

# HOPSCOTCH *in the* SKY

Poetry Kit

Lucinda Jacob



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# About this Poetry Kit

## **What on earth is a poetry kit?**

This poetry kit is a bunch of ideas about writing poems. These ideas are little seeds. If you plant them in your head, they could grow into big ideas – or even into poems!

## **Why is it called the *Hopscotch in the Sky* poetry kit?**

Because I wrote a book of poems called *Hopscotch in the Sky*, published by Little Island Books and Poetry Ireland, and this poetry kit is a kind of best-friend book to that book.

You might find some good ideas in this poetry kit even if you have not read *Hopscotch in the Sky*, but if you have a copy of *Hopscotch*, this kit will make a lot more sense and be more useful.

## **Who is this poetry kit for?**

If you like to write your own poems, or you think you might like to try, then you are the very person I made this poetry kit for. Most of this book is for children – and of course you can read the bits for teachers too if you like.

If you are a teacher (or a parent) and you would like to have poetry-writing sessions with your pupils in class (or your children at home), then you are also the very person I made this poetry kit for. The sections labelled 'For teachers' are especially for use in class, but you may also find useful ideas in the children's sections.

Writers who work with kids who like to write poetry might also find this poetry kit helpful.

## **Where can I get another copy of this kit?**

This poetry kit is free to download from <http://littleisland.ie/books/hopscotch-poetry-kit/>

## A Few Words for Children

The reason I love poetry so much is the connections it can make between us and the wonderful, funny, difficult, complex world that we live in. I hope you enjoy reading my poems in *Hopscotch in the Sky*, and I also hope you have fun trying your hand at writing your own poems.

## A Few Words for Grownups

I've been encouraging children's creativity in schools and libraries for over twenty years now, and I love working with poetry because it works on so many levels. And it's great fun!

### **Talk, sing, rhyme!**

If you are lucky, you grew up with nursery rhymes, nonsense poems and wordplay. This is a great start, and a good way to get children tuned into the rhythms of poetry long before they can read and write.

### **Read, read, read!**

Children need access to poems if they are to write their own, just as they need to have encountered lots of stories before writing them successfully themselves. The poems in *Hopscotch in the Sky* are a good place to start, of course, and I've also listed the titles of some of my favourites by other poets.

### **Collaborate**

The activities described in this book start with reading and discussion of poems and progress to collaborative writing, with the teacher leading the class. You may find it useful to act as a 'writing machine' for your class, using a board or flip-chart to make poems together. Once the class is confident in the process the activity can be extended into independent work by asking them to write individually or in small groups.

### **Encourage inspiration**

Sometimes a child will write their 'own' poem rather than following the set activity – and that's fine! Feel free to encourage enthusiasm and allow children to focus on their own impressions, observations and memories and to follow their own feeling for sound and sense in the way they write their poems.

### **Reading *Hopscotch in the Sky***

This poetry kit homes in on particular poems in *Hopscotch in the Sky* that work as examples for particular kinds of poetic forms or techniques, but it's also a good idea to read the poems in sequence. That is because the poems in *Hopscotch* are arranged in a particular order.

They follow the seasons of the year – there are about eight poems for each season. If you read the poems in sequence, working your way from the front to the back of the book (not all at one sitting, of course!) you'll notice that the colourway changes to indicate the changes in the light and the landscape colours as the year progresses through spring and summer into autumn and winter.

# Favourite Poems

Here are some of my favourite poems for sharing with children. Some of them are by contemporary writers, some are classics and some were written specially for children. You can find most of them online, or you can try collections and anthologies from your school or public library.

'What I Saw' – Anonymous

'Recipe for Good News' – Mandy Coe

'Your Dresses' – Carol Ann Duffy

'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening' – Robert Frost

'Saint Francis and the Birds' – Seamus Heaney

'Anto's Inferno' – Rita Ann Higgins

'Amergin' – Douglas Hyde (transl.)

'Warning' – Jenny Joseph

'No. 115 Dreams' – Jackie Kay

'Ten Things Found in a Wizard's Pocket' – Ian McMillan

'Prayer Before Starting' – Paula Meehan

'Overheard on a Saltmarsh' – Harold Munro

'Jewels' – Christina Rossetti

'Buffalo Dusk' – Carl Sandberg

'Lines' – William Carlos Williams

'Stuck Indoors' – Enda Wyley

# POETIC FORMS

Poems come in all kinds of shapes and forms. Even if you haven't got an idea for a poem at the moment, you can sometimes kick-start your brain by having a bash at writing a poem in a particular form. A poetic form is a kind of shape or a mould for a poem (like a muffin tin). If you are using a poetic form, you have to make your words fit into the mould so that the poem comes out the right shape. It's not that difficult, as long as you know the rules for the different forms, and it's a great way to get your poetic muscles working hard.

