Performance poetry

Poetry is powerful. Poems can help us understand and make sense of the world. They can change the way we think and help us learn more about others' thoughts, feelings and experiences. Performance poetry is a unique and compelling context for oracy which requires students to think carefully about the impact of their performance on an audience.

In this project, students will write and perform a poem about their town or city, providing their own take on why their home is so unique. This is a chance for students to shine a light on what is important to them and to fly the flag for their local area.

This sequence of learning could be delivered in English or History or within discrete oracy lessons. The suggested outline can easily be modified for both younger and older students and we encourage you to adapt the project and example lesson plans to suit your students.

This project requires at least 1- 2 weeks teaching time, however it could be extended over a whole half term.

Examples & stimuli

- 'I come from hope. I come from Bradford' is a moving poem written and performed by 12-year-old girls from Bradford, recorded as part of a BBC project, 'We are Bradford'.
- Tony Walsh's poem 'This is the Place' about Manchester is an excellent example of a poem that encapsulates the spirit of a place. It was written in 2012 but was performed by Walsh at the vigil shortly after the bombing of Manchester Arena in 2017, becoming a symbol of pride for the people of Manchester. Here, students from Plymouth Grove Primary School in Manchester perform their own poetry inspired by Walsh at the Great Oracy Exhibition.
- 'Liverpool: a People's Poem', written and performed by Murray Lachlan Young, uses snippets of conversations with Liverpudlians to paint a picture of the city.

Suggested teaching sequence

Introduce: Share project outline with students and explain what they are going to produce. Explore a range of examples of performance poetry rooted in a place. How are they similar/ different? How do they make the listener feel? Why?

Immerse: Explore the idea of 'place' with students and collect ideas for their poem. What does their town or city mean to them? You could introduce students to aspects of local history or explore the uniqueness of their local dialect.

Innovate: Work with students to create their own poems. You could use frames or structures from poems you have explored previously, or introduce students to poetic devices they may wish to include in their poems.

Inspire: Watch inspiring examples of performance poetry. Consider how poets have demonstrated different aspects of the Oracy Framework in their performances. Students prepare their own performances. Include plenty of opportunities for peer critique and feedback.

Introduce: what is performance poetry?

1. Introduce the word 'poetry'. Ask students to share three words that they associate with poetry. You could collect these on post-its or, if learning remotely, use a tool such as Mentimeter to create a word cloud to share with students.

2. Share some examples of performance poetry with students. Depending on the age of your students, you could share some of Michael Rosen's poems performed aloud such as 'Chocolate Cake' or 'No Breathing in Class'. Amanda Gorman's inaugural poem 'The Hill We Climb' is an excellent example for older students. Prince Ea, Holly McNIsh and George the Poet are also great examples to share depending on the age of your students.

   Discuss how the poems made students feel, what they liked about them and what they noticed about the performance of the poem.

3. Create a shared class outline of what makes great performance poetry, using the Oracy Framework as a basis. You could create a working wall and continue to add to this throughout the project.

   - **Physical:** How does the poet vary the tone, pitch, pace and volume of their performance? What effect does this have on the listener? How do they use body language and gestures to support the delivery of their poem?
   - **Linguistic:** What poetic devices are used in the poem?
   - **Cognitive:** How is the poem structured? What is the message of the poem? What is the poet trying to say and how do they convey this?
   - **Social-emotional:** What is the impact of the performance on the audience? How does it make them feel?

4. Revisit the words students collated at the start of the lesson - are there any that they would change as a result of today's lesson?

Resources and external links

- The Oracy Framework
- Michael Rosen- 'Chocolate Cake'
- Michael Rosen- 'No Breathing in Class'
- Prince Ea- 'Dear Future Generations'
- Holly McNish- 'British National Breakfast'
- George the Poet- 'My Neighbourhood (St. Raphael's Estate)'

Introduce: what can poetry tell us about a place?

1. Explain to students that their poems are going to focus on their town, city or neighbourhood.

2. Share examples of poetry rooted in a place. You could share Tony Walsh's 'This is the Place', or Murray Lachlan Young's 'Liverpool: a people's poem'.

