

How Poetry Can Save the World

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**'While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.'**

(Wordsworth, *Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey*)

**"I can't think of a case where poems changed the
world, but what they do is they change people's
understanding of what's going on in the world."**

(Seamus Heaney)

1. Introduction
2. The power of poetry
3. Boys' experiences of poetry
4. Strategies for teaching/engagement
5. Conclusions

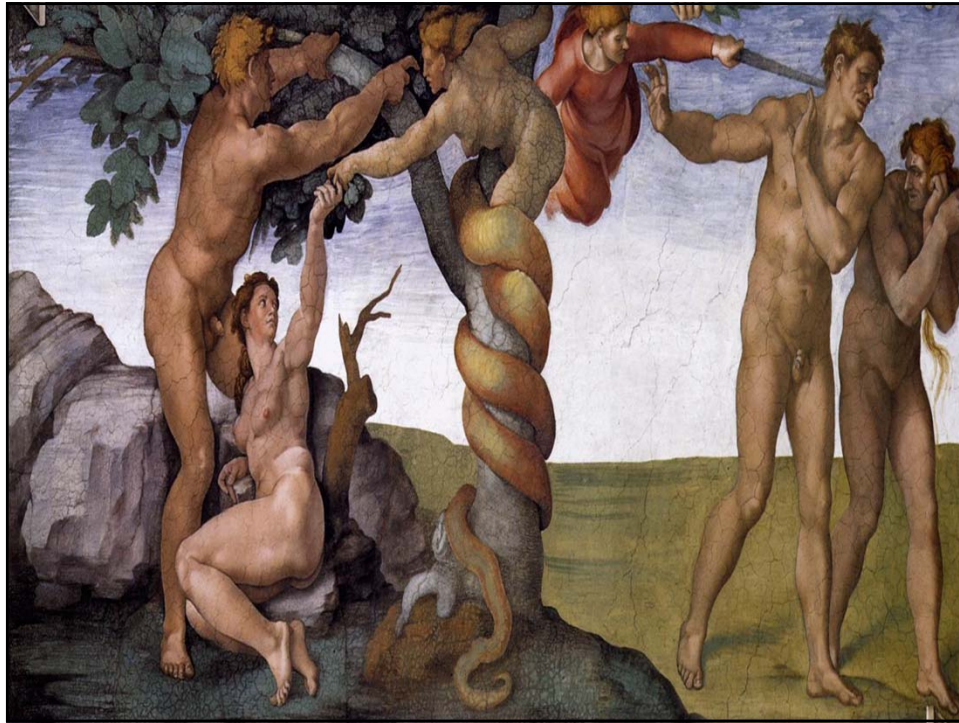
Which image comes closest to boys' views of a poet?



What do boys like and dislike about poetry? Share your thoughts/experiences.

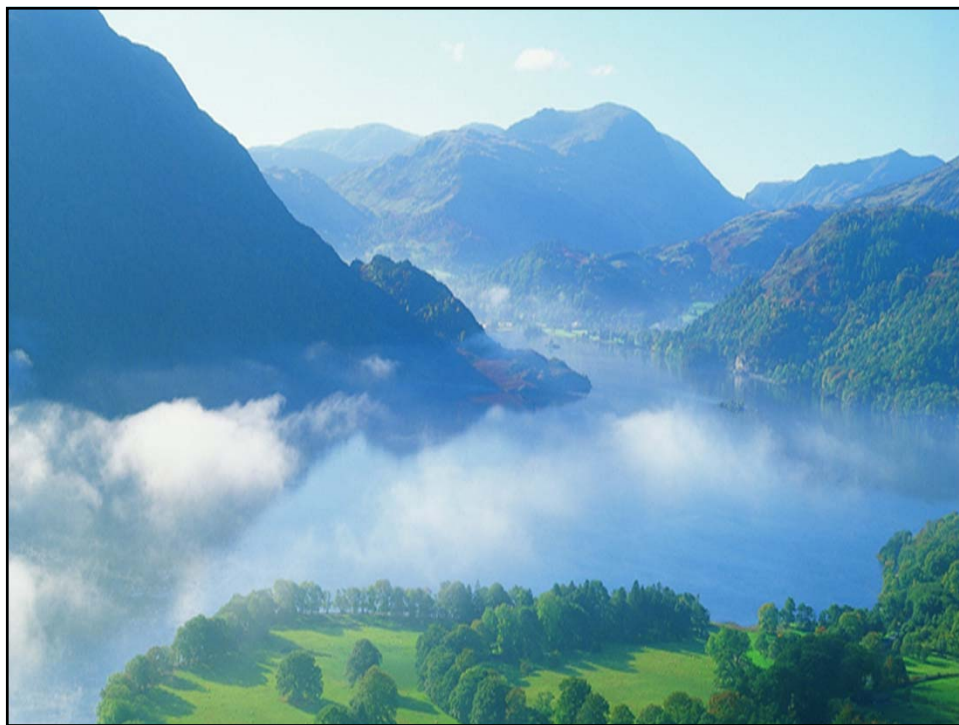
Likes

Dislikes



'Man's first feeling was that of his own existence, and his first care that of self-preservation. The produce of the earth furnished him with all he needed, and instinct told him how to use it. Hunger and other appetites made him at various times experience various modes of existence... Such was the condition of infant man; the life of an animal limited at first to mere sensations.'

(Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, 1754)





<p>‘...Nor less, I trust, To them I may have owed another gift, Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood, In which the burthen of the mystery, In which the heavy and the weary weight Of all this unintelligible world, Is lightened:—that serene and blessed mood, In which the affections gently lead us on,— Until, the breath of this corporeal frame</p>	<p>And even the motion of our human blood Almost suspended, we are laid asleep In body, and become a living soul: While with an eye made quiet by the power Of harmony, and the deep power of joy, We see into the life of things.’</p>
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‘A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all
thought,
And rolls through all things.’