When you get good at writing poems in different forms, you can go on to make up new forms yourself by changing the rules or adding new ones.

# Acrostic

An acrostic is a poem where the first letter of each line makes a word (or words) which you read downwards instead of across. Let's say your name is Jack and you want to write an acrostic on your name. First you write your name vertically down the left-hand side of the page:

**J**  
**A**  
**C**  
**K**

And then you write the rest of the poem. The first word of the first line has to begin with J (if your name is Jack!), the first word of the second line with A, and so on. For example:

**J**ust as owls begin to call  
**A**nd the night gets dark  
**C**atch a star about to fall  
**K**eeep it for a lark

That acrostic rhymes, but they don't have to. Each line in an acrostic can just be one word or a few words:

**O**h so  
**R**osy  
**L**ively  
**A**rty

That acrostic also describes the person whose name it is built on. So does this one:

**K**night in armour  
**E**ven when feeling  
**V**ery  
**I**nsecure and  
**N**ervous

## Write your own acrostic

- Try writing an acrostic based on your own name. Write your name downwards, letter by letter, and off you go!
- If you are feeling extra-clever, see if you can describe yourself in the poem as well as 'hiding' your

name in it. Remember, an acrostic can be very simple: you can just have one word per line if you like.

- Acrostics don't have to be based on names. You could write any word or words downwards and then fill in the rest of the acrostic. If you don't tell anyone it's an acrostic, the reader might not notice. You could even use acrostics as a way of writing secret messages. Have a go!



# Cinquain

A cinquain is a very simple kind of poem, even though it has an unusual name. Can you count up to five in French (or Italian)? If you can, you'll be able to guess how many lines are in a cinquain. (The French for 'five' is *cinque*.)

A cinquain is a poem of five lines with no rhyme. It has two words in the first line, four in the second, six in the third, eight in the fourth and two in the fifth, so it looks a bit like this:

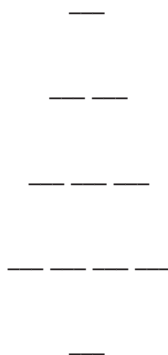
— —  
— — — —  
— — — — — —  
— — — — — — — —  
— —

(There is a cinquain like this in *Hopscotch in the Sky*. Can you find it?)

Another kind of cinquain has one word in the first line, two in the second, three in the third, four in the fourth and one in the fifth, like this:

—  
— —  
— — —  
— — — —  
—

Or this:



Here is an example of the simpler kind of cinquain:

Blackbird  
tossing leaves  
in the garden  
hopping about looking for  
worms

## Write your own cinquain

- Begin by reading the cinquain you have found in *Hopscotch in the Sky*.
- Ask yourself these questions and think about your answers:
  - What do you notice about the poem?
  - What is it about?
  - What does it remind you of?
- Count the words on each line in the poem. Write down the number of words you find on each line, to help you to remember how a cinquain goes.
- Now, think of a subject you'd like to write about.
- Keeping the number of words per line in mind, write your own cinquain. Remember, cinquains do not rhyme, so that makes them quite easy to write.
- If you prefer, you could write the simpler kind of cinquain (with one word on the first line, two on the second and so on – half the number of words per line as in the more usual kind of cinquain).

## For teachers

### Whole class writing activity – cinquain

- With your class, choose a subject to collaborate on for a class poem.
- Ask the class to say something about the subject in two words for the first line. Write this on the board or flipchart.
- Ask them to continue the sense of the first line and suggest something for the second line. Adjust their suggestions until you have agreed on four words for the second line, and write that next.
- Then continue with six words for the third line and eight words for the fourth line.
- Ask the class if they can remember (or guess) how many words should be in the fifth line. (They may suggest ten.)
- Read my cinquain, 'Sunrise', from *Hopscotch in the Sky* again. Show the class how it closes with two words in the fifth line (not ten as they might have been expecting).
- When you have completed your poem with two words in the last line, ask the class why they think a cinquain ends in this way. There is no 'right' answer to this question, but I like the way a cinquain seems to open out as the lines get longer and then it ends almost back where it started with a short line, a bit like opening and closing the lid of a box.
- If you have time, each child could now write their own cinquain.