3. What do the poems tell us about each city and the people from there? What do we learn about each place from the poems? How do the poets create a sense of place e.g. through the use of local dialect.

4. Discuss how the poems made students feel, what they liked about them and what they noticed about the performance of the poem.

5. Add the output of your discussion to your working wall or document outlining what makes a good piece of performance poetry, This will form your success criteria when students go on to write and perform their own poems.

6. Discuss with students what they might like to convey about their hometowns, cities or neighbourhoods. Begin to share ideas on what they might include in their own poems.

Resources and external links

- [Tony Walsh - 'This is the Place'](#)
- [Murray Lachlan Young - 'Liverpool: a People's Poem'](#)

Immerse: what is my local accent and dialect?

1. Begin the lesson by asking students the following questions:

    ● What do you call your evening meal? Supper, Tea or Dinner
    ● What is the name of the chasing game you play in the playground? Tig, Tag, Tick, Tiggy, Tap
    ● What do you call a medium sized lump of bread? Roll, Cob, Muffin, Teacake, Bun, Bap, Barm

2. Introduce the term 'dialect' - explain that a dialect is how grammar and word choice vary depending on geographical location (this relates to the linguistic strand of the Oracy Framework)

3. Now share the term 'accent'. How many accents can students think of? Which is their favourite? Why? Create a shared definition of the term accent (the way words are pronounced by people in different places- this relates to the physical strand of the Oracy Framework). What is the difference between accent and dialect?

4. With older students, you could ask them to complete the NY Times British-Irish Dialect Quiz, using this as a stimulus to reflect on their own accent and dialect. With younger students, display some key words or pictures, such as: mother, grandmother, baby. Which words do you use to denote these in your local area? Are there any regional peculiarities?

5. Explain to students that their poem is going to focus on their local area and could include examples of their local accent and dialect. Display a series of images from around your local area e.g. the local market, football stadium, the park. Ask students to imagine what they might hear people saying in these places. Alternatively, you could encourage students to go for a walk in their local area, listening out to what people are saying and taking note of this as an example of 'found poetry'.

6. Perform a class poem using the 'popcorn technique'. Each student chooses one phrase or sentence they particularly like. In turn, students pop up and perform their line, focusing on the physical aspects of oracy such as volume, intonation, as well as any actions or gestures. Encourage students to record any words or phrases they would like to incorporate into their poems to return to later when they begin writing.

Resources and external links

● The British Library - British Accents and Dialects
● The G2 Guide to Regional English
● Tongue and Talk: The Dialect Poets

Immerse: what important landmarks are there in my area?

1. Provide students with pictures of important landmarks from their local area. Include a range of different types of landmarks e.g. sports venues, statues, civic and religious buildings as well as places in their neighbourhood such as parks or shops. In groups, ask students to discuss the following questions:

   ● Have you seen these landmarks before? Where are they?
   ● What happens/happened at these landmarks? Why are they important?

2. Alternatively, assign each group a landmark and use the 'fed-in facts' strategy to answer the question, 'what is this landmark and why is it important?'. Outline 4-5 facts about each landmark, such as when it was built, what happens there and how this has changed over time, as well as any other interesting information. Set groups off discussing the above question and feed in facts about their landmark every few minutes to enrich their discussion. Afterwards, ask one student from each group to explain what their landmark is and why it's important to the rest of the class.

3. When students are familiar with each of the key landmarks and why they are important, introduce them to the 'consensus circle' activity. Explain that there has been a flood and that there are only enough sandbags to save 3 of the key landmarks they have explored this session (everybody's homes and the local hospital are already safe).

4. Provide each group with a 'consensus circle' (a circle drawn on a large piece of paper) and post-it notes. Ask them to write one key landmark on each post-it note and arrange on the paper, outside the circle. Are there any other important landmarks that they would also add? In groups, students discuss which landmarks should be saved. Only the landmarks that they all agree on can go into the 'consensus circle'.

