Poetry as a Language Teaching Resource

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Introduction to Poetry – Billy Collins

I ask them to take a poem
and hold it up to the light
like a colour slide

or press an ear against its hive.

I say drop a mouse into a poem
and watch him probe his way out,

or walk inside the poem's room
and feel the walls for a light switch.

I want them to waterski
across the surface of a poem
waving at the author's name on the shore.

But all they want to do
is tie the poem to a chair with rope
and torture a confession out of it.

They begin beating it with a hose
to find out what it really means.

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A. Readers' Theatre

Mornings – Alan Maley

Rustling sheet, *Start by whispering*
Shuffling feet,
Creaking bones,
Stifled groans,
Chirping, crowing
Noses blowing,
Toilets flushing,
Bath taps gushing,
Coffee cups clatter, *Gradually speak louder*
Breakfast chatter,
Neighbours singing,
Telephones ringing,
Radios tuning,
Traffic booming,
Motorbikes thrumming,
Power drills drumming,
Jet planes thunder –
I just wonder *Very soft again*
At the NOISE! *Shout*

B. Sound Effects

In the Kitchen – John Cotton

In the kitchen
After the aimless
Chatter of the plates,
The murmurings of the gas,
The chuckle of the water pipes
And the sharp exchanges
Of knives, forks and spoons,
Comes the serious quiet,
When the sink slowly clears its throat
And you can hear the occasional rumble
Of the refrigerator's tummy
As it digests the cold.

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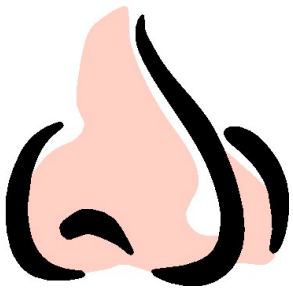
C. Speech Gym in Role

Be Glad Your Nose Is On Your Face – Jack Prelutsky

A.	Calm	Be glad your nose is on your face,
B.	Angry	not pasted on some other place,
C.	Excited	for if it were where it is not
D.	Disappointed	you might dislike your nose a lot.
A.	Sick	Imagine if your precious nose
B.	Energetic	were sandwiched in between your toes,
C.	Nervous	that clearly would not be a treat,
D.	Determined	for you'd be forced to smell your feet.
A.	Interested	Your nose would be a source of dread
B.	Bored	were it attached atop your head,
C.	Sad	it soon would drive you to despair,
D.	Happy	forever tickled by your hair.
A.	Thoughtful	Within your ear, your nose would be
B.	Dramatic	an absolute catastrophe,
C.	Informative	for when you were obliged to sneeze,
D.	Preacherly	your brain would rattle from the breeze.
A.	Snobbish	Be glad your nose is on your face,
B.	Disgusted	not pasted on some other place,
C.	Scared	for if it were where it is not
D.	_____	you might dislike your nose a lot.



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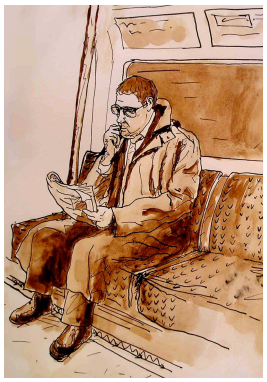
D. Illustrating a Theme

Commuter – Alan Maley



He lives in a house in the suburbs
He rises each morning at six.
He runs for the bus to the station,
Buys his paper and looks at the pics.

He always gets in the same carriage,
Puts his briefcase up on the rack.
Thinks miserably of his office,
And knows he can never turn back.

He gets to his desk by nine thirty,
Wondering what he should do.
When the coffee break comes at eleven,
He knows he still hasn't a clue.

His lunch break is quite uninspiring,
He sits it out in the canteen.
It's fish and chips, mince or potatoes,
A choice that's quite literally obscene.

At five he runs back to the station,
Gets in the same carriage again,
Unfolds his evening paper,
Pulls a veil down over his brain.

E. Prose & Poetry

A Sad Song about Greenwich Village – Frances Park

She lives in a garret
Up a haunted stair,
And even when she's frightened
There's nobody to care.

She cooks so small a dinner
She dines on the smell,
And even if she's hungry
There's nobody to tell.

She sweeps her musty lodging
As the dawn steals near,
And even when she's crying
There's nobody to hear.

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I haven't seen my neighbour
Since a long time ago,
And even if she's dead
There's nobody to know.

Woman may have lain dead for five years – Andy Philip, Press Association

The body of a pensioner may have lain undiscovered for five years in a city centre flat, it was revealed today. Tests are being carried out to identify the body of the woman, named locally as Isabella Purvis, who would have been 90 this year. Officers forced their way into the flat in the Canonmills area of Edinburgh after a neighbour reported water dripping through the ceiling.

The owners of a nearby florist told the Edinburgh Evening News they had not seen the elderly woman since 2004. Giovanni Cilia, who owns the Fioritalia florist below Ms Purvis's flat, said he was shocked at how long it took to find her. He said, "How did no one notice the smell, or wonder where she was? I heard there was a big pile of letters and bills behind the door. I used to see her walk past the shop maybe four times a week."