## Extra activities

- You can also write a simpler cinquain on the pattern 1, 2, 3, 4, 1 words per line.
- Or you can try something a little more challenging by counting syllables on each line instead of words, following the same pattern – 2, 4, 6, 8, 2 syllables per line.

## Wrap up

Conclude the session by asking the children to read their poems aloud and talk about what they have written.

# Free Verse

Free verse really does give you lots of freedom! Free verse typically uses language that is close to the way we talk, so it can be used to say what you want to say without being forced into a formal structure or particular pattern. It follows the rhythms of everyday speech, so you can use the pauses you naturally take when you are speaking to decide where to start a new line. You can start a new verse when you start a new thought, rather like starting a new paragraph when you are writing a story.

Free verse does not have a regular rhyme scheme (although the occasional rhyme may creep in). Repetition and alliteration are often used to strengthen the sound patterns in free verse.

Quite a lot of the poems in *Hopscotch in the Sky* are in free verse. Can you find some of them?

I wrote about my own home area in *Hopscotch in the Sky* in the poem 'In the Library beside the Sea'. I was inspired by something I overheard someone say about mermaids coming into a library near where I live as it is so close to the sea. I brainstormed these two ideas (the place and the creature) and wrote down everything that came into my head. Then I arranged some of the ideas to give the sense of mermaids visiting a library. I used free verse, using ordinary speech, close to the way I talk.

## Write your own poem in free verse

- Begin by reading 'In the Library beside the Sea'.
- Think about these questions:
  - What do you notice about the poem?
  - What is it about?
  - What does it remind you of?
- Now, think about what you would like to write about. One idea is to write about your home town or the place where you live or your own home or school. That's a subject you know very well and probably talk about a lot. And if you like you could add in something a bit unexpected, like a wizard or a superhero.
- Think up as many ideas and images as you can about your chosen subject and write them all down.
- Then choose the ones you like best, and write them down as a poem, using words that come naturally to you. Use your own voice, reading your writing aloud, to guide you on where you should end each line.

## For teachers

### Whole class writing activity – free verse

- Ask the class to describe places near where they live, and choose one place to write about in a class poem. (For example a library, park, church or shopping centre.)
- If you can, visit your chosen place with the children; if that is not possible, get the children to do some research about the place.
- Next brainstorm for a mythical creature that could be associated with your chosen place. For example, it could be a giant, a unicorn or an elf. A dragon could come down from the hills. Or you could choose an ancient warrior or a historic character.
- Pick one of the creatures from the brainstorming session and ask the class to describe how the creature might feel and what might happen if they visited a local facility such as a library, school, swimming pool, park, heritage site, shopping centre or restaurant. Note their suggestions on the board.
- Using 'In the Library beside the Sea' from *Hopscotch in the Sky* as a model, rewrite the ideas you have come up with in an order that pleases the class. As this poem idea is about a visit to a place, a sequence may emerge naturally.
- Free verse follows the natural rhythms of ordinary speech, so new lines can be started with new ideas, with new phrases and where you pause for breath when you say it aloud. Allow the children to suggest where the lines should begin and end.
- Free verse often features alliteration. For example, my first draft of 'In the Library beside the Sea' had a number of words beginning with 's' in it; when I noticed this, I changed some of the other words in the poem, choosing instead words that also began with 's', to make the sound pattern stronger. Re-read your poem as it stands and see if there is any alliteration; if so, suggest to the children that some of the words might be changed to add to the alliteration.

## Independent activities

Invite the children to write individually or in small groups. They could write their own version of the whole class poem or use some of the ideas that were generated but not used in the whole class poem. Encourage them to choose a character that excites them.

## Extra tip

Free verse often makes use of repetition, just as we often repeat ourselves when we are talking to each other. See 'Rules for a Good Walk' in *Hopscotch in the Sky*, where a line is constantly repeated. Ask the children to try repeating some lines in a free verse poem of their own, to see how it changes the overall effect.

## Wrap up

Conclude the session by asking the children to read aloud and talk about what they have written.

# Haiku

A haiku is a traditional Japanese poem of three lines that do not rhyme. Haiku follow a particular pattern:

- The first line has five syllables
- The second line has seven syllables
- The third line has five syllables

Such a short poem (just seventeen syllables) has space for only one thought or image, though that thought could be as tiny as a raindrop or as vast as the universe. A haiku often captures the moment when something changes or moves (like the frog that jumps into a pond in the famous haiku by the Japanese poet Basho). There are quite a few haiku in *Hopscotch in the Sky*. How many can you find?

