

Teaching Waste Poetry

Writing poetry with children is an important part of learning to be playful with the English language and can give children an interesting outlet for their creativity. Read our hints and tips below for how to inspire children to create a great poem all about waste!

[Article about the perfect poetry lesson:](#)

"It's simple, really. Enthusiasm. Writing for real audiences. Teachers as poets. Poetry as a major strand of the curriculum. Lots of paper. Off you go."

<https://www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/2012/oct/03/national-poetry-day-perfect-poetry-lesson>

Tips from experts

From **Ted Hughes – Poetry in the Making**

In his book, *Poetry in the Making*, the famous poet Ted Hughes explains how to help children create great poetry, including getting them to experience things which they then can turn into poetry. Children can often write well about novel or strange landscapes, and this can be triggered by a few words to start them off thinking before writing.

Here are some ideas for triggers for this competition and links to books that could be read out loud to a class:

1. Imagine yourself as a turtle in a sea full of plastic. You are trying to find your lunch. What do you find? (*Hint: there are some great stories about turtles and plastic in the oceans including Tuamor the Turtle by local Devon author Jo Earlam or Duffy's Lucky Escape by Ellie Jackson*)
2. You are standing on the edge of a landfill site in South America. What is it like? (*Hint: use the book Ada's Violin by Susan Hood to help elicit responses*)
3. You are a cat watching the dustmen and women collect the recycling from everyone's homes. What are the sights and sounds you experience? What if you joined them on their journey through the streets and lanes of Devon? (*Hint: the classic storybook The Patchwork Cat by Nicola Bayley has some lovely pictures and a comforting story*)



4. You are a piece of litter travelling along a river to the sea. Where do you go? (Hint: read the poem *I Asked the River* by Valerie Bloom to the children - <https://clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poems/i-asked-river>)
5. You are an alien and you land next door to the Energy from Waste plant in Exeter. Explain in your report home what is going on. (Hint: watch the *Recycle Devon Schools* video about the Exeter Energy from Waste plant - <https://youtu.be/cFpHaCd76ls>)

Lesson Plan: Take a Poetry Walk to the waste and recycling bins

One of the ways to get children to write poetry on a subject is to get them to experience the sights and sounds of the subject. If you were asking them to write about nature, take them to a quiet meadow or forest and ask them to sit, listen and experience.

Rubbish and recycling is all around us. Why not take your class out to the school bins? Have a good look and smell. If your school has a compost heap, then take them there. Take magnifying glasses and plastic containers and do a minibeast or bug hunt while there!

Back in the classroom ask them to come up with a Word Bank – this will be particularly helpful for the lower ability in the class. Display it on the board.

Then give them space and time to create a poem, write and re-draft. Don't limit their creativity – a poem is called a poem when the reader and writer agree it is a poem.

If you want to go further afield than your school bins, then Devon County Council can arrange a visit to an Energy from Waste plant in either Exeter or Plymouth. The machinery and scale of operation is bound to inspire some children. Contact Lucy Mottram for more details on lucy.mottram@devon.gov.uk or 01392 383519.



Sample Lesson Plans

KS1 Poetry

Subject: English		Year: 1/2
<p>Topic: Waste Poetry</p> <p>Links to National Curriculum:</p> <p>Y1 - Listen to and discuss a wide range of poems.</p> <p>Y1 - Write sentences by saying out loud what they want to write.</p> <p>Y2 – Develop positive attitudes towards writing poetry</p> <p>Y2 – Use and understand adjectives and expanded noun phrases in their writing</p>		
Learning objectives: To think about some good words to describe waste and to write the start of a poem		
Lesson structure		Teacher notes/structure
<p>Starter: Go on a waste and recycling treasure hunt around the school</p> <p>What do you see/smell/hear/feel?</p>		<p>Start by saying that rubbish is not just to throw away. Talk about precious metals that are present in mobile phones like gold.</p> <p>Ask if children have old tablets and mobile phones at home – are they buried in a drawer like buried treasure?</p> <p>Can your class find the bins where all the school’s rubbish is hidden?</p>
<p>Main Activity: Thinking of words</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Word cloud of words children could use in a poem. 2. Talk about poetry. Read out some poems with strong imagery. 3. Ask children to compose out loud a first line of a poem titled “Stinky rubbish or buried treasure” 		<p>Think about words on way back to class. Discuss with a partner.</p> <p>Use a free online tool like https://wordart.com/create or http://www.wordle.net/ to create a class word cloud of different words.</p> <p>Look at the words together. Talk about adjectives – powerful ways of creating images.</p> <p>Talk about using expanded noun phrases to create imagery, e.g. the silvery bin.</p> <p>See the poems in our collection below or search for the suggestions above online.</p> <p>Or choose a title of your own choosing...</p>
<p>Plenary:</p> <p>Ask children to read out what they have written.</p>		
<p>Extension: Write out the sentence. Draft, check for mistakes and re-draft.</p>		



