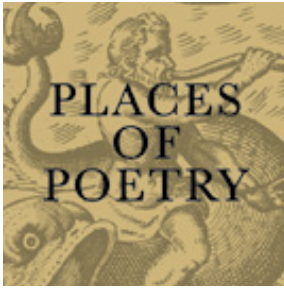


PLACES OF POETRY



TOOLKIT 3: FOR CHILDREN (SECONDARY)



Places of Poetry is a community arts project, centred on a newly designed digital map of England and Wales. Over Summer 2019, writers of all ages and backgrounds from across the country will be invited to write new poems of place, heritage and identity, and pin them to the map. . (Under 13s will require a parent, teacher or guardian to do this.) Places of Poetry will help us reflect on our national and cultural identities, and celebrate the diversity, heritage and personalities of place.

This toolkit – produced by The Poetry Society – is for teachers, parents, guardians, home-educators and youth-group leaders who would like to help young people between the ages of 11 and 18. Depending on their level of creative confidence, the young person can either work through the ideas by themselves or with assistance.

'If you don't know where you are, you don't know who you are', claimed the American poet and environmentalist, Wendell Berry. Perhaps the opposite is also true, that what we know already about ourselves and where we come from, helps us form a new understanding of the place we are in now and those we have yet to go to.

Poetry can be written on any subject but whatever else it is about, a poem tells us something important about the person who has written it as well as the time and place it was written in. A poem about place therefore, has the potential to provide us with something much richer than straight factual information ever could.

Use these writing suggestions to guide you to create a poem about a place, its past and what it means to you – then pin it to the Places of Poetry map.



EXERCISE 1

USE YOUR IMAGINATION!

Samuel Taylor Coleridge famously wrote his poem, 'Kubla Khan', in a dream-like state while under the influence of opium, commonly prescribed as a painkiller in his day. Though Kubla Khan was a real person (grandson of Genghis), and Xanadu was a real place in ancient China, Coleridge wrote from his own imagination, constructing Kubla's idyll with his pen, this 'stately pleasure-dome' furnished with high walls, towers and bright gardens.

Kubla Khan

Or, a vision in a dream. A Fragment.

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan

A stately pleasure-dome decree:

Where Alph, the sacred river, ran

Through caverns measureless to man

Down to a sunless sea.

So twice five miles of fertile ground

With walls and towers were girdled round;

And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills,

Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;

And here were forests ancient as the hills,

Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.

Coleridge grew up surrounded by books, fascinated by fairy tales and the stories his father told him about faraway planets and stars. Through these, Coleridge said, "my mind had been habituated to the Vast—and I never regarded my senses in any way as the criteria of my belief." Coleridge believed it was not necessary to physically be in a place in order to know it. He believed in a feeling, he said, of "the Great" and "the Whole."

The Xanadu he imagined in his poem was:

A savage place! as holy and enchanted

As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted

And in this place he imagined:

That with music loud and long,

I would build that dome in air,

That sunny dome! those caves of ice!

Kubla Khan's paradise, as conceived by Coleridge in the poem, is never fully realised and thus Coleridge allows us, the readers, to be the architects of our own vision.

Choose a historical site that interests you – anything from a prehistoric flint mine, a Roman fort, a medieval church, a castle, a tower, leisure gardens to a farm, forest or football ground. Is it somewhere near to where you live, or somewhere you have visited?

Imagine yourself to be the person who first created the idea for this place. Does this person have a name, is s/he a real person or are you inventing them?

Introduce your persona, name your place and write a poem that enables the reader to see that vision unfolding. Make sure you include the kind of detail that will enable the reader to really see and experience this place, not only what it looks like, but how it feels to be there – use all the senses to describe the feeling.

What happens if you write your poem using the third person ('s/he built' etc)? What about if you write it using the first person ('I built' etc)?



EXERCISE 2

PLACE NAMES

Looking at the poem you have just written - did you choose existing names for your place or choose new ones? How did you decide on that name?

Names are generally given to places by the people who first discovered them, and these names can carry a great deal of backstory and meaning and can provide rich clues about the place and its inhabitants. In this poem by Philip Williams, the poet remembers Wales through the names given to the places he spent time in as a boy. The names become a route to rediscovery and a way of knowing afresh.