Note: The plural of 'haiku' is 'haiku'. (Like 'sheep'!)

## Write your own haiku

- Begin by reading a few of the haiku in *Hopscotch in the Sky*.
- Count the syllables on each line.
- Now, compare a few of the haiku. Can you see that they all follow the same pattern, using the same number of syllables on each line?
- Make a note of the number of syllables per line to remind yourself to stick to the haiku form.
- Try writing a haiku of your own. Remember you have to count the syllables very carefully to make sure you get it right.

## For teachers

### Whole class writing activity – haiku

- Close observation is a good starting point for writing haiku, so preparing to write haiku could involve an outing. While you are out, encourage the children to discuss what they can see and hear, feel, smell, and taste. Look out for tiny details as well as the broad sweep of your experience. You might bring back a few 'souvenirs' from your walk: a leaf, a stone, a twig, a photograph.

- Back in the classroom, ask the class to write a short description of their most vivid memory from the outing (in prose).
- Encourage them to use words that are specific and will bring their memory to life on the page.
- Next, read aloud one or two of the haiku in *Hopscotch in the Sky*. Then give the class time to read the poems themselves.
- Check that the class know how to count syllables, and ask them if they can see the pattern of syllables in the poems.
- Ask the children to suggest a first line of five syllables using some of the words from their descriptive piece, and write an agreed line on the board.
- If what they want to say is longer than five syllables, try shortening it until it contains five syllables, or let it run over into the second line.
- Write (or complete) the second line, which should continue the idea in the first line and should be seven syllables long.
- The third line, which completes the haiku, should have five syllables.
- Get the class to double-check the number of syllables on each of the three lines and adjust any line that is too long or too short. (This is a good introduction to the idea of re-drafting and editing.)
- Remember, the lines should not rhyme.

## Independent activities

- Ask the children to write their own haiku using their descriptions of the class outing. They could extend the pattern by writing a series of three or five haiku.
- Ask the children to find and identify other haiku in *Hopscotch in the Sky*.

## Extra tips

- Another way into writing haiku is to begin with a short description and gradually take words away until you have 17 syllables in three lines.



- Don't forget that rules are made to be broken! My poem 'Bird', in *Hopscotch in the Sky*, started out as a haiku but what I had to say wouldn't fit the pattern. It's fun to work in particular poetic forms, but sometimes what you want to say is more important.

## Wrap up

Conclude the session by asking the children to read aloud and talk about what they have written.

# List Poem

Everyone makes lists to remind them of things.

One of my favourite list poems is Ian McMillan's 'Ten Things Found in a Wizard's Pocket'. You should be able to find this poem online. There are some surprising things in the poem, as the poet combines something ordinary (a pocket) with a wizard's magic.

My poem 'Teacher Said' in *Hopscotch in the Sky* is a list poem; can you find another one in the book?

## Write your own list poem

- Read 'Teacher Said' from *Hopscotch in the Sky*.
- 'Teacher Said' lists the contents of a schoolbag with a bit of magic added. It was inspired by Ian McMillan's poem 'Ten Things Found in a Wizard's Pocket'. Take a look at that poem too, if you have access to the internet.
- A list is an easy way to structure a poem. You could try using shopping lists, 'to do' lists, holiday lists, homework lists, contents lists, recipes, menus, days of the week, months of the year, number sequences and the alphabet. Choose a list type that appeals to you.
- Then try writing your own list poem. Pick something that could have lots of stuff in it, and don't forget the magic!

## For teachers

### Whole class writing activity – list poem

- Begin by reading 'Teacher Said' from *Hopscotch in the Sky* aloud, and then give the children time to read it for themselves.
- Invite responses with open questions:
  - What do you notice about the poem?
  - What is it about?
  - What does it remind you of?
- Discuss lists and our reasons for writing them with the class. Then ask the children to give some examples. With a little prompting, suggestions could include shopping lists, 'to do' lists, holiday

lists, homework lists, contents lists, recipes, menus, days of the week, months of the year, number sequences and the alphabet.

- Choose one type of list to structure your class poem.
- Ask the class to think who the list could be for and to add something surprising or magical to it. For example it could be a shopping list for a princess or a dog, or it could be a menu for a party for ghosts and vampires.
- Ask the children to suggest items for the list and write their suggestions on the board. Take a new line for each item on the list.
- Some items may go over two lines (as in 'Teacher Said').
- When the list is complete, invite the class to read it aloud.
- Invite them to look at the order of the items on the list and to rearrange it until they are satisfied with the poem.
- With a large class and a very long list you may find that the items suggested could make two poems.
- List poems generally do not rhyme but if you find some rhymes have emerged, encourage the class to disperse these in a regular pattern. Ending with a rhyming couplet can be very effective.