Lower KS2 Poetry

	Subject: English	Year: 3/4
Topic: Waste Poetry	Links to National Curriculum: Y3/4 - Preparing poems to read aloud and perform	
Learning objectives: To write a poem using Sarah Cynthia Sylvia Stout by Shel Silverstein as inspiration to perform aloud to the class		
Lesson structure		Teacher notes
Starter: Show the YouTube video of Shel Silverstein reading his poem Sarah Cynthia Sylvia Stout.	YouTube video available here: https://youtu.be/-104x-t85G4 Provide the class with print-outs of the poem from our Poetry Pack. Talk about the poem as a class – what parts were good, funny or boring.	
Main Activity: Compose a poem In groups compose a poem based on their own experiences at home. (NB. Poems from groups will not be accepted for the DCC poetry competition, but this lesson can be used as inspiration for individuals to write their own poems)	Start with questioning: How many bins do they have at home – recycling, compost/food waste and black bin bags? What do they look like? What is in them? Check out our guide to local bins here: https://zone.recycledevon.org/practical-information/ Now talk in partners about what is in their bins and if they help their parents take the bins out. They could draw pictures to help them think about the items they throw away at home.	
Plenary: Perform each poem to the rest of the class.	Then work in groups – decide who is scribe/writing down what to say. Can the rest of the class think of ways the group could improve their poem? What bits were brilliant?	
Extension: Ask the children to write their own poem based on this lesson and submit it to the DCC Waste Poetry Competition.		



Upper KS2 Poetry

	Subject: English	Year: 5/6
Topic: Waste Poetry	Links to National Curriculum: Read and discuss a wide range of poetry Plan, draft and write a poem	
Learning objectives: To plan, draft and write a poem about waste, recycling, plastic pollution or litter		
Lesson structure	Teacher notes	
Starter: The current state of the world – waste and plastic pollution	Show the class pictures of waste and plastic pollution from the internet. Show the children parts of the Blue Planet film about plastic pollution (https://youtu.be/xLx4fVsYdTI) or look at our YouTube channel for ideas of other short videos to play: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLHby835r5GWVN13bLdyii9VVet_Th26jZ	
Main Activity: Read some waste poems and discuss	Read through some waste poetry – as well as those listed in this pack look here: https://allpoetry.com/poems/about/plastic	
Think of good words or phrases.	Partner talk, then discuss as a class some good adjectives, nouns. Use the word bank for specialist words associated with waste, recycling and sustainability.	
Think of a message.	Discuss what students would like their poems to communicate – what is their message? Is it one of action, powerlessness, hope for the future?	
Think, draft and write a poem. Share and edit.	Leave children time to think and talk to each other before writing. Some children may need to jot ideas down or draw pictures to be able to write a poem.	
Plenary: Share what some students have written.		
Extension: Type it out so the poems can be entered into the DCC waste poetry competition.		