5. When groups have decided which landmarks to save, allow them time to walk around the room and look at other groups' shortlists. Ask one member from each group to stay next to their 'consensus circle' to answer any questions others students might have about why they chose to save certain landmarks over others.

Resources and external links

● [Free BBC resources for KS1](#)on landmarks[via Twinkl](#)

Immerse: which places are important to you in your local area?

1. In preparation for this lesson, students choose one place in their local area which is particularly important to them. Ask them to take a photograph of this place and bring to the lesson as a stimulus for talk.

2. In pairs, students share their photographs with each other. Provide sentence stems such as those below to scaffold their responses.

   - *This is ….*
   - *It is important to me because…*
   - *A memory I have from here is…*

3. When students have shared their photographs with their partner, ask each pair to join with another pair. Each child shares their partner's photograph and why they chose it with the new pair, using the sentence stems below to support.

   - *….chose …because*
   - *A memory she has from there is…*

4. After each student has presented their partner's photograph to a new pair, ask them to discuss the following question as a group.

   Were there any similarities or differences between the different places that each of you chose?

5. Ask groups to feedback to the class. Did any common themes emerge? Discuss with students what the places they have chosen tell us about them as a person.

6. Record examples of places with particular importance to students on a shared Powerpoint or working wall to revisit when writing their poems.

Resources and external links

- [National Geographic resources on important places in your community](#)

Immerse: what does it mean to be from…?

1. Display the noun which denotes people from your town or city on the board e.g. Brummie, Leicesterian, Mancunian etc. Ask students to consider what this word means to them. You could use Mentimeter to share which three words come to mind when they see this or ask pairs to play 'ideas tennis', generating as many words which link to this as they can.

2. Explain to students that their challenge is to interview someone from their local area to find out what being a Brummie, Leiceserian, Liverpudlian etc. means to them. Discuss what makes a good interview question. You could explore the difference between open and closed questions; which would be more effective in an interview?

3. In small groups, ask students to generate as many different questions as they can, writing each one on a post-it or recording via [Jamboard](#) if students are learning online. Now, ask students to choose their group's top three questions, ranking these from 1-3. One member from each group presents their questions back to the class. Why did they choose these questions? Why do they think they would be most effective?

4. Now focus on how students will conduct the interview. You could use the four strands of the Oracy Framework to generate success criteria around how to conduct an effective interview.

   Physical: What tone/ volume of voice is appropriate in an interview?
   Linguistic: What register is appropriate with your interviewee?
   Cognitive: What sort of questions will you ask? Will you ask any follow-up questions?
   Social-emotional: How will you put your interviewee at ease? How can you ensure you are listening effectively?

5. Provide students with time to practice their interview skills on their classmates.

6. Students conduct their interviews. They could interview a family member, or speak to a friend or relative via phone or video call, as homework or interview staff members from across the school as part of the lesson.

7. Reflect on what students learnt in their interviews. Allow students time to share in small groups or with the whole class what being from X meant to their interviewee. Are there any common themes? Did they learn anything new about their hometown during the interviews? Do students agree with their interviewees? What does being from X mean to your students?

Immerse: why am I proud to come from …?

1. Display a range of images of significant local people. Do students recognise any of these people? What are their achievements?

2. Explain to students who each person is and provide them with a list of their most notable achievements. Alternatively, you could ask students to research one person for their homework or use the 'fed-in facts' strategy to teach students about different people and their accomplishments.

3. Discuss with students who they think the most important person is and why? Is there a consensus in the class? If not, why not? Do students have different ideas about what makes someone important? Develop a set of criteria which students can use to decide how important someone is e.g. their achievements have made people's lives better or they have overcome setbacks.

4. Tell students that they have to award students the 'Pride of…' award (e.g. the Pride of Leicester or the Pride of Manchester Award) to one of these people. In groups, ask students to discuss who should win the award. Ask groups to come up with a winner and runner up.

