

The theme for National Poetry Day 2018 is ‘Change’.

We think it can be interpreted loosely and widely, to include:

- Poems about the many themes of change, such as growing up, growing old, looking back on how life has changed, historical change, the changing seasons and so on...
- Poems urging change– polemics, arguments for a different kind of society, a different kind of world
- Poems that change other poems– re-writings of old myths, re-workings of well-known poems, poems speaking back to others
- Poems that change the rules– game-changing poems that reinvent genres, mix and mashup or find brand new ways of writing poetry.

On the Poetry Station, we’ve made a page of all the poem performances that explore these different kinds of change, so that you can select from them ones to share with your students on National Poetry Day. Each video is a short experience of a poem, mostly read by the poets themselves, bringing the poem off the page and making a performance of it. They’re a great introduction to the rich variety of poems and poetry available, both from past periods and the here and now.

- John Agard: Listen Mr Oxford Don
- Patience Agbabi: Remix – The Canterbury Tales
- Patience Agbabi: Remix – The Wife of Bath
- Patience Agbabi: The Change
- Moniza Alvi: I would like to be a dot in a painting by Miro
- Maya Angelou: And Still I Rise
- Jean ‘Binta’ Breeze: Spring Cleaning
- Imtiaz Dharker: Blessing
- Maura Dooley: History
- Jonathan Edwards: How to Renovate a Morris Minor
- Eastbury Community School students: Making Sense of Me
- Sophie Hannah: Trainers all Turn Grey
- Seamus Heaney: Digging
- Jenny Joseph: Warning
- Jackie Kay: Old Tongue
- Adrian Mitchell: Back in the Playground Blues
- Wilfred Owen: Futility
- Jacob Sam-la Rose: Spell for Forgetting a Father
- Michael Rosen: Leaving Home
- Owen Sheers: Calendar
- Natalie Stewart: Her Story

We’ve created a set of teaching ideas to go with it, to allow you to do some great poetry reading and writing activities on the day, with the minimum of fuss or advance preparation. Most of these activities can be done by simply watching Poetry Station videos and then setting students off on one of the suggested tasks.

Change – EMC’s National Poetry Day Activities

Poems ABOUT change

- Watch some of the videos of poems that deal with the theme of change. Among others, you might want to look at:
 - Owen Sheers: Calendar
 - Jenny Joseph: Warning
 - Maura Dooley: History
 - Seamus Heaney: Digging
 - Sophie Hannah: Trainers all Turn Grey
- Talk about what aspect of change each poem is exploring – for instance, the changing seasons, or how one changes from childhood to adulthood, or the idea of coming to terms with things changing and dying.
- Pick the poem you were most interested in and write your own poem about that theme. For instance, you might write your own ‘Warning’ poem, imagining what you might be like in your twenties, thirties or forties! Or, if you liked ‘Trainers all Turn Grey’, you might write a poem about the disappointment of something you’ve really liked disappearing or changing.

2. Poems URGING change

Poetry is a great way of arguing for change. As a spoken form, it can speak to people directly, and act as a powerful call for action.

- Watch a few of these poems:
 - Maya Angelou: ‘Still I Rise’
 - John Agard: Listen Mr Oxford Don
 - Eastbury School Students: Making Sense of Me
 - Natalie Stewart: Her Story
- Think about, or talk about:
 - What change they seem to be arguing for
 - Which you find most powerful and persuasive
 - Which you personally find most inspiring and why.
- Is there something that you feel strongly about and would like to see changed? It might be something to do with the environment or young people, or perhaps even something in your own life that you’d like to change. Using ideas from the poems you’ve heard, try to write a poem about the thing you’d like to change. Draw on the poetic techniques you found most powerful and persuasive.

3. CHANGING poems – remixes, mashups, updates, transformations

- Watch a poem that changes another poem, for instance:
 - Patience Agbabi: Wife of Bath remix or The Canterbury Tales remix
 - Sophie Hannah: Trainers all Turn Grey
- Pick any poem that you like, from watching Poetry Station videos, from work you've done in class, from an anthology, or a favourite poem.
- Remix it in whatever way you want. Update it, answer back to it, give it your own spin.
- Share your 'changed' poems by reading/watching the original and then reading your own out loud.

4. Poems that CHANGE THE RULES

Some poems do something so differently that they could be seen as changing the whole way poetry works. One example of this is prose poems, poems that look like prose but have many of the other qualities of poetry. Here are two ways of experimenting with poetry and prose to make new kinds of poetry.

Create a prose poem

- Try taking a poem you like and writing it out as prose. What difference does this make to it? Does it still seem to be a poem?

OR

Create a poem out of everyday prose

- Find a short bit of everyday prose, for instance a short news story in a newspaper, or a public notice or advert, or something in a school newsletter, or an extract from a factual book like an encyclopaedia or science textbook.
- See if you can turn it into poetry. What happens if you:
 - Repeat words and phrases
 - Cut out words that seem superfluous
 - Break up the text into poetic lines to make some words stand out
 - Use stanza breaks to make individual lines stand out
 - Add in lines of your own to make the point, or create the feeling you want to make.