rhythm and music and sounds and beats. Young children -- babies and preschoolers included -- may not understand all the words or meaning, but they'll feel the rhythms, get curious about what the sounds mean and perhaps want to create their own. Contrary to popular belief amongst kids, boys get really into poetry when brought in through rhythm and rhyme. It's the most kinesthetic of all literature, it's physical and full-bodied which activates your heart and soul and sometimes bypasses the traps of our minds and the outcome is that poetry moves us. Boys, too.”

a. Read the poem aloud about five times. Listen for the rhythm. Don’t worry about line breaks, but pay attention to any punctuation. Feel the rhythm. Stand up. Move your body or arms or hands to help you feel the rhythm. Whether form or formless, all poems have a rhythm, but you often have to “find” it. Rhythm is key. Rhythm is the most important key for memorisation as far as I’m concerned.

b. Don’t simply read the words off the page; try to perform the poem as though you were telling the story to a crowd of people. Lower your voice in the quiet moments, and get loud in the emphatic moments. Use hand gestures to highlight key passages. Be theatrical.

c. Look up any words you don’t understand.

d. Learn and internalise the “story” in the poem, so that you have some sense of what the poem is about generally.

e. Read the poem slowly and theatrically, bringing all your new knowledge of the poem to bear in your performance. The more you commit to the theatrical performance of the piece, the more easily it will plant itself in your brain.

f. Keep reading aloud, over and over. Wait until certain parts of the poem naturally flow from your mouth and use your brain to remember the bits your tongue won’t. It helps here to think about connections between parts so that you understand the flow on two levels – one the muscle memory, two the sense memory.

g. There are a variety of memorisation techniques. I personally prefer what I call the bulldozer method; sheer bloody repetition until my mouth knows the poem irrespective of my brain. But I do use other things, especially sound connections. I look for sound connections to help me remember what comes next. You might use image connections, or sense connections, but it’s the sense connections that we’re trying to find a shortcut around for now. There’s the ‘wandering through many rooms of a mansion’ method.

Part II. Sound effects in poetry

What I want to do next is to take a single poem and analyse its sound elements across a range of devices and how they come into play and create meaning. Let’s say I use “An Irishman Airman Foresees His Death.” Give the audience 3 minutes to find all the sound elements they can, all the echoes, symmetries, and connections, that you hear when the poem is read aloud.

Prosody/Rhetoricity: An Irishman Airman Foresees His Death

I **know** that **I** *shall* **meet** my **fate**, (consonance - meet/fate)

some**where** a**mong** the **clouds** a**bove**. (iambic rhythm)

**Those** that I **fight** I **do** not **hate**, (moderation: spondee/anapest; rhyme hate/fate; echo f/t)

**Those** that I **guard** I **do** not **love**. (anaphora – those; opposing pairs – fight/guard, love/hate)

My **C**ountry is **K**iltartan **C**ross (alliteration C/K; sound allusion – kill)

My **C**ountrymen, **K**iltartan’s poor (anaphor; epistrophe - Kiltartan)

No **LikeLy** end could bring them **L**oss (alliteration L)

or **L**eave them happier than before. (assonance short a)

**Nor** law **nor** duty bade me fight. (long vowels slow; internal rhyme – nor/law)

**Nor** public men **nor** cheering crowds (anaphora - nor)

A lonely impulse of delight (exact echo of the L sounds from line 7)

**drove** to this tumult in the clouds. (moderation: echoes that of lines 3/4)

I balanced all, brought all to mind (alliteration B, conduplicatio – all)

the years to **come seemed** waste of breath (sibilance S, consonance come/seem)

A waste of breath the years behind (anadiplosis waste of breath x 2, conduplicatio - the years)

in balance with this life, this death. (conduplicatio – balance)

I don’t really want to go through a list of all the sound devices, but it’s useful to be aware of them. Today I’m mostly concerned about the act of reading aloud as a practical matter without worrying about the names of all these analytical terms. I kmow they’re part of the curriculum, and of course they should be taught, but far more important for getting kids interested in poetry is getting them to actually read it aloud, to say it. They’ll learn vastly more about sound effects in poetry from memorising and reading aloud than they would from formal analytics of sound. But they’ll learn even more if we combine the two.