## Independent activity

Ask the children to take another list and write their own poem.

## Extra tips

- Asking each child in the class for their favourite food is a simple way to write a list poem together. It may contain a lot of repetition (perhaps everyone's favourite is pizza?) or become funny as the children make increasingly wacky suggestions.
- Read 'Nature Table' in *Hopscotch in the Sky*. It is also a list poem with some repetition, based on the seasons. You might get the children to suggest why it was chosen to be the first poem in the collection.

## Wrap up

Conclude the session by asking the children to read aloud and talk about what they have written.

# Rondelet

A rondelet is a short poem that is based on traditional French songs. It is quite a complicated form, with a lot of things to remember. Writing a rondelet is a bit like doing a puzzle – difficult, but fun!

- A rondelet has seven lines.
- It rhymes on the pattern:  
**a b a a b b a**
- And the syllables also have to be counted:
  - The first line has four syllables
  - The second line has eight syllables
  - The third line is an exact repeat of line 1
  - The fourth line has eight syllables and rhymes with line 1
  - The fifth line has eight syllables and rhymes with line 2
  - The sixth line has eight syllables and also rhymes with line 2
  - The seventh (and last) line again repeats line 1
- 'Autumn Rondelet' in *Hopscotch in the Sky* is (obviously!) a rondelet.

## Write your own rondelet

A rondelet is quite tricky, so it's a good idea to practise first by writing simpler kinds of poems, such as haiku (so you get used to counting syllables) or rhyming couplets (to get you used to rhyme schemes).

After that, you might feel ready to try a rondelet yourself.

- Begin by reading 'Autumn Rondelet' from *Hopscotch in the Sky*.
- Ask yourself these questions.
  - What do you notice about the poem?
  - What is it about?
  - What does it remind you of?
- Now, look at the way the poem is written. You'll notice that lines 1, 3 and 7 are the same – like a chorus.
- Lines 1, 3 and 7 are only half the length of the other lines. They have four syllables, and all the other lines have eight. Count them to check!

- Look at the rhyme scheme also. Lines 1 and 2 do not rhyme with each other. Lines 3 and 7 are the same as line 1, so obviously they all rhyme. What about lines 4, 5 and 6?
- It's a good idea to write down the number of syllables per line and the rhyme scheme before you start writing a rondelet yourself, to keep you on track.
- Now, think of a subject you'd like to write about.
- Keeping the number of syllables per line AND the rhyme scheme in mind, write your own rondelet.
- If you manage it, give yourself a clap on the back. If you can't get it right, don't worry – there are lots of other kinds of poems that you can try instead.

## For teachers

### Whole class writing activity – rondelet

- Begin by reading 'Autumn Rondelet' from *Hopscotch in the Sky* aloud with your class; then give the class time to read the poem by themselves.
- Remind the class that the rondelet is based on traditional French songs and is quite a tricky form – but can be fun to write if you have had some practice already with simpler forms.
- Check that the class understands what a rhyme is, and that they can count syllables.
- Choose a subject for your rondelet and brainstorm, noting down everything that the class suggests.
- Look for a short phrase for the line that is repeated three times. If it doesn't already have four syllables ask the class to suggest adjustments by adding or taking words away. Remember that you don't have to use full sentences in poems.
- Then, using the brainstormed ideas, ask for suggestions for line 2 and adjust that line until it has eight syllables. Remember that line 2 must not rhyme with line 1.
- Now for the easy bit: create line 3 by copying line 1.
- Next, collect words that rhyme with the last word of line 1, to use at the end of line 4.
- Also collect words that rhyme with the last word of line 2, to use at the end of lines 5 and 6.

- To find rhyming words, go through the alphabet and write down all the rhyming words you can think of with the help of the class. Sometimes there are very few rhymes for a particular word; in that case, it might be best to go back and change the first two lines so that they end in words with lots of rhymes.
- Now, remind the class of the rhyme scheme and the number of syllables required, and invite the class to suggest words for lines 4, 5 and 6.
- Some suggestions may need adjustment to fit the pattern. This can be a good introduction to re-drafting and editing.
- Don't forget to finish by repeating line 1 again.

## Independent activity

Some of the children's ideas may not have been used in the class poem. Ask them to use these to write rondelets on their own or in pairs.