Douglas McLellan, of Help the Aged in Scotland, said, "This is a tragic case but perhaps not as surprising as people think. If she was not receiving care treatment from anyone and not receiving social care, then the likelihood of her being found quickly is minimal." Mr McLellan urged people to take more notice of their neighbours and "knock on doors" if there is any concern. He added, "Society has fractured. We're not in the same units as we used to be. People might not phone their own grandma more than once a month."

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F. Animated Poems

Cinders – Roger McGough	*Opening shot: man holding young daughter in his arms. She is holding a wand in her hand. Close-up of him shielding her from the cold.* *Close-up of girl's face as she looks at her wand.*
After the pantomime, carrying you back to the car On the coldest night of the year My coat, black leather, cracking in the wind. Through the darkness we are guided by a star It is the one the Good Fairy gave you You clutch it tightly, your magic wand. And I clutch you tightly for fear you blow away For fear you grow up too soon and - suddenly, I almost slip, so take it steady down the hill. Hunched against the wind and hobbling I could be mistaken for your grandfather And sensing this, I hold you tighter still. Knowing that I will never see you dressed for the Ball Be on hand to warn you against Prince Charmings And the happy ever afters of pantomime. On reaching the car I put you into the baby seat And fumble with straps I have yet to master Thinking, if only there were more time. More time. You are crying now. Where is your wand? Oh no. I can't face going back for it Let some kid find it in tomorrow's snow. Waiting in the wings, the witching hour. Already the car is changing. Smells sweet Of ripening seed. We must go. Must go.	

G. List-type poems

A is for apples that I crunch in my mouth

B is for ……

C is for ……

etc.

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Red is the sun sinking,

Blue .....

Green .....

Purple .....

H. Stem/frame poems

I like ..... because .....

I like ..... because .....

I like ..... because .....

But I hate ..... because .....

I. Missing Vocabulary

Listen – Pie Corbett

Listen,
can you hear the bus grumbling by?
Listen,
can you hear the glass bottles _____?
Listen,
can you hear the jet _____ overhead?
Listen,
can you hear the police car's siren _____?
Listen,
can you hear the shopper's feet clacking?
Listen,
can you hear the cars' engines grinding?
Listen,
can you hear the distant train _____?
Listen,
can you hear yourself _____?

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Words - Alan Maley

Some words are happy and others are sad.
Some words are perfumed and others smell _____.
Some words are _____ and some words are sly.
Some words are slimy and others are _____.
Some words are cold and some words are _____.
Some words are _____ and others are not.
Some words are _____ but other words cheat.
Some words are bitter, while others are _____.
Some words move quickly; some words move _____.
Some words are _____, while some others grow.
Some words we use _____ and some quite a lot.
Some words are remembered, and others _____.

J. Similes

Coat - Vicki Feaver

Sometimes I have wanted
to throw you off
like a heavy coat.

Sometimes I have said
you would not let me
breathe or move.

But now that I am free
to choose light clothes
or none at all

I feel the cold
and all the time I think
how warm it used to be.

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K. Jumbled Poems

a. Put the following lines in order by numbering them from 1 to 8. You should be able to form a poem made up of two stanzas.

That cannot fly.	
Life is a broken-winged bird	
For if dreams die	
Hold fast to dreams	1.
For when dreams go	
Hold fast to dreams	
Frozen with snow.	
Life is a barren field	

Langston Hughes

b. Now write your own four-line stanza. Make sure to use the following words:

dreams life

_____

_____

_____

_____

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Q. Sounds, Sights, Actions

In Our School – Pie Corbett

In our school we heard –
children chattering while they worked,
pots and pans clattering in the canteen,
the school clock tick tock.

In our school we saw –
a photo of a blue whale deep beneath the sea,
a painting of yellow flowers,
a velvet curtain.

In our school we saw –
crows pecking in the playground,
Mrs Bancroft listening to children read,
the little one dancing to music.

R. Upside Down Poem

I am Standing on my Head – Pie Corbett

I am standing on my head
so that I can see the world from an ant's point of view.

I am standing on my head
so I can hold up the world.

I am standing on my head

_____

I am standing on my head

_____

I am standing on my head

_____

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S. Model Poems

In two minds – Roger McGough

What I love about night
is the silent certainty of its stars
What I hate about stars
is the overwhelming swank of their names
What I love about names
is that every complete stranger has one
What I hate about one
is the numerical power it holds over its followers
What I love about followers
is the unseemly jostle to fill the footsteps
What I hate about footsteps
is the way they gang up in the darkness
What I love about darkness
is the soft sighing of its secrets
What I hate about secrets
is the excitement they pack into their short lives
What I love about lives
is the variety cut from the same pattern
What I hate about pattern
is its dull insistence on conformity
What I love about conformity
is the seed of rebelliousness within
What I hate about within
is the absence of landscape, the feel of the weather
What I love about the weather
is its refusal to stay in at night
What I hate about night
is the silver certainty of its stars

Poor Child	
Always playing in muddy puddles	Always ... ing ...
Always getting in scrapes and muddles	Always ... ing ...
Poor child	Poor ...
Poor child	Poor ...
Dirty clothes, dirty hair	Adj + noun, Adj + noun
Almost always on welfare care	Almost always ...
Poor child	Poor ...
Poor child	Poor ...
Living in the dirty slums of a town	... ing in ...
When will they ever pull them down?	When will they ever ...

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