5. Alternatively, whittle down the shortlist to two candidates and create a motion for debate e.g. 'Alice Hawkins deserves the Pride of Leicester award'. Assign students to the proposition and opposition and conduct a debate using a structure such as this one.

6. Reflect on the people you have learned about during this session. Use the sentence stems below to encourage students to reflect on who is important to them.

   I am proud _____ is from (your area) because…
   I was surprised to learn that ...

Innovate: how can I use metaphors to convey a sense of place?

voice 21

1.   Play a variation of the 'furniture game' with students. Share some image of well-known people on the board and the sentence starters below. Students take it in turns to create metaphors about different people on the board while their classmates guess who they are describing.

- If they were an item of furniture, they would be…e.g. *an antique grandfather clock with a loud cuckoo*
- If they were a meal, they would be…
- If they were a pet, they would be…
- If they were an item of clothing, they would be…
- If they were a piece of punctuation, they would be…
- If they were the weather, they would be…

2.   Discuss what students liked about this game. How difficult or easy did they find it to guess who their classmates were describing? What did they learn about the the different figures' character, personality and appearance?

3.   In pairs, ask students to generate as many ideas as possible for furniture game prompts as possible. Encourage them to include some more abstract ideas- such as a colour or time of day- as well as more concrete things- such as a bird or tree.

4.   Explain to students that they are going to create a 'metaphor poem' about their town, city or local area. Using the prompts you have generated as a class, ask students to make notes about how they might choose to describe their city, as in the example below.

A boat	An oil tanker screeching and spluttering as it moves towards the horizon
A drink	A warm cup of tea served with with a friendly smile

5.   Students pick their favourite metaphors and arrange these into a poem.

6.   Encourage students to share their poems with each other. What do we learn about their city from this poem? What is the mood of the poem? Is it consistent? Does it need to be?

7.   Spend time with students editing their poems. Ask students to read their poems aloud. What might they add to their poems to improve how they sound when read aloud? Is there anywhere they could use alliteration or a rule of three for example? Can they vary the length of each line? How does this affect the way the poem sounds?

Innovate: what if my local area was a person?

This lesson is inspired by an idea in Kate Clanchy's incredible book 'How to Grow Your Own Poem'.

1. If students haven't already played the furniture game described in the lesson *'How can I use metaphors to convey a sense of place',* introduce the session by playing this game.

2. Share Simon Armitage's *Furniture Poem* with students. What do we learn about the person Simon Armitage is describing from this poem? Which lines are students most drawn to? Why?

3. Explain that today we are going to use *personification* to bring our city to life. If students are unfamiliar with the term personification, explore what it means.

4. In small groups, ask students to imagine what their home town or city would be like if they were a person. Encourage them to think about the physical attributes as well as their character or personality. Ask each group to join up with another to share their ideas and ask each other probing questions, such as 'why did you decide London would have a big stride?'

5. Provide students with a series of prompts for their personification or generate these with students. You could use some examples from Simon Armitage's poem to get your started. Encourage students to include things they explored during the *immerse* stage of the teaching sequence; could they reference any important local figures, landmarks or events?

   - *Her hair was…*
   - *And her eyes were…*
   - *And her blink was*
   - *Her heart was…*
   - *And her smile was…*
   - *And her footprints are…*
   - *And her promises were…*

6. Ask students to share the lines they have created in small groups. Students provide feedback and give each other ideas on how they could improve what they have written. They could refer to the poetic devices identified during the *introduce* phase.

7. Students weave the lines they have created together to make a poem.

Innovate: what is an acrostic poem?

1. Share an acrostic poem with students. With older students, you could share Edgar Allan Poe's 'An Acrostic'. For younger students, you could use this example on BBC Bitesize. What do students notice about the poem? Explain that in an acrostic poem, the first letter of each line spells a word. The word is the subject of the poem.

2. Explain to students that they are going to create an acrostic poem about their home town or city. Discuss with students what they would like to convey about their home in the poem. Draw on ideas developed during the immersion stage of the teaching sequence e.g. local history or events, important landmarks, local dialogue.