I imagine this midnight moment's
forest:
Something else is alive
Beside the clock's loneliness
And this blank page where my fingers
move.

Through the window I see no star:
Something more near
Though deeper within darkness
Is entering the loneliness:

Cold, delicately as the dark snow,
A fox's nose touches twig, leaf;
Two eyes serve a movement, that
now
And again now, and now, and now

Sets neat prints into the snow

Between trees, and warily a lame
Shadow lags by stump and in hollow
Of a body that is bold to come

Across clearings, an eye,
A widening deepening greenness,
Brilliantly, concentratedly,
Coming about its own business

Till, with a sudden sharp hot stink of
fox

It enters the dark hole of the head.

The window is starless still; the clock
ticks,

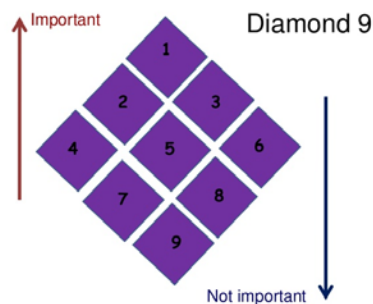
The page is printed.



Our meddling intellect
misshapes the beautiful
form of things: -
we murder to dissect'

Diamond 9

Put the statements into a diamond formation of importance. Most important at the top, least important at the bottom.



1. Poetry develops emotional resilience in boys.
2. Science should take precedence over poetry in the classroom.
3. Poetry should take precedence over science in the classroom.
4. Poetry encourages boys to share their feelings.
5. Poetry is fundamental in improving literacy.
6. Poetry increases awareness of climate change.
7. Boys should be encouraged to read poetry as much as novels.
8. Writing poetry is more important than reading poetry.
9. Learning poetry off by heart should be a compulsory part of a boy's education.

The evidence

National Literacy Trust (UK) 2010 survey:

- 43% of boys say they enjoy reading compared with 58% of girls
- 19% of boys say they only read in class while just 11% of girls agree with this statement
- 24% of boys think reading is boring, compared with 13% of girls
- 45% of girls like going to the library, while only 35% of boys do
- Twice as many boys as girls “never” write (8% boys v 4% of girls)
- Just 12% of boys write poems, compared with 21% of girls

Strategies for engagement

1. Crunched poems

a a A a a A a a a acrid all an and and antlerless, approaches; a
 re as as as as assures at at awful backward, be big Brunswick b
 us bus bushes bus's by can caught childishly, church, come cranin
 g creatures
 . gears. grand, hairy, harmless. has he her high his his homely ho
 od. hot house houses). impenetrable in in in in It it It's
 It's jolt, joy lamb's lights. like longer, Look looks looms, macad
 am; man's middle mist moment Moonlight moonlight moonlit mo
 ose moose moose, new of of of of of off on on otherworldly.
 our out over, passengers pasture. Perfectly plain." quiet rather, r
 oad. rolling r's. safe says scratchy, seen sensation she she!" shifts
 smell smell sniffs softly, Some splintery; stands stops --Suddenly
 Sure sweet Taking that, the the the the the the the the the
 e them Then then there, there's this time, Towering, turns us vo
 ice we we whispers, why Why, with wood woods, wool would y
 ou."

The Moose by Elizabeth Bishop

Moonlight as we enter
the New Brunswick woods,
hairy, scratchy, splintery;
moonlight and mist

caught in them like lamb's wool
on bushes in a pasture.
--Suddenly the bus driver
stops with a jolt,
turns off his lights.

A moose has come out of
the impenetrable wood
and stands there, looms, rather,
in the middle of the road.
It approaches; it sniffs at
the bus's hot hood.

Towering, antlerless,
high as a church,
homely as a house
(or, safe as houses).
A man's voice assures us
"Perfectly harmless...."

Some of the passengers
exclaim in whispers,
childishly, softly,
"Sure are big creatures."
"It's awful plain."
"Look! It's a she!"

Taking her time,
she looks the bus over,
grand, otherworldly.
Why, why do we feel
(we all feel) this sweet
sensation of joy?

"Curious creatures,"
says our quiet driver,
rolling his r's.
"Look at that, would you."
Then he shifts gears.
For a moment longer,

by craning backward,
the moose can be seen
on the moonlit macadam;
then there's a dim
smell of moose, an acrid
smell of gasoline.

Strategies for engagement

2. Off by heart – creating a poetic culture

- Appeals to boys' competitive instincts.
- Once learnt, a boy can be said to possess this artwork for life.
- Develops skills in speaking, listening and performance: all skills that we value.

Strategies for engagement

3. Make it physical

- Move poetry away from feelings/abstract concepts. Choice of poems is crucial.
- Give them a natural object to touch and look at before asking them to describe it.
- Relate it to things they enjoy e.g. sport, history (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FozhZHuAcCs>)

Field trips!



Strategies for engagement

Your ideas?

Conclusions

- Poetry is a fantastic tool for encouraging and nurturing a closer relationship with the natural world as well as encouraging self-reflection and space in hectic modern society.
- Boys sometimes struggle with poetry, finding it difficult to identify its purpose and pleasures.
- Creating a culture of poetry in a school has numerous benefits that go beyond the English classroom.
- We all need more poetry in our lives!

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And/or contact me at
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Further Reading

Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth*

Alice Oswald ed., *The Thunder Mutters: 101 poems for the environment*