KS3/4 Poetry

	Subject: English	Year: 7/8/9/10/11
Topic: Waste Poetry	Links to National Curriculum: Read a wide range of fiction, develop critical thinking skills and write their own poetry.	
Learning objectives: Draft and write a poem about waste		
Lesson structure	Teacher notes	
Starter: Read through the poems by John Wedgwood Clarke as a class (see poems on page 15).	<p>What do the poems make you feel about the places and scenes the poet describes?</p> <p>What language is he using to make you feel that?</p> <p>Is there anything shocking or disturbing about the images?</p>	
Main Activity: Write a poem about waste	<p>We see waste, recycling and litter around us all the time, but don't often consider it worthy of writing about. Do you know where your waste and recycling goes and the journey it goes on? When do your paths cross with the rubbish and recycling?</p> <p>On your own, make a mindmap of all the different moments in your day or week when you come across rubbish and recycling. Do you visit the tip with parents at the weekend? Do you pass by a sorting facility or somewhere they deal with food waste or composting? Have you ever seen the stack of the Energy from Waste plant in Exeter or Plymouth? Do you get stuck behind the recycling collection vehicle when it's picking up from your street?</p>	
Plenary: Share the poem	<p>Our website (http://zone.recycledevon.org/videos) and Youtube channel (https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC5GLQ89DvLEnuvYXHkx41vQ/) has some videos about where your food waste and black bin bag waste goes after it leaves your doorstep.</p>	
Extension: Type up poetry and submit to the DCC Waste Poetry Competition	<p>Discuss in groups the journey that rubbish and recycling takes from bin at home to disposal or recycling centre. Where does litter fit into the picture? What happens when rubbish falls out of the system, eg. cotton buds that fall through sorting equipment?</p> <p>Read through the poems again on your own. Highlight some of the techniques the poet uses to create atmosphere and sense of place in the poems.</p> <p>Write your own poem about a location where rubbish exists, whether bins at home, sorting facilities or Energy from Waste plants. Use interesting language to convey sense of place and create atmosphere. Draft, edit and re-draft the poem.</p>	



Word Bank

Some words to help you:

Reduce	Natural resources
Reuse	Raw material
Recycle	Disposable
Rubbish	Consumer
Litter	Renewable
Landfill site	Finite
Plastic	Non-renewable
Waste	Energy from Waste
Crude oil	Nurdle
Climate change	Carbon dioxide
Greenhouse gas	Mitigation
Greenhouse effect	Adaptation
Methane	Business-as-usual
Microplastics	Circular economy
Ocean gyre	Sustainable development

Poems

Dump song

By John Wedgwood Clarke



Sing, summer,
In our plastic bags,
sing tatters
in the shining buds,

a zephyr, tumour,
inflated heart,
snag and fritter
in the May.

The ground fluffs,
generators throb,
merry spin
the cowls,

Our leaking sacks,
simmering blur,
mount up, crying
in the May.

Vertigo

By John Wedgwood Clarke

They pulverized broken pots and querns
and mixed the temper into clay,
one body fused inside another,
old thirsts and thumbprints in new cups.

At the dream-cliff's edge, unable even to crawl,
my body's liquid flows towards
rocks surfacing like the heads of seals
in a multi-coloured plastic soup.



Processing Plant

by John Wedgwood Clarke

I. Heap of Doors



By the conical mound of crushed rubble
they're stacked like a child's pack of cards,
wedged apart, rocking on door handles,
neither entrance nor exit, nor a place for change
to occupy the hand; no longer able
to repeat the letting go of what cannot
be let go of in great jamb-cracking slams,
or opened once more into rooms
that sweat our histories; and not, now they're hinged
on air, playthings of the weather,
tapping at their latches, haunted by the same wind
that fans and combs the sea, rattling
at rooms beyond so close they might be in us.

IX. All God's Dumb Animals



Flies rise as a shadow passes over
plastic bottles crushed
like oyster shells. A midden of
industrial thirst,
polymerized petroleum
blue-tinting purity into tepid
organic volcanic
limestone/chalk-filtered
brands, a market out of parched
water fountains. A wagtail
drops from a rogue sycamore,
blessing with shit a two-litre empty
adrift in long grass,
lemonade sunlight greening the interior.

John Wedgwood Clarke, from *Landfill*
(Valley Press Poetry, 2017)