3. Write the letters of your students' home town or city on the board and generate the first two to three lines in conjunction with students. Model the writing process aloud, sharing how you might choose a better word or phrase.

4. Set students off writing their own acrostic poems. With younger students, you might like to provide images of your local area to inspire them whilst writing. You could also generate key words which link to each letter in the name of your students' home town or city as a scaffold for writing.

5. Provide students with plenty of opportunities to read their poem aloud, sharing it with their peers. Encourage them to think about how it would be performed. Build in time for students to rework sections of their poem based on feedback from you or their peers.

Resources and external links

- 'What are acrostic poems?' - BBC Bitesize
- Edgar Allan Poe's 'An Acrostic'

Innovate: how has where I am from shaped who I am?

1. Share Mark Beaumont's poem 'I am Mark Beaumont' (which featured on an Orange advert) with students.

2. In trios, ask students to discuss what we learn about Mark Beaumont from this poem. You could use the 'silent summariser' protocol in which two students discuss what they learned while the other listens silently. Once they have finished speaking, the 'silent summariser' shares back the main points. When you bring the class back together you could ask a couple of 'silent summarisers' to share their group's key ideas.

3. Display the following talking point: *Where you come from shapes who you are.* You could provide students with a concept cartoon with key ideas around this talking point to explore or use Mark Beaumont's poem as a stimulus; what do we learn about where he has come from and how it has shaped him?

4. Explain to students that they are going to create a poem using the same structure as Mark Beaumont's (each line beginning with 'I am...') but which has a focus on how where they are from has shaped who they are. Discuss what could this mean and focus on 'place' in the broadest sense i.e. the people who live in their hometown, the experiences they have had there as well as their memories.

5. Model creating an 'I am …' poem using your experience of your hometown as a stimulus before setting students off on creating their own.

6. Provide students with opportunities to read and listen to each other's poetry. Ask students to share what they have learned about their classmates as a result of today's lesson. You could use the sentence stems below.

    I was surprised to learn…
    I didn't know that….
    I enjoyed finding out that...

Resources and external links

- 'I Am Mark Beaumont' video
- 'I Am Mark Beaumont' poem
- The Linking Project: Secondary poetry resources inspired by Mark Beaumont poem
- The Linking Project: example poetry resources for primary students on the theme of identity, including a lesson on Mark Beaumont's poem with examples of student's poems

Innovate: what does it mean to come from …?

This lesson adapted from Kate Clanchy's incredible book 'How to Grow Your Own Poem'. It is inspired by George Ella Lyon's Where I'm From Project which invites you to write a poem based on a list poem originally by Lyons, using the refrain 'I come from…'.

1. Share Robert Seatter's version of 'I Come From…' and this incredible version 'I Come From Hope, I Come From Bradford' written by 12 year-olds in Bradford.

2. In small groups, ask students to discuss the following: how were the poems were both similar and different. What did we learn about the poets in each poem? What did we learn about where they are from? How do the poets feel about where they are from?

3. Focus on one of the two poems. Or alternatively, assign groups one of the two poems to explore in further depth. Ask students to pick out each of the five senses in the poem. What tastes, smells, sounds, tastes and textures can they identify in each of the poems? How does this create a sense of place?

4. Explain to students that they are going to create their own 'I Come From…' poem. Introduce students to the idea of lists of three. In *How to Grow Your Own Poem,* Kate Clanchy suggests students create lists of three about the following as a basis for their own poem.

    - I come from: three tastes of your home. Curry, toast, tea.
    - I come from: three smells of your home. Food, ironing, garden.
    - I come from: three sounds of your home. Accents, music, the outside.
    - I come from: three textures or feelings of your home. Heavy curtains, cool air conditioning, warm beds.
    - I come from: objects. Three books, three bits of furniture, three things that were on the table.
    - People: the people that were there, the people that weren't.
    - Fears: real and unreal.
    - Joys.
    - And something bigger for an ending. Three skies. Three bits of weather. The thing that was going to take you away (Dreams and poetry. Trains, trains, trains).
    (Kate Clanchy, *How to Grow Your Own Poem,* p. 149)

5. Provide students with plenty of opportunities to read their poems aloud, experimenting with the rhythm and rearranging words where necessary in order to create this.

