

Poetry Prompts: Week 73

Story Space

This sheet is to accompany Poetry Prompt 73 that features Waterstones Children's Laureate 2022–2024 Joseph Coelho. Joseph Coelho was back at the Tate Britain this week. This time he was visiting the Story Space and creating a mini story poem. Here's another short poem by Joseph which tells a story; but it might not be the story you think it is at first...



Look at the poem:

Read the poem aloud. You might do this yourself, with a friend or someone else could read it to you:

Gingerbread man

**Billy chased me round the playground
with hands full of fists.**

**Billy yelled at me across the football pitch
with a mouth full of stings.**

**Billy spat, jibed and cawed
as I ran away singing...**

"You can't catch me, I'm the gingerbread man."

Billy had red hair.

I was cruel and called him names.

From *Werewolf Club Rules* by Joseph Coelho
(Frances Lincoln, 2014)

Think about the poem:

Consider the poem you just heard or read. What was the story behind the poem? Did the ending match what you thought about the story at the beginning? Why or why not? When did your perception of the story change?

Take time to read the poem once more and think about any personal connections you have with it. Have you ever had a similar experience? Can you reflect back on a time where you did something you now know was wrong? Have you seen anyone else behave in a way that was unfair to another person? What might be the benefit of sharing a truth in writing in the way the narrator of the poem has here?





Look at the language:

- Read the poem again. **Circle or underline words or phrases that directly describe Billy**, his appearance, his actions or his behaviours. What picture do you gain from Billy from these words? What words would you choose to describe Billy after reading the poem?
- **Compare this with what you are told about the narrator.** Joseph Coelho does an incredible job of showing you what the narrator is like, without telling you as directly as he does with Billy. **What picture do you gain of the narrator of the poem?** What leads you to think this? What words would you choose to describe them after reading the poem? How do you think the narrator might be feeling about themselves and their actions at the end of the poem?

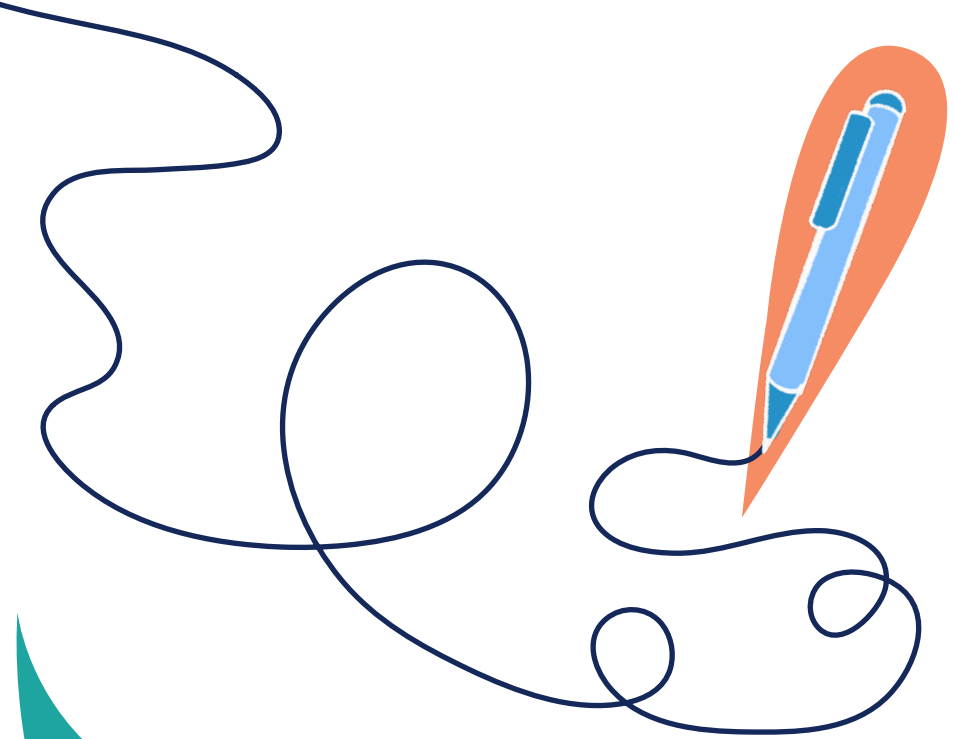
Perform the poem:

- Think about the **shift that happens from the start to the end of the story** that's told. How might you show this in a performance of the poem? How might you use your voice to present the character of Billy at the start of the poem? How might this change as you get to the final verse? What emotion do you want to leave your audience with? Will some parts be louder or quieter, faster or slower, higher or lower? How will you pace your performance or use facial expression to bring out the emotion or tell the story? How will you make sure any actions you choose to incorporate **add to the performance**, rather than detract from it?
- Rehearse your performance a few times until you are happy with it, **then perform it to someone else.** What sense did your audience get about Billy and the narrator from the way you performed the poem? Did this change from the beginning to the end of the poem? What did they think was most effective about your performance?



Write your own!

- Come back to **think about the narrator of the poem**. Why do you think they are choosing to share this moment? When you read it again, you might notice the poem is written in the past tense. Do you think this is an immediate reflection or something they have come back to? **What is the impact of their confession** coming in a single line right at the end of the poem? What are you left thinking and feeling? What questions are you left with after reading?
- Take some time to **think about a story** that reveals something to your audience in the same way as Joseph Coelho's narrator does in this poem. This might be based on:
 - A time when you or someone you know **behaved in a way** you now know was wrong.
 - Sharing the **contrast between what people think you are like, and what you are really like** – maybe people think you are quiet, when really you're not, maybe you have a hobby or talent no-one knows about.
 - Sharing **your feelings about something or someone** that is special to you that they might not realise.
- Think about how you might **draw on what Joseph Coelho did** in the original poem, for example, short verses that directly tell the reader what something is like; using words and phrases that give a clear picture, **being careful not to tell your readers everything** about the subject you are sharing. How might you keep an element of surprise to share at the end of your poem?
- When you're happy with what you have drafted, **write it out in your best handwriting or type it up** to share with someone else. When you've finished, you may also want to **illustrate your poem**.



Find all Poetry Prompts as well as more information about Joseph Coelho at booktrust.org.uk/childrens-laureate

Find and explore more poems on CLPE's website.

This sequence of activities was designed in partnership with CLPE. CLPE is a UK-based children's literacy charity working with primary schools to raise the achievement of children's reading and writing by helping schools to teach literacy creatively and effectively, putting quality children's books at the heart of all learning. Find out more about their work, and access further resources and training at: clpe.org.uk.