## Extra tips

Having had a go at a rondelet with the whole class, some children may want to write a poem using their own choice of rhyme or in free verse. Do encourage this, as rigid forms like the rondelet are not for everyone!

## Wrap up

Conclude the session by asking the children to read aloud and talk about what they have written.

# ELEMENTS OF POETRY

Poems are made up of words, of course, and the words are arranged and linked or divided in particular ways – with line breaks, for example – and in particular patterns.

Poets use all kinds of little tricks to make their poems sound extra-good or to bring their images alive. Rhyme is the main effect people think of, but other effects can be used instead of rhyme or along with it, to create sound patterns in your poems. But with these things, less is more: if you over-use these effects, your poems can seem false or clunky, so easy does it!

## Alliteration and assonance

Alliteration is the repetition of the sound at the beginning of words that are close to each other. For example, the letter *s* is used in this way in 'In the Library beside the Sea':

**s**lipped and **s**towed their **s**kins  
in **s**ailing club lockers

Alliteration can create pleasing sound patterns in your writing. Tongue twisters are the ultimate in alliteration. Look at this one!

**R**ound the **r**ugged **r**ocks the **r**agged **r**ascals **r**an

Assonance is the repetition of vowel sounds in words that are close enough to each other to make a subtle pattern in sound that is not quite a rhyme, but hints at it: for example if you had the words *cool, food, moon, choose* in a line or two of a poem, the *oo* sounds would echo each other softly.

## Line breaks and punctuation

If you are using a particular form or pattern to write a poem then this will usually dictate where the line breaks occur. For example each item in a list poem is likely to need its own line. Rhyming words are usually put at the ends of the lines.

If you are writing free verse, you have to decide for yourself where to break the lines. You could try reading your poem out loud and notice where you pause as you read. That's usually a good place to end one line and start the next.

Or a new thought might start a new line.

Does the poem sound like a poem when it is read aloud but look like a story on the page? If so, it may be worth revising and putting in line breaks.

Traditionally each new line in a poem started with a capital letter, and so nursery rhymes and other poems with a traditional feel to them are often printed this way. For example I have used capitals at the start of every line in 'I'll Take You There'.

Nowadays, most poets just use capitals where a new sentence starts, even if that sentence goes over a number of lines in a poem. It's up to you to use capitals any way you like – but it is kinder to your readers if you are fairly consistent about it.

A phrase is part of a sentence. You don't always have to have full sentences in poems. In particular, a haiku could be made up of three phrases – a whole poem without a sentence!

You can follow the ordinary rules of grammar to punctuate your poem or you can use no punctuation at all.

It is usual to start a poem with a capital letter and end it with a full stop, but very often the pauses at the end of lines can take the place of commas and other punctuation.

Remember, though, that punctuation is one of the ways that you can help your readers to get the meaning you intend, so it is worth taking some time over it. Read your poem aloud to see if any punctuation is needed to indicate the rhythm of your voice as you say it.

## Personification

If you give human qualities to creatures, things or ideas in a poem, then you are 'personifying' that thing or idea. For example, 'The trees sighed in the wind' is treating the trees as if they were human. Look at how the plastic bag is personified in 'The Dream of a Plastic Bag' in *Hopscotch in the Sky*.

## Repetition

This is the way we make patterns and it is used in various ways in poetry. For example, rhyme is the repetition of sounds at the ends of lines, alliteration is repetition of the sound at the beginning of words that are close to each other, and rhythm is the repetition of beat.

Repetition of phrases or whole lines can create strong rhythms and emphasise meaning as in, for example, 'Shopping Centre Escalator Blues' and 'The Mountains and the Sea'.



# Rhyme

Rhyme is the repetition of sound at the ends of words: and, band, land, stand all rhyme with each other.

In rhyming poetry, words that rhyme with each other are usually placed at the ends of the lines.

Rhyme is so important to poetry that sometimes people call poems 'rhymes'. Rhyme helps us to remember a poem, and it makes poetry extra-enjoyable to read and to say out loud.

I have used rhyme in a number of ways in *Hopscotch in the Sky*. For 'Shopping Centre Escalator Blues', I found as many words to rhyme with 'blues' as I could. 'Autumn Rondelet', 'Classroom Ghost' and 'Beware the Ghoul's Lunchbox' all have regular rhyme schemes.

One of my favourite ways of writing poetry is to use rhyme occasionally rather than throughout a poem so that I can enjoy the sound patterns while keeping the sense of what I have to say. I have used occasional rhyme in 'A Showery Spell', for example, and you will find lots of other examples in *Hopscotch in the Sky*.