Resources and external links
- George Ella Lyon's Where I am From Project
- 'I Come From Hope, I Come From Bradford'
- Robert Seatter, 'I Come From…'
- Kate Clanchy's Twitterfeed has a wealth of poetry writing inspiration

Inspire: how should a poem be performed?

1. Revisit the first lesson 'what is a performance poem?'. What criteria did you generate on what makes a great piece of performance poetry. Hone in on the 'physical' and 'social-emotional' aspects as these concern how a poem is performed.

2. Watch Michael Rosen's top tips for performing poems or stories or Joe Coelho on how to perform a poem. Discuss key words such as emphasis, tone, speed, pacing, expression. Discuss which strands of the Oracy Framework these relate to and begin to create a class set of success criteria or a toolkit with ideas on how to perform a poem.

3. Watch examples of performance poetry such as: 'Don't' by Michael Rosen; Amanda Gorman's 'The Hill We Climb…'. Discuss the tone of each poem and how this has impacted the poet's performance. In small groups, students identify different aspects of the social-emotional and physical aspects of the Oracy Framework that they notice in each performance.

4. Ask students to revisit their own poems (any of the poems created during the 'innovate' phase). What is the tone of their poem? How might this change the way they choose to perform it?

Resources and external links

- Michael Rosen's top tips for performing poems or stories
- Joe Coleho on how to perform a poem
- 'Don't' by Michael Rosen
- Amanda Gorman's 'The Hill We Climb'

Inspire: how can I inspire others through my performance?

1. Explain that today students are going to focus on bringing their poems (if students have created multiple poems ask them to choose one to perform) to life through their performance. Revisit the success criteria you generated with students around the cognitive and social-emotional strands of the Oracy Framework.

2. Discuss with students how they would like their audience to feel when watching their performance. How might this change the choices they make about how they perform their poem?

3. Use 'the nest' strategy to get students to begin practicing (and memorising) their poems; in a classroom, or larger space if possible, students find a space and begin performing their poem (or simply reading aloud to begin with). You could display different keywords on the board such as: pace, pause, gestures or tone, asking students to spend 5 minutes practicing how to incorporate each element into their performance. As students are practicing individually, walk round the space and give students feedback on their performance.

4. Now, ask students to focus just on the first line of their poem. Ask them to repeat this a number of times in different ways: loudly or quietly, for example. Explain that the first line is especially important as it is the first part of their poem the audience will hear, drawing them in.

5. Choose a couple of students to perform their poems to the rest of the class. Using the success criteria you have generated around the physical and social-emotional strands, give them kind, helpful and specific feedback.

6. You could repeat this lesson a number of times focusing on different elements of the performance. For example, you could spend a whole lesson on the most effective use of pause in a performance, encouraging students to consider when to pause in order to have the biggest impact on their audience.

Resources and external links

- [PoetryQuest resources including helpful guidance on teaching performative aspects of poetry](#)

Inspire: how can I help my classmates become better performance poets?

1. Explain to students that today they are going to watch each other's performances and provide feedback on what they're doing well and how they can improve. Discuss with students what makes good feedback. You could display the term 'constructive feedback' on the board and discuss what 'constructive' means in this context.

2. Group students in trios. In turn, each student performs their poem to the rest of their group. Encourage students to use the success criteria you have created around the performance of their poem (the physical and social-emotional strands) of the Oracy Framework in order to give constructive feedback.

What worked well	**Even better if**
It was highly effective when…	To challenge you, I would suggest…
I enjoyed your performance because…	I wish you had used/ utilised/ employed...because
Full marks for…	Next time, could you…
I liked the way you used/ employed/ utilised… because...	I would draw attention to...

3. Spotlight examples of kind, specific and helpful feedback.

4. Once groups have shared their performances with each other, invite students to share their poem with the whole class.