Certainly it’s fun to analyse sound in poetry to see how it enhances meaning, but I personally think this effort almost seems like a waste of time in light of memorisation which essentially teaches all this information intuitively, and practically, and allows the student to understand it much more deeply by virtue of having worked out how to say the poem. The student should be made aware of all these sound devices operating in poetry, so that they’re aware of them while practicing for memorisation or reading aloud, but the analysing that leads to and understanding of meaning – that part comes from the mere fact of memorisation. And how much better to learn from doing than from textbook definitions of sound devices. How much better for the student to learn to wrap his or her tongue around these sounds as they practice to say a poem with conviction and conveyance of their personal understanding.

I’m going to present “An Irishman Airman Foresees His Death” for PROSODY study.

Ideas to make poetry learning fun for kids.

1. Pre-teach some vocab if there are too many difficult words. Do challenge the kids though.

2. Take out all the rhyming words (i.e. every other word) and get the kids to fill it in themselves.

3. A story poem made of verses can be cut up. Students have to put the verses into the correct order.

4.Do a sound analysis. Get students to highlight all the sound connections/echoes they can find.

5. Record students saying the verse aloud, or they can record each other.

6. Memorisation.

7. If a poem has more than one voice, do a role play.

8. Choose unknown poems. Don’t choose famous poems. Try to choose poems that students cannot find all the analysis on the internet.

Part IV.

Books of poetry

Book of Beasts by M Krishnan

Children of Two Seasons by Lara Saguisag. Also Animal Games & Blanket, same author. For all of primary.

Flags of Childhood, poems from the Middle East. This is a collection of 60 poems by adult poets writing about childhood, and makes a good introduction to the middle east. For older primary.

Misuzu Kaneko, The Lost poetry of Misuzu Kaneko. A collection of poems written nearly 100 years ago relating to life and nature, especially for children. For younger.

The Iceball Man & Other poems by Margaret Leong, who is not actually Asian, but she married a Chinese man and lived in Singapore and wrote these poems about life in Singapore for kids.

Gwen Lee – two titles. Takes nursery rhymes and rewrites them with a Singaporean setting. For younger kids

Binturong by M Krishnan

I sadly fear the binturong

may not be there for very long—

it is a threatened beast.

So experts now suggest we catch

a dozen bear-cats in a batch,

to breed in zoos at least.

The trouble is the binturong

is very wild and very strong,

and being caught defies:

it kicks and claws and spits and bites,

and howls and growls and snarls and fights

until it’s free—or dies!

Kamayan by Lara Saguisag

All hands! No knives for cutting, no forks for piercing, no spoons for scooping

Instead let’s eat with hands that go straight to teeth

just pick up that chunk of beef, that chicken wing, that meaty rib

and bite!

No plates!

Just heap your meal on fresh and green banana leaves

then feed that hungry mouth.

Pinch the rice into a mouthful mound with your fingertips

and pressing still, raise it to your lips

and use your thumbs to push in that white ball of rice, so warm, so sweet

Just don’t forget to wash your hands.

STARS AND DANDELIONS by Misuzu Kaneko

Deep in the blue sky,

like pebbles at the bottom of the sea,

lie the stars unseen in daylight

until night comes.

You can’t see them, but they are there.

Unseen things are still there.

The withered, seedless dandelions

hidden in the cracks of the roof tile

wait silently for spring,

their strong roots unseen.

You can’t see them, but they are there.

Unseen things are still there.

Winking Island by Margaret Leong

If the tides are high

It never will appear,

That little winking island

Not very far from here;

But if the tides are low

And mud-flats stretch a mile,

The little island rises

To take the sun awhile;

The barnacles enjoy the air

Its daring mangroves cling;

Around it swirl the sea winds

And the flying fishes sing

Peter, Peter, Durian Eater by Gwen Lee

Peter, Peter, durian eater,

Ate so many he shocked his mother;

She gave him salt water in the shell,

To drink and gargle away the smell.

Peter, Peter, durian eater,

Ate so many he began to teeter;

Got sent to bed with so much brine,

He dreamt he ate a porcupine.