## Rhyme schemes

A rhyme scheme is the pattern of rhyming words in a poem. It is described with letters of the alphabet, using **a** for the sound at the end of the first line and for any lines that rhyme with it in the rest of the poem. The second rhymed sound is called **b**, the third is called **c** and so on.

So, for example, if you had a very simple poem, consisting of just two lines that rhyme (which is called a 'rhyming couplet') the rhyme scheme would be described as **aa**:

Pencil crawling on the page  
Homework always takes an age.

Suppose you had a four-line verse (called a 'quatrain') made up of two rhyming couplets like this:

Twinkle, twinkle, little star  
How I wonder what you are  
Up above the world so high  
Like a diamond in the sky.

In this case, the rhyme scheme would be written as **aabb**. Another very common rhyme scheme in a quatrain is **abab**, where the third line rhymes with the first line and the fourth line rhymes with the second.

Poems are often made up of more than just a few lines, of course, and the more rhyming lines you have in a poem, the more letters you will need to describe the rhyming pattern. For example, a poem with twelve lines might have a rhyme scheme like this: *abab cbc b adad*.

## Write your own rhyming couplet

- The best way to start writing in rhyme is to write a rhyming couplet.
- Think of something short that you want to say in a poem and write the first line of the couplet. Make sure the last word on the line is one for which it is easy to find lots of rhymes.
- Now make a list of words that rhyme with the last word of your first line. (You can go through the alphabet, changing the first letter of your rhyme word as you go, to gather as many rhymes as you can, for example, bare (or bear), care, dare, fare (or fair) hare (or hair) and so on.)
- Next, choose a rhyming word for the end of line 2 of your couplet and write it under the last word of line 1.
- And then fill in the rest of the second line.
- If you like, you could write a few more rhyming couplets on the same subject, and put them together to make a longer rhyming poem.

## For teachers

### Whole class writing activity – rhyme

- Invite the class to share any nursery rhymes, short rhyming poems or jingles that they remember, by saying them aloud.
- Remind the class that rhyme is the repetition of sounds, usually at the ends of lines.
- Read aloud 'Evening' – the last poem in *Hopscotch in the Sky*. Also read the tiny 'Shortest Summer Song'.
- Give the class time to read the poems themselves. It won't take long!
- Invite responses with open questions:
  - What do you notice about these poems?
  - What are they about?

What do they remind you of?

- Spend some time talking about rhyme and rhymes, what the children like (or dislike) about them, how easily predicted and memorable rhyme is (it is no surprise that advertisers use rhyme) and how much fun it can be.
- 'Writing' a very short poem like 'Shortest Summer Song' is most fun when done orally, as word-play. Give the class a few 'starters' and ask the children to complete each one with a rhyming word to make one-line rhyming poems. (Note that in the examples below the rhyming is not at the end of lines, but within individual lines.)

It's fun in the ...

It's hot, no, it's ...

Can't you see? It's only ...

It's bad when you're ...

Red jelly in my ...

I like jam, I don't like ....

- Remember: there are no wrong answers, however silly or nonsensical, so long as they rhyme!
- Ask the children to continue in this vein to make their own one-line rhyming poems, working in pairs. One child reads out or calls a starting phrase and the other responds.
- Inevitably some of the lines will be more pleasing than others, but it is the playing with sound that is the focus here. Let the children choose one or two of the lines to write down as tiny poems.
- Ask the children to think of titles for their favourite one-line rhyming poems. A title is a good way to add context, meaning and humour to a very short poem. It can even be longer than the poem itself.
- Reading the poems aloud to the class and inviting discussion could generate some good titles.
- For example a title for 'It's hot, no it's not' could indicate that the poem is about food (have you got to the table too late? or is it spicy or mild?) while a different title could establish that it is about confusing weather.
- Next, re-read the rhyming couplet 'Evening' from *Hopscotch in the Sky*.

- To write a rhyming couplet with the whole class, choose a subject, perhaps from some topic you have been working on in class.
- Brainstorm for phrases or short statements, and collect as many as you can on the board. These will become the first lines in rhyming couplets.
- Next ask the class to find words to rhyme with the words at the end of the phrases that you have collected. Some words will have lots of rhymes and others may have hardly any.
- Choose one of the phrases with a number of possible rhymes and ask the class to suggest a second line to complete the rhyming couplet. This second line should rhyme with the first and also match its rhythm.