Link to 'Torfaeon by Philip Williams - www.poetrysociety.org.uk/poems/torfaen/

Where were you born? Where do you live? Where might you live one day? Research the name of a place, and what it can tell you about its history. Did your town or city develop because it was close to a river or sea – good for industry or trade? Or does your place name reflect a rural, agricultural history?

Write a poem that thinks about the people who named the place you live in. What would they think about the place now? Would they recognise it still?

EXERCISE 3

LANGUAGE LESSON

The use of dialect in poetry familiarises place and helps establish new knowledge of it. Liz Berry's 'Birmingham Roller' is about a pigeon with that name famous for doing back-flips in mid-flight over the city. The poet's easy use of Black Country dialect in the poem makes us feel as though we are local too, paying homage to the place as well as the pigeon.

Link to 'Birmingham Roller' by Liz Berry - www.poetrysociety.org.uk/poems/birmingham-roller/
What are the dialect words used in your part of the world? Compile a glossary, like Liz Berry did for her poem, of any slang, dialect or terms you know that are specifically used by the people who live there to refer to things in that place.

Try this quiz to see if it can guess your location correctly www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/02/15/upshot/british-irish-dialect-quiz.html

Is there a local custom that only takes place where you live? Is there a local historical figure or famous landmark that everyone knows about? Write a poem about it or them, using your local dialect words as stepping stones in your poem. Try to use at least one place-specific word in each line of your poem. See if this helps to establish a particular rhythm, style or shape to your poem. Imagine each name or term is like a label on a drawer or a door for you to open and look inside, which will reveal something hidden about the place and the people in it.

EXERCISE 4

HOME FROM HOME

Here is a poem I wrote a few years ago on the borough of Wandsworth for London Lines, a poetry project by Southbank Centre and Jaybird Live Literature which was part of the Festival of Neighbourhood in 2013. Before writing the poem I spent time wandering around Wandsworth (it's a big borough!) and stopped at places like the Battersea Power Station, the Cats and Dogs Home, St. Mary's Church, where the Putney debates were held in 1647, Albert Bridge, Wandsworth Prison and the old Truman Brewery. It was really the borough's name though that first led me in to the poem.

Wandsworth

*It starts with a name
and don't we all begin that way?
Two rivers meet, the watermills flow
and Wandesorde, Wendelsorde,
Wandsworth is born.*


*In Domesday's book this
Borough boasts meadows and sufficient hides
for a dozen neighbourhoods to thrive. A Brewery
and a trembling bridge where troops must pause
to break their step.*

*For really I think
that the poorest here in England
hath a life to live as the greatest and therefore
truly Sir, we measure our hearts according
to the promise:*

*No cat, or dog or person
will be left in the cold. There is common land
for all to graze, parks and promenades to praise
and you will know it when the cabbie says, 'Here's
Gateway to the South'.*

*A monument to power
still, four chimneys rise like upturned legs,
a table waiting to be set. Towering, the prison walls
shadow homes as evening falls on Carmichael Mews
and Alma Terrace.*

What are the equivalent spots and sites where you live? Grand historical public sites like castles and cathedrals, sites related to trade and business like mills and docks, or more personal sites like playgrounds and parks? Pick five sites, and write a poem that expresses your feelings about where you live, incorporating those five sites.



Would you like
the world to read your
poems? Pin them
to the online map!

KEEPING SAFE ONLINE


All the poems pinned to the online Places of Poetry map will be generally accessible to visitors from all over the world. The site will be live until October 2019, and then archived. When pinning children's poems to the map, please make sure that the poems contain no identifying details about their identities and locations. Some children might want to write poems about their own houses – please make sure that they are not pinned directly to the specific point on the map. All poems can be submitted anonymously or with a pseudonym if desired. In the case of under 18s who list poems, please ensure they use a pseudonym or their first name only.

THE POETRY SOCIETY

The Poetry Society was founded in 1909 to promote ‘a more general recognition and appreciation of poetry’. Since then, it has grown into one of Britain’s most dynamic arts organisations, representing British poetry both nationally and internationally. Today it has more than 4,500 members worldwide and publishes the leading poetry magazine, The Poetry Review. With innovative education and commissioning programmes and a packed calendar of performances, readings and competitions, The Poetry Society champions poetry for all ages.

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