## Independent activity

- Children can write their own rhyming couplets using the remaining phrases from the board. This could be done in pairs, with one child calling and the other responding, and then they can swap around. This oral method has the added benefit of making the rhythm of the first line obvious and easy to match in the second.
- Ask the children to look for other poems that rhyme in *Hopscotch in the Sky*.

## Extra tips

- Going through the alphabet, either out loud or silently in your head, is a good way to find rhymes. A rhyming dictionary could be a good addition to the classroom.
- Rhyming couplets can be put together to make longer poems. For example, if the class has written couplets on one subject these could be gathered to make a longer poem comprising quatrains with the rhyme scheme **aabb ccdd eeff**.

## Wrap up

Conclude the session by asking the children to read aloud and talk about what they have written.

# Rhythm

Rhythm is a basic element in language, whether we are speaking or writing. Rhythm is repetition of a beat, as in music and dance, and we can feel a rhythm when we are walking or breathing in and out. Some poems have a strong, regular beat and others follow the natural rhythms of ordinary speech, using the pauses we take and the changes of pace we make when we talk.

## Simile and metaphor

When you say that one thing is *like* (or *as ... as*) another thing, you are using a simile. For example, 'I am like a tortoise crawling out of bed' or 'I am racing as fast as a cheetah'.

If you make a comparison without the words like or as, you are using a metaphor, for example 'I am a tortoise crawling out of bed' or 'I am a racing cheetah'. We are using metaphor when we say someone is 'a couch potato', 'the black sheep of the family' or that it's 'raining cats and dogs', or something is 'the icing on the cake'. Metaphors can create powerful images in your writing.

You can use simile and metaphor to help you to describe things vividly in everyday speech.

Metaphor has a stronger impact than simile, because it is saying that one thing actually *is* another, which is quite a strong statement.

My poem 'I Am' in *Hopscotch in the Sky*, which uses a series of metaphors, was inspired by the ancient Gaelic poem known in English as 'Amergin'.

## For teachers Whole class writing activity

- Read 'I Am' aloud to the class.
- Give the class time to read the poem themselves.
- Invite responses with open questions:
  - What do you notice about the poem?
  - What is it about?
  - What does it remind you of?
- Ask the children if they can see a pattern in the way the poem is written. (Some of them may

notice that it is a list poem, which is correct, though not the point here.)

- Now give each child a 'sticky note'.
- Ask them to write one line each on the sticky note, describing themselves using similes and the structure: 'I am like ...' or 'I am as ... as a ...'.
- They could use animals, plants or objects in their descriptions.
- Ask the class to take turns in reading these descriptions of themselves aloud, and then post them up on a board or on the wall.
- Read aloud what they have written on the sticky notes and move them about to create a sequence that pleases the class.
- The repetition of 'I am' line by line sets up a strong, pleasing rhythm.
- Having written a poem using simile you may wish to conclude at this point, or carry on to the next phase of the exercise.
- Explain how metaphor differs from simile.
- Ask each child in the class to read out their own description of themselves, this time leaving out the words *like* and *as*. You can cross the words out as they do so. (Some adjustment to the phrasing may be needed to maintain sense.)
- Ask the class what differences using simile and metaphor made to their writing. (Metaphor usually strengthens the images in a poem.)

## Independent activity

Read my poem 'Bird' from *Hopscotch in the Sky*, which also uses simile. Ask the children to write a short poem using simile. They could use their original sticky note as a starting point.

## Wrap up

Conclude the session by asking the children to read aloud and talk about what they have written.

## Extra tips

- People use simile and metaphor a lot in everyday speech. Remind the children of the examples we have used earlier, and ask them to look out for comparisons like this in their conversations, reading and classwork. Ask them to write down a few they notice and bring them into class.
- Make a classroom collection of similes and metaphors and ask the children to add to it.

## Syllables

A syllable is a single unit of speech, so words are made up of one or more syllables. The name 'Jack' has one syllable, 'Eva' has two (E-va) and 'Lucinda' (Lu-cin-da) has three.

It's important to be able to break words up into syllables, especially if you are writing a poem like a haiku, where each line needs to have a certain number of syllables. But it doesn't matter exactly how you break up a word – syl-lab-le and syll-a-ble are both fine; the important thing is to be able to count them.

## For teachers

A good way to introduce the concept of syllables is to clap out the names of the children in the class, with one clap for each syllable, and talk about how many are needed for each name. Children can check this with each other. Haiku, rondelets and some cinquains depend on syllables.

